

**Holy land, holy language:  
A study of an Ultraorthodox Jewish ideology**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the correlation between notions of language and territory in the ideology of a present-day Ultraorthodox Jewish group, the Hasidim of Satmar, in the context of Jewish Ultraorthodoxy (Haredism) in general. This involves the present-day role of Yiddish vis-à-vis Hebrew, particularly in Israel. We first address the relative sanctity of a space that accommodates a closed Haredi lifestyle and of a language in which it is expressed, then contrast this with the absolute sanctity of the land of Israel and the language of Scripture both in their intensional (positive) and in their extensional (negative) dimensions, and finally examine the quasi-absolute sanctity with which the Yiddish language and Jewish habitat of Eastern Europe have been invested. Our conclusion is that three such cases of a parallel between linguistic and territorial ideology point to an intrinsic link. Indeed, the correlation of language and territory on the plane of quasi-absolute sanctity betokens an ongoing, active ideological tie, rather than a set of worn, petrified values evoking mere lip-service. These notions of quasi-sanctity find many echoes in reality: in the use of Yiddish and in the creation of a surrogate Eastern European lifestyle in the Haredi "ghettos." (Cultural geography, sociolinguistics, Judaism, Hasidism, religion, Israel, sociology of language, Yiddish, sacred land, Hebrew, territory)

This study addresses the ideology of a present-day Jewish Ultraorthodox group, the Hasidim of Satmar, with respect to notions of sacred territory and

sacred language and seeks to establish a correlation between the two. This correlation is plotted across three types of sanctity: a relative sanctity that serves to uphold group segregation from other groups, an absolute sanctity that claims an enduring superiority for the Holy Land (Israel) and the Holy Language (Hebrew), and a quasi-absolute sanctity that claims something close to absolute sanctity – by association – for territory (prewar Jewish Eastern Europe) and language (Yiddish) that has enjoyed a relative sanctity. The study throws light on the present-day role of Yiddish vis-à-vis Hebrew, particularly in Israel.

Recent years have seen the beginnings of research into the ideology of present-day Ultraorthodox Jewish communities.<sup>1</sup> These groups, commonly known both by outsiders and to themselves as Haredim (singular: Haredi), are found mainly in the United States and Israel and in smaller numbers in Western Europe and Canada. Whereas, in the words of the demographer Schmelz (1987), "it is by no means easy to measure statistically the frequency of the Ultra-Orthodox, since there are no generally accepted criteria for defining them and no direct data sources," the same scholar has estimated the Haredi population of Jerusalem at 60,000 (= 20% of Jerusalem's Jews), adding that in view of their high birthrate and cohesion, "their share of the Jewish population seems bound to increase, unless there is considerable in-migration of other Jews." Of the United States' 5-6 million Jews, some 9 percent are Orthodox by affiliation (Wertheimer 1989), and of these a sizable minority are Haredim.

Haredim are distinguished from other contemporary Orthodox Jewish groups by a tendency toward the more stringent options offered in the Jewish codes of practice, together with an attachment to the traditional Eastern European Jewish lifestyle wiped out by two world wars. As Friedman (1987:238ff, fn.12) has put it, "The Eastern European, Ashkenazi character of Haredi Jewry remains unquestionable to this day." To be sure, Haredi society has changed much in the last generation, sometimes toward a modernity and sometimes toward a greater orthodoxy than was ever the tradition; indeed, traditionalism has not stopped the so-called Lithuanian sector of Haredi Jewry adopting (in Friedman's words) "relatively greater flexibility with regard to the commitment to traditional garb and external appearance." But the basic Eastern Europeanism perpetuated in a generation uprooted from Eastern Europe or never even familiar with Eastern Europe is unmistakable in such aspects of ritual as festival customs; melodies; texts, styles, and accents or worship; dress; folklore; educational institutions; and so on.

One particular focus of interest has been Haredi territorialism. The processes of geographical self-insulation displayed by the Haredi population and its results in terms of urban space have been dissected at length.<sup>2</sup> Haredism entails considerable, though far from total, insulation from the non-Haredi

world. Haredim live in ghettos while providing religious services (e.g., rabbis) and accessories to the outside secular Jewish world and sometimes even working in business among Gentiles. These ghettos, wherever they may be, may be said to possess a relative sanctity; in addition, Haredim assign to the Land of Israel an intrinsic, absolute sanctity, thus deeming it particularly ill-suited to the presence of a secular Israeli society and Israeli state, though in practice their relationship to this state is far from straightforward.

Another theme to have attracted notice is the Haredi attitude to language. Schneller's (1980) description of Jerusalem Haredim as working for "total segregation from the wider society" appeals in particular to the fact that "Yiddish is the language of daily conversation and instruction. The use of Modern Hebrew is forbidden." The use of Yiddish as a Haredi in-group language in the West has also been addressed (Poll [1955] 1981). And beyond this is a conception of Hebrew as the Sacred Tongue of the Scriptures, ill-suited to be the secular, let alone the profane, language of modern Israel (Poll 1980).

However, such studies have failed to ask whether the motifs of language and territory are to be related, either extrinsically or intrinsically. The prominent role of language as a social and territorial boundary marker and source of conflict hardly needs stating, and a rich literature also exists on the manner in which language boundaries are perceived in terms of political and ethnic frontiers rather than on an objective linguistic basis (see e.g., Edwards 1984; Ferguson 1971). The present article examines the degree of parallel in Haredi ideology between sanctity of language and sanctity of land – with particular concern for the point where language and territory appear to cross from the instrumental into the realm of the idealistic and absolute.

A segregated or otherwise distinct group may not see any need to maintain a language of its own, for the very reason that its isolation or distinctiveness is perceived as sufficient protection and because the outside language is not rated an intrinsic danger (see e.g., Edwards & Chisholm 1987; Hymes 1966). To the extent that the Haredim are isolated, do they fear secular Modern Hebrew (or American English, for that matter) as an intrinsic danger, or do they feel strong enough to handle it? Alternatively, do they fear that merely to abandon Yiddish, their transitional Eastern European tongue, would in itself symbolize capitulation to the outside world?

The present study, in treating language, is not an exercise in social psychology or sociolinguistics; would that such data were available. Rather, it analyzes ideological writings that have active significance in Haredi circles. Prominent among our sources are the writings of the Satmar Hasidim, in particular the late Rebbe ('leader') of Satmar, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, revered throughout Haredi society. The Hasidim of Satmar (Satmar being the Transylvanian town upon which they were once centered) are a Haredi sect concentrated primarily in New York and Israel.<sup>3</sup>

The polemical writings adduced herein represent over a century of Haredi ideology, but we would not wish to introduce any sense of evolution. As so often in traditionalism, the past is the present, the synchronic overshadows the diachronic; many of these writings are regularly reprinted or reedited. In fact, as Friedman (1986:74) observed, the tide of erosion has receded, and Haredism is in many ways exhibiting more stringency and more self-confidence than ever. We argue that the very nature of the linguistic-territorial correlation in these writings, and in recent Haredi behavior, betokens on-going, active ideological nexus, rather than a set of petrified values invoking mere lip-service.

The study concludes by considering the differences between the ideological model being analyzed and the day-to-day reality of language and territory. Haredi ideological polemics actually imply a substantial use of Modern Hebrew in the home, despite its ban; and impressions bear this out. Rigorous social study of such segregated groups is notoriously difficult (see Shaffir 1985), particularly with respect to religiously loaded issues. It is our hope, however, that the present study encourages such endeavors.

#### LANGUAGE AND TERRITORY AS RELATIVE VALUES

In day-to-day life, at first glance, the Haredim display a nonchalance about choice of both territory and language. Neither New York nor London, neither Munkacz nor Bnei Braq, would seem to have great intrinsic status; if one wishes to move on, one does, provided there is a full-fledged like-minded community where one is heading. This would appear to be the general spirit of *golus* 'exile', to which the Haredim believe all Jews are condemned until the Coming of the Messiah. Similarly, which language one uses as one's vernacular appears at first sight to be of no great importance in Haredi writings, certainly not as long as it is a specifically Jewish language.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than *absolute* choice of a special territory and a special tongue, it is the relative choice of territory and tongue that appears to matter: self-insulation in ghettos, wherever they may be, and adoption of a distinctive tongue, whatever that tongue may be.

Examining territory in detail, two paradigmatic geographical approaches, outlined by Sack (1981), can be applied to the concentration and self-insulation of the Haredim. The conventional approach to urban segregation sees it as being due to the benefits of concentration; there are advantages to minimizing the distances between group members while maximizing their distance from other groups. The second, more recent, approach is one of territorialism, defined by Sack (1981:55) as an attempt to "enforce control over a specific geographical area. . . . Territoriality makes the territory appear to be filled with power, influence, authority, or sovereignty."

In this context, Haredi segregation is in no sense peculiar. This community

enjoys the advantages of proximity in the supply of commodities and services to its members and in the facilities for monitoring socialization among its youth, both by virtue of the short distances within the community and equally, perhaps even more, by virtue of the remoteness of other groups.

The present discussion seeks to add the territorial dimension, without, of course, seeking to detract from the other explanations. To comprehend the territorial significance of Haredi segregation, one has to be aware of the force and significance of two historical traumas underlying the existence of the Haredi community today.

The one trauma derives from secularization and the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskala*), processes that have their origins in the emancipation of the Jews and their liberation from the ghetto and which continued via urbanization and industrialization, the end result being the abandonment of the world of Torah and of its religious precepts by the majority of the Jewish people. The other trauma is the Holocaust and the destruction of Europe's (particularly Eastern Europe's) great centers of Judaism and its communities, extirpating the type of small-town Jewish settlement known as the *shtetl*.

In the consciousness of Haredi communities there evolved a sense of menace and obligation. Both as a group and as individuals, the Haredim feel that they are a surviving remnant, in the fullest sense of the words. They are the guardians of the flame of the original unswerving Judaism, who survived the physical genocide and the processes of spiritual extinction that they see as complementing it, threatening the very existence of true or faithful Judaism, as they put it. The Haredi world has evolved a system of self-defenses by creating mechanisms for monitoring all sections of the populace, its economy, and its cultural-religious life. The aim is to stem the drift to modernity and secularism, while at the same time conserving the living memory of the communities that perished by fashioning an identical lifestyle and guarding it with zeal (Friedman 1981).

These developments have clear territorial significance. A further characteristic, which can be attributed to the foregoing and which is of special importance to the understanding of spatial behavior and attitudes to territory, involves the Haredi approach of confrontation between religion and life (Luz 1985). Today's Haredi population centers live out an existential paradox: endeavoring to maintain the traditional *shtetl* 'small town' way of life within, a dynamic, modern, urban-Western environment so fundamentally dissimilar. The contrast that pits the latter - with its achievement-specific system of relations and its characteristic initiative, innovation, permissiveness, and anonymity - against the community with its olden lifestyle, sealed to any wind of change from the surrounding city, makes for constant pressure against the Haredi citadel.

Turning now to language, Yiddish - until Hitler and Stalin, the vernacular of the vast majority of Eastern European Jews, both the traditional masses

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and the secularizing minority - now survives in the Soviet Union, in Israel and in the West in sorely reduced circumstances (see Fishman 1965, 1981; Fishman & Fishman 1977; Isaacs 1988; Moskovich 1987; Peltz 1987; Poll [1955] 1981, 1980). It is virtually only among Haredim and in a few outposts of Socialist-secularist sentiment that Yiddish has been perpetuated to a younger generation as the main language of social interaction. The result is that where Haredim live (as they almost invariably do) within broader Jewish communities of various degrees of acculturation, Yiddish serves as a barrier, both symbolic and real, between Ultraorthodoxy and other Jews. Whether other Jews or the Haredim themselves perceive Yiddish today as a specifically Ultraorthodox language *de facto*, or as an echo of a lost Eastern European past, or simply as an ethnic marker is hard to say. Nor is it possible to say with much confidence how prevalent the use of Yiddish is among today's Haredim in terms of age group, sex, religious subgroup, country, situation, register, and so on.<sup>5</sup> It is evident, however, that knowledge or use of Yiddish serves to facilitate the socioeconomic absorption of group members as they move frequently from one country to another (e.g., from Antwerp to London or from Jerusalem to Brooklyn) for business, marriage, and so on - paralleling the tangible benefits of geographical concentration already mentioned - and to identify members of the group, exclude outsiders, and, by its distinctively religious brand of Yiddish, to underscore an intragroup world view, thus creating a sense of cultural control akin to what we depicted as territorialism.

Evidence of a relative, as against an absolute, sanctity in the use of Yiddish in furtherance of the religious community is to be seen in the paucity and mildness of polemics in favor of Yiddish in Haredi writings (although we point to elements of a quasi-absolute sanctity, regarding both language and space, later in this article); in the significant use of English, Modern Hebrew, and so on, within the group in day-to-day reality; and, intriguingly for any theory of sacred language, in the lack of care for the language. Yiddish is commonly referred to simply by the intimate term *mame-loshn* 'mother tongue' or as *zhargon*; it is commonly thought in the popular mind to have no grammar (despite the emergence this century of an outstanding Yiddish literary culture in the non-Haredi world). Yiddish is a language that *ret zikh* 'speaks of its own accord', not a language with which care must be taken or with standards to uphold - quite unlike such carefully cultivated and codified vehicles of religion as literary Arabic, Sanskrit, or literary Tamil, unlike even Standard English or French.<sup>6</sup> Isaacs has noted the scarcity of Yiddish books or printed children's resources in Jerusalem Haredi schools and bookstores; the same is true in the West. This betokens an ongoing diglossia - oral Yiddish and written Hebrew - as was traditional for centuries in Eastern Europe. The outcome is that Yiddish is not subject to broad standardization, oral or written.

## TERRITORY AND LANGUAGE AS ABSOLUTE VALUES

Aside from the use of space and language in keeping the holy community distinct and together, creating a relative sanctity, Haredi life also features absolute (i.e., intrinsic) notions of sacred territory and language. These are to be seen as aspects of an all-embracing spiritual-religious dimension of life, attributing sanctity in various degrees to certain times, places, people, texts, actions, and artifacts (Aspects of the sacred are treated ethnographically in Glinert 1985; Heilman 1973, 1983, 1988).

Sanctity is primarily perceived and expressed in terms of prohibited and mandatory acts involving the time, artifact, and so forth. An example of a highly sacred artifact would be a Scroll of the Law (*Sefer Torah*) - a parchment scroll of the Pentateuch written by a ritual scribe in a ritually prescribed way. A *Sefer Torah* must be clothed in finery (embroidered cloth, a silver case, or the like) and housed in its own cabinet in a room not used for sleeping and may only be moved to be read from; all whom it passes must be up-standing; its parchment should not be touched with bare hands; if the scroll is dropped or destroyed, the community must fast, and if it becomes unusable, it must be buried in earthenware in hallowed ground.

Sanctity, understood as being restricted to religious functions, is both intensional and extensional, that is, positive and negative - having sacred properties in and of itself, and at the same time repulsing that which is not religious. In the case of the land of Israel, sanctity in our times is meant to rule out (for Haredim) the elementary function of a country, namely, to accommodate the masses organized as a sovereign community. And when we come to examine the sanctity of the Hebrew language for Haredim, we will see that it rules out the elementary function of a language, namely, to act as medium of general communication.

Focusing first on absolute sanctity of territory, this refers to the land of Israel, the sacred territory given in trust (rather than in perpetuity) to the ancient Children of Israel, the land to which the Jews will be returned when the Messiah comes. Haredi belief is that, until the Messiah, Jews may live there but must not establish their own political entity; they must remain under foreign yoke until the final, miraculous redemption. According to Jewish law, Israel is the most sacred of lands and Jerusalem its most sacred spot. This sanctity is given mandatory expression for Jews the world over in the repeated references, many times a day, in blessings over food and in other prayers, to the holiness of the land of Israel, and to the yearning for the Messianic regathering of the Jews. There are a multitude of other regulations, particularly involving agriculture, for example, tithing Holy Land produce, cessation from tilling in the Sabbatical year, and prohibition of sowing diverse vegetables at close quarters.

Here, we are concerned as to whether Haredi territorialism is influenced

by these special conditions of Jerusalem and the land of Israel, that is, their sanctity and Jewish sovereignty over them. How is "sacred space" regarded by the Haredim, and does it make for special components in the spatial organization of the community?

As mentioned earlier, the fact that the Haredi ghetto in Israel involves self-segregation from a population of Jews makes the situation difficult, as this adds the dimension of delegitimizing many in the surrounding urban areas. This claim ties in with our issue of Haredi territorialism and, most directly, with the relationship of different religious groups to the land. This question arose naturally with political Zionism and immigration to Israel. To be sure, religious yearning for the land was always part of Jewish life and Jews always immigrated, but these were small groups seeking to fulfill the duty of living in the Holy Land. Even the legal discussion of this duty in the literature focuses on the question of the individual's (rather than the masses') duty and the conditions that free the individual from his or her obligation.

The change triggered by Zionism and its immigrations was one of ideology and quantity. Individual obligations were replaced by mass movements of national importance in all matters of territory and sovereignty. The opening up of the land for which one had yearned and prayed acutely affected religious-legal discussions concerning the land of Israel. Opposition flared once it was understood that Zionism would cause real changes in Jewish society, culture, and theology; but Zionism also triggered new ideas. Rabbi Israel Trunk stated in his response (1891: section 66): "It [settling the land] is undoubtedly an important duty, for the Ingathering is the harbinger of Redemption." Liebman and Don-Yehiya (1983:190-98) identified several religious approaches within the 20th-century Zionist consensus.

Haredi thought, however, does not partake of such consensus. It views Zionism as a rebellion against heaven - and not only because of the secular nature of the movement. The very decision to take one's fate into one's own hands and cast off oppression is deemed a religiously forbidden act.

The source of this prohibition is talmudic, as the Haredim understand it. Urbach (1969:610) noted that "early talmudic times saw the rise of a utopian millenniumism," with the demise of realistic messianic hopes. The Biblical Song of Songs was interpreted as imposing three oaths concerning the Jews, two of which were that they should not rebel against the nations of the world and that the latter should not overdominate the Jews. Now whereas many authorities have understood these three oaths as merely representing an existing state rather than a legal or ideological guideline, they are assigned obligatory force in Haredi thought today. Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum of Satmar, late leader of Haredi Jewry, condemned Zionism on three counts: (a) it involves the masses, (b) it involves the majority of Jews, (c) it involves war against the resident population of the Holy Land (1959-1961:30). Zionism is thus held to transgress the bans that stem from these oaths; it is intent on

"scaling the walls." And lest there be doubt, Rabbi Teitelbaum stated (ibid:59): "Anyone thinking that one can brazenly leave our exile defies our faith and our Holy Law." He further explained that the prohibition is one of principle and not just due to the secular nature of Zionism, "and the oath was not given to heretics but to all Jewry; and even if the whole Government were pious like men of old, any attempt to take their freedom prematurely would be to deny the Holy Law and our faith" (ibid:93). And not just a denial of faith but a substantive disaster, delaying the true millennium, for "Exile has been lengthened for our sins of ignoring this oath."

These arguments do not rule out instrumental opposition to Zionism for its secular influence on the lives of the various inhabitants of the Holy Land. "And truly even without such oaths I intend to give other straightforward reasons why it is absolutely forbidden to take part in this regime, each of which are a capital offense . . . but I have attempted first of all to explain the seriousness of the oath" (Teitelbaum 1959-1961:102).

In this context, Friedman (1978:33f) noted that the Balfour Declaration, its ratification at the San Remo Conference, and its inclusion in the Palestine Mandate had implications going beyond the political and social realm and into the theological. Zionism now received international legitimization and was apparently no longer "a revolt against the nations," being supported by England, the world's greatest power. This threw the anti-Zionist Haredi world into dismay. Perhaps the Rabbi of Satmar referred to this dismay when he wrote:

There are fools who say that the consent of virtually the whole World means that there is no prohibitive oath against hastening the End of Days, but there is great blindness in the [Jewish] world in such matters . . . for the oath applied to the very act of hastening the End; the opinion of the rest of the World is immaterial. (Teitelbaum 1959-1961:103)

One might infer that the very presence of Jews, even without a state, on the soil of the Holy Land is against divine wishes, but this is not the case. Haredi communities have been present in the land for centuries, and there has been substantial immigration even by Satmar Hasidim, coming as Holocaust survivors at a time when Zionist settlement was already flourishing, and even following the creation of the Israeli state to which Zionism had aspired.

There is no suggestion in Haredi thought that the presence of secularists in the Holy Land has defiled it to the point of rendering it uninhabitable, nor that the land is inherently uninhabitable because all Jews are nowadays considered in some sense to be impure or unworthy. And indeed, eminent Jews throughout the centuries have lived and died in the Holy Land.

However, the religious world view of the Haredi population influenced by the traumatic awareness of secularization, Enlightenment, and the Holocaust

(depicted earlier) places the Haredi ghetto in a special position vis-à-vis Israeli society. The Israeli city in its Western garb, populated by Israeli Jews, not only threatens – in this sense, all modern cities are equal – but is also seen as illegitimate. Delegitimization involves territorial factors essentially bound up with the meaning that must be given to the term “sacred space” and its expression in real space.

The Haredi reaction is to maintain a separate space that can protect its way of life and culture and at the same time serve as living memorial and everlasting flame for the Jewish *shtetls* that perished in the Holocaust and whose traditions were transferred to the Haredi ghetto in the modern city, where they are zealously maintained. These ghettos reborn are considered both by their inhabitants and by those outside as the direct and perfect sequel to that *shtetl* life. However, this is purely an external similarity. As noted, the environmental and civilizational background of these ghettos, and the processes and structures within them, are quite different from those of the *shtetl*. We soon focus on this difference, with its clear territorial import.

First the term “Haredi ghetto.” The Jewish historical memory has invested *ghetto* with markedly negative connotations, for self-evident reasons. Indeed, the professional literature, too, abounds with references to the ghetto as a segregatory area forced in a certain sense upon its inhabitants by outside socioeconomic pressures (see Johnston 1971:111-14). On the other hand, the reference here to ghetto is quite neutral, referring not to the way it was created but to the very phenomenon of geographical segregation that can appear at various levels, from the first degree of ghettoization – the distinctiveness of a residential area with a specific population – to the ultimate degree, a kind of microcosm within the city, completely severed from it and independent in its socioeconomic systems and in the supply of vital services. Between the two extremes stretches a continuum with various degrees of geo-sociological and economic separatism. The question of the motive for this separatism is irrelevant for defining ghetto. At the same time, one cannot disregard the accepted distinction between forced and voluntary segregation. The claim being made here is that this distinction is good perhaps for a schematic description of a self-segregating population, but at a deeper level this is a superficial distinction and quite insufficient. This is nicely illustrated by the subject under discussion. How can one foist geographical insulation on a population? It can be done by administrative diktat or official discrimination or both, and also by active rejection of a minority by the majority. The first two are extreme and rare, whereas the third will always depend on the way in which the messages of rejection are perceived by the minority population. On the other hand, the desire for self-isolation stemming from the autonomous wish of the separating group is not free of external constraints either, for the considerations en route to a positive decision about segregated housing always allow for mixed housing with other groups, with all the ad-

vantages these entail. Once the decision to segregate has been taken or, better, evolved, it also involves some degree of rejection of the other possibilities that were considered bad. In other words, even voluntary segregation involves elements of rejection.

The distinctions mentioned here may appear insignificant, until one examines the segregation of the population under discussion. It is customary to see geographical and social separatism of the Haredi community as voluntary. Indeed, there is no organized system – administrative, legal, social, or otherwise – that forces its Haredi community to live in a certain area or prevent the individual from living where he or she wishes. In this particular case, there is no open and direct compulsive element, as forced isolation has traditionally been understood; it is indeed very rare. However, it must be remembered that in such discussion it is not only external organization in space of an objective type that is decisive, but also the manner in which space is subjectively seen by the population. The study of this perception can make an important contribution to understanding the process in its positivist as well as its phenomenological-humanistic dimensions.

We have observed that Haredi spatial organization can be assigned two dimensions: the positive dimension of the advantages of concentration, which one can see as a factor in voluntary segregation; and the negative, which aims to prevent the integrative processes completely. The latter, stemming from the sense of a threat from the surrounding modern city, is subjectively a compulsive factor. Even were there no advantages to concentration, the community would feel obliged to assemble in a defined area of residence in which it can defend itself from the urban threat. The community both wishes to and must segregate. Therefore, it would be only half true to portray this separatism as voluntary segregation. The Orthodox ghetto is the integrated result of forces pulling the community to concentrate and forces pushing it apart from a dissimilar population and from all urban threats. The existence of push forces and their sheer strength sets the Haredi ghetto beyond the category of voluntary separatism, but without this being a forced separatism. The terms “pull forces” and “push forces” indicate the similarity between creation of the distinct area and migration factors. Just as migration considerations are mixed with elements of push and pull, so too are processes of geographical separatism. Instead of a dichotomy, it is better to refer to separatist factors as a gamut of synergetic forces ranging from compulsory to voluntary, bearing in mind that the two extremes – the ideals – are very rare and suited to a conception that uses a model. A specific phenomenon of segregation can be located on a scale of relations between pull (i.e., voluntary separatism) and rejection (yielding forced isolation). As noted, the two extremes involve the rare case of isolation, either entirely voluntary or entirely compulsory. Considering the threat by the Western city and its values to the Haredi community, we cannot place its separatism near the voluntary end

of the scale. Rather, it tends toward the compulsory, this being sensed as prominent – a sense expressed in manifold ways, as with a Jerusalem Haredi interviewed by a newspaper (*Erev Shabat*, Aug. 28, 1987) after his son was attacked by a stranger and his side-locks cut:

It's awful nowadays. There's fire in the streets and my Rabbi said that things have reached a point where there's almost no alternative, it's already gone beyond "steering clear of sin." The Rabbi's opened the study house in Bnei Brak so boys won't need to cross the streets, because even in Haredi areas like these the gentle soul needs to be guarded from evil. One's eyes are like a magnet drawing in these terrible sights and there's just one answer: flee, flee and flee again.

Summarizing thus far, we have depicted the land of Israel as involving an absolute sanctity that militates against a "normal" Jewish state and society and that gives rise to a particular Haredi ghettoization.

Turning to the sanctity of language, Haredi religious life involves an intrinsically sacred language, Hebrew. Hebrew is consecrated as the sacred text of the Bible, prayers, and early rabbinic literature. The Bible is handed down in a traditional spelling and pronunciation that is not to be consciously changed; the other texts are also treated conservatively, particularly as regards the overall pronunciation system. Even where used for other religious writing or practical everyday purposes, Hebrew is also deemed sacred, to a lesser degree, by virtue of the form of its letters, so that it may not be used for profane purposes. Sacred and secular writing are accepted, but profane writing (i.e., that of the nonreligious) is unacceptable. Furthermore, Hebrew is not meant to be spoken except in explicitly sacred contexts: a learned discourse or, at least in the recent past, when conversing on the holy Sabbath day. Secular use of Hebrew in speech, let alone profane use, is condemned by Haredi ideologues.

Here, it should be noted that Haredism does not represent the detailed position of all Ultraorthodox leaders of the past century. In our particular case, the major polemical work on the use of the Hebrew language, by Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, is in effect a polemic against the markedly modernistic linguistic views of the highly authoritative turn-of-the-century leader, Rabbi Barukh Halevi Epstein.

Hebrew is considered in Jewish religious tradition to have been the language of the Israelites in their land. Before that, too, as early as the Israelites' first appearance as a religious-ethnic group (starting with Abraham and his descendants in Canaan) and thereafter as a people awaiting a return to their land (the enslavement in Egypt and the Exodus), they already are widely believed to have possessed the Hebrew language.

But before there was a Jewish entity, Hebrew was, according to traditional belief, the possession of a few wise men, handed down since Creation, and

indeed a supernatural language from which the world was created rather than created in the course of life. The Midrashim (Biblical commentaries of late Antiquity) abound with motifs of the kind: "Just as the Torah was given in the Holy Tongue, so the World was created with the Holy Tongue."<sup>7</sup> In the words of the philosophical magnum opus of the 11th-century thinker, Judah Ha-Levi, treated as authoritative in Haredi circles: "The language created by God, which He taught Adam and placed on his tongue and in his heart, is without any doubt the most perfect and most fitted to express the things specified" (Kuzari, 11:68). This notion continues to make itself felt in the contemporary norms of Orthodoxy in general. The prewar Ashkenazi authority, Rabbi Israel Meir Ha-Kohen, in connection with the legality of prayers and vows in vernacular languages, ruled in his elucidations to the standard code of law that "whereas the Holy Tongue is a language *of its essence*, other tongues are to be considered languages only by popular convention" (Bi'ur Halakha, Orah Hayyim, 62). Thus, Hebrew is seen to have been bound up with Jewish peoplehood and territory, while yet in some way superterritorial and even supernatural.

Now just this very description is also true of the land of Israel. Even before becoming the physical homeland, it is traditionally deemed to have been the Holy Land designate, the center of the world and no other nation's possession by right.<sup>8</sup> As expressed in the opening, celebrated comment on Genesis 1:1 by the authoritative commentator, Rashi (1040-1105; printed in most copies of the traditional Jewish Bible):

What is the reason, then, that it [the Torah] commences with the account of the Creation? Because of the thought expressed in the text "He declared to His people the strength of His works [i.e., He gave an account of the work of Creation] in order that He might give them the heritage of the nations." For should the nations of the World say to Israel, "You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan," Israel may reply to them, "All the Earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He . . . When He willed, He awarded it to them, and when He willed He took it from them and awarded it to us."

On a teleological plane, great emphasis has been placed on the tie between maintaining Hebrew for sacred ritual and perpetuating Jewish peoplehood until the return to Zion, particularly in the shadow of concerted campaigns by 19th-century reformists against twin symbols of Jewish peoplehood, the linguistic and the territorial: Hebrew and longing for Zion. Quoting again from the widely authoritative Hafez Hayyim's glosses on the standard code of law:

They have translated the whole body of prayer into the vernaculars, and one sin leads to another: they excised the blessing for the Ingathering of

the Exiles and the blessing for the Return to Jerusalem, and just as they seek to obliterate the memory of Jerusalem so they seek to obliterate the Holy Tongue among the Jews, lest we be redeemed by virtue of not switching our language. (Mishna Berura, Orah Hayyim, 101:13)

Ultimately, in fact, the Holy Land and Holy Tongue – and indeed the world itself – exist for the sake of the Torah, the Holy Writ, which dictates to the Jews a system of actions (Halakha) and beliefs. All things sacred in the Ultraorthodox Jewish ideology we are studying are geared teleologically to the fulfillment of the Halakha.

Using an extensional concept of sanctity, stressing what sanctity seeks to avoid, Haredi polemic makes much of the traditional teaching (in the Midrash, the Biblical commentaries of late Antiquity) to the effect that Israel was redeemed from Egypt because it did not forsake its dress, its language, and so on. "The Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabba ch. 23 states: 'They should not abandon the language of Jacob their father and should not learn the language of Egypt because of the ways of idolatry, as it says, "Who is like unto your people Israel, one nation in the World?"'" (anonymous pamphlet, *Beinyan masoyres avoseynu*<sup>9</sup> [Concerning the tradition of our ancestors], 1970s).

The sanctity of Hebrew, like the sanctity of the Holy Land, stems in large part from the religious duties it involves. Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the Satmarer Rebbe [leader], sees knowledge of the Holy Tongue as geared to the duties of prayer and study of the Law, which must be performed in Hebrew, that is, as knowledge for survival's sake (Teitelbaum 1959-1961:103-08):

Language is of great value to those whose whole speech is holy; and conversely, to those who sin in their speech it is more disgusting in the Law's eyes if it is in the Holy Tongue – because it is certainly a major imperative for the pious to know the Language, but to accustom the folk to speak the Holy Tongue is impossible, as the sins of speech, even in foreign tongues, are horrendous: mendacity, evil talk, bad language, eroticism. Thus, if they grow used to speaking the holy language our sins will only be greater. (ibid: para. 18, p. 422)

And just as Zionist settlement has, for Haredim, nothing to do with the religious imperative of settling the Holy Land, so too the modern Hebrew Language is not the Holy Tongue. Here is a key question of language definition. As long as Hebrew was not a spoken language, one could preserve its ancient, dormant layers as a medium of prayer and, to an extent, of study, calling it a holy tongue.<sup>10</sup> But once the revival and modernization of the language had begun, with Hebrew acting as a secular spoken and written medium, open to foreign influence, was this still the Holy Tongue? Was a modern, dynamic medium of functional and secular communication still to be considered a holy tongue if it had ancient layers still used for exclusively sacred registers?

The Haredi answer to this is unambiguous: Not Modern Hebrew but the language of the Scripture, and it alone, constitutes the Holy Tongue.

It [the Holy Tongue] is only that which comes by prophecy . . . and undoubtedly, even if the sages of the Talmud added some words which were not truly of the Holy Tongue but their own coinages, they have sanctity as the Sages drew inspiration from a sacred place and everything they said was uttered in their Houses of Study in a spirit of understanding and sanctity. But what the free-thinkers have coined to add to the language is totally impure, and impure may not be mixed with pure. (Teitelbaum 1959-1961:432)

Taking the sanctity of language one degree further, the *Hurban* (destruction of the Jewish Temple in 69-70 of the Common Era [C.E.]) is considered by Satmar ideologues to have signified that the Jews, whatever their piety, not only lost the right to political independence in the Holy Land but also have no further right to speak Hebrew until the Messiah. To quote from the tract *Es Nisoyen* 'Time of Tribulation' (p. 17) written some 20 years ago, extracts from which appear in a recent updated issue of the American Satmar Yiddish-language periodical *Bedarkhey Hatoyre* 'In the Ways of the Torah' (no. 5:3):

The Land of Israel and the Holy Tongue [Hebrew], which are higher privileges, were taken from us at the time of the Destruction of the Temple because we were not worthy of them, and it will be restored at the Redemption which will be much higher and greater, as Redemption itself, which is the end goal of Creation, is the time when God will reign forever. [our translation]

There is a further parallel to be noted between language and territory. This extract might have appeared to imply that the Holy Tongue has been entirely abandoned, but this is no more true than to suggest that the Holy Land is off limits altogether. Hebrew has traditionally been deemed mandatory by Halakha (Jewish law) as the language in which Biblical texts must be publicly read and statutory prayers recited.<sup>11</sup> And, de facto, the legal texts and commentaries of Antiquity, written either in Hebrew or in Aramaic, have been preserved in their original language for study, and most subsequent legal texts and commentaries (as well as much artistic and scientific writing) have been in Hebrew (see, e.g., Glinert 1987b; Rabin 1973). Haredi society, like Orthodox society as a whole, continues to attach great value and prestige to the ability to write *hiddushim* (innovative articles and squibs) elucidating traditional texts – in Hebrew. Indeed, Rabbi Teitelbaum of Satmar himself deemed it perfectly natural to write his anti-Zionist legal tractate (Teitelbaum 1959-1961) in the Holy Tongue.

Whether the use of Hebrew for newspaper reports or other, not intrinsic

cally religious, purposes has ever been queried in any quarters is not clear to us. But the Haredi newspapers and Neturei Karta wall posters regularly use Hebrew. The non-Zionist Aguda political party even employs the contemporary Israeli style of Hebrew in its newspapers for these purposes. Given the low priority for Yiddish literacy in Haredi schools noted by Isaacs (1988), one wonders if private letters and notes of a nonreligious nature are more likely to be in Yiddish than in Hebrew. Such issues aside, the use of Hebrew for written purposes has not been questioned, at least not for religious written purposes.

*lack of attention in Haredi schools*

This state of affairs, self-evident though it may appear to Jews, to whom the use of Hebrew in religious writing is normal, is of interest when one considers Haredi attitudes toward the land of Israel. Even though some of the Torah's basic precepts (*mitzvor*) can only be fulfilled in the land of Israel,<sup>12</sup> there has been no movement to encourage Haredim to migrate from the United States or elsewhere to the Holy Land in these times when one can at last do so easily and economically. Arguably, a combination of fear of the secular Zionist state and Diasporic well-being and inertia is largely responsible; to actually get up and change countries is a major upheaval. To this may be added apprehension as to whether it is possible to observe those Torah obligations involving the Holy Land correctly and scrupulously.

By contrast, the use of Hebrew as a written religious language undoubtedly serves to maintain the basic Jewish understanding of the Torah and is furthermore quite simply a continuation of an ancient tradition rather than a new departure and upheaval. Also, there is no reason to fear that it might allow unwelcome contact between the Haredi community and the written secular Hebrew culture of present-day Israel.

It is only as spoken language that Hebrew was largely in disuse since the second century C.E. It has, admittedly, often been used (a) as a lingua franca for Jews who did not share the same vernacular and (b) as a Sabbath language in pious Hasidic circles in Eastern Europe. In general, though, the spoken language of everyday life and even of religious teaching has been Yiddish or some other Jewish vernacular.

What is it about speaking Hebrew that so offends Satmar ideologues? Is it a matter of extensional as well as intensional sanctity, that is, of repulsing the profane as well as affirming the sacred? And does it relate in some way to the anathema against having an independent Jewish state in the Holy Land?

In fact, it appears that the notion of a spoken language is perceived as being intrinsically similar to that of a state. Just as the state inescapably involves its citizens in rights, duties, and general interdependence (e.g., in public services, taxation, education, etc.), so a shared spoken language – far more than a written one – irresistibly creates contacts, spreads a sense of identity, and spreads a shared semantics, far less consciously than the writ-

ten word. Thus, it behooves the believers to steer well clear of the sacred spoken language (i.e., Hebrew) until such time as society as a whole is ready for it. It is too hot to handle.

And because of the particular vulnerability of spoken intercourse, if the believers are unfortunate enough to find themselves among profane speakers of Hebrew, they must do all in their power to avoid contact with these sinners. It is as dangerous as having contact with a secular Jewish state.

On the power of language as a whole, written as well as spoken, the anonymous author of the tract *Be'inyan Masoyres Avoseynu* 'Concerning the Tradition of Our Ancestors' had this to say: "Language expresses inner essence more than all other behaviour." Every language was divinely assigned in accordance with the nation's character. "A language epitomizes a nation." Indeed, "languages are equipped for any and every evil in accordance with the external forces of the national spirit, and one thereby regrettably mingles with the nations, thus prolonging the Exile."

As for the power of the spoken Hebrew language, the anonymous compiler of the recent issue of the Yiddish periodical to which we referred *Be-Darkhey Ha-Toyre* 'In the Ways of the Torah' (ibid.) said:

We are addressing ourselves here to the God-fearing, for whom the Holy Torah is their guide – they acknowledge the truth, but out of ignorance and inattentiveness they have grown accustomed to the "State of Israel" and the "Ivris" [Hebrew] language, as if it were a straightforward and self-evident matter. Some do understand perfectly well the notion of the State and are its fierce opponents, but, being accustomed since childhood to speaking "Ivris," they have come to regard the latter as permissible; it is a habit that is hard to break. (3-4, drawn from *Kuntres Ba-Sofo Ho-Ivris* 'Tract on the Hebrew Language')

Note the use of the term "Ivris" for the secular language; we come back to this later.

Just as the greatest danger posed by a premature Jewish state is its being a secular one, controlled by free-thinking Zionists, so is spoken Hebrew most threatening because it is the work of these same free thinkers.<sup>13</sup> Their ideas are thus able to penetrate into the innermost recesses of the well-guarded Jewish home. To cite *Be-Darkhey Ha-Toyre* again: "And strangers have come and desecrated it to make it impure to use it for talking all manner of revolting things. . . . Now even among upright Jews the habit has spread of speaking the language with their own family" (7, drawn from *Shoymer Emunim* 'Keeping Faith', Maamar Tsahali ve-Royini, 12).

The supreme irony, and perhaps the reason for the ideologues' extreme hostility toward Modern Hebrew, is that the use of a Jewish language has traditionally been a shield separating Jews from the outside world. This has

involved both Hebrew and Yiddish. Hebrew, as the written language of European Jews up to the late 18th century and of most Eastern European Jews until late in the 19th century, was the language in which one wrote one's business accounts, kept one's communal records, and generally conducted one's affairs with other Jews. It was thus a key point in the emancipation of Austro-Hungarian and German Jewry that they should thenceforth consent to keep their records and accounts in the Gentile language, open to outsiders' inspection.<sup>14</sup> As for Yiddish, which in the vast Jewish settlements in Slavic lands was totally unintelligible to the Gentile, it was perceived by Jews as a thoroughly Jewish language - brimming with Hebraisms and Jewicisms - and by Ultraorthodox ideologues as fulfillment of a religious imperative to maintain a separate Jewish vernacular, always written in the Jewish alphabet.

For example, in Antiquity the Midrash stated that the Hebrews were redeemed from Egypt because they did not forsake their dress or their language (see Leviticus Rabba Emor (32,5) and Canticles Rabba 4). This was a theme espoused by Rabbi Moses Schreiber (known as the Chasam Sofer), the early 19th-century scourge of Jewish secularization in central Europe and a prime authority of Haredi ideologues ever since. 7210 AM

And I cannot imagine why you sign your names in Roman lettering even in secular documents and in dietary certificates, something unthinkable to our fathers and ancient rabbis, and I believe that the Ancients were masters of foreign tongues and yet deliberately set out to jumble them [i.e., convert them into Jewish languages, when they abandoned spoken Hebrew and adopted Gentile tongues] because of the Eighteen Rabbinical Decrees [The First Century Decrees of Beth Shamai, including one against speaking Gentile tongues] in the Jerusalem Talmud, ch. 1 of Shabbat.<sup>15</sup>

As Poll ([1955] 1981:199) observed, "the usage of Yiddish was one of the major instruments which strengthened the social separation between Orthodox and nonobservant Jews in Hungary. For example . . . the Chasam Sofer prohibited the Jewish communities from electing rabbis who were 'readers of a foreign language, because [even] the words of the Torah it is forbidden to receive from such a person. It is like putting an idol into the Holy Ark.'"

Thus, it appears that language has always been more segregatory than territory in Haredi ideology and collective memory.<sup>16</sup> The Haredim and their ideologues have never sought nor preached total isolation from Gentiles or present-day Jews. Their ghettos have not been hermetically sealed, and in today's Israel they share the same stores, the same transport, and so forth. But the ideology has demanded that language be used as a safeguard against any social intercourse. Of course, if one does not enjoy territorial sovereignty, it is not so simple to achieve self-isolation, but comparison with the efforts of other self-segregating groups (such as the Amish) does suggest that the

segregation by l more than by territory  
Haredim have, in practice as well as in theory, worked for segregation by language more than by territory.

In recent times, however, the secular Jew has infiltrated not only into the territory of the Haredim, the traditional Holy Cities of the Holy Land (it is arguable whether the whole country is perceived as Haredi territory), but into their language space too, affecting both Yiddish and the Holy Tongue, Hebrew. The large-scale secularization of Yiddish-speaking Jews in industrializing *fin de siècle* Eastern Europe seriously threatened the quasi-sacred *Sitz im Leben* of Yiddish, a threat tragically lifted only by the Holocaust and by the displacement of the surviving Haredi centers to the West and to Israel, where they no longer dwell within a cultural sea of secular Yiddish.<sup>17</sup> d'upar  
yidish  
over

And with Hebrew, a particular problem for the Haredi is that the Hebrew of the secularists is so intelligible (being essentially the same Hebrew as that of the Hebrew Sources, except for some differences in style and some modern vocabulary) that there is ultimately little that Haredim can do - short of prohibiting the study of the Hebrew Sources to their womenfolk at least, or moving away from secular areas - that would lessen the potential subversion of the secular world. Revealingly, indeed, Haredi publicity aimed at the outside world often seeks to employ Israeli colloquialisms and army jargon, whether in the belief that these are necessary to literal communication or from a desire to sound less alien.

Even the Rabbi of Satmar himself recognized the special practical pressure to speak Hebrew in Israel and regarded this as a less heinous (though still heinous) offense.

In Eretz Israel, that impure tongue [Modern Hebrew] is the state language and people think they need it for all their needs and there it is like an idol of silver and gold; whereas overseas - where it is unusable and useless - it is like an idol of wood and stone . . . of which the Talmud states that one's penalty is the greater, and since it is useless it simply betokens gratitude and respect for the heresy and for the language they have concocted to push out the frontiers of heresy. (Teitelbaum 1959-1961:432)

One particular parallel between the linguistic and the physical barriers is the rigid maintenance of European (*Ashkenazi*) pronunciation and European dress. Both are portrayed as a tradition of ancestors that *qua* custom must not be changed. It is a felicitous coincidence that the Zionist settlers decided early in the century to switch, as well as they could, to a Levantine pronunciation of Hebrew, thus providing the Ultraorthodox with a ready-made linguistic barrier (Morag 1959). Even when orally pronouncing sacred texts, Haredim do not sound secular.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, *Ivris*, the name of the Hebrew language of contemporary Israel, is readily treated by the Haredi as distinct from the real, sacred Hebrew, in the same way as the name of the state distinguishes the state from the sacred

geographical land of Israel. In the case of the former: *Ivris* (Israeli pronunciation: *Ivrit*) versus *Loshn Koydesh*, literally 'sacred tongue'. In the latter: *Medinas Yisroel* (Israeli pronunciation: *Medinat Yisrael*), literally 'state of Israel', versus *Eretz Yisroel*, literally 'land of Israel'.

In examining the notions of absolute sanctity of territory and language as perpetuated and elaborated in Satmar ideology, we have noted several major parallels, some of them explicitly articulated as such in the religious literature: positive use of the sacred, avoidance of certain uses, and vigorous self-segregation (particularly featuring pull forces) from those who make secular use of the absolutely sacred. At the same time, we have suggested that it is language rather than territory that has been seen as the more functional and compelling in terms of segregatory effect. We now turn to notions of a quasi-absolute sanctity.

#### QUASI-ABSOLUTE SANCTITY: THE IMPLICATIONS OF YIDDISH

In examining the parallels between the linguistic and the territorial in Satmar ideology, we must ask whether one may talk of an intrinsic link. An important test of this is whether the parallel extends to Yiddish with respect to its quasi-sacred functions.<sup>19</sup>

The general notion of quasi-sanctity has recently been evoked by Heilman (1988:263f) in connection with the degrees of holiness of ritual objects, such as Torah Scrolls and their appurtenances. He distinguished (a) sacred objects (in Hebrew, *kley kodesh* and *tashmishey kedusha*); (b) para-sacred objects (*tashmishey mitzva*), "which in and of themselves do not have sanctity but which - while they are being used in the fulfillment of some religious ritual act - share a measure of veneration," such as prayer shawls; and (c) quasi-sacred objects, "that have some association with Jewish religious and ritual life but have according to Jewish law no inherent sanctity nor are they absolutely required for the fulfillment of some religious or ritual act." Heilman noted that, although the dividing lines are blurred (both in legal theory and in the quite distinct world of folk practice and perception), there is nevertheless a clear hierarchy.

Heilman's category of quasi-sacred can profitably be applied in our context. Let us first consider whether, beyond the Holy Land, Haredi ideology knows any notion of quasi-sacred territory. The issue goes all the way back to the great 3rd-century Babylonian sage, Rabbi Judah. In an age when Babylonia and the Holy Land served as the twin foci of Judaism, his academy was a center of religious gravity in Babylon. Study centered on the laws of tort and property, of practical importance by contrast with the mass of laws relating to the now-defunct Temple. This indicates a pragmatic approach to the restoration of Jewish life in exile, for which Rabbi Judah supplied much of the ideology. The Babylonian Talmud speaks in two places of

Rabbi Judah's pupils who wished to emigrate to the Holy Land and had to avoid their Rabbi. He had ruled that "anyone who leaves Babylon for the Holy Land commits a religious offense," citing Jeremiah 27:22. Furthermore, "just as it is wrong to leave the Holy Land for Babylon, it is wrong to leave Babylon for other countries," explained as meaning "because there are academies there that teach the Law continually."

This explanation is in fact a motto for Haredi territorialism. The value of territory that emerges is not intrinsic but based on the use people make of it. When there was no longer a way of properly keeping the territorial commandments in the Holy Land and there was a religious center outside it, that center competed with the Holy Land. In discussing burial, Rabbi Judah said, "Anyone living in Babylon is like someone living in the Holy Land." Yet at the same time he was known for his love of the Holy Land and its produce, and he insisted on speaking Hebrew - a holy language - rather than the local Aramaic in daily life, even in the bathhouse.

And tension developed between the religious tie to the Holy Land - based on a plethora of duties such as prayers, festivals, and commemorations - and the reality of life on foreign soil, where a quasi-sacred space was being created by a Jewish lifestyle and the institutions connected to it. Perhaps part of coping with the tension is the notion of the millennium and the return to Israel as a Utopia, that is, a matter for the end of days, to be awaited patiently.

Thus, the Haredi are instructed that a place and its environment must be assessed according to what they contain. The Haredi can fully express themselves only in a space that is defined as Haredi quasi-sacred territory.

The linguistic correlate to this notion of do-it-yourself quasi-sacred space may be found in Yiddish, as expressed in the seminal teaching of Rabbi Moses Schreiber that Yiddish and other Jewish languages are an outcome of a religious imperative to fashion Gentile languages into Jewish ones. An interesting version of this conception of Yiddish is the belief of Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin (1817-1898), a leader of Jerusalem Haredism, that "the Jews of Germany, fearing assimilation through the influence of language, chose to adopt the mother tongue of the simple peasantry (who were wont to speak differently than the cultured Gentiles) which would keep them separate from the Gentiles, and thus was born our Yiddish" (related in *Be-Darkhey Ha-Toyre*: 21).

But beyond this, Rabbi Diskin actually perceived Yiddish as having some kind of extrinsic sanctity, and here too we soon note a parallel with territorial notions. Rabbi Diskin went on to the effect that, "if the language was the defense against assimilation, then it per se is the sacred language [in Yiddish: *loshn ha-koydesh*]" (ibid). Similarly, the Hungarian Hasidic leader and inspiration of Satmar Haredism, Rabbi Hayyim Elazar Shapiro of Munkacz, in his volume *Divrey Toyre* 'Words of Torah' (1922):

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This teaches us the ways of our sainted rabbis, so that we may cleave to them and the meaning of their speech in all matters, and even to the Yiddish language, spoken by our sainted correligionists. Though it is an everyday language, they themselves are our fathers and teachers of blessed memory and the special quality of their every utterance has brought it to the threshold of sanctity.

In practice, too, the degree to which Yiddish was used in prewar Hungary corresponded to the degree of religiosity, ranging from use merely in teaching sacred texts to total use in traditionalist circles (Poll [1955] 1981:201).

This attitude is widely, if somewhat palely, reflected in the general preference even among non-Satmar Haredi circles for sacred study to be conducted in Yiddish, though their everyday vernacular may sometimes be English or Flemish or Modern Hebrew. Thus, in London, some 3,500 children, many from English-speaking homes, are currently estimated to be learning Torah, commonly for at least six hours a day, by translation from the original into Yiddish.<sup>20</sup> (Indeed, this particularly sacred perception of Yiddish has undoubtedly grown as secular Yiddish-speaking circles in the West have shrunk, giving the Haredi a near monopoly of the language.) There is, however, no objection to the use of English in secular contexts (Poll [1955] 1981:207) any more than there is objection to mixing with the outside world at one's work. Interestingly, moreover, English is the standard home language between parents (particularly those who were themselves raised in English) in many Satmar households, the same households for which socializing with outsiders is anathema – though the same parents will often prefer to speak to their offspring in Yiddish, which is arguably the easiest and most practical thing to do as it is in Yiddish that most of their long school day and long school year is conducted. Y: from symbol to instrumental tool for insularity

Most germane to the nexus of language and territory is the question of whether Yiddish in Western-born Haredi circles might actually be progressing from medium of instruction to a more general medium of home communication, that is, from symbol of identification with the perished glory of Eastern Europe to instrumental tool of social insulation. Our impression is that this is so.

One ideologue to have gone still further is Rabbi Simcha Elberg, editor of the influential American Haredi journal *Ha-Pardes*, who would limit the status of Hebrew to an "original medium with a strong historical tradition"<sup>21</sup> rather than an intrinsic sacred value: "Without the Holy Tongue, a strong, fertile Judaism can develop." He mentioned the medieval luminaries Maimonides and Saadiah Gaon as examples of Jewish law and philosophy in non-Hebraic medium. (Interestingly, he does not condemn the speaking of Hebrew per se.) For him, Yiddish and Hebrew are almost on a par: "If Yiddish serves the holy goal, Yiddish is precious and we surely will never make sacrifices for Hebrew."

Territorially, the Eastern European heartland of pre-War Ultraorthodoxy is itself invested with a certain derived sanctity, as expressed by Rabbi Aharon Roter (1982:93):

The level of a man is measured by his proximity to places of Torah study . . . In our days, having no altar or Temple, two things make for good environment:

- a. well-established *yeshivas* ('Talmudic academies'),
- b. a great man living there.

As Hazon Ish (Rabbi A. Karelitz, 1879–1954) stated: "The land of Poland, with its well-established *yeshivas* and the saintly Hafetz Hayyim and other revered great men of Torah living there, has the same legal status as the Land of Israel, whereas other lands simply have the status of 'Outside the Land of Israel'."

For a particular example of Orthodox territorial-linguistic Yiddishism, see Fishman (1986). In practice, as Poll ([1955] 1981:200) has noted, linguistic separation created a large body of postwar Hungarian Haredi immigrants "still far removed from the world of Jewish nationalist secular interests."

#### THE MODEL AND THE REALITY

This study has focused on an ideology of language and territory. Reality is inevitably somewhat different. In our case, the ideologues themselves admit the deep inroads made into Haredi home life by Modern Spoken Hebrew. This is no doubt the triple result of (a), above all, day-to-day contact with the outside world; and to some extent (b) contact with the so-called Haredo-Sephardim (Hebrew-speaking Sephardi Jews sympathetic to Haredi values, who have recently become an institutional and political force);<sup>22</sup> and (c) the openness of Haredi society to intermarriage with Hebrew speakers (many from nonreligious backgrounds, referred to as *hozrim bi-teshuva* 'penitents') who have chosen to adopt such a lifestyle. No sociolinguistic study is as yet available.<sup>23</sup>

Socioterritorial studies, by contrast, do exist. Shilhav and Friedman (1985:9) noted that, unlike such groups as the American Amish, the Haredi in Israel are economically dependent on the outside world and its service jobs, despite the insularity of their place of abode and schooling.

As observed earlier, the attempt by Haredism to separate and adopt the instrumental and value components of modernity to the exclusion of its cultural components faces severe difficulties. Such separation between various components and variables is well understood and accepted as theory, for this is an analytical thought pattern commonly exercised in a model in which isolation of variables is of the essence. By contrast, to transpose the analytical model to an operative level, applying it to daily life, is a virtual impossibility.

ity, because the components whose separateness is clear and simple to formulate in theory are so interwoven in practice as to preclude setting up neat, discrete components.

We refer here to the extreme model of Haredi separatism, be it territorial or linguistic. Both types are part of the same isolation of the sacred. General, basic models dealing with the meanings of sacred space depict a holy location as an order of values at odds with the chaos all about it (Shilhav & Friedman 1985). Both order and chaos have various embodiments, according to group, faith, or ideology. In any event, sacred/profane (or even impure) is a clear-cut dichotomy – in the model.

In reality, the Haredi lives an existential paradox: rejecting the secular urban way of life while vitally depending on it. This entails many departures from the theoretical ideal. Haredism has taken up an extreme, model-type position. Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, late leader of the Satmar Hasidim, was considered leader of the Haredi community (Eda Haredit) of Jerusalem although resident in the United States since the Holocaust. Revered throughout the Haredi world, he nonetheless never saw his extreme anti-Zionist views accepted as binding in everyday Haredi life, save by a tiny minority. This chasm between ideology and practice, territorially and linguistically, is the difference between model and reality.

If research reveals that Hebrew in Israel is steadily gaining against Yiddish within the Ashkenazi Haredi homestead, to an extent not justified by marriage with penitents, one will have to conclude that Modern Spoken Hebrew is being regarded by the Haredi masses not as modern culture but as an instrument of modernity – just like computers and medicine – and thus intrinsically permissible.

This study set out to determine how far the linguistic and territorial ideology of present-day Satmar Hasidism, and of Haredism in general, can be correlated. We examined first the relative sanctity of a space that accommodates a closed Haredi lifestyle and of a language in which it is expressed, then contrasted this with the absolute sanctity of the land of Israel and the language of Scripture both in their intensional (positive) and in their extensional (negative) dimensions, and finally studied the quasi-absolute sanctity with which the Yiddish language and Jewish habitat of Eastern Europe (the *heym* 'home') have been invested. We are thus led to the conclusion that three such cases of a parallel between linguistic and territorial ideology are more than a coincidence. Indeed, although the writings of Haredism – ancient and modern – do not, on the whole, speak explicitly of language and land being bound up intrinsically, we believe that the correlation of language and territory on the plane of quasi-absolute sanctity (as expressed by Yiddish and by the Jewish *heym*) betokens an ongoing, active ideological tie, rather than a set of worn, petrified values evoking mere lip-service. These notions of quasi-sanctity find many echoes in reality: in the use of Yiddish and

in the creation of a surrogate Eastern European lifestyle in the Haredi ghettos.

## NOTES

1. See Friedman (1986, 1987), Lamm (1971), Poll (1980), and Schneller (1980). A variety of other labels have been used in recent scholarship, notably "Right-wing Orthodox," "Traditionalist Orthodox" and "Sectarian Orthodox." On Orthodox and Ultraorthodox Judaism in the United States, see Liebman (1965), Spero (1978), Helmreich (1982), and Wertheimer (1989:107–24).
2. See, e.g., Friedman (1978), especially ch. 5; Shilhav (1983, 1984a, 1984b); Shilhav and Friedman (1985); and Shafir (1987).
3. The Satmar Hasidim are sometimes referred to as *Neturei Karta*, though strictly speaking this refers to a Jerusalem-based militant group incorporating some members of other sects too. More broadly, these and other anti-Zionist sects in Israel form the *Eda Haredit* ('Community of the God-fearing'), embracing militant and nonmilitant anti-Zionists, though the rapid changes in Haredi politics in Israel and America render such terms and categories a trifle precarious. On the general outlook of Satmar, see Weinberger (1978).
4. In practice, as opposed to polemic, it appears that Yiddish, since the Holocaust, has been geared to bolstering an Eastern European ambience and spirit in yeshivas (talmudic academies), rather than just to promoting segregation. This was observed of the United States in 1961 by the then Executive Vice President of the Aguda, a major Orthodox organization (Poll 1981:215): "In the Orthodox Yeshivas, Yiddish is the language of instruction, and the lease of life which Yiddish enjoys in this country is only directly due to these Orthodox institutions of learning." This is not a consideration in Satmar polemics.
5. Isaacs (1988), emphasizing the irrelevance of census data, is able to report that Yiddish is the language of instruction for 18,600 elementary and high school Haredi children in Jerusalem. This figure, we would stress, does not even include teenage boys – who enter Yeshiva (full-time religious college) at the age of 13 – and kindergarten children, let alone the large Haredi population in the Tel Aviv conurbation. At the same time, she reported a very widespread knowledge of Modern Hebrew; indeed, the majority of Haredim (though undoubtedly not those of the Satmar circles on which our article focuses) may be speaking and educating their children primarily in Modern Hebrew.
6. On attitudes to Yiddish among European Jewish intellectuals and masses, see Miron (1973, chs. 1 and 2). Compare the attitudes to vernacular dialects as depicted in Wolfram (1986).
7. For references and discussion of such traditional theories expounded in the Midrash, the Talmud, and by medieval philosophers, see Glinert (1987a).
8. Interestingly, neither the Holy Land nor the Holy Tongue has a Jewish name in the Biblical sources, as if (in traditionalist eyes) to underscore the fact that they are sacred entities held in trust rather than by absolute right and title. The land is always referred to in the Bible as *Canaan*; and as for the language, it is hardly ever referred to by name, only as *yehudit* 'the language of [the political entity] Judea' (Isaiah 36 and Nehemiah 13), not by a name encompassing the whole people of Israel. The names traditionally used post-Biblically and to this day in Ultraorthodox society are *eretz yisrael* 'the land of Israel' and *loshn koydesh* 'holy tongue', the latter notably emphasizing the function rather than the speakership or possessors of the language.
9. For this and all other Haredi references, our transcription represents an Ashkenazi pronunciation.
10. The status of Hebrew as a language of religious study already declined (Teitelbaum 1959–1961: para. 21, p. 425f) in late Antiquity, with the switch to Aramaic for the main bulk of the Talmud.
11. Strictly speaking, ancient and medieval Halakha allowed for statutory prayers to be read in one's vernacular, but in practice – particularly in Halakhic rulings of the 19th and 20th centuries (apparently responding to Reformist campaigns to make German the language of prayer) – Hebrew has been required (see Glinert 1987a).
12. Notably those connected with agriculture, e.g., tithing and the sabbatical cessation from farming.
13. Poll (1980) ignored the intrinsic prohibition against spoken Hebrew and regarded the

anathema against Hebrew as an extrinsic, instrumental issue of secularization and assimilation with secularists.

14. See Reinhartz & Mendes-Flohr (1980:35, 127) citing, respectively, Joseph II of Austria's Edict of Tolerance and Frederick William III of Prussia's Declaration of Emancipation.

15. Chasam Sofer (Rabbi Moses Schreiber), Responsa Even Ha-Ezer, Part 2, 11. However, there is no actual ban on speaking Gentile vernaculars outside Israel in Haredi ideology (see the Satmarer Rebbe [Teitelbaum 1959-1961:432]), apparently for purely pragmatic reasons.

16. Historically, however, Jews and Gentiles had spoken mutually intelligible tongues in Germany, France, and many Mediterranean lands. The relative weight of language and space in terms of absolute sanctity in normative Judaism as a whole, historically and currently, is a complex question. For space, one may point to the centrality of the synagogue; territorially, the all-pervasive yearning for a return to the Holy Land was seldom (or seldom able to be?) translated into reality and even today Orthodox communities rarely mobilize to emigrate to Israel en masse. For language, the traditional codes of law gave preference to Hebrew for prayer and ritual, while fully condoning the use of the vernacular in case of ignorance, though far more mutely since the rise of Reform Judaism. The net result, though, was and is a preoccupation with imparting a rudimentary Hebrew literacy (commonly even to women) and a maintenance of the ancient sources in their Hebrew or Aramaic original, but a failure to develop methods for opening these Hebrew sources to the masses. Of special significance here is the mystic notion that prayers said in Hebrew are effective even when one does not understand the language.

17. Secular Yiddish has waned rapidly since the 1950s, when Poll ([1955]1981:204) could claim that "the role of Yiddish has changed from a language of isolation, as it was in Hungary, to a language of broader horizons."

18. Interestingly, though, we know of no attempt by Haredim to employ this European pronunciation in speech. If one is being obliged to speak to one's family or to outsiders, one might as well use the Israeli pronunciation and be done with it.

19. Whether women and indeed even men always use Yiddish among themselves is uncertain. It may be that, as with the Lubavitch community investigated in Jochnowitz ([1968] 1981), the Satmar womenfolk in the United States make substantial use of English.

20. We are grateful to Rabbi Avrohom Pinter for this estimate. For the same phenomenon in 19th-20th century Hungary, see Poll ([1955] 1981:201).

21. S. Elberg, "Vos men hot gemakht fun undzer loshn hakoydesh," *Jewish Tribune*, January 15, 22, 29, 1987, London.

22. Thus, Friedman (1986) stated that "the vast majority of the Middle Eastern Haredi Jews have studied either in Ashkenazi Haredi institutions or in those modelled after them."

23. On penitents in Israeli society, see Danziger (1989). Schneller (1980) has noted complementary inroads into the upbringing of Haredi girls in Israel. To avoid the "worse evil" of girls being sent to non-Haredi schools (by the many parents for whom the whole education of women is less serious), the leadership has allowed a range of secular subjects to be taught. One Hasidic school set up in 1964 even offered Modern Hebrew grammar - in the prevailing Israeli pronunciation, of course. This apparently conflicts with long-standing bans on teaching foreign languages or speaking Modern Hebrew; interestingly, a comparable ban on teaching girls Torah sources has also been sidestepped. For boys, however, the traditional prohibitions remain in force.

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**Language loss, language gain:  
Cultural camouflage and social change among the  
Sekani of Northern British Columbia<sup>1</sup>**

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ABSTRACT

The creation of a large artificial lake in 1968 that flooded a large part of the Sekani homeland has led to change in the political outlook of the reorganized Sekani villages. In particular, there has been a reemergence of a universalist social-political philosophy, pan-Indianism, that had as its precursor the cultural-political category of phratry. The association between disruption and the emergence of this system of categorization is historically grounded. The particular problem addressed is why the Sekani speak English when there is little direct contact with Euro-Canadians and no particular advantages, in terms of adaptation to the new economic regime, in doing so. Changes in Sekani English in the political sphere and in relationship terms are examined within the context of maintaining a commitment to pan-Indianism/universalism. (Language loss, bilingualism, political culture, ways of speaking, British Columbia, Athapaskan languages)

In the summer of 1978, a young Sekani girl asked me when I was going to learn Sekani so that I could then teach her and other young people on the Reserve. I responded that I was trying to learn Sekani, with little success, from her parents and people of her parents' generation. Why didn't she, I suggested, simply ask them directly to teach her the language? This, she replied, was impossible; her parents wouldn't talk to her "about that."

This exchange took place in about the third month of my fieldwork. At that point, I had almost abandoned the idea of learning Sekani, an Athapaskan language once spoken by perhaps 500-1,000 people of north-central British Columbia. Now, few people spoke it; most preferred English as their everyday language. At that time, I judged the desire shown by some of the young people to learn their grandparents' language to be a political gesture that was in line with the pan-Indian sentiments common among the young. It seemed not more than a symbol, reaffirming self-identity for purposes of political solidarity with other Native groups. A short while later, I abandoned my attempt to learn fluent Sekani when the last