

Religious Newspapers in Israel: A Rhetorical Perspective*

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The tension in the society of Israel between the Religious Sector and the Seculars is increasing dramatically. The status quo of the earlier days of the State has vanished. A gulf, many say unbridgeable, has been opened, and a *Kulturkampf* between the Religious, namely the Ultra Orthodox, and the Seculars is almost a daily reality. Given the concern of the present paper, my attention is focused on the presentation of the conflict through the religious media, specifically the religious newspapers. The position of the Ultra Orthodox regarding the secular Jews is aptly demonstrated through the work of Rabbi Elhanan Bunim Wasserman (1875-1941), an outstanding leader of Orthodox Jewry. He considers our period as a time of God's judgment, preceded by a period of trial. Modernity is God's trial. God tests His people via temptations introduced by the gentiles. Many Jews, Rabbi Wasserman argues, cannot confront the temptation and they fall into the trap of modernity, adopting foreign ways of behavior such as assimilation and secularism. As a result, the Orthodox Jews are the "sacred remnant" of the Jewish people. Their true goal is to study the Torah. One who studies the Torah accepts the sacred law, and is fulfilling the covenant between God and the people of Israel. Orthodox Jews must devote themselves to the study of the Torah as the true manifestation of their life (Schweid 1994: 15-29, Ravitzki 1999).

Given the Orthodox commitment to the study of the Torah as the essence of Judaism, the study of the sacred law, the Ultra Orthodox maintain, is a necessity, and they reject any other commitments, including the State's affairs. Consequently, from the early days of the State of Israel there has been an agreement between the government and the Ultra Orthodox circles that students of *Yeshivot* (institutes of high Orthodox Jewish learning leading to Rabbinical ordination) may postpone their military service for their years of study. As a matter of fact, at the birth of the State in 1948, Israel granted exemptions to only 400 Ultra Orthodox students to free themselves to rebuild a *yeshivot* system devastated by the Holocaust. The exemption was granted by the State

in spite of universal conscription, given the military situation. However, in 1999, the number of 18-year old Ultra Orthodox students who studied in the *Yeshivot* had reached 30 414, of whom 9.2% qualified for army service. These students of *Yeshivot* were exempted. Moreover, they were funded through government subsidy (Beyer 2000: 34-35).

During the period of the 1999 Elections in Israel, there was strong criticism among the non-Orthodox against Religious men who did not serve in the army (Religious women are exempted by the law). The Seculars felt that the nation and the army are one. Thus, S. Cohen describes the impact of the army, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) in Israel as follows:

The IDF still plays a conspicuously obstructive role in almost any walk of domestic Israeli life which we might care to name. Its prominence was especially notable in the national exhibition held in Tel Aviv in the summer of 1998...ultimately, it was the military which clearly topped the bill (2000: 76).

The growing number of exempted students of the *Yeshivot* has increased opposition to Religious exemption. In the light of a growing number of Israeli soldiers who forfeit their lives to secure the State and her citizens, the issue of conscription for Orthodox Religious men became extremely sensitive for the non-Orthodox. In the 1999 elections the matter became a major political concern. Politicians raised the issue, and the Religious circles could not ignore the increasing public criticism.

We are living in a new age of media; a new media culture is prevailing. Yet, for the Jewish Ultra Orthodox community the newspaper is the media, the informative communication with the external world on the one hand, and on the other hand a channel for communicating special concerns of the community. Given the growing involvement of the Orthodox parties in political life in Israel, the Religious Papers tend to reflect on matters that concern their circles. These circles constitute a number of movements, each of which publishes its own newspaper reflecting its specific position. Attention should be given to the fact that the articles appearing in the religious newspapers are normally read in advance by the 'authorities'. Hence, they convey an official position (Michelson 1998: 218-232). Therefore, the religious newspaper is the appropriate platform for tracing the religious response to the criticism of the Seculars.

The goal of this paper is to study specific religious responses regarding the question of secular criticism on the issue of conscription as they appeared in the religious newspapers, and to look carefully at their ways of argumentation. We may assume that the Religious writers make distinctions between academic and popular writing while popular writing is the medium of the newspaper. The

distinction between Rabbinic academic writing and the popular newspapers is the application of different modes of argumentation. The question is whether the arguments employed in the religious papers introduce a specific mode of argument which we might coin as Religious Rhetoric. Interestingly enough, the readers of the religious newspapers will find out that they are reading articles which employ a religious argumentation that they may be familiar with, in line with their way of studying the Torah. We earlier saw above, Rabbi Wasserman's position regarding the role of the Religious in the society; they are the true "remnants of Israel". His argument is based on a careful reading of the Torah, and an application of the Scriptures' warning regarding the punishment of the people's misbehavior. Rabbi Wasserman applied the expected Divine punishment to the Modern period, namely, to the secular Jews. This mode of argumentation has been discussed by Rachel Landau (1993:50-63), who studied the Rhetorical impact of the Biblical (Torah) quotation as a decisive authority in Religious polemics. She pointed out that the use of the Biblical verses is a means for introducing specific lessons, developed for the sake of providing specific meanings, such as Rabbi Wasserman's conclusions regarding the Seculars.

Thus, on 30 April 1999, *Yated Neeman*, a newspaper which reflects the position of Rabbi Shach, one of the most influential Rabbis of the Ultra Orthodox, published the following article, written by its editor Nathan Zeev Grosman. The article is an analysis of the cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hence, the timing of the publication was not accidental. The Arab-Israeli conflict refers to the military situation, which affects the sensitive question of the conscription of religious men and which stimulated the public debate, specifically during the period of the election campaign. The article purports to shed light on a topic, which, the author says, does not appear too often in his paper. The Arab-Israeli conflict is a political issue, and politics is not the main concern of *Yated Neeman's* readers. However, Grosman motivates his stance by claiming that the Religious community assesses the conflict not in political terms, as do the Seculars, but regards it as a reflection of the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. For Grosman, as a devout believer, the true answer to the roots of the conflict is found in the Torah. He quotes Biblical verses to establish his case, reciting the following passage:

Ye therefore shall keep my Statues and Mine ordinances, and shall not do any of these abominations...that the land vomit not you out also, when Ye defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you (Leviticus 18:26-28).

Our author adds the following elaboration, quoting *Rashi* (Rabbi Shlomo, son of Itzack, died 1105), the great Jewish commentator:

“It is compared to a son of a king that they gave him something disgusting to eat, that he cannot stand it but throws up, similarly the land of Israel, does not keep those who do any of these abominations.”

The meaning of these disgusting matters in this context of Leviticus is discussed in the earlier verses, which deal with matters of naked sexuality. We read:

The nakedness of your father and the nakedness of your mother you shall not uncover... The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover...The nakedness of your sister...you should not uncover...You shall not lie with mankind, as with womankind, it is abomination. And you shall not lie with any beast to defile yourself ...neither shall any woman stand before a beast, to lie down, it is perversion (Leviticus 18: 6-23).

The Torah regards these deeds as unforgivable sins. These were the awful deeds, which defiled the nations who were in the Land before the Israelites, and who were, consequently, thrown out of the Land. The people of Israel are warned in the light of the Biblical passage that the same will happen to them if they misbehave. The moral ethical behavior of the people of Israel in the Land of Israel therefore determines the attitudes of other nations towards them. In other words, the military situation which threatens their existence in the Land, is not caused by external factors. Rather, it arises internally as a result of the misbehaviour of the people of Israel themselves. Specifically, it is a result of their sexual abominations, the writer of article argues, following the Biblical pattern.

Having established the premise of his thesis on the basis of the sacred authoritative citations, the article refers to the current political affair, the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, Grosman's interest is in the cause of Arab resistance to the Israelis. He refers to an authority on the conflict, Professor Yehoshua Porat of the Hebrew University. According to Grosman's reading of Professor Porat, the hatred of the Arabs for the Jews is rooted in the early century, as a result of the immoral sexual behavior of the *Halutzim*, that is, the secular pioneers who came to settle in the Land of Israel in the pre-State period. Their liberal attitude towards sexuality shocked their conservative Arab neighbors to the degree of deep hatred. The connection has been established. The Jewish Seculars are those who commit the sins of abomination; the Arabs reaction, given the Biblical lesson, is God's punishment. Hence, whether Israel arms itself or not is of no significance whatever. The security of Israel does not depend on the IDF.

The Seculars are the reason for the terrible bloodshed and the sequences of wars, which threaten Israel's existence to the degree of catastrophe. That is to say, the issue of the Religious service in the Army is meaningless. As the Torah reveals, the existence of the State of Israel depends on the moral-ethical behavior of her people, and in light of this, secular misbehavior is disastrous. Consequently, the ultimate devotion of the Religious to the study of the Torah, rather than to being drafted into the IDF, is absolutely justified.

The argument that the IDF does not strengthen the security of Israel is discussed from a different perspective in an article which appeared in *Hamodia*. *Hamodia* is the newspaper of *Agudat Israel*, an Ultra Orthodox party, called also "The United Jewish Torah and Sabbath." The party regards itself as "the most Religious Orthodox movement" (ibid, 9 May 1999). The *Hamodia* of 9 May 1999 published a long article under the heading: "A Struggle to Deny the Citizen Rights of the Ultra Religious". The article carried a sub-title, elaborating as follows: "The Head of *Tzomet* (a political secular right-wing party) Rephael Eithan: There is a Need to Deny the Right of Voting in the Elections from Arabs and Ultra-Religious till They Serve in the Army". According to the Paper, the leader of *Tzomet*, referred to as the former Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Force, announced that Religious people who do not serve in the army would be excluded from their right to vote, along with Arabs. Reacting to the former Chief of Staff's warning regarding the right of the Religious to vote, the article turns its attention to the quality of the Israeli secular education, presenting it as a world of crime. "The prisons are full of graduates of secular education", the readers are told, "... all the people who live in Israel are locked behind steel doors frightened by the graduate of the secular education". However, claims the article, secular criminals are allowed to vote and no one questions their rights. This concentration on the criminal secular world aims to achieve the following goal: to shift the attention from the question of the security of the State, which requires service in the defense force, to the issue of domestic safety. The question of safety in the streets is the main problem of Israel, claims *Hamodia*, and this is not a matter of service in the IDF. Hence, the readers are led to deduct that the matter of military service is not the first priority of the State of Israel. The Seculars' claim regarding the service of the Religious men, argues the article, is just for the sake of criticism; annoying, no more. What are the achievements of secular education? The article depicts its graduates as drug addicts who terrify the innocent citizens of the State of Israel. That secular education has failed, is clearly implied by the article. Hence, Religious studies must carry on; the Religious students are not drugged, and the more students that study at the *Yeshivot*, the more crime will be prevented and the safer Israel would be.

The above conclusion regarding the Seculars and the question of the State's safety employs an argument which differs from the argumentation applied ear-

lier by both Wasserman and Grosman. They both utilise a rhetorical strategy which is based on quoting passages from the Torah. This is academic Rabbinical argumentation, which requires a sophisticated level of Jewish learning. Nevertheless, the newspaper is a popular medium, hence, it might use appropriate rhetorical strategies designed to suit to its vast readership. These would be based on horizontal thought, i.e., analogy. That is to say, we need to distinguish two modes of thought. The first is rational thinking and the second is analogical. The rational argumentation is based on logic. This principle of thought is based on part-whole relations; the theory of types, causal implications and logical entailments; in organising experience in theoretical terms. The other type of thinking is presented as analogical ordering. It is based on analogical associations (Douglas 1999: 15-16): "It is horizontal (analogy) in the sense that it involves the association of concrete experienceable items" (Hall and Ames 1995: 124). The logical type, the logic of part-whole relationships, is termed as the dialogical system. The dialogical system is in fact the medium of secular, philosophical and scientific thinking. It is open and inquiring. Analogical thought, however, is not inquiring but rather seeks to find concrete examples for the sake of a comprehensive concept of truth (Gitay 1999). Lessons are drawn by analogies between one object and another (Douglas 1999:39). Analogy replaces an argument. Suzanne Langer called the analogy as "presentational discourse," which lifts analogies from one context to another (1942). Along the same lines, attention should be given to Perelman's remarks regarding the distinction which Aristotle made between analytical and dialectical reasoning. Perelman writes as follows:

It is necessary that we clearly distinguish analytical from dialectical reasoning, the former dealing with truth and the latter with justifiable opinion. Each field of thought requires a different type of discourse (1982: 3).

In short, truth versus justifiable opinion.

Hamodia's article employs the rhetorical technique of *analogy*. The author provides a list of professional and social sectors in Israeli society, outside of the Religious, who do not serve in the IDF, who are neither condemned nor threatened with the loss of their voting rights. The list includes groups such as thieves and drugs addicts. Also listed are entertainers, artists and athletes. The analogy is that while these groups are not required to serve, and the Israeli society accepts the situation as such, the Religious community is being discriminated against; it is the only one – among the other groups – which is requested to give up its right to vote. The analogy is used to present the Seculars' criticism as hypocritical. This conclusion strengthens the author's thesis that the question of the service is only an excuse to criticise the Religious

community as such. Note that the horizontal/analogical approach employed here does not seek to search for the truth – in Perelman's term – the true reason for the exemption. Rather it intends to justify the Religious.

The analogy presents a further strategy of appealing to the Ultra-Orthodox audience through the negative depiction of the 'others.' The destructive description of the 'others,' namely the Seculars, is typical of the Ultra Orthodox rhetoric (Schweid 1994: 15-29). Now that the defender of the Religious community has presented the Seculars' claim regarding military service as a matter of prejudice rather than a justified criticism, a set of emotions, namely anger, towards the secular opponents has been induced. The primary rhetorical function of the emotions of anger, Kennedy explains, is to "arouse these emotions in an audience and thus to facilitate the judgment sought" (1991:122). "Emotions", writes Aristotle, "are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments." Anger is an element that sets the state of mind. "Anger is an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge..." (*Rhetoric* 1378a-b). In this respect, *Hamodia's* article concludes as follows:

Today they intend to take from us the right to vote, tomorrow they will seek to deny us (the Religious community) the allocation of Social Security and welfare, the following day they will take from us Religious our piece of bread and will supply water by allocation...

That Seculars seek to eliminate the Religious is the message. This sort of horrified description regarding the condition of the Religious community in the Israeli secular state matrix has one specific aim—to incite anger against the Seculars. The rhetorical strategy is designed to appeal through emotions, and thereby to incite the reader's anger. The aim is to affect their judgment regarding the Seculars and their criticism.

Below is a further demonstration from *Hamodia* of the use of analogy for justifying the Religious position by stirring up anger. The analogies here tend to be taken from the realm of Jewish history, that is, events which are perceived as facts by the readers. We read:

The Jewish people knew through its long history numerous sorts of persecutions, maintaining various limitations of human rights. These include the *numerus clausus*, the restricted area of residency (*tecum moshav*), and being pushed to the ghetto. (ibid)

The article refreshes the reader's memory through a chain of traumatic disasters which mark Jewish collective memory since mediaeval times. The author con-

tinues as follows:

Does Eithan indeed seek to repeat the methods of the past hundreds of years, intending to refresh them and to apply them to our days?

That is, the secular leader's request to remove the voting rights from the Religious is equated, given the analogies, with that of the persecutions of the Jews by the anti-Semites. Actually, the analogy seeks to imply the following: the equation: the Seculars = the Jewish foes. This is a demonstration of the dialectical/analogical mode of thought. A series of analogies substitutes as an argument. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that this sort of horizontal thought applies only to specific audiences who are reconditioned to be receptive to the matter. We may conclude that for the readers of this religious paper, sharing a common ground of perceptions, the analogy is an effective rhetorical means. The pre-condition of the audience's perception can be paraphrased in the following words of Kenneth Burke: "it is hard to praise Athenians when you are talking to Lacedaemonians" (1969:55). Burke elaborates as follows:

Here is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his. (ibid)

To sum up, *Hamodia* does not intend to argue with Eithan's views on the basis of either *Halacha* (Jewish law) or Jewish custom (*minhag*) or analytical logic. There is no straightforward attempt to take issue with the question of the conscription of Religious men to the IDF. Instead, dialectical/analogical reasoning and emotional stimulation are applied: "...They will take from the Religious their piece of bread and will supply them water by allocation...".

Furthermore, the intention to stir the readers' emotions is intensified through the employment of a specific linguistic code of communication. In this respect, Barthes' discussion of connotative semiotics is informative. That is, "a system whose plane of expression is itself constituted by a signifying system" (1996: 129-133). In other words, there is a linguistic level connoting a cultural context rather than an etymological one. Cassirer has stressed the connotation of certain words which carry mythical force for specific audiences. He writes as follows:

Verbal structures appear also as mythical entities, endowed with certain mythical powers, that the word, in fact, becomes a sort of primary force (1946: 45).

Linguistic usage such as *numerus clausus* ('closed number' amount fixed as maximal number in the admission to specific professions), *tecum moshav* (ghetto, the restricted areas of the quarters of residency) which are employed in the article as a chain of historical analogies comparing the present secular attitude towards the Religious, conjure up the horrifying history of Jewish persecutions of the Dark Ages. They create a mythical force, which presents the Seculars through its cultural codes as the modern foes of true Judaism.

In short, *Hamodia* has chosen the rhetorical strategy of an offensive counter-attack on the Seculars rather than attempting to reason with their position. Eithan's statement regarding the IDF service is taken by the Ultra Orthodox as a point of departure for their internal objective: to strengthen the Ultra Orthodox position against the Seculars who are regarded as the real opponents of the true Jewish mission.

The Judenrat: The Good and the Bad is an article by Akiva Zimmerman published in *Hatzofeh* (9.5.99). The writer maintains that in Israel today Jewish members of the *Knesset* (Parliament) spy on Jewish settlers in Judah and Samaria in case, God forbid, they are building some temporary accommodation or planting a tree in the Biblical "Motherland", that is, the present Judah and Samaria (the West Bank), the territories partially occupied by Israel, and the subject of negotiations with the Palestinian authorities. Zimmerman seeks to strengthen the position of *Hatzofeh's* readers that every Jew, regardless of his/her political affiliation must confirm the right of the Jewish people to settle, legally or illegally in terms of State law, but in terms of their reading of the Torah, in the Biblical land, that is, God's promised Land to the Jewish people. In other words, the Biblical heritage overrides the law of the State. In order to appeal to his readers he employs the rhetorical tactic of *analogy*. Zimmerman reminds his readers about a tragic chapter in Jewish history, which is the tragedy of the Jewish leaders in the ghettos under Nazi rule. These leaders were forced by the Nazis to co-operate with them against their fellow Jews. They were called the *Judenrat*. However, there were good *Judenrat* who preferred to commit suicide rather than betray their fellow Jews. Nevertheless, Zimmerman maintains that under these circumstances there was no good or bad, because the Nazis forced them till they had no choice. However, Zimmerman claims that *Knesset* members of the Independent State of Israel *do* have a free choice. Nobody forces them to report on other Jews. They do so of their own volition, thus implying that these Jewish *Knesset* members are worse than the *Judenrat*. The analogy is the rhetorical means used by the author to portray the *Knesset* members who exposed the Settlers' actions in such a negative light. Again, the use of the word *Judenrat* carries within itself a specific mythical connotation for every Jew.

Satire is another rhetorical technique employed often in Religious polemic. Abrams has defined its function as follows:

The literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation, or scorn. It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself, while *satire* derides; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon (1971:153).

Hatzofeh is a newspaper which represents a much more moderate religious movement than does *Hamodia*. In fact, *Hatzofeh* is a newspaper which represents a Religious Zionist party. In the 9 May 1999 edition, a columnist, Cani Luz, wrote an article under the title: "The Democracy: How Much Does it Cost Us?" She responds to the secular criticism of the Religious students of the *Yeshivot* who are not conscripted through the use of satire. I translate:

Everyone knows that the *Yeshivot's* students suck the essence of the State. Everyone knows that the settlers squeeze the state's budget. Everyone knows that the big families of the Religious exhaust the budget of the social security. If we just get rid of these sick people then the State's budget will be cured. Every one who does not believe this should attend to the announcements of Yosi Sarid/Lapid and Ehud Barak (the leaders of the left identified as the anti-Religious parties)...

The author presents a satiric version of the depiction of the Religious by the Seculars. The Religious exhaust Israel's budget, claim the Seculars. This is a severe accusation. Nevertheless, the writer prefers to employ a rhetorical device, which replaces a refutation by reason. There is no systematic, dialogical discussion, in essence, regarding the State/ Religious conflict.

In this way, the columnist of the Religious paper avoids a meaningful deductive, argumentative approach to the religious position of military service. Instead, she follows the classical Biblical rhetorical tradition of satire (as demonstrated in Isaiah 40:18-20, and for further information consult Gitay, 1981 as well as my comments in Religious Rhetoric in this issue). The criticism of the Seculars against the Religious men is dismissed as ridiculous. However, that this sharp satire was published in *Hatzofeh*, the official voice of the Religious Zionist Party which is committed to sending both its sons and daughters to serve in the army, is significant. It projects the Religious position that the question of the draft is not a matter of reasoning with the Seculars.

The utilisation of satire in *Hatzofeh* signifies a tendency to avoid a debate with the Seculars regarding a sensitive matter for the Religious community: the study at the *Yeshivot* funded by State subsidy. Nevertheless, *Hatzofeh's* and *Hamodia's* intention is to avoid reasoning with the Seculars. Instead, the secu-

lar criticism is presented as a joke in relation to the Religious community. That is to say, its own circle of readers read *Hatzofeh*, and the article is designed to appeal to its readers and not to go beyond them.

In conclusion, the religious newspapers of Israel are much occupied with the problem of the Secular-Religious relationship. The papers take the Seculars' attitude for granted. They depict them as misbehaving, ethically corrupted, seeking to exclude the Religious and discriminating against them. The Seculars, claim the newspapers, follow the historical tradition of the European anti-Jewish attitude. Hence, the Religious newspapers do not seek to reason with the Seculars or engage in dialogue with them. This depiction of the Seculars must be seen in the context of the struggle of the Ultra-Orthodox against modernity. The Papers employ two basic rhetorical strategies. The first is academic, drawing conclusions regarding the present from the sacred authority of the Torah. The second rhetorical strategy may be coined as popular. This is the 'presentational discourse', that is, horizontal thought. Analogy is the prevailing method, which seeks also to stir emotions of anger toward the opponent. That is to say, emotion, anger or ridicule are the methods of arguing employed in the Religious newspapers for refuting secular criticism regarding Religious participation in State affairs such as military conscription. The presentational discourse or analogical/dialectical argument substitutes for a true dialogue and reasoning which searches for the truth. This sort of rhetorical strategy does not inquire into the cause of a problem. That is to say, a rhetorical analysis of the Religious argumentation as it is reflected in the Religious newspapers reveals that there is no attempt to seriously answer the secular criticism. However, the criticism is not ignored, but is presented in a way which signals a tendency not to engage in a true dialogue with the 'others'. Hence, the religious newspapers seek to justify their position only in relation to their readers, consequently employing appropriate rhetorical strategies for achieving this argumentative aim.

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* I wish to thank and acknowledge the National Research Foundation of South Africa for supporting my project on Religion and Rhetoric.

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