SECULAR IDENTIFICATION: THE CASE OF BINA AND ITS SECULAR YESHIVA

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ABSTRACT

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The clashing perspectives over Jewishness in Israel, on the one side an orthodox minority that is a major political player, on the other a secular majority that is politically fragmented, is a cause of constant tension in Israeli Jewish society. In Israel, Jewishness with its religious overtones overlaps with national sentiments. This overlap is one aspect of the Israeli secular story, orthodox monopoly over the state's Jewish character is another.

The Jewish renewal movement in Israel looks to bridge, and reestablish a reciprocal relationship, between the national and religious aspects of Israeliness with Hebrew culture based on the Hebrew Bible as the common core. The movement calls upon secular Jewish individuals to challenge the Jewish orthodoxy monopoly in Israel. Furthermore, it calls for secular individuals to reclaim ownership and with it authority over Jewish culture, recreating Jewishness in their own secular image. What exactly is that secular image that is to mold Jewishness into a contemporary frame of reference, is in fact the subject of this dissertation.

In this work, I carry out an analysis of group identification based on secular principles. I argue that group identification based in secularity facilitates inclusive environment; however, it does not guarantee inclusion. Looking at BINA and its secular yeshiva in the south of Tel-Aviv, I introduce ethnographic data showing how secular sensibilities challenge current understanding of group belonging and boundaries. The binary notion secular-religious forms the basis for understanding the secular by both layman and experts. In Israel's socio-political atmosphere

orthodoxy has become equated with religiosity, leading many to believe that secularity and Jewishness are mutually exclusive. However this study shows that the ethnographic findings about BINA and its secular yeshiva prove otherwise. The coupling of the term secular and yeshiva is a socio-political claim against Jewish orthodox monopoly in Israel. BINA proudly claims its in-between status, representing both the secular and Jewishness, not as oppositions but simply as different cultural frameworks coming together to form BINA, and in turn these frameworks are being reimagined through BINA, embodying the processual nature of culture.

Two themes guide my investigation of BINA: the ways the secular informs its operations as a Jewish educational institution, and the relationship between the collective and the individual in the secular institute. Concentrating on five secular modes of operation – literacy, multiplicity, contextual truth, activism and sovereignty, I show how Jewish inclusiveness is facilitated. I use two tracks to make my arguments regarding secular groupness: BINA's teachings and BINA's operations as an institution. Analyzing BINA's teaching I demonstrate how secular sensibilities are transmitted to students. Furthermore, I show how these secular sensibilities encourage a more inclusive perception of Jewish groupness. BINA's institutional dynamics offer a window on the way secular sensibilities guide the interplay between the individual and the collective.

I argue for a new model for group identification that is more flexible and thus more inclusive. I introduce and explore the notion of inclusive groupness as a voluntary collective individualism, which achieves group cohesion through its very dynamism, flexibility and ability to foster change. The model of inclusive groupness is based on two principles: fidelity, and debate and negotiation.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

At the age of twenty two, while traveling South America, I engaged in a conversation with a British fellow traveler, which initiated the journey that led to these words. The conversation started by my traveling companion, Tom asked me for clarification regarding a Jewish custom. I answered to the best of my knowledge, which was not extensive considering I was secular who was brought up in a secular home. Yet, it was obvious that I should know the answer; after all I am an Israeli, for both of us Israeliness was a Jewish membership card. As the conversation went on, I asked Tom about his religion; he simply looked at me and said "I have no religion." I could not grasp it and pressed Tom for an answer, saying "well I know you no longer go to church but still what is your religion." Tom insisted that he has no religion. It was only then, at the age of twenty two, that I realized that religious affiliation is not inherent to all.

With this revelation resonating in my head, I started questioning the axiom equating Israeliness with Jewishness. I was sure about the components of my Israeliness, but had no idea about what constituted my Jewishness other than being an Israeli. I do not believe in God, I do not uphold any of the religious ordinances and never did; the holidays for me are about family traditions and vacations, they have no religious meaning. And yet it was clear both to me, the insider, and to Tom, the outsider, that I am a Jew. Ten years later, as I was writing my M.A. thesis on Jewishness as ethnicity, I was able to put these thoughts into an anthropological vocabulary. As an Israeli, my national identification was intertwined with my religious identification, and as a young adult I did not realize that the two are not synonymous. The following ten years leading to the present, have been about figuring out what kind of secular a person is, when her religious membership is included in her national identification.

As I was concluding my thesis it became clear to me that Israel constitutes a unique case in the Jewish social sphere. Israel was created as a secular Jewish democracy. The majority of its people identify as secular (The Central Bureau of Statistics 2015). In Israel, Jewishness with its religious overtones overlaps with national sentiments. As a result, one's participation in Jewishness is a national activity, thus forming a religiously infused social atmosphere in which secular individuals act (Liebman and Yadgar 2009). For some scholars who adhere to the religious-secular dichotomy, this fact amounts to the view that secularity is impossible in Israel (Beit-Hallahmi 2007). However, it is my observation that for Jews, Israel offers an opportunity for secular life that is not available in the Jewish diaspora. The framing of Jewishness as a national identification allows people to cultivate their secularity without perceived conflicts. A Jewish Israeli does not need consciously to work out her participation in the Jewish collective, usually involving membership in a synagogue, since this is incorporated into her nationality.

The overlap in secular Israeli society between national and religious identifications is but one aspect of this secular story. The other influence that shapes the secular discourse in Israel is the orthodox monopoly over the state's Jewish character. The orthodox Jewish stream solidified in reaction to the reformation movement that took place in the early 19th century. In contrast to world Jewry, and as a result of historical developments relating to the establishment of the state of Israel, Orthodox Jews in Israel are a political power house. The social implication of this fact is that in Israel, Jewish orthodoxy has a monopoly over Jewishness. In practice that means that orthodox forms of Jewish practice are considered authentic, while other forms namely Reform and Conservative Jewish practices are all but invisible in Israel's public sphere. Furthermore, Israel's Jewish orthodoxy backed by its political sway, has the power to name that which is Jewish. The most potent example for this issue is the contested control of the rabbinate, a branch

of the government controlled by orthodoxy Jewry, which oversees all Jewish life cycle events. Thus, de facto, the rabbinate has the state's authority to name who is a Jew and who is not. The Jewish orthodox monopoly in Israeli society can be best understood through Bourdieu's (1977) notion of doxa: orthodox forms of Jewish practice are 'naturalized' as authentic, right, or correct while the range of possible alternatives is obscured by the presumed authenticity of the orthodox form.

Jewish orthodoxy was formed in reaction to changes in the Jewish world brought about by the enlightenment and Jewish emancipation. In an effort to stand strong against the tides of change Jewish orthodoxy sanctified the Halakah (The Jewish codex of laws). As such, orthodox Jews see the Halakah as a direct extension of the word of god. According to Jewish orthodoxy the Halakah is monolithic and cannot and should not be changed. Jewish orthodoxy perceives any adaptation of the Halakah to present-day social needs, as going against tradition and unauthentic, hence not Jewish. It is worth noting that this claim that the Halakah is monolithic does not stand the scrutiny of reasoning. The Halakah has been characterized as a corpus of laws that is in a constant state of interpretation and negotiation (Ben-Rafael, Jewish identities : fifty intellectuals answer Ben Gurion 2002, Burg 2004, Cohen 2005, Leibovitch, Ariel-Joel and Inbari 2006, Zameret 1999). In line with this perception, the Halakah can be looked at as more of a process then a concrete codex of laws, in that it is a constant process of interpretation of the laws in accordance to the social circumstances of the day.

The clashing perspectives over Jewishness in Israel, on one side an orthodox minority that is a major political player, on the other a secular majority that is politically fragmented, is a cause of constant tension in Israeli Jewish society. Every now and again tensions rise in relation to marriage, burial, immigration, to name the most acute issues. These tensions have been more

than once, dubbed by Israeli media as a war over the character of the Jewish state and its people. As a result of this socio-political war the term secular in Israel came to be a divisive term with overtones of antagonism towards Jewishness the religion, as it is formulated by Jewish orthodox. It is so much so that during my preliminary mapping of the field I found secular individuals and institutions that dropped the use of the term in fear that using the term secular will alienate anyone who is not an avowed secular. So we see that in Israel the idea of the secular as it emerges in the Jewish sphere is on the one hand, more independent from religion compared with its diasporic Jewish counterpart; on the other, it is politicized and thus seems to connote a specific world view representing a narrow segment of the population.

The Jewish renewal movement in Israel is firmly grounded in the secular Kibbutz culture. In fact it is reclamation of Jewishness by the third and fourth generations of Kibbutz pioneers. It is a movement that looks to bridge, and reestablish a reciprocal relationship, between the national and religious aspects of Israeliness with Hebrew culture based on the Hebrew Bible as the common core. Using again Bourdieu's (1977) scheme of doxa-orthodox-heterodox, the Jewish renewal movement in Israel is an effort to bring heterodoxy to the Jewish social discourse in Israel, and in doing so, marking the Jewish orthodox variety as the doxa in Israel. As a secular reclamation of Jewish heritage the Jewish renewal movement in Israel has called secular Jewish individuals to get back to the rich Jewish heritage that was left at the hands of Jewish orthodoxy in the early days of the state. Furthermore, it is a call for secular individuals to reclaim ownership and with it authority over Jewish culture, recreating Jewishness in their own secular image. What exactly is that secular image that is to mold Jewishness into a contemporary frame of reference, is in fact the subject of this dissertation.

In 2007 I started my current intellectual journey. Reading more and more about secularity, and its Israeli vernacular, I came to realize that although Israel's secular variety is unique in its position verses religion it is problematic. Liebman and Yadgar discussing the use of the Hebrew term for secular (*hiloni* Heb. חילוני) in Israeli discourse state that "[t]he problem is that the term …tells you what somebody is not, rather than what somebody is." (2009, 151). That meant that looking into the meaning of secularity in Israel will either be met with a simplistic 'non-religious' type of response; or discarded as term which only serves to inspire conflict. In the energetic field of Jewish renewal in Israel where, as I noted, many do their best to avoid the secular label, I found the Secular Yeshiva of Tel-Aviv operated by BINA – Center for Jewish Identity and Hebrew Culture[1].

In BINA's Secular Yeshiva I found a place that not only embraced its secular heritage with no apologetic maneuvers, such as utilizing terms like plural or humanistic in place of secular; but which also dared to couple itself with the Jewish religious term for seminary or school: 'Yeshiva'[2]. This polemic title chosen by the decision makers at BINA was a clear statement as to BINA's cultural milieu. It proudly waved two flags of affiliation: the secular and the Jewish. Furthermore, BINA as an organization did not want to apologize or hide its secular background from Jewish aficionados in fear of being stereotyped as anti-religious; and on the same token saw no need to apologize to secular die-hards for its love and appreciation for the Jewish religion.

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[1] BINA has since changed its name and today goes by several slightly different titles: 1. BINA Movement for Social Jewishness 2.BINA Center for Social Jewishness 3. BINA Educational and Learning Center for Jewish Identity and Israeli Culture. This is an emblem of BINA's secular dynamic approach to cultural production and its culture of negotiation and change, all to be discussed in the following pages.

[2] The term Yeshiva indicating Jewish education program for males has been in use for approximately 17 centuries. The Yeshiva as an educational institute dedicated to the study of Jewish texts was first formed in Jerusalem and Babylonia. At the heart of the classic orthodox Yeshiva is the aspiration to offer its students an intensive study experience isolated form the mundane world. Studies are comprised of lectures and study session in pairs called Havruta (Aramaic: חברותא lit. friendship). The Havruta study method is a characteristic of the Yeshiva institution.

Furthermore, in claiming the Yeshiva in its title, BINA's decision makers were making a clear statement about the kind of studies they wanted to offer: studies at their institution would be in-depth exploration of Jewish texts, employing yeshiva study methods. Notwithstanding, these studies would be in a secular spirit using reasoning and critical thinking. The coupling of the term secular and yeshiva is also a socio-political claim against Jewish orthodox monopoly in Israel; governmental budgets to yeshivas defined as such by Jewish orthodoxy are a constant contention point in Israeli politics. In calling their educational institution yeshiva the founders of BINA make a claim to the same privileges accorded to the religious yeshiva, albeit without much success as of yet. With such a clear statement made in its title I knew that this was a place that is as deeply committed to secularity as it was to Jewishness. I knew that in such a place I would find a real engagement with the term secularity and with the question 'what does it mean to be secular?' in the context of Jewishness. I had found my research site.

At the time, BINA's Secular Yeshiva in Tel Aviv was located at a corner municipal building in a busy crossroad opposite the entrance to Tel-Aviv's central bus station[3]. It was an old building that used to serve as a medical clinic rehabilitated by BINA's own. Coming into the building at any given moment one would always find at least two groups of students huddling together studying, planning, or idling between activities. The Secular Yeshiva houses the After-the-Army Program and the preparatory program for high-school graduate before their army service: the preparatory program is a live-in multi-year program; while the After-the-Army program involves a day and a half of studies per week throughout one academic year. Both programs, and in fact all of BINA's enterprises, have a social activism component where participants take part in social projects affecting the communities in their surroundings. The

[3] In 2015 the Yeshiva has moved to its new location at the Nature Gardens Campus in Tel-Aviv's Abu-kabir neighborhood just south of its old location.

Secular Yeshiva operated in Tel-Aviv's south neighborhood Neve Shaanan, whose residents are generally of low socio-economic backgrounds. The neighborhood is also a center for foreign workers in Israel, including illegal workers, refugees and their children.

In order to fully appreciate BINA's commitment to the secular, it is important to understand its historical background. BINA was established in 1996 by educators from the Kibbutz movement and elsewhere, and was formed in response to the deep Jewish identity crisis that engulfed Israel following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by a religious right wing extremist. BINA's operations encamp a vast array of social segments in Israel. Its main areas of operation are: the Secular Yeshivas network, Public Schools, Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Diaspora Jewry, Beth Midrash[4] for the general public. In all of these arenas BINA's goal is to influence the character of the state of Israel by inspiring future leaders and activists in Israel through social activism grounded in secular Jewish philosophy.

Within the Jewish renewal movement in Israel, BINA and its leaders have taken leadership roles, and its staff members regularly publish socially minded Jewish related pieces in Israel main stream media. Eran Baruch, BINA's CEO and one of its founders, regularly interviews in relation to Jewish renewal news in Israel. Nevertheless, BINA as an organization does not promote any specific political agenda. Probing BINA's core staff regarding their political views during interviews revealed that most see their social activism as political, even though it is not within the classic political system. As an organization that promotes social justice, humanism, and pluralism it is no surprise that its members as individuals occupy varied locations on the left political spectrum in Israel. BINA is a do-it-yourself institution. Its holistic DIY approach both to Jewishness and to any other aspect of its activities (including catering its

[4] Beth Midrash - בית מדרש is a Jewish study hall traditionally located at the synagogue.

events or rehabilitating its buildings) is part of its Kibbutz legacy, as Eran Baruch states in a recent radio interview (Eran Baruch - Redio Interview about the 'Shabat Law' 2015).

I first approached BINA in the summer of 2009 as part of my field mapping. I met with then the head of the preparatory program Tal Shaked, who is also one of the founders of BINA's Secular Yeshiva in Tel-Aviv. I presented my research and was able to secure a corporation letter. In spring 2011 I reconnected with the yeshiva and started my field work which extended to Fall 2012. The statistical facts regarding BINA's membership and employees were, self-reported by BINA as part of a mapping project of the field of Jewish renewal in Israel. In 2011, BINA reported 130,000 participants across its varied areas of operation, of whom half were between 18 and 35 years old, and of which another 20% were under 18 years old (Midot.org.il 2013). It was also reported that BINA had 300 volunteers in 2011. I could not find clear numbers as to employment, though I will estimate its core employee roster at approximately 50 in 2011. BINA continues to develop and extend its operations – for example, at the end of 2015 a Secular Yeshiva in Beersheba[5]opened its doors for the first time – and the number of both employees and participants is growing.

With a general description of BINA as an institution in mind, I now turn to a detailed account of the field work conducted in 2011-2012. In addition to methodology in the following I offer a window into the particulars of my data collection. As stated earlier, in the summer of 2009 I spent two months in Israel mapping the field of Jewish renewal there, and during this time I first contacted the Secular Yeshiva and BINA, and was also in contact with two other institutions: 1. Yuvalim - a pluralistic center for Jewish culture and identity; and 2. Tmura - a training institute for secular rabbis. My relationship with Tmura did not materialize due to conflicting visions– Tmura's dean perceived my standing as a participant-observer distracting to

[5] Beersheba the 8th largest city in Israel and is the largest in the Negev desert in the south of Israel.

the group and required my full participation in the program – and on my arrival in 2011 in Israel it was mutually agreed that I did not fit in the program, either in terms of personality or in my life experience. However I did establish working relations with Yuvalim and BINA's secular yeshiva.

During my two years of field work in Israel I conducted 52 semi-structured interviews all in Hebrew, using the same questionnaire as a guideline for the conversation. On average interviews lasted an hour. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed by a professional transcriber or myself. Finally, I translated all quoted segments of data from Hebrew to English. Here is a survey of the interviews conducted, along with a description of interviewees' affiliations.

Yuvalim was a pluralistic center for Jewish culture and identity operating out of Tel-Hai academic college in the Galilee, located in the northern part of Israel. The center offered academic programs for the students of Tel-Hai and enrichment programs for the communities of the Galilee and the Golan Heights, and I conducted participant observations sessions in two academic courses administrated by the center: *Jewish Pluralism and its Limits* in Spring 2011; and *Jewish Identities the Challenge* in Fall 2012. Each class was attended by approximately 15 to 20 students once a week. I solicited interviews from among the students enrolled in the courses to a total of 13 interviews. As all other interviews were with persons of interest in the Jewish renewal environment, the Tel-Hai student interviews were designed to give me a less biased context, in that interviewees were students motivated by degree and schedule requirements, and were to a much lesser degree if at all, interested in the Jewish renewal movement.

During the academic year of 2011-2012 I was also privileged to conducted participant observations during the meetings of Ma'agalim[6]. Ma'agalim is, as its name suggests a study and discussion circle for prominent leaders among the communities of northern Israel. The circle is meant to engage the Jewish literary sources with current affairs, and to promote secular literacy in the Jewish library. Meetings took place at Tel-Hai academic collage once a week between 6 to 9 pm. I interviewed six out of approximately ten participants in that year's program.

The interviews of both the students and participants of Ma'agalim program in Tel-Hai, although not directly contributing data to this work, have been most valuable in framing a social context to the analysis of BINA's operations. They allowed me to get a sense of what Jewish renewal and secularity means outside of BINA and, by no means less important in Israel's social geography, outside of Tel-Aviv. Finally, I conducted seven more interviews with non-affiliated persons of interest referred to me by other participants. Aware of the political bias, as most of my interviewees were of left political orientation, I actively sought out self-declared seculars that are also of right political orientation. In addition, I was able to interview two avowed seculars with no ties to the Jewish renewal movement.

As I began my data analysis it became clear that BINA provided the focus of this research. As I describe in detail below, the data collected at BINA offered a unique opportunity to explore the secular from both the scholastic and the operational aspect of an educational institution, and thus BINA became the sole focus of this work. Although this effectively meant excluding all of the data collected at Yuvalim and elsewhere, I wish to state that these data strongly supports the analysis of secularity offered in this work, and suggests that the secular as it emerges from BINA is not specific to this institution. Similar characteristics of the secular can be inferred based on data from Yuvalim and elsewhere. However, the variety of institutional

[6] Ma'agalim - Hebrewמעגלים lit. circles.

affiliations of interviewees outside of BINA has prevented the use of the data when looking at the way in which the secular informs institutionalization.

At BINA I conducted 26 interviews: ten interviews with the After-the-Army program participants, ages ranging from 22 to 30 years old, and the other 16 interviews with BINA's staff members. As part of my participant observations at BINA's monthly staff study sessions I asked attendees for interviews. I was able to secure interviews with 16 staff members and teachers ages ranging from 30 to 73 years old. During participant observation sessions I approached possible interviewees, and upon securing general agreement to take part in the research, I would set a time and a place for the interview. Locations for interviews were varied and included: coffee shops, empty classrooms, BINA's offices, and interviewees' homes. As part of the interview, interviewees were asked to self-identify. Of the 26 interviewees 12 identified simply as secular; three interviewees self-described as secular traditionalists meaning secular persons that practice Judaism to some level; two claimed religiosity, while two others simply identified as Jews; two refused definitions altogether. The other five responses included: atheist, ignostic[7], not religious, humble human being, and searching for god. These varied self-definitions are indicators of the diversity in Jewishness hosted by BINA. It is worth noting that interviewees noted that definitions are in themselves dynamic and situated in circumstances and are thus fluid.

Most of my work at BINA took place during the academic year of 2011-2012, during which I conducted participant-observations sessions with the After-the-Army program. The program took place at the Secular Yeshiva in Tel-Aviv on Thursdays and Fridays, full days and half days, respectively. It included instructions in prayer, Zionism, Hebrew culture, Talmud,

[7] Ignostic was defined by the respondent as the constant state of questioning regarding god while agnostic is the acceptance that we will never know.

holidays and the Jewish life cycle. Its purpose was to promote an intimate and honest investigation of one's own Jewish identification alongside Jewish literacy.

I initially met with Eran Baruch the CEO of BINA, and a teacher with the program, and was welcomed with open arms. To gain access to the different courses I approached each teacher individually and presented my project. My main person of contact was Tova, who was then the head of the After-the-Army program, among other duties, as all BINA's staff members occupy a number of different roles in the organization. Eran invited me to carry out participant-observation in his year-long course with the After-the-Army program. He also invited me to join the monthly staff study sessions which involved most of BINA's staff. Ultimately, it was these study sessions that became the core of my research. In these sessions I witnessed how issues of representation were dealt with in the institution, as they offered me an insight into the inner dialog that took place at BINA. Furthermore, these sessions were where some of the institutional dynamics played out. The data collected from these sessions allowed me to analyze BINA beyond its role as an educator.

The After-the-Army program targets young adults who completed their army services. In 2011 there were between 10 and12 participants at any given time[8].Their ages ranged from 22 to 30 with the mean being 24. Their social background was diverse: two were recent arrivals to Israel, and those raised in Israel hailed from all parts of the state. Three had experienced kibbutz living. Most of the participants did not have any academic background, and the instructional atmosphere was very relaxed, with the basic assumption held by both educators and students being that participation is voluntary. Classes take place in the same modest room, with teacher and students all sitting around a table. There were no homework or grades; however every once in a while there were assignments which every student was expected to complete to the best of

[8] The number of participant has fluctuated through the year as participants left and join the group.

their ability. Students could come and go and even multitask during classes, the only expectation being respect for others in the group, and for the efforts put in by the teacher and others in creating and operating the program.

As part of my participant-observations with the After-the-Army program I observed three other courses: Rami Porat's course about Jewish holidays and ceremonies; Dr. Moti Arad's Talmud course; and Muki Tsur's course on the history of Zionism and Hebrew culture. My request to observe other courses was refused due to fears that the presence of an outsider would detract from the intimate nature of these courses and ultimately from the ability of the group to bond. I respected this decision, and found that my access to the others courses enabled me to observe how the secular informed the teachings at BINA.

Throughout my stay in Israel (Jan 2011 to Feb 2013) I attended public events hosted by BINA, including holyday celebrations such as: Yom Kippur[9], Yom Ha'atzmaut[10], Shavout[11] etc. Attending the same celebrations year after year exposed me to the dynamic nature of BINA's activities, and allowed me to expand my view of BINA and observe how changes in actors led to changes in form and content.

In the data analysis I included transcriptions of interviews and participant-observation sessions. At the first stage of the analysis I read my field notes from both participant observation sessions and interviews, and focused my research questions. The most interesting issues arising from the data were the tension between expressions of individuality – a cornerstone of secularity – and building group cohesion as part of an institutionalization process. Thereafter, I reread the relevant interviews, this time coding them with my focused research question in mind. I applied

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[9] Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement
[10] Yom Ha'atzmaut – Independence day
[11] Shavout – Pentecostal

the same process to my participant-observation sessions, from the classes at BINA, the staff's monthly study sessions, and public events to compile the ethnography presented here.

In the field of secular studies today there is a rough distinction between secularity and secularization (Asad 2003, Kosmin and Keysar 2007, Swatos and Christiano 1999). Secularization is most often used to refer to struggles between religious and secular powers in the public sphere. Thus secularization, in these debates, is most often represented by the nation-state and its agents. Secularity, in contrast, is the consideration of secular sensibilities as they are expressed in everyday lives, and it is this sense of secularity which represents the focus of this work.

The secular and its derivatives – e.g. secularism, secularity, and secularization – are reflected from the religious, and are commonly considered to be the negative end of the religious spectrum. The binary notion secular-religious is the pragmatic result of such thinking, and forms the basis for understanding the secular by both layman and experts. Although this binary approach to the secular is inescapable, due to its prevalence, I am making a sincere effort to uncouple secularity and religiosity and to examine secularity in its own right although, as the word inescapable implies, I do not always succeed.

In this work, I carry out an analysis of group identification based on secular principles. I argue that group identification based in secularity facilitates inclusive environment; however, it does not guarantee inclusion. I introduce ethnographic data showing how secular sensibilities challenge current understanding of group belonging and boundaries. The variety of Jewish identifications observable at BINA suggest that group boundaries guided by secular sensibilities are more flexible and have a range, rather than the notion of clear borderlines. This flexibility allows for negotiations of differences in power and/or ideology when social elements try to assert

group identification and belonging. Furthermore, it facilitates diversity within the group. In this regard, and more critical to this work, inclusive groupness allows for the incorporation of individualism and individual creativity in a group setting.

Moving the discourse of groupness beyond the borders between *us* and the *other* might open a space for groups currently conceived as mutually exclusive to negotiate some level of corporation and ideally to achieve co-existence. In looking at groupness beyond the acceptable analytic framework of boundaries Israel offers a valuable case study. Social scientists acknowledge a link between state boundaries and the formation of societies within these boundaries. Migdal (2001) shows clear links between changes in state boundaries and changes in society in the Jewish settlement in Israel both pre and post statehood. His observation of the influence the instability of state borders brought about by the Six Day war in 1967 has on Jewish society in Israel today, is most relevant to this work. He notes that as state borders fail to solidify so do the boundaries of society are put into question. Since the boundaries of both state and society have failed to form in post 1967 Israel, groupness in Israel had to be envisioned through alternative frameworks: alternatives that do not inherently relay on boundaries as the frame on which the fabric of society is woven. It is in the context of these questionable boundaries both of state and society that secular inclusive groupness emerges in Israel, pushing the study of identification beyond borders.

Looking at BINA and its secular yeshiva in the south of Tel-Aviv, I focus on the tension between expressions of individuality - a core principle of secularity – and building group cohesiveness as part of the process of institutionalization. BINA, claiming both secularity and Jewishness, offers scholars of secularity a window through which secularity and religiosity can be seen to interact and influence one another beyond resisting religious orthodoxies. In the

context of Israeli society such work offers a new way to engage the notion of the secular, defusing its conflicting politicized connotation and offering a positive meaningful understanding of the term. Such a meaningful understanding of secularity separated from anti-religious overtones is of importance beyond Israel's borders: in a region where religious extremism seems to be the most vocal, it is important to expand our understanding of secularity beyond the religious so it can have a legitimate voice within religion-saturated environments. In a region where national and religious identifications are often in confluence it is important to carve a social space for the secular beyond its stereotype as the enemy of religion.

Concentrating on five secular modes of operation – literacy, multiplicity, contextual truth, activism and sovereignty, I show how inclusiveness is facilitated. I use two tracks to make my arguments regarding secular groupness: BINA's teachings and BINA's operations as an institution. Analyzing BINA's teachings – i.e. looking at both content and method of teaching – I demonstrate how secular sensibilities are transmitted to students. Furthermore, I show how these secular sensibilities encourage a more inclusive perception of Jewish groupness and its boundaries. BINA's institutional dynamics offer a window on the way secular sensibilities guide the interplay between the individual and the collective, and I pay special attention to the tension between individual creativity and group cohesion.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical frameworks that guided my data collection and analysis. It is divided to three sections, starting with the establishment of secular principles: multiplicity, individualism, and flexibility, as secular. As part of the historical theoretical survey of the secular I mark the five secular modes of operation. I then move on to examine how these modes inform two fields of studies: Jewish studies and Identity studies.

In the first section, *Secular Principles*, I discuss multiplicity, individualism, the here-and-now, critical thinking, and its logical consequence that truth is contextual. I trace the theoretical roots of these modes of operation in relation to the development of the secular. In the second section, *Secular Principles and Jewishness*, I explore the secular as it informs the field of Jewish studies. I look at how these secular modes contribute to a more inclusive Jewishness. Finally, in the third section, *Secular Principles and Group Identification*, extrapolating from the secular Jewish experience I suggest an alternative reading of groupness as inclusive. It is an investigation of the tension between human perceptions of ourselves as individual entities with individual sovereignty on the one hand, and humans as part of a cohesive social group on the other hand. I argue for a new kind of group identification based on secular principles, which promotes inclusion of individual differences, which I call 'inclusive groupness'.

Following the theoretical discussion is a chapter concentrating on the kibbutz as the socio-historical context from which BINA has emerged, in which I present the connections between BINA and the kibbutz as a social phenomenon. The kibbutz was born out of the secular milieu of the Jewish enlightenment; beyond issues of secular Jewishness, kibbutz culture in its hundred years of history has grappled with the tension between the individual and the collective. I show how developments in the relationship between the individual and the collective in the kibbutz inform BINA's own operations and goals. Following this socio-historical background survey are two ethnographic chapters detailing BINA's teachings and operations in relation to the secular modes of operation discussed earlier.

The fourth chapter engages directly with my ethnographic observations and presents how secular modes of operations help in achieving the cultural goal set by BINA and its secular yeshiva, which is to exercise cultural sovereignty over Jewishness in secular context. The

gathered data presented through the secular modes of operation legitimizes individualized interpretations of traditions, and position them as expressions of cultural sovereignty. This chapter focuses on both methods and content of the teachings offered at BINA.

The fifth chapter presents ethnographic data, showing how the goal of the secular institution – balancing individualism and collectivism, thus being an inclusive institution that facilitates individual creativity – is achieved at BINA. It uses the same five secular modes of operation discussed throughout the dissertation as an outline for presenting the ethnographic data. This chapter focuses on BINA's organizational structure and operations (such as staff meetings, and debates regarding structure). In the data presented, debate and negotiation emerge as mechanisms for individual expression within a group setting. They are also a platform leading to acceptance, i.e. individual sovereignty within groupness.

Chapter 2 – Theory

The goal of this chapter is to provide the reader with the analytic tools they will need in order to understand the reasoning behind the arguments emerging from the ethnographic data. The aim of this thesis is to describe BINA in terms of secular groupness. I argue that BINA, in their expressed affiliation with the secular, present a unique opportunity to investigate the secular, offering the researcher a window into the way the secular informs group identification.

In order to achieve this I have divided my theoretical analysis into three steps: under *Secular Principles*, I set out to delineate the secular, teasing out of the available literature what I deem to be secular principles: individualism, flexibility/dynamism, and the here-and-now. In the context of these secular principles I define secular modes of operation: contextual truth, multiplicity of voices, critical thinking, activism, and finally the exercising of sovereignty.

Under *Secular Principles and Jewishness* I analyze Jewish group identification through the secular prism, exploring how the secular principles and modes of operation delineated in step one inform our reading of Jewish groupness. Based on my reading of Jewish groupness in secular context I argue for an alternative understanding of group identification, one that is more inclusive and better advances secular principles.

The third and final step, *Secular Principles and Group Identification*, is an extrapolation of the Jewish secular experience to a general theory of inclusive groupness, in which I shift the analytic focus of group identification to the two axes of inclusive groupness: fidelity, and mechanism for debates and negotiations. Fidelity is formulated as the bonding core for inclusive groupness: it is surveyed in the context of group boundaries, the current analytic focus of groupness. The other analytic axis, mechanism for debates and negotiations, is where power relations, currently analyzed in the context of boundaries, operate and ideally reach resolution.

Secular Principles

The secular is most commonly conceived as negation of religion (Asad 2003, Berger 1990, Burg 2004). It is positioned as a binary to religion by both experts and laymen, thus thought of as meaning non-religious or anti-religious. This conception of the secular poses limitations on the term since it restricts its interpretation to the religious realm. Furthermore, as the end spectrum of religion it makes the secular monochrome and obscures shades and nuances inherent to it. The binary pair secular-religious is part of what can be seen as an organizing principle for the world, with the overarching binary pair being West/North vs. East/South. Talal Asad's analysis of the secular is rooted in the binary as an organizing principle. Thus, he conceptualizes the secular as operating through a set of oppositions, most fundamentally the sacred/religious vs. the secular. Bangstad (2009) in his critic of Asad's analysis of the secular argues that there are blind spots in Asad's work resulting from the binary approach to his analysis. Bangstad also argues that Asad's work suffers from lack of ethnographic data to support his claims, although these shortcomings can be mitigated, according to Bangstad, by looking at secularity as a vernacular practice. He points out that the secular is analog rather than digital, and an analog approach to the study of secularity means considering secularity as an attribute that one can have more or less of, rather than an absolute approach, where one is either secular or not. An analog approach creates even more distance between the secular and the binary paradigm in its analysis.

The writers in Kosmin and Keysar's (2007) edited volume have challenged the conceptualization of the secular as the negation of religion, and do their best to identify and study the secular as a force of its own, notwithstanding the fact that the majority of the writers have admitted that they have failed in achieving this goal. It is in this theoretical junction that my

contemplation of the secular enters. In this current work the secular is considered within a vernacular context anchored in history. The vernacular Israeli-Jewish context poses challenges to the secular-religious binary, with social categories such as Masortim (Hebrew מסורתיים lit. traditionalists) and Secular Jews indicating that the religious and the secular are concurrent rather than mutually exclusive. This variety of the secular is not concerned with the secular as it is reflected from the binary secular-religious opposition – i.e. as a digital absolute; but rather, the secular is here seen as a range of possible practices, ethics and values applied to the world.

The in-between, also known as hybrid, is a theoretical approach which suggests that in-betweens – physical, geographical, mental, or cultural – are locations of heightened negotiations and production. They thus provide fertile observation points for cultural change resulting from negotiations (AlSayyad 2001, Bhabha 1994, Merry 2006, Tsing 2005). The analytic framework that considers in-betweens as locations of negotiation allows the conceptualization of secular Jewishness as an in-between the secular and the religious. Thus, the secular and the religious are each considered in their own right, each being a side in the negotiation process leading to the cultural production of secular Jewishness. This is in contrast to the more common contemplation of the secular as it is reflected from, and considered in relation to, religion. Secular scholarship has yet to develop the secular as a completely independent notion. The study of the friction[12] caused by the negotiation of secularity and religion positions the two as concurrent concepts rather than a mutually exclusive pair, an approach which allows researchers to explore the different ways in which secularity is perceived by both religious and secular people. Creating a space for differences in perception of the secular, is an acknowledgment that secularity is a

[12] Friction is a term coined by A. Tsing (2005) to describe the difficulties arising from collaboration with difference. Further discussion of this term and its relevance to secularity is available in the *Secular Principles and Group Identification* section of this chapter.

range, and that it is infinitely more complex than the common understanding of it as simply the negation of religion.

It is important to remember that secularity in its independent formulation does not deny the basic idea of the sacred. Secularity suggests that the sacred, like the truth, is contextual. Once the sacred is contextualized it is a short path to contemplating both atheism and religiosity as relative. In *Letter to a Christian Nation* Harris writes to his Christian fellow Americans "The truth is, you know exactly what it is like to be an atheist with respect to the beliefs of Muslims. … Understand that the way you view Islam is precisely the way devout Muslims view Christianity. (2006, 7)"

Contextuality of belief, or no belief, and ultimately of truth is an important thought exercise for the secular mind. It serves as the basis for inclusion, or better yet of not excluding, on grounds of **a single** absolute truth, an idea that echoes the notion of a clear boundary. The idea of contextual truth can be traced back to pre-enlightenment philosophers such as Spinoza and Locke. At the end of the 17th century Locke wrote *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (2009 [1689]). In this essay Locke was primarily interested in issues relating to the separation of church and state, which was avant-garde thinking for his time. As part of this contemplation Locke observed that salvation cannot be enforced by the power of the magistrate, and the same applies to faith. Locke recognized religious society as a voluntary society, which means that the rules of organization are set by the society itself. Thus, excommunication can be exercised within a religious society; however Locke stressed that that should not be reflected in deprivation of civil goods or rights, since those belong to the magistrate. Locke expanded this notion and stated that these same relationships, mainly the separation of church and state, apply to interactions between churches; thus, no one church may have influence on the civil goods and rights of another.

By advancing the idea of the separation of church and state in relation to both the citizen and religious organizations within the state, Locke shifted the realm of faith from the public to the private sphere. Thus, in Lockenian society, religious affiliation is voluntary. Moreover, the power of the church becomes contextual and relative in relation to the power of the magistrate. In Locke's philosophy we see a shift in focus from the community, namely the religious community, as the social unit to a focus on the individual. Thus, for Locke, the individual who is excommunicated form the religious community still has rights as a citizen. Spinoza (2001[1670]), by ushering in the critical studies of the scripture and highlighting its manmade imperfections, introduced the possibility of truth situated in specific social configuration – i.e. contextual truth. (Further discussion of Spinoza's critical reading of the Bible is available as part of the discussion of secularity and critical thinking p.28.)

Centuries later, Swatos & Christiano (1999) took the idea of secularism as the separation of church and state a step further. They noted that scientific rationality has marginalized religious influence on all levels of life, including personal and institutional, although it is important to note that the authors' observations are limited to Western society. Swatos & Christiano conclude that secularization is a process by which societies experiencing modernization have created a market in which institutions, including religious institutions, compete for social improvement. Swatos & Christiano also clearly state that religions are turning to commodities rather than dogma, but I want to highlight the authors' assertion that the religious shift is part of a large social shift, in which free market ideas – in which the individual is the axis of action and choice – become the foundation of social life. Berger (1990) observed the same shift, in which religions are part of a pluralistic market of religions; however, he attributes this shift to the fragmentation of the Christian church rather than modernization processes *per se*. Whatever the causes, it is this shift

to society based on a market of ideas that has opened the gates to conceptualizing truth as contextual rather than absolute, and in the term contextual truth we find the idea of multiplicity of voices.

Charles Taylor and Martin Buber are another set of thinkers who reflect in their work the shift in Western thought from singularity to multiplicity. Martin Buber (1996 [1923]) in his seminal work *I and Thou* challenged religious orthodox claims for a single path to the sacred by situating this path in the open dialog between the *I* and the *Thou*. Taylor (2007) presents us with the idea of exclusive humanism where a shift is being made from a transcendental orientation for existence, to a more worldly and human focus for existence. In exclusive humanism, it is the flourishing of man which is the drive and focus of action. Exclusive humanism opens before all humans a multitude of options to achieve fulfillment, and thus individualism and multiplicity enter the scene of modern secularity in Taylor's scheme, and in accordance with the paradigm shift discussed above. The two, I argue are the cornerstones of secular attitudes, and their expressions are explored in the ethnography of this thesis.

Individualism and all of its derived meanings, such as personal choice, individual creativity, and subjective authenticity, are at the core of secularity. Locke's rationale regarding citizenship is embodied in Yovel's biography of Spinoza, in which Yovel (1988) tells the story of the excommunication of Spinoza from the Jewish community in Amsterdam. He notes that Spinoza did not exit one religious community in order to enter another. Notwithstanding, this situation, in a pre-nation-state society left Spinoza detached from existing social structures with no social rights. Yovel (1988) presents Spinoza as the categorical individual, undefined by any social-historical circle. This categorical individuality is marked by Yovel as Spinoza's uniqueness, and his contribution to the coming generations. He points that Spinoza saw in the

political state 'the direct frame of reference of the individual', and thus brings to consciousness the notion of citizenship. Spinoza's understanding of the Jewish experience as a national one – i.e. one separated from religious experience – is due to his background as a converso (convert). This national experience was the result of the rejection from Iberian society of conversos, considered to be Jews by blood and descent even after they have converted their religion to Christianity (Kahanoff 2002).

The ascent of individualism in society continued from Spinoza's days to modernity. The Enlightenment, the historical period following the era of Locke and Spinoza, saw the emergence of reason as one of humanity's defining characteristics. Foucault, following Kent, saw the Enlightenment as a process through which the personal freedom of individuals is guaranteed (Foucault, What is Enlightenment 2003). Thus, we see another advancement of the individual-centric society which is so closely identified with modernity and secularity. As a socio-cultural process, individualization has also made a mark on religion. "This means that privatized religion is a matter of 'choice' or 'preference' of the individual or the nuclear family…" (Berger 1990, 133). The individualization of religion is the application of the individualized modes of experiencing the world to the religious milieu, and can be seen as part of the expansion of the secular.

Buber puts the individual at the center of existence, with life extracting meaning from the encounter of the self with the other – the *I* with the *Thou*. Thus, the *I* become the vehicle to revelation and salvation. This relationship is between the self – the *I*– and the other, the *Thou*, which could be an entity or an object. According to Buber, this relationship is only to be understood and consummated in the present moment, in the here-and-now of the *I-Thou* encounter. This encounter involves the ability of both sides of the encounter to be mutually open

and attentive. Through this notion of the *I-Thou* encounter in the present as an open dialogue, Buber has opened the door to challenging fixed orthodoxies which may block the path to the exploration of the here-and-now, and through these explorations to the sacred and the divine. Thus, Buber has positioned the human *I* as the driving force, and in direct relation to the sacred (Buber 1996 [1923]).

One important aspect promoted by this human-centric world view is a shift from the transcendental ONE, i.e. God, to the human ONE, i.e. the individual (Malkin 2008, Taylor 2007). Thus, instead of god being at the center of human creativity, both as an inspiration and as an objective, a defining criterion of secularity is that the human individual is the inspiration and purpose of human creativity: in other words it is the rise of humanism, although this shift has not yet promoted a change of terminology. Thus, Malkin (2008)while acknowledging the shift in society's center of gravity from the transcendental to the human, fails to move away from religious terminology and uses the notion of belief – in the transcendental on the one hand and in men on the other – to present his contemplation. It should be noted here that the use of religious terminology for the investigation of the secular is limiting the secular to a very narrow frame – that of the not religious – with no space left for the notion to develop beyond its religious mirror.

With Buber's understanding of the world as an open dialog in the present as a stepping stone, let us consider another secular principle: the here-and-now. Burg (2004) saw in the story of Eve and the expulsion of humankind from the Garden of Eden "…the biggest potential of the revolt against [god]. [Translation mine] (2004, 24)" Inflicting death on humans is, according to him, the path to an understanding that all there is, is the here-and-now, and it is better to make the most out of it; this is also the basis for empiricism. Following the rationale of the here-and-now, all that exists is what can be seen, and what cannot be seen holds no obligations over men,

god included. Burg also sees in the story of Eve another aspect of the beginnings of secularity. In her story he sees the earliest example of the secularists' constant curiosity, doubt, and questioning, a theme to which I will return later.

The here-and-now is also central in Charles Taylor's (2007) understanding of secularism. Taylor uses the phrase 'condition of belief' to connote the importance of the here-and-now to secularism. He points out that in modernity there has been a change in the conditions of believing in god. In the past the belief in god was unchallenged and singular, while in the present the belief in god is not only contested but is one option among many: it is no longer axiomatic. Thus for Taylor, an index for secularity is the conditions of experiencing the secular and the ways it is sought after, rather than the idea of rejection or the absence of a trait. He stresses that if we are to understand a specific 'condition of belief' we have to study it within its historical and social context, in other words in its context in the here-and-now.

For another secular thinker, Andre Comte-Sponville (2007), the here-and-now is not only the logical space for human activity, it is in fact the road to human fulfillment. In the book *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, in which he contemplates on hope and happiness in an atheist context, he comments that "…happiness is not something to be hoped for but something to be experienced here and now … Such is the trap of hope, with or without God – the hope for tomorrow's happiness prevents you from experiencing today's. (2007, 51)". In his contemplation Comte-Sponville discusses our duty as humans to act humanly, and the fact that we need not wait until salvation to do so, calling this the ethic of practical humanism. He then goes on to reason that for a faithful atheist "The kingdom [of heaven] is here and now. It is up to us to inhabit a material and spiritual space (the world, our bodies: the present) in which we have **nothing to believe but everything to learn, nothing to hope for but everything to do** (for

those things we can change) or to love (for those we cannot). [Emphasis added] (2007, 58)". Thus action in the here-and-now is presented as an atheist ethic.

After reviewing secular attitudes relating to multiplicity, individualism, and the here-and-now, I want to turn my attention to critical thinking as a secular principle. I use critical thinking here as a heading for a set of concepts which include knowledge, reason, and literacy. I have chosen critical thinking over other terms, since it is a representation of that which is considered categorically secular. Returning to Burg (2004) and his reading of the story of the Garden of Eden for an early manifestation of the secular, it can be seen that Eve's actions are an example of secularist constant curiosity, doubt and questioning, all of which are essential components of the critical thinking process; the importance of critical thinking and reasoning to secular attitudes is in its challenge to the idea of singular absolute truth.

I trace these same ideas back to Spinoza's critical reading of the Bible. In his *Theological-Political Treatise* (2001[1670]) Spinoza puts the Bible to the test of reason and exercises a form of critical reading of the text. He reveals the interference of commentators on the scripture which have arisen in their efforts to adjust the text to the authors'/editors' view. He considers these actions on the text to constitute a form of its annihilation in the sense that this leads to its losing its authority as an expression of the transcendental. Over three hundred years later Berlinerblau in *The Secular Bible* (2005) has continued this line of reasoning. Between these two works, an immense body of literature has accumulated which deals with questions of authorship, consistency, and the authenticity of the Hebrew Bible.

Berlinerblau has produced a secular reading of the literary composition the Hebrew Bible and its interpretations. Of this endeavor he wrote "Ideally, secular hermeneutics provides [*sic*] new theories and methods for the study of sacred texts. But often it simply reads [*sic*] established

theories and methods through the optic of a **new highly critical orientation**. [Emphasis added] (2005, 10)" This reading sets out to undermine two basic assumptions in regards to the Bible from which follows a large array of critical inquiries into the meanings assumed to be present in the Bible: firstly, secularists question the idea of mono-authorship of any of the scriptures or the assemblage as a whole. Berlinerblau argues for 'composition by aggregate' which is trans-historical and poly-authorism both synchronic and diachronic; and secondly, due to its 'composition by aggregate' no intentional meaning can be teased from the text. Thus any claim for authentic meaning is false. Moreover, as a result of the 'composition by aggregate', including superimpositions and the juxtapositions of numerous words and phrases, the scripture become nonsensical and unintelligible. In the process of translation of this unintelligible biblical Hebrew further superimpositions and layers were and are added to the aggregate, denying any possible claim for 'true' meaning.

The most relevant consequence of such a line of thought is the notion that I have termed contextual truth, the idea that any narrative is subjective to the context in which it is produced and received. Thus no single narrative is privileged, or innately holds, authority over others: all narratives can and should undergo a process of criticism, opening a space in which to negotiate differences both in power and in ideology between the social elements involved in the narrative, through debate over discrepancies in the narrative and in relation to parallel narratives. Furthermore, the secular orientation of the here-and-now combined with secular commitment to critical thinking requires a flexibility and dynamism not available to those champions of a singular absolute truth.

So far I have emphasized individualism, multiplicity, contextual truth, critical thinking, and action in the here-and-now as secular modes of operation. Yet, the question remains: what is

secular identification? In the following I examine how these secular modes of operation inform our understanding of secular group identification. I argue that it is an inclusive, voluntary identification, a form of collective individualism that requires dynamism and flexibility to achieve group cohesion through negotiation. In the next section, I investigate how these secular modes of operation shape our understanding of Jewishness.

Secular Principles and Jewishness

Having discussed multiplicity, individualism, the here-and-now, critical thinking, and its logical consequence contextual truth, and having traced the socio-historical roots of these principles in relation to the development of the secular, I will now show how these secular principles are played out in the theorizing of Jewishness. Furthermore, I will show how these principles promote a specific Jewish variety – secular Jewishness.

I begin with multiplicity within Jewish heritage. Traditionally, Jewishness has been regarded in the social sciences as a timeless, spaceless unity. Challenges to this approach have been present since antiquity and through the ages (Boccaccini 2009, Sand 2008, Zeitlin 1936) but since the modern era the challenge to the singular Jewishness model has been intensified, as a result of the breakdown of religion as a totalizing system and the development of civic and cultural life-organizing institutions alongside the existing religious ones (Ben-Rafael 2002, Kahanoff 2002). (See also discussion of multiplicity in Secular Principles section p. 24).

A wide array of works in the social sciences in recent decades has addressed the issue of 'Jewish unity: yes or no?' in which two main fronts can be discerned. One can be seen as 'shaking the stable', and is evidenced by the kind of works in which authors set out to challenge the prevailing presentation of Judaism as fixed, stable entity across space and time. Goluboff (2001) terms this state the 'transcultural transhistorical' representations of Jewishness, challenging these

notions by exemplifying the shifting attitudes towards Judaism from outside and from within. Ben-Rafael (2003) uses attitudes in the Jewish world towards the classic three pillars of Jewish religion – the God of Israel, the Jewish People, and the Land of Israel – as a way to show the multiplicity in meanings and identities within the Jewish world. In Silberstein's (2000) edited volume contributors question the fixity of Judaism by presenting the varied ambiguities that arise from works in Jewish studies.

Challenges to the transcultural and transhistorical model of Jewishness are not restricted to theoretical works but have also been present in ethnographies and sociological research. These works brings us multiple representations of Jewishness in relation to individual Jews, and in relation to the group *Jews* as a whole (Goldberg and Krausz 1993, Goldstein 2001). We also have accounts of multiple representations of Jewishness from within and outside the group (Markowitz 2006, Webber 1997); however, none of these representations are the same, hence, all are parallel narratives of Jewish existence.

All the works cited above support the fact that the notion of a singular, unified transcultural and transhistorical Jewishness is no longer sustainable. In a continuation of the shift from a single Judaism to multiple Judaisms, I have here chosen the term Jewishness over Judaism because Judaism is highly associated with religion, while Jewishness is a more inclusive term, encompassing both religious and ethno-national/secular expressions of Jewish life.

The self-evident Jewish multiplicity has led to a call from Jewish scholars for alternative models and frameworks for the study of Jewish identities. In these alternatives there exists a recognition of the fact that we can no longer look at Jewish identity as a fixed entity, whether over time or space. Furthermore, they call for the accommodation of notions such as multiplicity of identification, individualism, and flexibility in the analysis of Jewishness, all of which are

elements associated with both secularity and modernity. Their call can be read as a call to better integrate secular principles in the analysis of Jewish identification. Thus, Secular Jewishness is an alternative to the classic models for Jewish identification, and has been offered as a framework that anchors modernist doubters lost to Jewishness due to the fixed system of traditional religious Judaism (Silberstein 1984). Secular Jewishness has been envisioned as a pluralistic enterprise, and as such it ensures open channels of communication between all cultural contributors regardless of their religious or secular orientations. This pluralistic mode of Jewishness has been likened to a market[13], and in it religion as a commodity (Jobani 2008). This model offers us a communal space for all facets of Jewishness to interact and negotiate their differences. In the Jewish context it is an inclusive model allowing diversity in Jewish practice and belonging to have a common platform for communication and collaboration.

Pluralism is not a new notion to Jewishness. Part of the main evidence supporting this claim is the fact that Jewishness has never had a singular source of authority. A multiplicity of traditions and world views can be observed in Jewish literature throughout the generations, first and foremost in the Bible itself (Berlinerblau 2005, Sand 2008). Both external and internal sources contribute to Jewish pluralism, while discussion and debate, as methods for learning and development, form the pillars of Jewish culture, and facilitate its existence as a pluralistic culture. Three rationales are available to justify such arguments. Firstly, there has never been singular face to Jewishness, with multiple movements, trends and traditions always having been in play in Jewish culture. Moreover, a constant challenge to ruling traditions is the driving force behind the development and survival of Jewishness throughout the ages, embodied in the vast Talmudic literature. Secondly, throughout history and as adjustment to historical circumstances

[13]The market as a metaphor for modern social interaction has been used in general debates about religion in modernity. See Secular Principles section p. 20

Jewishness has taken many forms. Thus, any claim for primordial privileges of any Jewish trend or movement does not stand the test of history. And thirdly, secular perceptions of Jewishness are not modern radical innovations, as traces of them can be found in Jewish literature throughout the ages. Thus, secular Jewishness is not a revolutionary idea, but a longstanding, although suppressed, tradition in Jewishness (Malkin 2006, Biale 2011). Indeed ethnographic data introduced in Chapter 4 shows efforts by secular Jews (as BINA) to expose these multiplicities in the early forms of Jewishness.

Multiplicity in the Israeli variety of Jewishness can also be discerned: Charles Liebman (1997) challenges the binary portrait of Jewish-Israeli society in the media as divided into religious and secular. Liebman charts three cultural influences over Jewish-Israeli society: religio-political culture, consumerist post-modernist culture, and secular-Jewish culture, and conceptualizes secular-Jewish culture as an in-between of the two others, and also as a mixture of the two. For Liebman, secularity is the relegation of religion to specific areas of life, that is, its designation as a chosen life style that can be individually modified, rather than a totalizing system of giving meaning to life. Leibman situates the Jewish-Israeli Masortim (traditionalists) in the center of this culture pattern, although they are marginalized, overlooked and dismissed as random, individual, unsystematic, and without intent. Many of these claims about the Masortim have been raised within the secular Jewish discourse against secularity itself, and I will come back to this in my discussion of critical thinking in the context of Jewish studies.

I will now examine the place of individualism in the context of secular Jewish culture. An oscillation between individualism and communality in European Jewish society can be traced back to the Enlightenment. The emancipation of the Jews in 19th century Europe had literally taken down the walls of the Jewish ghetto. A whole range of opportunities have been opened to

Jews, but these were available to Jews as individual citizens of each nation, at the expense of a Jewish communality as such (Eisen 1994). The general process of the individualization of society through the ushering in of citizenship is seen here as it operates on European Jewry.

After the atomization of European Jewish society, we see a move back to communality alongside the rejection of Jewish religion. This movement is epitomized by the establishment of the kibbutz (Miron 1977) and culminates in the establishment of the State of Israel, a strong expression of Jewish communality crossed with nationalism. With the advancements of modernity and the development of consumerism culture in Israel, the kibbutz has reached such a crisis that by the end of the 20th century the kibbutz has become privatized, providing evidence of another oscillation towards individualism. Finally, with the sprouting of the Jewish renewal movement, of which secular Jewishness is a part, the Kibbutz Movement has resulted in a turn back to communality as it is grounded in Jewishness (Cohen 2005). (See discussion of individualism and the kibbutz in Chapter 3 – The Kibbutz and BINA p.58)

However, in this last round of social gravitation towards communality as part of the Jewish renewal movement, the individual has not been expected to bow out of the public arena. In fact individualism, as a secular principle, takes center stage in this social phenomenon called secular Jewishness. Thus, with the understanding that religious Jewishness cannot be delineated from secular Jewishness and in fact serves as the fountain source for secular Jewishness, individual choice emerges as a secular marker (Cohen 2005). Yaakov Malkin's (2003) reading of the Bible as a literary classic can serve as an example. One of Malkin's two aims in his book is the reading of the Bible as a literary classic, and of its characters, god included, as literary heroes. In the second part of the book, the Bible is presented as a literary classic that has shaped the life of Jews throughout the ages. Reading the Bible as a literary classic opens its doors to

those who do not believe in god, yet feel fidelity to the philosophical lessons, values, and morals of this literary creation. Malkin goes to great lengths to establish pluralism as part of the foundations of Jewishness; an argument that legitimizes his literary reading of the Bible. In Jewishness (the religion) the Bible is considered the word of god, and thus intolerant of any interpretation of these words by any other than the ones who are closest to god. However, pluralism can accommodate collective individualism in the spirit of secularity, by acknowledging subjectivity as legitimate framework for interpretation.

The viability of secular Jewishness as an alternative to religious expressions of Jewishness requires cultural innovation and production, in which the role of the individual in the creation of new meanings is central. These new meanings can be derived from the past, i.e. tradition, but they have to pass through the filters of individual, rational, and critical thought (Malkin 2000). In other words, it is individual creativity and interpretations synthesized in the collective sphere that are the source of cultural production and innovation (Hill, et al. 2014). The words of Haim Cohen, one of Israel's most prominent Supreme Court judges and an advocate for secular Jewishness are very clear in this regard.

> A true Epicurean believes that each and **every person is entitled to pave their own way and build their world of belief and none belief according to his will and conscience** … My opinion is (or my dream is), that Jewish studies and the whole of the Jewish heritage assets need to be learned by Epicurean teachings: not to preserve them but mostly in order to revive them as a living and renewing heritage of a living and renewing people **– a renewing Jewish Epicurean people who creates another tier, original, on top of the tiers of his heritage**. [Emphasis added; Translation mine] (Cohen 2005, 72-3)

In the passage quoted above we see Cohen placing the individual and individualism at the core of secular-Jewish creation - a Jewish creation which is innovative, as the use of the words *original*

and *renewing* connote. Notwithstanding this, Jewish creation is a direct continuation of its predecessors, despite its innovative status.

In secular Jewishness, as opposed to religious Jewishness, there has been a reverse of the relationship between the people and their culture[14], where Jewishness is conceptualized as the creation of the Jewish people rather than "…a divinely revealed pattern of life. (Silberstein 1984, 557)" Such an intellectual move creates a symbiotic relation between a people and their culture, the production of culture becoming a way to constitute the people as such. I want to emphasis my delineation here between cultural production and cultural preservation. Cultural production in this context, involves some level of innovation, that is, creation of something new. Cultural creation is used to assert belonging and cultural sovereignty, and indeed the ethnographic data presented in this thesis suggests that cultural creation, and consequently cultural sovereignty, are in fact the goal and aspiration of BINA as a secular Jewish institute.

In the above discussion I have noted the importance of cultural production to secular Jewishness. No creation can be made out of nothing; any cultural creation is based on culture that preceded it. Thus, there is a general agreement that secular[15] Jewishness derives inspiration and meaning for its innovations from past traditions, traditions that are typically religious (Ackerman 2010, Biale 2011, Cohen 2005, Jobani 2008, Malkin 2000). It is the idea that the secular derives inspiration from the past rather than authority, that leaves an open space for creativity and innovation (Brinker 1989). It is the Jewish secular stance that religious sources should be reinterpreted by individuals and be filtered through the sieve of critical thought. Such a process of critical reinterpretation requires the ability to choose out of a massive body of

[14] I here use culture as an umbrella term referring to all of human creation, including religious culture.
[15] Some of these works refer to secular Jewishness in terms of national Jewishness and in opposition to religion. The correlation between the secular and nationalism is part of the binary framework in which religious is part of the pre-modern while the secular and national are associated with the modern era. The question of validity of this correlation can serve as the basis for another dissertation altogether, and will not be addressed here.

Jewish heritage those past sources that are relevant to the cultural project taking place in the present (Cohen 2005). Literacy, and more specifically Jewish literacy, i.e. a knowledge of, and familiarity with, what is known as 'the Jewish bookcase' is fundamental to this process. Once more, the words of Haim Cohen reveal the core of the issue at hand

> There is in the Jewish heritage, in addition to the Torah and other sources, a hidden treasure of humanism, of integrity, of justice. When you extract this wealth out of the sources, (I speak for myself), you are filled with identification and joy that are unrivaled. …There is a sort of intellectual limpness, a sort of intellectual laziness in the people today. Not that the Jewish sources, as they are, are unfit in any regard; simply, [they are] being lazy to investigate deep inside them [the sources], in order to discern that which is valid in them, the beautiful, that which is vital for us today, to extract it from them [the sources] and implement in present reality. Instead [the people] take "whatever they feel like" and use it for momentary gain. … The sources are very hard to access, and whoever has no skill and is not inscribed with the ability to mine their inner depths – will have [a] hard time to reach all of the richness hidden in them. [Translation mine] (Cohen 2005, 71-72)

However, literacy in itself is not sufficient for the creation of secular Jewish culture; in order for cultural conceptions to be marked as secular they require literacy, but they also need to pass through the filter of critical thinking and finally to be open to individual interpretation and adaptation.

As the ethnographic data suggests, secularity is not to be found in any specific cultural artifact (in the broadest sense), but rather in the principles of behavior. Thus, secularity is to be observed in the way cultural artifacts, with or without religious roots, are used, managed and transferred. Secularity, as it has emerged from the field, is in the process, in the action. As such secularity can be detected in relation to what is seen as classically religious; in relation to BINA, this occurs most notably in the study of scriptures or the celebration of the Shabbat. At the same time the same secular benchmarks can be observed in a different cultural realm altogether, for

example in BINA's operations as a social institution. In Chapter 4 I demonstrate how considerations of the secular as a dynamic action rather than an object allow its investigation beyond the religious realm as it is expressed in BINA's teachings as a Jewish institution. In Chapter 5 I present an ethnographic account of the ways in which the secular shapes institutional culture at BINA

Intellectual Jewish literacy serves as the communal ground on which Jewishness stands. In his book about atheist spirituality, Andre Comte-Sponville (2007) discusses the etymology of the word religion in his attempt to discern what makes religion so prominent in human society, and considers whether human society can continue without it. He traces the word religion to two possible Latin verbs *relegare* and *religare*, *religare* meaning to bind together - in this context, to bind together society – and *relegare* meaning to contemplate or reread, or (as Comte-Sponville suggests) to reread in contemplation. Comte-Sponville offers a causal connection between the two Latin verbs. He writes:

> *Relegare* is what produces or renders possible *religare*; we are bound together because we reread. The bond can be created (*within* each generation) only if it has first been transmitted (*form* the preceding generation). In this sense, civilization always precedes itself. It is only possible to meditate together (to commune) if something has first been taught, repeated or reread. There is no such thing as society without education, civilization without transmission, communion without fidelity (Comte-Sponville 2007, 20-21).

Comte-Sponville discusses in general social terms that which has been iterated in Jewish studies. Knowledge of the past, historical and intellectual, is what binds societies together, and the transmission of this knowledge to future generations is part of what makes a society culturally viable (Gitelman 2009).

In relation to the cultural viability of Jewishness Zvi Gitelman (2009) raises the issue of thick versus thin culture. In this argument, religious Jewish culture is presented as the thick

variety – i.e. richer and more likely to sustain group cohesion in future generations – while secular Jewish culture is formulated as thin culture, in danger of becoming 'symbolic ethnicity' and losing its viability. Amos Oz (2005), one of Israel's most well-known literary figures, makes a similar argument specific to the Israeli society, noting that Halakhic Jews conceive of secular Jews as empty vessels, and secular Jewishness as an 'empty wagon', compared to the perception of Halakhic Jewishness as a full wagon. In true secular form, Oz notes that there are two issues at stake here: firstly that all Jews should recognize that Jewishness is made up of several full wagons, and secondly that it is not the Halakhic laws that have sustained the Jews as such but in fact individual Jews who chose to keep the Halakha laws and other forms of Jewish practice. This element of the individual driving the creation or renewal of Jewish culture is important, in that, as Oz concludes, it is the Jews that choose to be Jews who are at the heart of Jewish survival.

The question then arises of whether thin secular Jewish culture is capable of sustaining Jewish identification in generations to come. Schweid sees individualism, championed by secular Jews such as Malkin and Cohen, as an agent of dis-integration leading to an existential crisis, as it fragments and presumably inhibits group cohesion. Indeed, many writers hold that Israeli secular society has already reached this stage of existential crisis (Azulai and Tavori 2007, Hevlin 2009, Waxman 2006). However, in contrast to Schweid, I argue that communality does not need to come at the expense of individualism, and religion does not need to be at the expense of secularity. Instead of religious conformity as to the level and manner of belonging, in secularity we find the idea of fidelity[16] – a voluntary commitment to a set of ethics and practices (Comte-Sponville 2007) – and thus we see at BINA, and other secular environments such as

[16] A discussion of fidelity in the context of group identification is found in the group identification section starting at p. 49

corporations and open-source projects, a new kind of communality that embraces individualism and creates space for individual creativity to be expressed (Hill, et al. 2014, Weber 2004). Moreover, these secular social environments build on collective individualism for their advancement. Community has emerged from the data as a central social construct at BINA alongside individualism, with secular innovation springing from the way in which individualism is incorporated into communality. As I have already stated, Leibman (1997) notes that the Masortim in Israel are dismissed as random, individual, unsystematic and without intent; indeed all these descriptors are used in relation to secularity, as is evident in the thick-thin culture debate. The individualistic nature of secular societies, coupled with the tendency to privilege cultural artifacts over thought processes as markers of identification, tend to color secularist social groups as atomistic – lacking cohesiveness and direction – and thus lacking the ability to foster group identification. However, focusing the investigation of secular group identification on attitudes and thought processes rather than cultural attributes reveals a deeper level of communality: one that is not based in conformity, but rather on the manner in which actions are taken. Indeed the consideration of thought processes as secular markers in chapters four and five allows for secularity to be marked and then investigated beyond the religious realm.

In the cultural attribute model for group identification Jewish identification is measured by attributes of religious affiliation, and secular Jewish culture is seen as thin relative to its religious counterpart. In 2002 Rabi Tsvi Blanchard called for a change in the way we measure Jewishness, framing the process of identification as 'an ongoing process of choosing'. Thus, for him what is to be transmitted to future generations is "…how important and vital it is for them to 'choose Jewish' " (Blanchard 2002, 43); or, using Comte-Sponville terminology, to foster Jewish fidelity among future generations. This approach echoes Oz's understanding of Jewish survival

through the generations. The irony here, or maybe the ray of hope for secularists, is that Tsvi Blanchard, a rabbi belonging to Jewish orthodoxy, is an advocate of inclusive Jewishness that is grounded in freedom of choice and individuality, and which is understood as a fluid social construct linked to the experience of the here-and-now – i.e. secular Jewishness. He, like some of my informants is an in-between, proving that secularity and religiosity are not mutually exclusive.

Multiplicity in Jewishness does not only legitimizes secular Jewishness and facilitates individualism in the collective, it also adds dynamism to the process of identification. Meyer (2006) in his review of Jewish history in modernity attempts to identify a single historical thread of continuity. He fails. His survey of the historical debate shows two common arguments, either for national continuity or religious continuity depending on the historical point of view – i.e. history of a people, or history of a religion. Out of the realization that a single historical thread of continuity is impossible to determine, Meyer suggests an alternative model. Using the metaphor of a rope, he proposes multiple threads of continuity. As a rope is made up of single threads, each of which may be cut and change, the rope nevertheless remaining a strong continuous whole, so is Jewishness continuous; we can find discontinuities in specific points of time and space, but an overall continuity is undeniable.

Boccaccini (2009), much like Meyer and others, claims that any variety of Jewishness is in fact a combination of both its religious and ethno-national elements. I argue that in parallel narratives about Jewish identification the variable factor is the balance between the two. Thus, on the one hand a secular person will see her Jewishness as an ethno-national project with very little remaining of its religious aspect; while on the other an orthodox Jew will conceive her Jewishness in almost strictly religious terms, although she will not deny the ethno-national

elements of her identity. This notion positions every Jew as an in-between, for which this balance is a dynamic element, and provides an alternative to the binary model of ethno-national vs. religious basis for Jewishness. As such, this alternative can serve as a model for avoiding binary strong holds. Applied to the secular-religious binary, if we accept co-existence of the two extremes – i.e. rejecting the binary – then our focus turns to the balance of these two elements. This theoretical shift brings to groupness a dynamic element in that it presents a continuum on which there is fluctuation over time and space, with such a continuum allowing for expanded and more flexible group boundaries since they are based on tension rather than fixed truth.

Secular Jewish identification is the balancing of the two known extremes, the ethno-national and the religious; not only do those identifying as secular choose to reject the binary opposition assumed between the two, but they offer a new alternative groupness, identification – a community that is committed to both heritages, the secular humanistic (Western/ethno-national), and the religious. In the same way that the life experience of the conversos prepared Spinoza to contemplate a non-religious existence for the individual, Jews who have had to cope with the supposed binary – secular/ethno-nationalism vs. religion – have formed a model of Jewish identification that is dynamic and facilitates the integration of secular principles with religious traditions. This dynamic model for identification is based on the tension between different but co-existing circles of identification; the inherent instability, which creates tension, opens a door for negotiation of group boundaries and, in time, an adjustment of these boundaries to reflect the historical context in which they are negotiated. In order to explore this further, the following section offers a comprehensive discussion of dynamism in groupness, outlining the way in which dynamism contributes to inclusiveness in the context of group identification.

Secular Principles and Group Identification

Identity studies in social sciences have focused on social groups as their unit of investigation, and indeed this dissertation, as part of this investigative field, focuses on groupness. However, I choose to open this final theoretical section of my dissertation with an exploration of the individual rather than the group. Being human, individuals are social creatures that survive in groups. It is the tension between our perceptions of ourselves as individual entities with individual sovereignty[17] on the one hand, and ourselves as part of a cohesive social group on the other hand, that is of interest here. I have noted in the previous section on *Secular Principles and Jewishness* that Jewish society has in recent centuries oscillated between communality and individualism. Predictably, this has not taken place in a vacuum, and in fact the same oscillation can be discerned in general terms across Western society. In this section I will therefore explore the ways in which we can include individualism in groupness, for which I employ the term 'inclusive groupness'.

Theories of individual identification and group identification have been in dialectic relationship, with ideas about consciousness being appropriated from theories about individual identity to theories of national and ethnic identity (Bhabha 1996, Hastings 1997) while theories re-grading circles of identification in group identities have been applied to the study of individual identity (Schachter 2004). In whatever direction we investigate – group to individual or individual to group – we find that identity is far less fixed and far more contextual than the term identity connotes (Clifford 1988). Hence, my use of the term identification rather than identity as a way to bring to the concept a sense of fluctuation and dynamism.

[17] Sovereignty according to the dictionary is "a country's independent authority and the right to govern itself (Merriam-Webster 2015)". Individual sovereignty exchanges the term 'country' for 'individual' meaning: an individual's independent authority and the right to govern herself.

The theoretical concept of identification of individuals, and the groups they constitute, has been undergoing a process of realignment since the mid-20th century. The main change, as the shift from the term identity to identification suggests, is the acknowledgement that we can no longer speak in terms of a singular totalizing identity. Such a totalizing approach rejects two crucial forces in present day society: 1) individual sovereignty – the right and aspiration for self-determination and self-expression within the collective; 2) identification as a continual process of *being* rather than as a fixed social artifact.

When considering individual sovereignty and dynamism in identification we are confronted with multiplicity of identifications: the multiplicity of individual identifications within a group; and the multiplicity of identifications taking part in the individual process of *being*. These new social modes require social scientists to reimagine the way groupness is formed and maintained in a way that accommodates both individual sovereignty and the dynamism inherent in the process of identification. In other words, a new framework for investigating and understanding identification needs to be employed. A framework that, while accommodating multiplicity and constant change, still allows for group cohesion.

Before I set out to contemplate on how a secular reading of identification can be used as such new framework for analysis of identification, I wish to expand on the two forces operating on the field of identification studies mentioned above. In my discussion of secularity at the beginning of this theoretical chapter I noted the rise of the individual as the primary social unit, that is, the citizen. At this stage of social development the individual, although acknowledged as a social entity and assigned some social power via citizenship, is expected to conform in favor of group cohesion and social hierarchy (Block 2015). Thus we see a sort of passive individuality that is secondary to groupness. With the advancement of western society and the break from

hierarchical modes of social organization in the digital age, there is a growing aspiration for individual sovereignty, that is, personal choice as to the terms of engagement with the group, level of conformity, and terms of belonging to the group. I would like to distinguish here the term sovereignty from autonomy. The two terms as defined by Merriam-Webster English dictionary share their definition as 'the right to self-govern'. The point of divergence between the two, in my understanding, is the reason I deem sovereignty better suited in relation to the secular. It is the connotation that each term relays regarding the relation of the group to those outside of it. While autonomy infers some level of isolation from the outside surroundings, sovereignty emphasizes independent authority in dealings with those outside. As we are looking at the ways individualism is asserting itself among other individuals in a group, this nuance regarding sovereignty in my opinion makes this term better suited for this context. This is also the case with cultural sovereignty, which is about asserting legitimacy and authority to operate within a specific cultural sphere in relation to other competing groups.

In 1969 Fredrik Barth published his seminal work regarding groupness *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. What made Barth's volume ground breaking was his shift of focus from cultural traits as group markers to boundaries. Barth conceptualized groups as clusters of relations arising from, and existing, in difference, thus making the first step towards the conception of groupness as a dynamic process rather than a static configuration of cultural traits. His attention to the boundaries between groups have positioned group identification as an in-between *us* and *them* – a concept I will expand on when discussing negotiation and its contribution to inclusive groupness – and by the turn of the 21st century we find more and more voices in the social sciences experimenting with identification as a process rather than social artifact (Brubaker 2006, Levine 1999, Roy 2001, Rutherford 1996).

Let us go back now to the question at hand: how can multiple identifications be integrated to a cohesive whole without the subordination of individualism? In other words, how can we think of groupness as an inclusiveness, and not as a boundary that exclude *them* from *us*? I propose focusing our investigation of identification on fidelity rather than boundaries, meaning focusing on identifying the ethics and values which are voluntarily shared among members of the group, rather than on that which separates it from other groups. Furthermore, I propose an examination of the mechanisms that open social space for debate over, and negotiation of, differences in power and ideology among group members and among different groups – i.e. the mechanism for inclusion.

Earlier, in my discussion of Jewish secularity, I discussed fidelity as a voluntary commitment to a set of ethics and practices (Comte-Sponville 2007). Voluntarism as an attribute of fidelity is of importance here, and so I will use here a voluntary community of open-source software developers as an example for inclusive groupness. Through this example I will demonstrate how fidelity as a voluntary act helps in fostering inclusive groupness. Steven Weber in his book *The Success of Open Source* (2004) sets out to chart the contours and features of an open-source community[18]: fidelity, individualism, literacy, innovative activism and debate are parallels that can be observed between an open-source community and the secular groupness as I have outlined so far. At the very basis of this correlation is the understanding of the issue at hand as process rather than product. Weber writes: "The essence of open source is not the software. It is the *process* by which software is created. (2004, 56)" Equally, as I have argued above, it is not any specific identification that is of importance but the *process* by which it is formed and sustained.

[18] Open source projects are processes of software production based on "…voluntary participation and voluntary selection of tasks…The source code [for the software] core is available freely … And anyone can modify the code freely, for his or her own use. (Weber 2004, 62)"

Weber points to "…strong elements of shared *identity and belief systems* within the community of developers (2004, 144)" as a counterforce to fragmentation resulting from competing individualities. He goes on to note that one of the "important elements of shared belief … within the open source community … is the notion that personal efficacy not only benefits from, but positively requires, a set of cooperative relationships with others. (2004, 145)" To put it in terms of fidelity, identification and inclusiveness: one of the important elements of fidelity in secular group identification is the notion that individualism not only benefits from, but requires groupness. The open-source community's understanding of the symbiotic relations between the individual and the collective is a particular expression of a more balanced relationship between the two. In focusing group identification on that which is shared by the individual units of a group[19] together out of volition – i.e. fidelity, we lay an inclusive foundation for that groupness. This is in contrast to the boundary model for group identification which focuses on the differences between individual units as a way to distinguish *us* from *them* (Barth 1969, Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power 1991). The now classic approach to groupness highlights differences in order to delineate boundaries. These boundaries encircle the *us* to clearly separate it from the *them*. The notion of fidelity, on the other hand, is about shared communalities thus highlighting common core rather than differences. In this formulation the *us* does not require the *them* as its mirror, thus differences lose their power to 'name' the *us*. In inclusive groupness, differences, instead of having a deterministic quality, become markers of diversity and tolerance. Differences are considered as individual preferences rather than group markers.

[19] I talk here of 'individual units of a group' so to include both social groups comprised of human individuals, and organizational groups such as the UN, in which case the individual unit is nation-state.

Literacy lies at the core of fidelity. Going back to the original definition of the term fidelity in the context of religion as stated by Comte-Sponville, it is the repeated reading and contemplation of narratives shared by the group. Thus, literacy in a shared body of knowledge is a way to express belonging, form identification, and claim power expressed through sovereignty.

Literacy is part of the language practices on both individual and group level, and as such it forms part of our identifications. Language in general, and discourse as specific form of language, have long been considered central to group identification. In the analysis of group identification as a form of social relations, language has been used as both the embodiment of social relations and their expression (Anderson 1991 [1983], Bauman and Briggs 2003, Del Giudice and Porter 2001, Hester 2002, Gellner 1983, Kroskrity 1999, Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power 1991). Conceptualizing language as power relations rather than power infers its status as a dynamic process in which power relations are worked out. Language as a dynamic negotiation of powers, through the analysis of discourse, is able to give voice to those with lesser power (Foucault, The Subject and Power 2003, Fairclough 2003). The consideration of discourse as negotiation of power relations helps eliminate some of the assumed determinism associated with hierarchies of power (Bhabha 1994), and such consideration is useful when analyzing discourse for inclusive group identification.

The term literacy as it is conceptualized here, goes beyond the notion of competency. This analysis accords language and the knowledge of it power in itself. Literacy is an expression of social powers that are outside of language. I build here on Bourdieu's notions of 'linguistic capital' and 'habitus', the social meaning of the linguistic act. Bourdieu writes:

> Legitimate competence is the statutorily recognized capacity of an authorized person – an 'authority'- to use, on formal occasions, the legitimate (i.e. formal) language, the authorized, authoritative language, speech that is accredited, worthy of being believed, or in a word *performative*, claiming (with the greatest

> chances of success) to be effective. Given that legitimate competence, thus defined, implies the effectiveness of the performative, one can understand how certain experiments in social psychology have been able to establish that the efficacy of an utterance, the power of conviction which is granted to it, depends on the *pronunciation* (and secondarily the vocabulary) of the person who utters it; (Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power 1991, 69-70)

In the above quote Bourdieu notes that the efficacy of an utterance is dependent on its pronunciation first of all, and then on vocabulary. I want to note two points of divergence of this theory from that of Bourdieu. First, Bourdieu refers specifically to speech, while I am looking at text, as the word literacy connotes. The primary shift brought about by the focus on text is the elevation of vocabulary to the primary element by which the efficacy of the linguistic act is established. In addition Bourdieu is preoccupied with the differentiation and delimitation of social groups – i.e. he works within the model of boundaries as the basis for the analysis of groupness, whereas this work focuses on fidelity as the basis of groupness - a fidelity which is reliant on literacy.

Within literacy intertextuality is of special significance. Intertextuality has a central role in assigning both meaning and efficacy to an utterance. M.M. Bakhtin (1981) commenting on literary language, i.e. written text, noted that "the unity of a literary language … [is] a highly specific unity of several 'languages' that have established contact and mutual recognition with each other. (Bakhtin 1981, 295)" Bakhtin understood a written text as a dialog between several 'languages' – what he terms heterogolossia. Furthermore, in Bakhtin's formulation the text as a dialogue represents a unity, specific to the text in question. Intertextuality as a practice of discourse is a way to expose and explore the variety of 'languages' taking part in the dialogue that creates the text. Those 'languages' are representations of distinct social groups taking part in the discourse of which the original text in question is part. Meaning is created in the process of

production and consumption of the linguistic act – i.e. in the dialogue both internal (heteroglossia), and external (between producer and consumer).

Thus the practice of intertextuality within literacy adds to the meaning of an utterance, as it exposes distinct social stances (as they are represented by heteroglossia) influencing the utterance. Briggs and Bauman (1992), building on Bakhtin's ideas of intertextuality and the meaning found in the heretoglossic dialogue, conceptualize intertextual links as bridges to distinct social times and landscapes. They note that such intertextual bridges augment an utterance's efficacy and social power. They see intertextuality as a form of contextualizing discourse and the social environment it both embodies and represents. Briggs and Bauman note that the practice of intertextuality is an assertion of authority and thus a crucial element in negotiating group identification[20].

Going back to literacy as the basis of fidelity I wish to note that the shift from boundaries to fidelity as the axis for group analysis does not suggest that power, and power relations, are not central to the understanding of groupness. However, such a shift demotes the deterministic characters of hierarchical social structures. If we forsake boundaries as the determining factor of groupness, then we forsake the need to *a priori* exclude. The focus on fidelity as an axis for groupness leaves the social 'door' open to all that are voluntarily willing to commit to a set of values and ethics set forth as the foundation for the group. Fidelity is a free choice that declares one's commitment to a shared socio-cultural base with no elements of coercion or conformism, which would be in contradiction to free choice. As such, fidelity can serve as a base for inclusive groupness but it cannot sustain it. It offers no outlet for working out friction caused by collaboration with difference (Tsing 2005).

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[20] For ethnographic discussion of intertextuality as practice of discourse see Chapter 4 - Cultural Literacy and Intertextuality p.81. For ethnographic discussion of intertextuality as practice see p. 127

This brings me to my second suggested shift when analyzing group identification, focusing on mechanisms that facilitate debate and negotiation. A useful theoretical concept in this regard is the in-between. The in-between, or hybridization as it has also been called in the literature, as conceived here, is the process of negotiation of difference. In recent decades, attention have been paid in the social sciences to the in-between as a location of dynamic processes that lead to change and transformation (AlSayyad 2001, Bhabha 1994, Feldman 2011, Merry 2006), with all the authors cited above conceptualizing the in-between, or the hybrid, as a state of negotiation towards creation. As such, geographical, mental, and theoretical in-betweens are considered observation points to processes of change and transformation resulting from the coming together of differences (Feldman 2011).

Hybridity according to AlSayyad (2001) has been prevalent in everyday discourse in Western society for years. AlSayyad emphasizes that hybridity "…does not emerge from a synthesis of different components, but form a space where elements encounter and transform each other" (AlSayyad 2001, 7). Hybridity is conceptualized as a dynamic process rather than a static fixity, especially in relation to identification (Roy 2001). In considering these terms of in-between and hybrid, I personally find the term in-between more useful here. Hybridity results in the hybrid, as Roy defines it, a 'static syncretism' and this is its downfall. In contrast, the in-between offers us no end-product; it is a transition, a process, the dynamism inherent to the in-between making it a more appropriate concept for the analysis of group identification as a dynamic process in itself. Bhabha (1996) argues that cultures in general, including cultural identities, are in fact in-betweens, stating that cultures are never self-contained and pure, but always partially ours and partially the other's. Thus, cultures are constant negotiations between us and the internal and/or external other; in Bhabha's understanding of culture, another way that

cultures are in-betweens is the fact that they are at the same time a process of differentiation and of coming together.

Tsing (2005), building on the understanding of hybridization process as a negotiation site, deals with issues of power through the concept of friction. Friction, according to Tsing, is the byproduct of ‘collaboration with difference’; it is what we observe when unequal powers come together in a situated historical configuration inevitably leading to change. Bhabha (1994), by looking at differences as ongoing negotiations between elements rather than a struggle over positioning in a hierarchy, can serve as the background for Tsing’s notion of friction. By looking at difference as negotiation instead of as a hierarchy, unequal powers are not pre-destined to remain in a certain order – i.e. hierarchy. Both Tsing’s and Bhabha’s formulations leave space for unequal powers to negotiate the terms of their co-existence, leaving an open path to transformation and innovation emanating from change. Change, transformation and innovation are all necessary if non-conformist and non-coercive – i.e. inclusive – groupness is to take place; change and innovation are the resolution of the friction brought about by collaboration in difference.

In translating this from the theoretical to the ethnographical, analysis of inclusive groupness should focus on the mechanisms that foster the non-formal, outside of hierarchical communication channels. These communication mechanisms foster debate and do not shy away from conflict, or (using Tsing’s terminology) friction, since conflict leads to innovation – i.e. practical solutions allowing collaboration in difference. Turning once more to the example of the open-source developer’s community, we note that Weber characterizes open source developers’ culture as encouraging discussion independent of hierarchical structures. Weber notes *talk a lot* as one of eight things that open source developers do. He writes:

> Open source developers love to talk about what it is they are doing and why. These discussions range from specific technical problems in a project to general issues associated with the politics or business of software development. … "Talking" among open source developers does not mean clam, polite discussion. … Discussion is indeed generally grounded in a common belief that there exist technical solutions to technical problems … (Weber 2004, 81)

According to Weber, a key strategy in the open source development process is that there is no meaningful distinction between users and developers – i.e. no affecting hierarchy. Thus any user, marginal as she maybe, can contribute to the development process by participating in the negotiations over it. In relation to the development of one of the biggest open source projects Linux[21] Weber writes: "The principal norm is to say what you think and not be shy about disagreeing with what others, including Linus Trovalds[22], might think. (Weber 2004, 63)"

Change and innovation have been noted above as the resolution of friction emanating from collaboration in difference, a theme pursued in the collaborative work *Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation* (Hill, et al. 2014) in which the authors contemplate what leadership practices contribute to and promote innovation. They note a set of practices they see as pivotal to promoting innovation, and although this thesis does not focus on leadership *per se*, the authors' insight into the process of innovation are of value here. In their explorations of leadership in innovation the authors point to non-hierarchical channels for communication, as well as collaboration, as crucial in promoting innovation. Here is an excerpt noting the kind of environment that drives innovation.

> The effective leaders of innovation we studied …recognize they could not plan for innovation, but they could organize in ways that encouraged it … They created forums where diverse groups could interact in both formal and spontaneous ways. They consciously created space for experimentation … Effective leaders involved people in each other's work, encouraged cross-

[21] Linux is "A hugely complex and sophisticated operating system [that] had been built out of voluntary contributions of thousands of developers spread around the world" (Weber 2004, 55)

[22] Linus Trovalds is the initial developer of Linux and its current leader.

> specialty collaboration … They constantly wove together reviewing, planning, and doing, with a heavy emphasis on learning from doing. They knew they could not eliminate hierarchy, but they worked hard to overcome the limits that hierarchy and expertise or experience could impose on open communication. (Hill, et al. 2014, 36-37)

Two important mechanisms for fostering innovation and with it inclusive groupness have been noted in the excerpt above. Most relevant is the issue of experimentation and open communications through all levels of the organization[23], as a means of sidestepping hierarchy and encouraging discussion. Hierarchy is an expression of a specific state of group power relations, open communications across a hierarchy facilitate negotiations outside the deterministic hierarchical frame, or at least scale back its influence on the negotiations. Experimentation are *de facto* negotiations regarding possible solutions to any given predicament.

No less important is the role of leadership in the process of innovation. Hill, et al. note that the leader of innovation– which inclusive groupness has to promote if its members are to collaborate in difference – are not visionaries but enablers. They write:

> If a problem calls for a truly original response, no one can know in advance what that response should be. By definition, then leading innovation cannot be about creating and selling a vision to people who are somehow inspired to execute that vision. (Hill, et al. 2014, 2)

This idea that innovation cannot be fostered in an environment that presupposes its outcome is the practical expression of the secular principle of contextual truth. The understanding that different paths may lead to different solutions to the same problem, is an equivalent to the idea that truth is contextual depending on the path by which one chooses to construct her reality; and

[23] The book *Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation* (Hill, et al. 2014) focuses on businesses. BINA, although not purely a business, nonetheless operates within a capitalist market including operating budgets, employees, and organizational hierarchies. Thus, there is enough resemblance for insight to be gained by comparing the two.

once again it leaves an open space for negotiations in the hope of reaching an alternative – i.e. innovation. To summarize, the role of leadership of an inclusive groupness is to manage the friction that rises from the collaboration of differences by enabling negotiations and creativity and ultimately leading to innovation and social transformation. This can be illustrated by the leaders of BINA implementing the staff's study session as a space for all of BINA's staff members to come together regardless of rank in the organizational hierarchy. These sessions are also an opportunity to work out individual difference and through this process to promote group cohesion. (For in-depth ethnography of BINA's organizational culture in secular context see Chapter 5 – Ethnography: BINA's Operations.)

Chapter Summary

This discussion has identified a trend in Jewish identity studies that is part of the general identity/identification studies trajectory. There is a call in Jewish studies for alternative models for Jewish identification which will accommodate notions of multiplicity, individualism and flexibility, thus allowing for the co-existence of different identifications – i.e. gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, national, professional – even when they seem to be contradictory. It has also been shown that movement in time and space mean change, shattering the notion of a fixed identity for life. Thus we see that reality is refusing its human simplification in favor of categorization, and that we are in need of a secular framework for reading identification: a framework that is inclusive in the sense that it has mechanisms in place for the inclusion of the marginal, individualistic, and different, mechanisms that grant any particular identification the flexibility it needs in order to be relevant for individuals and groups across time and space, in the highly mobile society of the 21st century.

I have used the term secular in relation to this new analytic framework of identification, primarily because this new framework is centered on secular principles: multiplicity, individualism, and flexibility. I have also explained that secularity at this stage is not divorced from religion altogether, meaning that secular identification embraces multiplicity, individualism and flexibility in ways that are contrasted with religious identity. Note that I have used the noun identity rather than identification in relation to religion, in order to reinforce the perceived monolithic state of religious identification. Moreover, I argue that the same can be said of the contrast between secular identification and national identity, since both the religious and the national variety involve privileging one identification over all others, to the point of assigning it authority over others. Furthermore, both religious and national identities are exclusive in the sense that they are drawing seemingly clear boundaries between us and the other. Lastly, it can be seen that both identities are presumed to be transhistorical and unchanging. With this distinction I make another move towards unpacking the secular from the national, and challenging the binary pair national/secular vs. religious. Inclusive groupness as it is supported by secular principles challenges simplistic binary ordering of the world, promoting the hybrid as the conventional aspect of groupness rather than the fixating aspirations of both national and religious identifications.

Secular identification or groupness is inclusive since it is not focused on the relationship between *us* and the *other*. This formulation of secular group identification does not ignore group boundaries; these are an undeniable reality. However, in the secular spirit these boundaries are dynamic, flexible, and negotiable. Secular group identification is centered on fidelity too, rather than us-as-reflected-from-the-other. Its boundaries are negotiable, leaving an open path for other identifications to join it and even change it, or at least collaborate on projects of mutual interest.

We now move away from this macro view of the complex theoretical background to this search for identification, into a more detailed exploration of BINA itself. The following three chapters tell the secular story of BINA: Chapter 3 presents the historical background from which BINA has emerged, while Chapters 4 and 5 are ethnographic accounts of BINA as a representation of secular group identification. In these ethnographic accounts I use the secular modes of operations outlined throughout Chapter 2, in order to tease out that which is secular at BINA, within the context of the goals set by BINA as a Jewish educational institute.

Chapter 3 – The Kibbutz and BINA

The kibbutz was born out of secular social ideology on the one hand, and practical necessity on the other, as a social experiment in communal living and economy. BINA is not a kibbutz and is not affiliated with any specific kibbutz: however, as was noted in the introduction, kibbutz culture is a major influence on BINA's organization and culture.

This chapter, in which I draw the connections between BINA and the kibbutz, is intended to situate BINA in its socio-historical context. It is an effort to give a broader meaning to the observations inferred about BINA and its secular character, and concludes with my observations on the most recent trends in kibbutz evolution and the ways in which they are reflected at BINA. I start from evident connections, and then deepen the focus to explore the more subtle relations occurring between the two. Although there is a considerable body of literature on the birth, development and evolution of this social structure,[24]I will firstly focus my survey of kibbutz social life on the interplay between the social group and the individual within the group.

The kibbutzim are based on the principle of mutual responsibility, and BINA is a social minded institution which takes the kibbutz principle of mutual responsibility and applies it to Israeli society at large. In so doing, BINA intertwines mutual responsibility and the kibbutz ethos of nation-building, an ethos that in recent decades shifted its focus from the economy and settlement to education and social activism. BINA is also a direct continuation of the holistic do-it-yourself approach of the kibbutz to Jewish cultural creation, and uses dialog and negotiations as a way to foster symbiosis between the collective and the individual, a lesson learned at the kibbutz and implemented at BINA which demonstrates another connecting thread between BINA and the kibbutz.

[24] See *Family and Community in the Kibbutz* (Talmon 1972) *& One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life* (Palgi and Reinharz 2011) for overview of Kibbutz life.

On the mundane level, BINA shares physical premises with the kibbutz movement in that the BINA headquarters are located at the educational center of the Kibbutz's Movement – Seminar Efal in Ramat Efal near Tel-Aviv. The Kibbutz Movement is an umbrella organization for approximately 250 kibbutzim in Israel, and was established in the year 2000 following the merger of two previous umbrella kibbutz organizations: the United Kibbutz Movment, known by its Hebrew acronym HaTakam, and the Kibbutz HaAtrzi (The Kibbutz Movement (התנועה הקיבוצית) n.d.). The 2000 merger saw all fractions of Kibbutz settlements come together, with the exception of the religious kibbutzim, which, although retaining a connection and an affinity to the Kibbutz Movement, choose to keep operating under the religious Zionist settlement movement – The Religious Kibbutz Movement. The Kibbutz Movement and BINA are also connected on a financial level as BINA is part of a Non-Profit Organization set up by the Kibbutz Movement named Merhavim. Merhavim's financial reports for 2011 show BINA as their main financial activity at the time (BDO Ziv Haft 2012).

However, BINA's connection to the kibbutz goes much deeper than mundane practicalities such as finance and location. In the *About* page of BINA's website it is stated that BINA was an initiative of intellectuals and educators from the Kibbutz Movement, among others. The influence that kibbutz structure and culture had on BINA is best illustrated by a quote from Lilach, one of BINA's senior staff members who was central for the creation of the group-facilitators program at BINA, a central source of employees for the organization. She noted in relation to her coming to BINA that "I very quickly sensed the smell of the kibbutz … the kibbutz alternative to Jewishness was a sort of something I was nostalgic about."

As an organization that is influenced by kibbutz culture, BINA encourages a holistic do-it-yourself attitude in both its employees and its members. As an example, most of BINA's

public events are produced and equipped in-house: There are no professional sound technicians, lighting experts or caterers. In addition, as I describe in chapter five's *Home Sweet Home* section (p. 162), BINA emulates the kibbutz to a certain extent by aspiring to bridge the gap between the home and the work place, thus alluding to the kibbutz' holistic approach to life, in which co-workers are also your neighbors and friends.

Another important linkage between BINA and the kibbutz is the movement for Jewish renewal in Israel. The organizations which comprise the movement come together every year at the HaKhel festival, in an effort to bring together intellectuals, activists, artists and anyone in between to discuss and celebrate Jewish Israeli culture. I attended the festival in 2011, when it was held at the educational center of the Kibbutz Movement –Seminar Efal. Interspersed between the different session sites were booths of the different organizations for Jewish renewal at the time, and upon closer examination I found that the majority of organizations at the time were based in kibbutzim. It is important to note that the movement, although originating among kibbutz members, has now expanded into general society, and examination of the HaKehl festival program of 2015 shows an expansion of the festival in duration, location and participants which goes far beyond its kibbutz origins.

BINA and its organizational culture cannot be properly understood without consideration of its kibbutz milieu. The organization's vision of impacting general society, its emphasis on creation, its culture of debate, and the organization's attitudes towards individualism and groupness, are all in direct relation to the kibbutz environment from which the organization emerged.

The kibbutz as a form of collective living was born out of practical necessity. Jewish settlers coming to Palestine at the second decade of the 20th century faced harsh physical and

social conditions; they found economic security, physical security, and social support in groupness and thus the kibbutz was born (Rayman 1981). As with any social phenomenon the kibbutz cannot be seen as a result of a single motive, and is in fact an intersection of several social trends. Two main influences can be seen to have been influential for the founders' generation: socialist thinking and Jewish nationalism. Social thinking complemented the general revolt of the founding generation against the capitalist bourgeoisie post-emancipation diasporic Jew (Yechezkel 2002), while the early kibbutz socialist ideology can be best described as socialist pragmatism, i.e. the adoption of socialist ideology as a pragmatic solution to the challenges of the Zionist settlement of Palestine, and later on the state of Israel. Communal living in the Jewish settlement in Palestine can also be seen in part as a reaction to the atomizing effect of the emancipation on European Jewish society. Jews in turn for their equal rights as citizens in European nations had to give up their Jewish community: as part of the emancipation they became Jewish individuals, members of, for example, German society, while conversely the Jewish society they once belong to started to disintegrate (Miron 1977, Eisen 1994). Thus we can see the establishment of Jewish communal society in the pre-state years as a reaction to this atomistic trend coupled with the rejection of the traditional capitalistic European Jewish culture.

It is important to note that within their originating societies the members of the founding generation were individualists who chose to leave behind their social support networks and their commitments to them. They came to a new land seeking self-realization through national realization (Avrahami 1989). The ethos of the first kibbutznikim[25] was pioneering and nation building (Gil 1996, Talmon 1972), and thus creation, both social and material, was at the center of this ethos. This core value was later adapted to changing historical contexts but never lost its centrality in kibbutz culture; it can be detected in current reincarnations of the kibbutz such as

[25] Hebrew plural form for Kibbutz' members.

the urban kibbutzim. Creation is also at the core of BINA, no doubt as part of the heritage that BINA's founders of kibbutz origins brought to the institution. (On social and cultural creation at BINA see Cultural Production p. 106 in relation to its teaching, and Activism p.150 in relation to its operations.)

As Talmon (1972) pointed out in the last chapter of her book, secular asceticism played a major role in realizing the kibbutz ethos. It also plays a role in the relationship between the individual and the collective. The main purpose of the kibbutz in the early settlement years was to create a self-sustaining economy for the emerging society, which included the introduction of agriculture, both as an occupation and as a production brunch, to Jewish society. Given that these young idealists had a bourgeois upbringing they had to train themselves in agricultural lifestyle and work, while any revenues were dedicated to the solidification and expansion of the enterprise rather than for personal gain in exchange for their toil. It was asceticism, in its kibbutz version, framed as a social ideal, that legitimized the postponement of self-fulfillment in the present in favor of the promise of the establishment of the nation in the future. Talmon writes "The doctrine of the common good enabled men to bear the badge of poverty gladly and freely… (1972, 209)"

Converging with asceticism at the pioneering stage of the kibbutz was the convention that individual realization should be attained through collective realization. For this convention to hold in practice, individual goals had to coincide with those of the collective. Of this Jerrold Levy wrote in 1956, a time that can be described as the golden age of the cooperative kibbutz system, the following "[c]omprehensive co-operation demands that an individual have common [*sic*] interests with the group rather than similar interests. If this identification is achieved, individuals are able to develop their personalities within the framework of the group by working

toward common goals. (1956, 82)" In other words in its heyday kibbutz living required total correlation between the aspirations of both individuals and collectives. Notwithstanding, both Avrahami (1989) and Talmon (1972) note that kibbutz collectivism did not, on principle, attempt to marginalize the individual. Avrahami writes: "In the kibbutz movement …the collective is grasped as central and as superior to the individual, as a tool for the realization of the national and social vision, and for that it was allowed to subordinate individual wants to the needs of the whole. [Translation mine] (1989, 7)" The fact that totalizing collectivism was not an ideological tenant in the kibbutz came to play an important part in the crisis it would later experience in the last quarter of the 20th century, a crisis and its consequences which I will discuss later on.

I have discussed collectivism in the kibbutz in very general terms. In everyday life, however, it came to be expressed in two main avenues: firstly, distribution of resources, and secondly, child rearing. Both of these avenues are grounded in the tension between the individual and the collective. Issues of consumption and child rearing in the kibbutz have framed the theoretical question of individual sovereignty versus group cohesion from the very first days of the kibbutz and, as I detail in the following pages, the investigation of the tension between individualism and groupness at BINA cannot be fully understood without a grasp of its historical context. Kibbutz members had very little individual choice regarding consumption, which was determined by the community: as Talmon (1972) noted, such regulated and standardized consumption was possible as long as the number of kibbutz members was small and their needs simple.

A brief description of collective child rearing is in order if we are to understand its influence on the collective-individual relationship. In the classic collective kibbutz children were raised in children's houses. From infancy children grow with their age-group peers, cared by

nurses and professional care givers from the kibbutz' membership. Children would see their parents once a day for a couple of hours, usually in the afternoons, and would go back to the children's house to have dinner and sleep. This meant that the main socialization of kibbutz children was by their age group peers. The age group was seen as an organism in and of itself, and it is the group which thus serves as the axis of life rather than the individuals comprising it (Levy 1956). The implication of such policy on the individual and her perception of her individuality in relation to the group, is described in a group psychotherapy study as follows: "The constant massive presence of the group framework in kibbutz life gives primacy to the process of accommodation to the outside … thus the survival of the group seems to come before many other needs of the individual in it. (Benyakar, Kretsch and Gurevitch 1997, 53)"

As the state of Israel was established and the pioneering stage of the kibbutz movement was coming to its end, a process of institutionalization started to take place. Institutionalization was a means of formalizing the new social norms established by the revolutionary idea of kibbutz living (Avieli 2012). A growth in kibbutz population, and with it the expansion of its economic enterprises, also contributed to the institutionalization of the kibbutz system. Institutionalization of the kibbutz has introduced differentiation into what was up to that time a holistic social system guided by a strong, although not totalizing, ideology (Dar 2002). This differentiation, brought about by diversification of both population and economy, was a blow to the homogeneity that characterized kibbutz social composition (Ben-Rafael 2011).

As the kibbutz, as a social structure, was moving further away from its revolutionary pioneering beginnings, cracks started to form in the total alignment between the individual and the collective goals and aspirations. In 1969, two years after the Six-Day war, a collection of conversations between young kibbutz members was published. These conversation are a

snapshot of the issues that were on the minds of young kibbutznikim at the time. The collection was called *Among Young People: Talks in the Kibbutz* (Tsur, Ben-Aharon and Grossman 1969), and reading through these conversations reveals a generational gap, with institutionalization at its base. To illustrate this I will quote here an exchange between three young kibbutznikim at kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek, part of a conversation entitled *Choice and Free Creation* by the editors of the collection.

> Avishai – […] For us that grow up here, these are known matters, given matters, for us kibbutz is nature and we are not at all impressed by it. **For our parents it was something; they could create; it was their creation. We did not create anything.** Again, these are known matters. […] Point to the tension element in the kibbutz, and [we] will say that for the young sometimes it is hard to grasp that for the seniors what they say it is really like that. **For a certain class, the formula that says that the source of happiness for man is in his identification with missions of the collective, that is what applies.** […] There is no formal coercion. Kibbutz is a voluntary form of life. Whoever wants can get up and pack the suitcases. **But there is coercion, mental coercion (and when I say that, so everybody is backing off: "what? what?" and [they] answer "we are coercing?")**. But in the educational process, in the whole mental atmosphere there are thousand and one details […]
>
> Anat – Already in 7th grade there is a party on Friday, and on this day a party, and on this day an activity, and on another day a group talk – **and everything is so organized… and everything is institutionalized.** And in [summer] vacation suddenly they do not know what to do with themselves – for two months it is not written for them what to do every day, exactly at what hour… and [they] say that it has to be institutionalized, because there are many people – and there has to be some kind of order. […] and then the question is asked if the phenomena called alienation, really is not [present] in the kibbutz. **Because sometimes I see people that have the feeling that they are dependent on people and committees that are like unknown forces. And they have a feeling that in fact…it may be that they chose 20 years ago to live here, but they did not chose this. They do not at all want what there is.**
>
> Yariv – you know when you talk about alienation some contemplation rises in me that in fact all things that men creates – and from this aspect the kibbutz, if we say it is a creation – so like any creation, that of the artist too, so precisely when it is created, it gains a life of its own, outside of the artist, independent and alien to him. […] **and the question is if at all the**

> **kibbutz cannot stand alienated from the moment its building was completed. It has arrived at some stage – and if you did not create it, if you are not connected to it in the creation process – it is outside of you. Even though you live in it.** [Emphasis added; Translation mine] (Tsur, Ben-Aharon and Grossman 1969, 244-5)

In the above conversation, several of the issues rising relate to the institutionalization process and to the collective-individualism tension in the kibbutz affiliated with it. The most evident is the shift in focus from the collective to the individual. Thus, Avishai notes that, while the older generation of the kibbutz aligned their personal aspirations with that of the collective, this does not apply to younger generations. We also see how creation is central to the feeling of fulfillment, whether personal or collective. Anat raises issues regarding fixity resulting from institutionalization, and with it, the loss of the individual as she is taken over by the abstract institutionalized collective. Yariv takes these issues a step forward and poses the question of alienation of the creator from his own creation, thus contemplating the alienation of the kibbutz as an institution from its members as individuals.

In the conversation above and others like it, we see questions arising among young kinbbutznikim at the time which reflect an imminent identity crisis among kibbutz members. It was no longer clear why kibbutz life was worth self-sacrifice (Talmon 1972, Gan 2011). The fact that totalizing collectivism and asceticism were not principled as ideology but rather a practical necessity in the initial stage of the kibbutz meant that once conditions changed – the Israeli state was established, settled and its economy stabilized – kibbutz members found themselves reconsidering their motivations for choosing such a lifestyle, as well as the cost it exerted on them as individuals. Elsewhere in the collection one of the discussants pointed out that "Our weak point is, that we actually do not really know what we want to be [Translation mine] (Tsur, Ben-Aharon and Grossman 1969, 21)"

Another issue that was raised in those conversations (see Avishai's quote above) is that at this point young kibbutznikim are not satisfied anymore in aligning their personal aspirations with those of the collective (be it the kibbutz or the nation). This reconsideration of the balance between the individual and the collective came about after the Six-Day War in which the kibbutz population in Israel – about 4% of the general population – suffered about 25% of the War's casualties. Those soldiers that survived started to ask themselves existential questions, such as, what is the meaning of their lives? How should they best experience this miracle of survival? And how to best deal with and commemorate their fallen brothers[26]?

This historical period is also a time when questions are raised about the connection between the kibbutz and Jewishness. The first of the six sections comprising *Among Young People* is entitled 'Jewish Person' and deals with the nature of the connection between the young kibbutz generation and the Jewish people in general. It is these contemplations that brought about the birth of the movement for Jewish renewal in Israel, and which later, in the last decade of the 20th century, would lead to the founding of BINA as a product of the kibbutz milieu. The following statement by Avishai, a member of kibbutz Ein Shemer at the time, is very characteristic of the sentiments that led to Jewish renewal in Israel:

> I think that in the current situation there is no escape from a serious return to the tradition. I do not think that we can go back to religion, and to the style of Neturei Karta[27], and it is not desired – but I do think that the intentional disconnect, stemming out of some sort of thinking of creating an original culture, proletariat culture and different – this intentional disconnect failed, did not succeed and did not justify itself. The stage we are standing in now is some sort of return in the direction of the wisdom of Israel, in the direction of the Jewish people in general and the connection with it. [Translation mine] (Tsur, Ben-Aharon and Grossman 1969, 12)

[26] It is important to remember, that as was written earlier in this chapter, the use of the word brothers here is not a figure of speech but a reality, considering that these kibbutzs' soldiers were raised from infancy together with their age group peers.

[27] A Jewish sect, considered by some as a cult, that see itself as the 'true Jews' and believe that only with the coming of the Jewish Messiah should Jews attain national sovereignty. They follow an ultra-orthodox Jewish life-style.

The same idea about the disconnect of kibbutz culture from Jewishness is discussed in Stanley Miron's article *The Individual and Society*, published several years later. He noted that one of Zionism's aspirations was to alter Jewish society; however, the Zionist version of the kibbutz is ambiguous about the role the kibbutz and its individual members have in Jewish renewal. He concludes this thought with the following words "To those born in Israel, who do not face the decision of Aliyah, the question of realization as a Jew remains a difficult problem. Lack of direction and purpose in relation to Judaism is another meter [*sic*] in the problem of individual and society. (Miron 1977, 30)"

Another trend that developed in the post-Six-Day War period in the kibbutz, and which relates directly to BINA, is 'Talk culture'. Talk culture is the implementation of group dynamics and workshops in kibbutz society to counter the stifling of individualistic tendencies in favor of conformism (Gan 2011). It was a way to work out unavoidable individual differences silenced by the demand for collective conformism. The volume *Among the Young Talk in the Kibbutz Movement* (Tsur, Ben-Aharon and Grossman 1969) quoted in this chapter is part of the talk culture that spread throughout the Kibbutz Movement, and which involved intimate debate circles allowing the expression of individual differences and non-conformity. These circles were led by group facilitators, who were there only to enable the conversation and by no means set its content or tone, which was left for the participants. These methods of negotiating differences through workshops and group dynamics are also dominant in BINA's institutional culture, which can be seen as a direct continuation of the kibbutz' talk culture of the 1970s. (For discussion of negotiation and debate at BINA see *Multiplicity – Acceptance, Debate, and Negotiation* section p. 130)

The post-Six-Day War period brought about questions regarding the future of the kibbutz as a social institution. This identity crisis culminated in the mid 1980s when the kibbutz system was facing an economic and demographic disaster. Economically, changes in consumption patterns which reflected a shift from asceticism as a kibbutz value to a more capitalist pattern inspired by trends in general Israeli society, have brought many of the kibbutzim to an unsecure economic future and even bankruptcy (Talmon 1972, Ben-Rafael 2011). Demographically, simply put, the kibbutz was getting old. The younger generations did not see a future staying in the kibbutz and were leaving, but without new members coming in to take their place. Part of the decline in the kibbutz appeal to newcomers was the political and ideological shift in general Israel society at the time. Since the establishment of the state of Israel the kibbutzim held a privileged status in Israeli society as the backbone of the new state's economy and settlement, and this was backed by policies enacted by the dominant ruling party – the Labor party and its predecessors. However, by the time of the kibbutz crisis in the mid 1980s the Labor party had lost its domination of Israeli politics. That led to changes in policies and budgets that once privileged the kibbutzim (Avieli 2012, Ben-Rafael 2011) and in the 1990s it became clear that reforms in the kibbutzim were needed in order to allow them to be financially sustainable in the context of the larger capitalist Israeli economy.

Kibbutz scholars point to a trend of the opening of kibbutz society to general Israeli society in the last decades of the 20th century. In the golden days of collectivist kibbutzim, its holistic self-sustained approach resulted in the isolation of kibbutz society from general society: kibbutz philosophy maintained that the kibbutz should supply its members with all their life needs, including medical, educational, social and economic needs. Its philosophy also supported self-labor and rejected hired labor based on its affinity to Marxist ideology (Dar 2002), attitudes

which maintained barriers between the kibbutz and general society. However, in the decades leading to the crisis of the 1980s changes in kibbutz economy and social composition led to the falling of these barriers in part, or in full, depending on the extent of the change in each individual kibbutz.

The diversification of kibbutzim's economic enterprises from agriculture to industry required greater cooperation and exchange with similar industries beyond the kibbutz movement. An increase in university graduates among kibbutz members alongside the introduction of national sources of news, such as television, meant a more opinionated heterogeneous kibbutz membership, and also meant more members working in the general job market as opposed to within the kibbutz. All these elements, together with the constant erosion of the ideological socialist component of kibbutz life, culminated in a total reevaluation of the kibbutz social structure in the 1990s (Ben-Rafael 2011, Dar 2002).

The changes introduced to the kibbutz system are extremely varied from one kibbutz to another. While production in the kibbutzim remains a communal enterprise, most radical changes have been introduced to consumption patterns, and consumption decisions have been privatized to varying degrees. The next element to be privatized has been the ownership of housing and other assets of the kibbutz. Along with it has come a differential salary structure among kibbutz members. By 2010 75% of kibbutzim introduced some level of privatization, warranting their classification as renewed or privatized kibbutz in contrast to the classic collective or communal kibbutz (Russell, Henneman and Getz 2011).

These radical changes have raised the question of whether kibbutzim still deserve to be considered as such. To answer this question there was a need to redefine the kibbutz as a social structure, and to realign the notion of who falls under the new definition and who does not. The

implications of this realignment go beyond social theory and have practical implications regarding government policies and taxation. This has led to the enactment of The Public Committee on the Issue of Kibbutzim headed by Eliezer Ben-Rafael, a sociologist form Tel-Aviv University. The committee's revised definition for kibbutz was adopted into law by the Israeli government in 2005, and as of present there are three recognized categories for kibbutzim: Collective, Differential and Mixed[28]. This process is ongoing and it remains to be seen what balance kibbutzim will find between their collective, socialist past and their individualistic capitalist present.

Moving on from this very succinct survey of kibbutzim as social institutions, I now wish to address the secular principles presented in the theoretical section and to explore how they are reflected in the kibbutz as a social structure.

The way individualism has played out in the transformation of the kibbutz in the last three decades is of most interest here. It is the rejection of collective conformism, where individual choice is subject to the collective wellbeing, which brought about the initial doubts regarding the kibbutz way of life. Individualization in 21st-century kibbutz society can be observed on both the institutional and personal scale, and thus we see within a given kibbutz a growing trend of personal individualization. The most explicit diversion from the classic collectivist kibbutz moto 'from each according to ability to each according to need' being the differential compensation relating to contribution of kibbutz members. Looking at changes in kibbutz society on a more institutional scale we can see that the once homogenous social niche is now presenting ever growing levels of heterogeneity; with each kibbutz implementing its own version of changes and privatization, according to its subjective social composition and needs.

[28] Mixed kibbutzim are those who chose to implement changes in some but not all aspects of kibbutz life, they been also termed 'hybrids' incorporating both collective and differential elements.

The underlying value that is promoted through the implementation of individualism is freedom of choice for the individual. Of this Ben-Rafael writes:

> The kibbutz community is autonomous, and it may decide to innovate again and again, or to withdraw from earlier decisions. In fact, this is the very essence of a kibbutz –whichever model wins its allegiance. […] This space of freedom is the very ground that generates pluralism among kibbutzim: each kibbutz is entitled to adopt its own "cocktail" of FRCs [Far Reaching Changes], or even to refuse to make do with them. (Ben-Rafael 2011, 90)

Ben-Rafael's words are a testimony for the sovereignty of each kibbutz over all aspects of kibbutz life. Ben-Rafael goes on to note that this sovereignty makes the kibbutz an 'at risk' society; since at any moment kibbutz members can vote to implement changes that will in fact dissolve the kibbutz as such, opting to follow some other structure of community settlement, or creating an innovative structure not yet implemented elsewhere.

The kibbutz today shows high levels of pluralism in a communal society, a fact that poses challenges to its communal decision-making ability, and generally to its cohesiveness. The enactment of such fundamental changes in an age where it is not acceptable to suppress differences in favor of collective cohesion, has created a need to reassess what keeps the kibbutz as a collective and how to accommodate difference within the collective. Ben-Rafael (2011) points to two basic values that constitute a settlement as a kibbutz: 1) mutual responsibility, and 2) that any core changes to the community must be voted by a two-third majority out of an assembly of at least three quarters of the voting community.

A definitive majority for voting principled changes to the community requires in-depth debates and negotiations about the different stands in a given matter until a consensus can be reached and voted on (Gil 1996). This is a way of giving different voices a platform for

expression, and for friction[29], as defined by Tsing (2005), to be worked out within the collective rather than becoming an agent of atomization. Such practices of direct democracy are a statement that kibbutz sovereignty is in the hands of the people and not the institution. It changes the balance, subjecting the institution to its members and thus giving them the right and power to change the institution, rather than subjecting the people to the institution. Furthermore, it allows for dynamism in all aspects of the institution – its structure, its membership and its goals – as it is flexed and changed according to the organic development of its membership; that is in contrast to the conventional understanding of an institution as a fixity. A flexible and dynamic institution changing organically through debate and negotiation among its membership, with fidelity[30] to a concrete set of values at its core, is the model on which BINA is formed as an institution.

But if change is always possible, how then can we still preserve institutional integrity and continuity? This question must be answered if the kibbutz is to avoid the survival risk noted by Ben-Rafael. The notion of fidelity of individuals to common core values held by the collective institution is helpful in this case; in the kibbutzim, fidelity to the principle of mutual responsibility has become the defining parameter for belonging to the social category 'kibbutz'. According to Ben-Rafael mutual responsibility among community members have come to represent their "…"togetherness" – in spite of (maybe because of) the fact that life has become far more individualist as FRCs are applied. (2011, 89)" Belonging to the social group 'kibbutz' has ceased to be about specific behavioral patterns and now revolves around fidelity to certain values and decision-making processes. Here I would like to stress again the move from fixity to a more dynamic way for belonging, allowing for change and differentiation. As noted earlier in this chapter the fixity of the kibbutz as a social institution was one of the first and fundamental

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[29] For a discussion of the notion of friction as it rises from collaboration with difference see *Secular Principles and Group Identification* in Theory section p. 39.
[30] See *Secular Principles and Group Identification* in Theory section for further discussion of the notion of fidelity.

aspects of the kibbutz to come under scrutiny by its young members, as this fixation arrested the process of creation so fundamental to the kibbutz persona.

The kibbutzim, from their very first beginnings were seen, from both within and outside, as being at the frontline of social experimentation and innovation. Notwithstanding this, the kibbutz exerted a strict demand for conformism of its members which stifle the creativity needed for innovation, as observed by Avieli: "[w]hile the kibbutz project itself was revolutionary, maintaining the revolution called for extreme conformity to the new rules. (2012, 114)" "[t]his inner conflict in the very foundation of the kibbutz brought about doomsday predictions of failure, and the demise of the kibbutz, as early as the 1920s and throughout its 100 years of existence (Avieli 2012). Avieli suggests looking at this as a consequence of the tension between revolutionary tendencies and conformism, both central to kibbutz lifestyle. The changes introduced to the kibbutz system in the last decades have countered the forces of conformism, introducing individualism and pluralism as legitimate aspirations within the kibbutz. Yet, voices warning of the kibbutz coming to an end have not disappeared, as evidenced by the title of Ben-Rafael's article's *Kibbutz: Survival at Risk*. I suggest that we see this constant threat to the kibbutz as a symptom of its experimental character – experimentation always carries with it an implicit risk of failure. In addition, this perceived instability is part of the kibbutz' secular dynamism, even more so since it has refocused its gaze on individual members rather than the institution as such (Gan 2011). This brand of secular dynamism was embraced by BINA's founders and, as the ethnography chapters show, it is a constant influence on both BINA's teachings and operations.

The coping mechanism devised by the kibbutzim to deal with the crisis that threatened their survival, and with the demand by its members to strike a more balanced relationship

between collectivism and individualism (Gil 1996), is not restricted to kibbutz society proper. It can be observed in action as it is employed by other social groups inspired by the kibbutz, most notably the urban kibbutzim and communal groups which have sprung up in Israel's urban centers over the last three decades. These kibbutzim and groups maintain some level of communal economic pool, which may vary from a joint bank account covering expenses for communal activities and projects, through full pledge communal economy where all economic transactions of members go through the communal monetary pool.

Aside from the economic sharing in each group according to their vision of collectivity, these groups seem to continue the kibbutz' ethos of mutual responsibility scaled to nation building, and leading to social change. The one common thread that can be seen to weave through all of these groups is their commitment to educational activities, formal and informal, in the general society (Dror 2011). More precisely, these educators are intent on bringing social change to deprived urban areas, such as one of the first urban kibbutzim which was founded in Kiryat Yovel, an impoverished neighborhood in Jerusalem.

These groups see education as a vehicle to social change. They hold fidelity to the very basic idea of the kibbutz in its latest form – mutual responsibility – only they take this notion beyond the confines of their close social milieu and apply it to the general society. This can also be seen as a continuation of the kibbutz trends which have already been discussed, through which kibbutz society in its classical form was isolated from general society, but which since the middle of the 20th century has gradually opened up to general society. The establishment of urban kibbutzim with a clear goal of bringing social change to general society is the vanguard of this trend, with fidelity to mutual responsibility put into practice providing the motivation behind the choice of these groups to live among the societies they try to empower.

In these groups, discussion and dialogue go beyond the decision-making process and become ways to assert the act of kibbutz[31], of coming together. Dror reports the findings of the "Communal Groups" research program at Yad Tabenkin[32], a collaboration of fourteen scholars from three universities in Israel, stating that:

> The dialog as a way of life is also manifested in their shared ideological discussions: The groups hold weekly study sessions of Jewish-Zionist and social-economic texts and try to implement ideas derived from them in their own lives. All decisions are made by consensus, thereby displaying the antithesis of today's "changing kibbutz" type. (Dror 2011, 320)

The "Communal Groups" research project found a differentiation between urban kibbutzim and 'communities created by graduates of youth movements'. The findings show a discrepancy between the two types of communal living regarding the balance of individualism versus collectivism. Urban kibbutzim attribute equal value to self-actualization and collective actualization, while the youth movements' graduate groups see self-actualization as secondary to collective aspirations. In that the youth movements' graduate groups are a direct continuation of the collective kibbutz, urban kibbutzim can be seen as an attempt to counter what was seen among segments of kibbutz population as the main obstacle of the kibbutz for survival – i.e. collective conformism. Dror notes that regardless of these differences "[t]he members' [of all types of groups] references and identification group is not merely the one within which they live, but also the group of the same age with the same background living elsewhere , including those who have left the graduates' groups and urban kibbutzim (2011, 322)." This observation provides evidence of the openness to general society that is intrinsic to the latest social experiments in kibbutz living.

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[31] The literal meaning of the word kibbutz in Hebrew is gathering.

[32] Yad Tabenkin is the research and documentation center for the Kibbutz Movement.

The ever shifting balance between the collective and the individual is at the heart of modern social thought. After several swings of the pendulum from one end to the other, it seems that there is an attempt to bring some equilibrium through corporation. The words of Efraim Gil, written in 1996 as the kibbutzim were facing the crisis, set the stage for the next development in human exploration between collectivism and individualism.

> In sum, what is proposed here is that the collective, instead of continuing as a reaction against brutish individualism, should become the "greenhouse", the support group, the family that nurtures the many positive aspirations of each of its individual members. (1996, 13)

I argue that openness to the general society in both identification and activism, recalibration of the individualism-collectivism scale, concentration on education and within it Jewish-Zionist literacy, and finally dialog as the foundation of social interaction, are all reactions to the kibbutz crisis that started to find expressions in the 1960s and culminated in the 1990s. They are inspired by a secular thought as it developed out of western philosophy, from which the kibbutz as social institution has materialized. These principles of mutual responsibility, symbiosis between collectivism and individualism, education, and dialog are also at the heart of BINA, and as such reflect BINA's roots in the kibbutz milieu and through it to its secular life-style.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented the ways in which BINA, as an organization established in the kibbutz movement, has incorporated lessons from kibbutz life into its operations. BINA was established in the mid-1990s when the kibbutzim were looking to redefine themselves, and as a social enterprise BINA continues to shatter the invisible social wall that has traditionally separated kibbutz society from general Israel society. As noted above, one of the two principles that still define kibbutz as such is mutual responsibility which, in its most classic sense and as a defining aspect of the kibbutz, refers to the responsibility of kibbutz residents for

the welfare of other kibbutz members. At BINA and other vanguard incarnations of the kibbutz the ethos of mutual responsibility goes beyond the confines of kibbutz society where it can be applied to the society at large.

BINA, like urban-kibbutzim mentioned earlier, chooses to operate among the populations which it hopes to empower, and in that BINA can be seen as part of the nation-building / social-activism trend that is part of the latest evolution of the kibbutz ethos. In its latest phase the kibbutz pioneering ethos has refocused its efforts from settlement of the land to education of its people. BINA, as part of this latest phase of kibbutz phenomenon, is thus focused on education, specifically Jewish education from a secular perspective. BINA is part of the reaction of the kibbutz society, and its individual members, in its concentration on Jewish-Zionist literacy; this relates to the need to reconnect with Jewish heritage after the slow dissolution of socialism in both kibbutz and general Israeli society, as the ideological axis of identification.

Finally, as the following ethnographic accounts will reveal, BINA has learned from the kibbutz experience regarding the balance of the individualism-collectivism continuum, and is putting conscious efforts into creating a more balanced environment in which individualism has clear paths for expression and negotiation of its status *vis-à-vis* the collective. This new approach is based in the understanding that the individual and the collective are in symbiosis, and that the collective relies on individual creativity for its advancement through innovation, while the individual relies on the collective for its basic survival as a social being. In order to do so BINA, just like the communal groups reported by Dror (2011), sees dialog as a way of life. Furthermore, creation of social spaces that reflect 'togetherness' on the one hand, and maintain individual voices on the other, such as weekly communal study sessions, are also features of vanguard kibbutz-inspired groups such as the urban kibbutzim, communal groups, and BINA.

Chapter 4 – Ethnography: BINA's Teachings

In the following chapter I utilize secular modes of operation to show how the goals of BINA as a secular Jewish institute are achieved. I present the reasoning behind the teaching and methods of BINA's yeshiva as a Secular-Jewish institution, thus delineating the ways in which BINA as an educational institution exercises its secularity. BINA's teachings, teaching content and methods promote the institution's end goal of Jewish cultural sovereignty and the legitimization of secular-Jewish practice.

My starting point is the pursuit of literacy as an aspect of critical thinking, the main purpose of literacy being, I argue, the creation of proficiency that accelerates participation in discourse, which in turn enables cultural activism and production. Literacy also provides an essential means of detecting and assigning meaning to intertextual references within a discourse (Fairclough 2003). I then move on from the subject of literacy to examine the concept of multiplicity. It is through literacy and critical thinking that layers accumulated in narratives through their transition in time and space are exposed, with multiple voices, disputes, and changes in the narrative being retrieved from the shadows of history in the process. Such an enterprise also restores the voices of those silenced by history (Trouillot 1995). The main gain from such an endeavor is the acknowledgment that traditions are not monolithic (Anderson 1991 [1983], Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). They are subject to changes, ranging in motivations from necessity to whim. Traditions as brought to us through rites, ceremonies and scriptures carry no unique status of truth or authenticity beyond those accorded to them as artifacts that have survived the forces of history, and literacy aids in countering any such claims.

The recognition that traditions, as we know them, have not been entrusted to us in their present form from the beginning of time asserts these traditions as human products, subjective

and grounded in social and historical context. In turn this human contingency serves as a precedent, first, for challenging present day acceptable traditions, and ultimately for ushering in change. It is in this part of the secular process of social change and innovation that individualism and activism are brought to the fore. It is through individual creativity and its interaction with other individual creativities, that innovation comes about (Hill, et al. 2014). In the case of Jewish secularity, the guiding motivation for these innovations is cultural activism and ultimately its production in the here-and-now. That is, innovations are intended to reinforce the connection between the actors and their culture, as well as between the actors and their surroundings in the present. Thus innovations are a form of individualization and personalization of collective traditions.

The final step in this chain of reasoning is allowing for cultural actors' sovereignty. In the context of this case study, part of cultural sovereignty is the legitimization of current secular-Jewish practices. In order to attain such a goal, one must be able to participate in the discourse as an equal – hence the importance of literacy and intertextuality: one must be able to show that what one knows is in itself a product of debate and historical selection – hence the interest in multiplicity of voices over time and space. Consequently, absolute authenticity cannot be assigned to any cultural artifact – hence critical thinking, a non-deterministic strategy for decision-making fitting for secular dynamic multiplicity. In removing the idea of absolute truth, a door is opened to innovation and cultural production – emanating from activism and individualism – and eventually leading to legitimization and cultural sovereignty.

Here a cautionary note is warranted, in that what is presented above is a somewhat simplistic two-dimensional flow chart which does not adequately reflect the inherent messiness of organic life. The chain of reasoning and actions accompanying it as described above are in

reality asynchronous and chaotic at times. For example, individualism in itself is an expression of multiple voices, while critical thinking can expose historically silenced voices. Thus, although these principles are presented here as a chain of causes and effects, in reality these principles come together in all kinds of configurations. Notwithstanding in my reading which favors comprehension and coherency, I have chosen to 'flatten' the observed experience and bring it to the reader in form of a flow chart. Although I do my best to organize the ethnographic evidence according to this rational road map, the reader should bear in mind that organic life is much more complicated.

Cultural Literacy and Intertextuality

BINA puts Jewish cultural literacy as it is reflected from a secular western background at the top of its priorities. BINA's officials have stated that they were concerned with providing their secular patrons with the knowledge required for them to engage with their Jewish heritage in a meaningful way. Noa, who had been part of the educational department at BINA for at least five years at the time of interview, stated this core aspiration very clearly. She noted: "I am not interested in the goals of the lesson plan, the most important thing is that the children will understand that they have successfully read and understood the text and say something about it….my primary goal is to tell 'kids this belongs to you too'." Later in the interview, while recounting her own transformation following her work at BINA, she clearly lays out what is in fact the underpinning aspiration in all of BINA's wide-ranging activities. She describes her journey since coming to BINA, a place she calls home, in these terms: "my personal process at BINA, that is highly significant…is that I speak secular Jewishness without confusion … I can say on several different levels that I am Jewish without keeping the religious laws or encompassing the entire world [Jewish literary world]." Thus it is BINA's aspiration that all

secular Jews will be able to speak 'secular Jewishness' and use this language to assert their influence on Jewish culture in Israel and beyond.

Noa's statements reveal two interpretations for the term cultural literacy. The classical understanding of literacy – a knowledge base relating to a specific subject – and the more interpretive approach to literacy as the commanding of familiarity and sovereignty over cultural heritage. Ariel, the co-founder of the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem, stated that his motivation for creating the yeshiva in Jerusalem was born out of his experience as a high school teacher in Israel. He realized that the average high school graduate knows nothing about Jewish literature and, as a consequence, hardly anything about their Jewish heritage. He went on to note that the situation is even worse when it comes to secular Jewish thought, which provides students with a context for their own secular Jewish cultural milieu. Rami, a longtime educator at BINA, has a perspective on the connection between culture and practice, expressed most clearly in these two sides of cultural literacy. Rami sees culture as based on practices, i.e. how people behave and what they do, which defines who they are much more than do their beliefs or ideologies. Under the term 'practices' Rami includes one's 'language, world of associations, the space you operate in, and the way you operate within it'. Thus Rami perceives language as a practice expressing our belonging. One's level of mastery of a language can be an index for one's level of belonging, an idea discussed by Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991)[33]. For this reason Rami sees a knowledge of Jewish cultural sources, such as the canonical texts and the holidays, as extremely important for cultural activism, as they provide the necessary background for participation in the culture. Indeed, Rami's course, and other activities he heads in BINA, revolve around the holidays and life events – i.e. practices. His teachings are intended to give students

[33] See page 52 for full theoretical discussion of language and belonging.

maximum exposure to a single subject, i.e. to promote literacy and through it cultural activism as an expression of sovereignty.

As a concrete example of this, in Rami's class about Jewish wedding costumes he emphasized that an important part of cultural literacy is learning the journey which cultural artifacts, in this case wedding costumes, have made before assuming their known form. His rationale is that by knowing the varied forms and changes a given life event or holiday had in the past, these will, on the one hand, help us better understand what are our options for renewal, and on the other hand, will supply us with supporting arguments and precedents. He notes that in the long history of Jewishness the likelihood is that the present options have already been contemplated by others in the past, and most likely there is no need to re-invent the wheel, so to speak, by claiming choices as new when most probably this is merely a renewal. In his approach we see how knowledge helps legitimate new – or rather renewed – forms of cultural activism.

Rami is not the only one to consider the importance of literacy's at BINA. Dr. Moti Arad is a Talmud scholar and lecturer at the Schechter Institute for Jewish Studies who has been involved with the BINA's enterprise since its beginnings. The question of the treatment of gentiles by Jews was one of the main themes in Moti's Talmud course for the After-the-Army[34] program which I had the privilege of observing. As part of the debate in class, a discussion arose about the xenophobic and at times immoral approach of Judaism to the Other, in both Talmudic time and at present. The importance of Jewish literacy in this debate was expressed by both students and teacher, with literacy being noted as an important facilitator in promoting universalism in light of the xenophobic tendencies of the passages in question, through its ability to offer counter arguments. Furthermore, literacy provides a bridge to a better understanding of

[34] The After-the-Army program is a yearlong program. It involves a day and a half per week of studies targeting young adults who completed their army service.

the context in which these xenophobic sentiments developed, and what elements – other than the 'Other' – bear weight on such matters. The latter point is of significance to inclusivity as it shows literacy in its secular formulation to encourage understanding of all sides in a debate. Here is an excerpt from this discussion.

> [Moti] – … when Abaye* stands in front of these things he cannot imagine the option of desecrating the Shabbat … understand the mindset, it is not easy. So even helping delivering a baby or saving lives, he [Abaye] will somehow explain to himself why it is right to not do them [deliver/save life] and in no way will he be prepared to be defined as equal to Pharaoh, how could you even suggest it. … [T]his mental problem is what we are facing. Meaning, when we deal, in the modern world, with religious or ultra-orthodox people that are loyal to the Torah and have to face key questions of this era whether about the land of Israel, the status of gentiles or of secular Jews, […] or giyur [conversion to Judaism] … or burial of a gentile soldier, who sacrificed his life, in a Jewish cemetery. All of these questions that also constitute for them [the religious Jews] a big problem dwarf compared to the feeling that they have to keep the Jewish tradition. I do not see a way to crack this [dilemma] but through a majority leaving no choice, or more and more religious people learning these things and facing these questions ….
> [Eli] – or secular people learning these too…
> [Moti] – yes, but they [religious Jews] will not accept it form us
> [Eli] – and [secular Jews] will be able to take part in the same discourse
> [Moti] – right, I think that it is our duty to be able to understand their mindset. Here I relate to what you said, Ruven, before the class began. **We need to be involved enough in this discourse so we can also understand the adversities of this type of Halakhaic person, what he is facing; and empathy should only be towards the mental process he is going through. It's not to say that you have to agree with him**… [Emphasis added]
> . . .
> [Moti] **– at the moment I am at the stage where I think that we need to simply prepare enough people who know how to take part in this discourse in an intelligent way, that cannot be duped.** [Emphasis added] We are not even at this stage yet. I see it both in public representatives and in journalists: in everybody that has to do with this field. Our different opinion, I dare say it is ours, the humanistic one that still searches for the path to connect to the original texts but believe that in these original texts there is a humanistic element …
> [Female Student] – but the [Hebrew] Bible also has
> [Moti] - In the [Hebrew] Bible, if you read what I wrote about the Exodus stories then you can see that in Deuteronomy it says 'you shall not detest an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land' [Deuteronomy 23:7]. I do not forget this sentence, it is forbidden to hate the Egyptian because you

> should not forget that you lived among them and they gave you the best of their land, remember that. So even when at a certain point they wanted to kill your children, do not detest an Egyptian … so it is true that there is also the other sides we encountered, the more violent; but I am not letting this eliminate the possibility of the other thing, the positive. For me the positive has to win eventually, but needs to be fought for because it is really easy to sink in victimhood and animosity and hostility and so forth

* Abaye is a Babylonian Rabbi of the Talmud era who lived in the first half of the fourth century.

In the excerpt above we can observe how literacy can be used as a common language, facilitating a platform for the debate of different social stances. In the same dialog we see the ways in which Moti, the teacher, uses the text to expose his students to the mindset of those who wrote it, and of those who live by it. At the same time, literacy is used to show an alternative option to that promoted in some Jewish religious circles. Towards the end of the excerpt, Moti tells his students that only by being literate in Jewish texts and the intricate referential connections between them (i.e. intertextuality) will secular Jews be able to take part in the conversation. He points out that the texts themselves have no particular bias, and that both violence and compassion can be found in them. It is knowing how to read the texts for a specific agenda, in this case humanism that is of significance. Furthermore, it is going beyond the reading of the texts and actually being able to counter arguments, and reference your sources, that really enables the debate. Thus, Jewish literacy creates a common language allowing the inclusion, in this case, of secular Jews in what is mainly considered a religious discourse. It also allows for the inclusion of xenophobic attitudes in a humanistic discourse by making an effort to understand the mindset of non-humanistic attitudes.

The connection between literacy and cultural sovereignty was clearly stated by Tova, who was the coordinator of the After-the-Army program at the Yeshiav during my time there. She noted in her interview that her goal in working with young adults is to achieve Jewish literacy

among them. She wants them to "feel that they can develop a personal dialog with their culture, not arbitrated, but an independent dialog." What Tova and the rest of BINA's educators aspire to is for students to go beyond mere consumption of Jewish culture to become producers of culture. One of the key elements to the production of culture is cultural literacy, a subject on which Tova touched, with her concrete vision of the relationship between literacy and cultural production as an expression of sovereignty. She believes that the more people are in dialog regarding their Jewishness, the more people deal with the question of the Jewishness of the state of Israel. "…the more people will take part in this discourse [the Jewish character of the state of Israel] and will decide what [to include] and what not [to include] and how, and will not give the mandate to a specific group to make the decisions." For Lior, the head of the preparatory program for high-school graduates at the time of the interview, having a dialog with your culture is part of being a secular Jew. Being in dialog entails making a responsible effort to change and being willing to be changed by culture, thus reflecting the importance of going beyond culture consumerism to cultural production, or, in less economic and more social terms, prioritizing cultural activism and achieving cultural sovereignty.

The connection between literacy and activism is discussed by Ari Alon, one of BINA's founders and a member of BINA's think tank named The Center for Contemplation and Creation (המרכז להגות ויצירה). In the learning session he led for BINA's staff as part of the monthly staff learning sessions, and which I observed, Ari continually urged his listeners to expand their readings in the Jewish classical texts as a means to promote their agenda. This statement must be put into temporal and social context in order to fully understand its relevance. The learning session in question took place in December 2011 at the wake of the social justice protests that engulfed Israel in the summer of that year. This was also at a time of heightened public debate

regarding the exclusion of women from the Israeli public sphere as part of conformity with religious orthodoxy. This debate was another ‘battle in the war’ over the Jewish character of the state of Israel. BINA as an organization, and its members as individuals, were much involved in these public debates, and the issue of women's exclusion from public sphere had a direct effect on BINA's programs. BINA's IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) department led Shabbat services to army units,[35] and BINA, being a secular Jewish movement, would send women to lead the services. The Shabbat service included leading the community in song, the context here being that within the debate about women's exclusion from the public sphere a special emphasis was given to the issue of women singing in public. This is a result of a strict prohibition of men to hear the voice of a strange – i.e. not related by blood – woman, which is considered to have erotic qualities to it. Thus, in one of the IDF Shabbat services led by BINA some soldiers refused to sit through the service, since women were singing.

It is within this context that we consider Ari's words to BINA’s staff members on December 25 2011 regarding the social justice protests that had taken place in Israel the previous summer.

> [Ari] - …those of us who know segments of the Bible, often remember David, and Elijah and Zechariah, including me …and in this manner I reached amazing moments, amazing passages like those of Hosea, the Angels, Amos and Obadiah and so on….there are passages of protest that if we simply worked on than we had endless material and we would not reuse the stories of 'poor at the entrance'*, and The Furnace of Akhnai , and Moses and Rabbi Akivah. But instead we would just […] move forward with things…

* 'poor at the entrance' - a collection of stories about having the poor as Shabbat dinner guests

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[35] The IDF department at BINA works with the IDF’s Education and Youth Corps and targets officers and commanders of all ranks. The department is contracted by the IDF to conduct full and half day workshops on the subject of Israeli-Jewish identity. It also conducts educational Shabbats either on base or at a designated location. These educational Shabbats include Shabbat service in pluralistic spirit in accordance to BINA’s secular approach to Jewish practice.

Later in his learning session Ari again expressed the need for BINA's staff members, and secular Jews in general, to engage more in the public debate, in this instance regarding the exclusion of women from the public sphere. He reiterates the need to expand the pool of sources and references – i.e. to deepen their literacy:

> [Ari] - This is my internal debate: what we should learn at BINA. We need to go to the Midrash and learn there…and I am to be blamed for this: I am one of those that [created] a repertoire of some 50 damn stories from the Talmud…and we ruminate these all the time …we need to be prepared for this thing [the debate over women's exclusion] in the clearest way, we have the tools, we have the capability, and we also have… a bit of resources… meaning …the Aggadah [the ideology - ESR] exist. … [Bialik] comes and says 'I need to provide tools. I need to create access'

Ari continues to emphasize that BINA keeps fighting for the mere right to access and produce Jewish knowledge, although considering that by now it should be in a completely different position. In a very secular fashion he assumes personal responsibility for the current state of affairs, and his call for action, which is a call to deepen literacy, is simple enough. He states that all those present have enough knowledge of Hebrew – and familiarity with the scriptures – to be able to use the technological tools, (such as specialized digital collections of the Jewish 'book-case' allowing targeted searches in the texts) so that they can be leaders of the conversation (in this case regarding the status of women in the public sphere) instead at the fringes fighting for acceptance. Building the confidence to be part of and to lead the Jewish conversation in Israel is exactly the goal BINA set itself as a secular Jewish institute. Having that confidence means being sovereign over one's culture.

I will now provide some examples from the field, focusing on literacy and its importance to intertextuality, and in turn the importance of intertextuality to cultural production in the here-and-now; these examples show secular modes of operation as they work at BINA. First is a class

that took place on April 2nd 2012 as part of Moti Arad's Talmud course. The general theme of the class was Jewish attitudes towards gentiles as expressed in the Talmud. However, Moti does not leave the learning experience grounded in the past and situates it in the here-and-now. On the same days on which the class took place there was a story in the news about a Danish peace activist who was hit by an IDF officer. Moti raises the issue and explains that there is a direct relation between the attitude of the Jerusalem Talmud and the current attitude of Rabbis to similar issues. Moti wants to train his students to see the text as multi-layered, and in order to do that he walks his students through the distinct layers that are in the Talmud. He notes that, while these are only the ones that are distinguishable on the surface, there are more to be discovered. As part of this theme Moti encourages questions arising from the structure of the text and the distinction between the layers.

The following example shows how literacy and intertextuality are applied beyond the written text to cultural narratives such as holyday rituals. Rami, as I mentioned above, was in charge of teaching the Jewish yearly cycle – i.e. the holydays – and the Jewish life cycle. His teachings include both the scriptures and the ceremonies that are associated with these events. In the context of the creation of cultural meaning through literacy and intertextuality, Rami went beyond the written text to explore the layers within the ceremonies, and demonstrating the ways in which meaning is derived through intertextuality and literacy. The following excerpts from Rami's teaching of Leyel Ha Seder (ליל הסדר), the ceremonial dinner celebrating Passover and the commemoration of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, provide a good illustration of this process.

The following is a discussion of the Matzah (the unleavened bread eaten during the week of Passover), its origins, its symbolism, and the traditions of which it forms a part. The first excerpt is Rami's discussion on the reasons for eating unleavened bread in Passover.

> [Rami] – […T]his is not … bread of haste [bread that did not have time to leaven], it is poverty bread. So we have another story [referring to Exudos 12:8] … meaning we have three stories [explaining] why the matzah is eaten. … one story is haste, second story is poverty bread which is told in *This is the Bread of Affliction* [passage from the Passover Haggadah] … and the third reason is … they were originally ordered to eat the matzah. Why do I note this? Because we now read in chapter 12 verses 1 to, (I do not remember what), that they were originally ordered to eat the […] sacrifice [of Passover] over matzah and bitter herbs.
> [. . .]
> [Or] – But where is [pverty] bread?
> [Rami] – Poverty bread appears in the Haggadah, and it has another source … but what I want to tell you is that first of all, all of this teaches us once again what we have seen several times: that a holyday always has more than one origin and that it is tradition upon tradition. It's a thing hanging down from a thing. What does the research says? The research presumes that the matzah is the ancient form of bread, meaning the matzah is the simplest form of bread.

The above is a discussion of the very origins of matzah and its association with the rites of Passover, through which students are able to gain access to the traditional knowledge alongside that knowledge which is part of the rational secular milieu.

The next excerpt is a discussion of the symbolism of the matzah as part of the Passover Seder. In this discussion we can see again the ways in which Rami relates the associations of the Seder ritual with general Jewish rites and their adaptation to Passover, exposing ceremonial intertextuality.

> [Rami] – [T]here are three matzahs. Why three matzahs? […] we know that in every holyday [dinner] two breads are served to the table. ... In each holyday and Sabbath a secondary bread is eaten, again in memory of the wandering of Egypt when it was forbidden to gather Manna [bread] and quail during Sabbath. And then they were given a double portion on Friday, and in commemoration of that we eat on Sabbath, [sic] serve to the table two

> loaves of bread. That is what is dictated to us regarding Passover only that in Passover there is an additional matter: a part of the matzah needs to be saved to the end [of dinner] and it would be called Afikoman […] this is why three matzahs are served [to the table]…

We can see how a broader context, going beyond the Passover Seder, continues to inform the customs of the Seder, all of which bring meaning to an otherwise esoteric set of customs.

In the following Rami recounts the transformations and reinterpretations a custom may go through – in this case the celebratory dinner of Passover. In doing so Rami dispels the idea of a monolithic tradition, which by definition rejects change and adaptation.

> [Rami] – Right, it seems this was the setup of eating at the family Passover [dinner] or at the community Passover [dinner] as it was, and of course, later in Passover [dinner] at the Temple. But later when the temple was destroyed the sages regulated. When the Temple was destroyed the sages faced the question of what to do with the rituals that where customary at the Temple. […]Then they went in two ways: some of the things they determined will no longer be done this way. […] For example sacrifices: no sacrifices. There is commemoration of sacrifice. There is exchange of sacrifice. By the way, our prayers are, for example, an exchange for sacrifice […] we had Shaharit [morning] sacrifice – [now] there is Shaharit prayer. We had Minhah [afternoon] sacrifice – [now] there is Minhah prayer […] That is, there is an exchange of the sacrifice, or an exchange of sacrament in a certain way. And there are things they said that even though it was customary to [do at] the Temple it will now be done everywhere, […] meaning, some selections of fractions [of sacraments] they preserved as commemoration of the destruction of the Temple, [and some sacraments] were passed on to communities and synagogues […], and [to some] things they said no. […] By the way, there where disputes around this. We know there were disputes; we know there were people that sacrificed on Passover after the destruction of the Temple. But at the end this method was not accepted

By showing the transformation of the sacrament as was required in the historical present, Rami relays to his students that making choices in their present is not breaking with tradition, as orthodox elements would want them to believe; on the contrary, they are continuing tradition. In my final excerpt from this study of Passover traditions I bring Rami's treatment of one specific rite involving the matzah at the Seder – the Afikoman. The word Afikoman has Greek

roots and signifies 'after meal nosh' or dessert. It is the term used for the matzah that is hidden during the Seder. It is customary for the children to seek the Afikoman and, upon discovery, to be rewarded in a materialistic way, most commonly in the form of money. In the following excerpt Rami explains the development of this tradition and its meaning.

> [Rami] – [T]he Afikoman needs to be saved to the end, which is why I break something form it. Now, what is the logic? […] the goal of Passover is to tell to the kids, to tell them of tradition, so among other things, [the] sages thought how to keep the children interested in the story, and part of it is games. […] [N]ow, we need to end the meal with eating this matzah because it concludes the Passover. Without it, so you understand […] the meal is not over: meaning, if we went to Aunty Sarah [for Passover], we are there to this day if we did not eat the Afikoman. We are forbidden to leave the house. [T]he meal is not over. What do the kids do? [They] steal. Why [do they] steal? So we will redeem [the Afikoman], because we are willing to pay all the money in the world to be freed from Aunty Sarah. O.K.?
> [Neharah laughs]
> [Rami] – Why are you laughing?
> [Neharah] – Because I lost the connection
> [Rami] – The Aunty Sarah connection
> [Neharah] – Why do they steal?
> [Rami]- Because they want to extort us, because it is clear to them that we have to eat this.
> [Neharah] – Ahh, okay.
> [Rami] – Because without this the Seder cannot end 'then we and our children's childrens…captives at Aunty Sarah until this day*
> [Neharah] – so, like, a game to entertain them
> [Rami] – So they steal, sure…they steal it so we will redeem it, then we will pay any amount, right? Point is that we could escape. Okay? Nice. What are we doing so they do not steal?
> [Students] – Hide
> [Rami] – Hide. You see how the game developed. So a game developed.
> [. . .]
> [Rami] – The Afikoman, meaning a stub of matzah I leave to the end [of dinner]. What name this stub of matzah has received? Afikoman, in the sense of snacks…between us, it is not a snack, but […] a final course: the dessert […that] ends the meal. Meaning, there is […] similitude of things. Instead of eating a piece of the meat [from the sacrifice] as the last course, I eat a piece of matzah. This matzah I name Afikoman for the after-meal nosh that was forbidden to me. It is very confusing...

*[This is a paraphrase of the following verse from the Passover Haggadah: "If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our fathers out of Egypt, then we, our children and our children's children would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt."]

These last few excerpts have demonstrated the evolution and development of rites and traditions, while also exposing the layers of transformation and change undergone by these cultural narratives over the course of time. These transformations are brought to the present through cultural literacy, so in the following section I will focus on multiplicity as it emerges from literacy, in order to expand the readers' understanding of how multiple voices are brought to the present and used to advance the goal of the institution – that is, to be a legitimate actor in the field of Jewish culture.

In secular context individual exegesis is highly encouraged and even expected. To prepare students for such a way of experiencing culture, BINA's CEO Eran, in his course focusing on Bialik's essay *Revelation and Masking in Language* (גילוי וכיסוי בלשון),[36] assigns his students the task of investigating a word of their choice and presenting it to him and their peers. The entirety of the course is an exegesis of Bialik's text, with the two and a half page long text investigated throughout the semester. In this investigation Eran uses a variety of cultural artifacts to shed light on this one specific essay; he also brings to his students Talmud passages, other writings of Bialik, popular Israeli songs, excerpts from Walter Benjamin's works and even an episode of Seinfeld. Eran introduces anything he sees relevant to the understanding of the text itself, and it is important to note that the purpose of this semester-long exercise, beyond learning the essay itself, is to learn to uncover and interpret intertextuality.

In the second lesson of the semester, while the students were continuing their intellectual journey into the meaning of Bialik's essay, Nir (one of BINA's staff members replacing Eran

[36] *Revelation and Masking in Language* is a two and half page essay written in 1915 in Hebrew. It is an exploration of the differences between poetry and prose. The main argument is that words' meanings are not static but change over time. This essay was created as part of a general Zionist awakening in which language was conceived as a central unification axis for Jews around the world.

that day) praises students for offering interpretations that are not necessarily those of Bialik, and congratulates them on going beyond Bialik in their interpretations. Nir goes back to the importance of personal exegesis towards the end of class with a more generalized comment on the subject. He notes to the students that these kind of studies are about taking these texts and examining where and how they encounter us today. There are two secular principles at work here: they are applying personal interpretation to established culture in the hope that it will produce more culture and engage actors with their culture, while in secular terms it is emphasizing the importance of cultural activism and the centrality of the individual to it. This study approach also emphasizes the here-and-now as the focus for cultural activism, so that in these statements we encounter two of the secular principles in action: individualism and the here-and-now.

Not all those at BINA see personal exegesis as advantageous. Rami, whom I mentioned earlier, claims that it is superficial to deal with a text simply through the personal prism without appropriate knowledge of the research and thought associated with the text. The main fault Rami finds in solely relying on personal intuitive interpretations of text is that it silences self-criticism. Rami, continuing with the idea of self-retrospect, states that he would like to see BINA developing and committing to a school/system for dealing with classic texts. He notes: "…the problem with everyone reading [a text] in their own way is that one can be critical towards everybody just not towards oneself. An encounter with different thought, different interpretation, [and] certain methods requires a person to examine the self." In this comment Rami highlights the contribution of multiple voices in discourse to its integrity, and to critical thinking as it is applied to the self and beyond. In the next section I expand on the importance of multiplicity of voices as a secular mode of operation.

Multiplicity

Multiplicity of voices supports the secular in two ways. Firstly, it is the practical expression of contextual truth in that it places sometimes contradictory narratives side by, and secondly, multiplicity is the background for dynamism and flexibility. The two are required in order to adapt and adjust to current circumstances, and multiplicity of voices provides us with several available alternatives. The variety of voices and attitudes expressed in discourse are indeed a pool of alternatives available for an individual to employ in the interpretation process. In this segment I show the emphasis of multiple voices, meanings, and interpretations which are given in secular-Jewish teachings. Multiple voices, or in the case of the scholastic discourse at hand, multiple approaches to the interpretive process, is an overarching practice and a learning objective at BINA. In the following I will show that the teachers I had the privilege to observe focused their efforts on 'reinflating' their subject matter from the two-dimensional 'flatness' of a written historical text. Words were therefore investigated for their full range of significance; editing questions and motivations were addressed, and alternative versions brought to the fore; finally, multiple interpretations of texts and customs both official and personal have been included as part of the discourse and consequently part of the cultural production process.

It is important to note right at the beginning that multiple voices brought through multiple interpretations are inherent to Jewishness, and forms the basis of the Talmud tradition. But as the following quote from Moti will show, it is the ability to make an informed decision after going through an individual critical thought process that is of secular character. On March 23rd 2012 I was observing Moti Arad's class dealing with the Jewish treatment of gentiles, which had been the central theme of his most recent lessons. Moti brings a varied array of sources debating the

issue at hand: here is what he says to his students in class regarding the methodological importance of knowing the sources:

> [Moti] – […] The passage that we will study today is […] Sifre Devarim - V'Zot Ha Berachah* portion. And now just for the sake of literacy. Once again and from a methodological perspective, my goal is always for you to also learn the source in an educated manner: what came before [and] what influenced [the source]
> [. . .]
> [Moti] – [following a discussion over the passage from Sifre Devarim] … Okay, so after they finished explaining this matter a narrative was created. What does [this narrative] says? God made an attempt to market the Torah, and no nation accepted the Torah.
> [. . .]
> [Or] – this story is not from the Bible?
> [Moti] – Sifre Devarim
> [Or] – Right, but not from the Bible, it is, like, an exegesis?
> [Moti] – Sifre Devarim is a Tanaitic** exegesis to the book of Deuteronomy
> [Or]- but why…what is…what is written in the verses that they …?
> [Moti] – they take the verses out of their contest and explain with them this narrative

* Sifre Devarim is a book also known as Sifre to Deuteronomy. It is a classical Jewish law exegesis collection referring to the book of Deuteronomy. Ve'zot Haberachah refers to the Torah portion from Deuteronomy for which the exegesis in the passage applies.
** The Tannaim were the sages whose writings have culminated in the Mishnah.

The excerpt above makes it clear that it is a methodological principle in Moti's Talmud teaching to be aware of the layers present in the text and of the intertextual connections that are the heart of Jewish exegesis known as Midrash. He uses these to expose the students to narratives that are, although historical, considered sacred by some. The importance of such teaching is amplified if we consider the narrative in question: the exegesis passages learned tell the readers that none of the nations would accept the Torah except the Jews, a narrative which is fundamental to all discussions of the relationships and dealings between Jews and non-Jews. It places the Jews in a position of advantage before god as they are the only ones who were willing to commit to god's Torah. As a seminal text, it is critical to know that it is not written in the Bible and in fact is a

result of subjective interpretation. Such knowledge challenges the narrative sacredness and opens the door of alternative interpretations. Later that day Moti clarified to his students the proper way, to his mind, in which these texts should be learned.

> [Moti] – […] this is a scientific edition, and what does a man that writes a scientific edition does? He gathers known manuscripts about the same text, edits them for you and helps you decide between them; because there were distortions throughout the generations. So, when we try today, at the start of the 21st century, to assemble all the treasured things, the only thing you need to always remember is that the text in front of you is not necessarily how it was originally [written]. It went through all sorts of processing according to what happened throughout the generations. To be a secular Jew in our age, from my point of view, is to be a person how chooses sovereignly. In order to understand, […] these treasures [narratives] went through many many [*sic*] hands. Over these eras things happened in history: things happened that made these narratives develop. Today you get to choose but not without respect: [we must] know how this developed, what happened, what caused [change in the narrative]… Because, in my view, we do not start form nothing, we are continuing something. For me, this is the meaning of being a secular person.

The class from March 23rd shows how Moti the Talmud teacher made it a goal to expose students to the many layers encapsulated in the text, and this is even more so in a Talmudic text where intertextuality, interpretation and discussion are the tools of the trade. His approach helps clear the dust of history and show the text as subjective interpretation. In the following section I want to present a different approach to the implementation of multiplicity to the content studied at BINA. Here we see the application of the same principle – multiplicity of voices in service of a deeper understanding – to a single term or word. Furthermore, multiplicity in this case is applied to culture beyond its textual representation. Thus, multiple interpretations are inferred from multiple socio-cultural contexts, expanding the range of understanding of the word.

As part of Eran's course *Revelation and Masking in Language*, students were requested to choose a word, investigate it and present it in class. As an example of what such investigation of a word will produce, Eran devoted a whole lesson to the term 'Work'. From the very title of

the lesson Eran presented students with the different meanings held by the term. He used in the very title of his handout the following interchangeable terms: labor/craft/work/profession. As should be expected he investigates the word not just through space – i.e. through its different meanings across social locales, but also through time. He noted the fact that the word עבודה (A'avoda – work) in biblical times was used to denote *worship* while מלאכה (Me'lacha – labor/skill) was used to denote the way one made a living. Eran stressed to his students that although they have investigated words in past lessons these investigations were firmly grounded in the text in which the word in question was encountered. Furthermore, he stressed that these were heavily reliant on Jewish sources. Eran wanted his students to see that it is "… possible to do this work not just with the Talmud," and for that he brings them a Seinfeld episode titled 'The Marine Biologist' which Eran described as a Talmudic style exegesis by the writers to the notion of work/profession.

After the class watched the episode, Eran started class discussion with the definition of the term from the *Encyclopedia for Social Sciences* which highlighted the subtle distinctions between profession and occupation. From there Eran returned to classical Jewish resources, presenting three quotes by three different prominent Jewish scholars from three different historical periods. At this stage in the lesson, students have been presented with three different socio-cultural contexts in which to look at the term עבודה (work) – classical Jewish, scientific, and popular culture – and have also surveyed part of the historical context of the term.

In truly secularist manner Eran also connected the theoretical investigation of the term to the here-and-now, not just by referencing current popular culture but by echoing contested issues in present day Israeli society. Here are his words:

> [Eran] – Let's take a minute to look at the sources […] Rabbi Ishmael says 'you choose life – that is craft'. Craft in the sense of occupation, [of] labor. [You]

> choose life, the first thing is occupation, […] labor. […] Here Rabbi Ishmael says that when you say 'choose life' then life is labor, it is work, it is an occupation, it is life. That is what he says. If that is not enough, Shmaya says […] 'love the work and hate the rabbinate'. It surprises you, because your image of Judaism, regretfully, and I am almost bursting in tears, is the opposite. [… I] try to give the interpretation *I* [sic] understand from the text: that choosing life is labor, and public needs is not labor

'Public needs' is a code term in Judaism for all those who serve the public, such as the rabbi and the cantor, and in order to understand this some social context is necessary. One of the most contested issues between religious and secular Jews in present day Israel is the reliance of large parts of the orthodox Jewish community on public funds for their livelihood. The argument made by orthodox communities is that their contribution to the collective is the studying of Judaism, and as such they should be supported by the collective. In practice this means that significant numbers of households in Israel need social assistance since men are expected to study and women are limited by the number of children they need to attend to. With this common image of the parasitic orthodox men persists in the minds of secular Jewish Israelis, it is easier to understand why Eran is so emotional about what he sees as the true attitude of Jewishness to working in the sense of making a living. Nevertheless, Eran emphasizes that students should not enter this debate with confrontational attitudes, but rather be aware that current attitudes towards work are in fact a distortion of the Jewish norm. He even goes so far as calling these modern Jewish attitudes unauthentic:

> [Eran] – Once again, I do not want to be in an opposing place, I think the perception of the sages was very clear, and here there is only part of the sources. A person needs to live off their labor. […] Our distorted image of Jewishness, which all of us here, living in the religious-secular-orthodox tension, [have…] gives us the feeling that Jewishness is all sort of other unauthentic perceptions. […] I do not know if you learned [about] Rabbi Simeon Bar Yochai and his son at the cave. Did you? When they come out of the cave they see people working and plowing the field, and they burn them because they deal with worldly matters. So this is also a school [of thought]. […] I bring to you, and you the more you study Torah and fill yourselves with Torah, you will see that this approach that glorifies and respects labor is deeply rooted and basic.

I want to accentuate here both the freedom of thought and freedom of choice that is not only offered to the students, but also expected to be exercised by the students. Thus, Eran acknowledges the existence of the opposing attitude in the sources; he does not offer judgment although his personal opinion is clear. What he wants is to show his students that what is considered the norm today was not always the norm, and furthermore, there is a clear understanding of the process of exegesis and the conclusions derived from it as individual and subjective. Both of these values of freedom of thought and choice are well suited for an inclusive environment allowing for multiple voices and options, with individualism within a group exercised through freedom of thought and freedom of choice. The two are also expressions of sovereignty, and both are facilitated and facilitators of an environment of inclusion. The recognition of an opinion as subjective and individual leaves cognitive space for the inclusion of other opinions equal in their subjectivity, thus allowing inclusion of differences.

Having presented the ways in which multiplicity is central in the study of texts at BINA, whether religious or secular, in full passages or in single words, I will now bring forth the way in which multiplicity is engaged in non-textual narratives. In the following section I show how multiplicity as a secular mode of operation contributes to an inclusive environment, and as such informs the study of the marriage ceremony. Furthermore, the following provides an illustration of how multiplicity is tightly connected to cultural literacy and thus facilitates cultural production.

In his last class for the 2011-2012 cohort of the After-the-Army program at BINA's secular Yeshiva, Rami chose to go over the Jewish marriage ceremony, its costumes, and its narratives. In the following I bring Rami's discussion of the חופה (Huppah – the traditional Jewish wedding canopy). At the beginning of the excerpt you will find Rami's reasoning for his

interest and teaching of the historical evolution of the wedding ceremony, a point he repeats several times during this final lesson.

> [Rami] – […] what I am offering people, and this is the point of the study, is to say 'you chose [bride] or you chose [groom] where to get married'. I want for you to at least be familiar with the traditional ceremony as a foundation to what you would want to do later. Now, what is our ceremony? A – We stand under the Huppah. We beginning under the Huppah. Now the question is: what is the Huppah? It is a symbol
>
> [Or] – A symbol for a home
>
> [Rami] – A symbol for a home, a sort of first home we make for ourselves. Do you remember we read the Book of Ruth? And what did Ruth asked from Boaz? 'Spread over me your skirt', right? […] Rashi* explains 'you shall spread your skirt over your handmaid'. Rashi says 'the skirt of your garments to cover me with your cloak, and this is a term connoting marriage'
>
> [Efrat] – Is this all that is needed?
>
> [Rami] – No. But he says it is an expression: 'to spread a skirt' means to gather. […] By the way, some bridegrooms get married with their prayer shawls, and one of the performative acts of the ceremony is to spread the prayer shawl over the bride […] There are a lot of questions [regrading] what is the reason for this Huppah. So, 1 – a symbol for a home: a sort of a prayer shawl, spreading of the prayer shawl. There is another [explanation …]: in the book of Joel it is written 'let a bridegroom come out of his chamber and a bride from her canopy'. So first of all, according to the paralleled structure of bridegroom/bride-chamber/canopy, it seems that canopy is like a room, or like a tent. And so either it is the women's tent; or there is someone that actually says [… the Huppah is] David's Citadel: […] a hiding place for the bride and the groom. Now, we know that in ancient times they had to be virgins when married. […] in fact right after the Huppah, after the marriage, they [officials] would lead [the couple] to a room called the Union Room. Afterwards [the couple] needed to prove that [the bride] was a virgin. In fact he needed to sleep with her there […] It may be that the Huppah, in this sense, is a symbol with multiple meanings. It is not clear exactly what its origin is, but it could be that in some way it reflects the immediate place of communion […] even though it is a public [place]. […] it is the way of symbols that they cling to some form […] but with some distance from their original meaning; even when the original intent is preserved in another institute – the communion room.

*Rashi - Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki, an 11th century Talmud and Bible commentator.

We see here how Rami exposes the different layers from which one aspect of the marriage ceremony – the Huppah – is built. Rami then subjects the כתובה (Ketubah – the traditional Jewish marriage contract) to the same process. He presents students with the original idea and purpose behind the Ketubah at the time of its creation, and then continues with recent developments to this practice, such as prenuptial agreements which are used both by religious and nonreligious couples. The lesson is structured in line with the marriage ceremony, with Rami going over each part of the ceremony starting with the wedding canopy itself, then the different blessings, and ending with the breaking of the glass. At each stage he asks the students to share what they know of, or assume, is the meaning of the element at hand. He then goes on to share what is known to him, detailing both the circumstances and motivations for the originating of a custom, and then the circumstances and motivations for its development. Rami does not restrict himself to any specific knowledge base in doing so, but introduces any piece of relevant information, be it academic, religious, popular, in the past or from the present. Rami's intention in this lesson is to give his students, all young adults some of whom will no doubt get married in the coming years, an understanding of the meanings held by each part of the ceremony. He aspires to give his students sufficient knowledge so that when the time comes they can critically adapt the ceremony to reflect the meaning *they* assign to marriage, and more specifically Jewish marriage. He hopes they will exercise their cultural sovereignty and let their individuality be expressed. Here is this sentiment in his own words:

> [Rami] – […] so this is why I [feel] good and comfortable studying the development of things, because I find in there both the argument and the change. In fact, it reveals a culture's face as I wish to perform my own culture in a certain way. So this is what I have tried to do with you [the students] at the end. [I wanted] to show you the development of things: to present to you, here and there, the versions of things so that later [when] you do your own, you will have a more familiar scope to deal with. […] I hope you will make use of it. I am telling you: you will meet me in 5 years, in 6

> years. Here and there we will say 'hello-hello', 'how are you doing', 'where are you at […] I will not always remember the names. That is alright. You will say 'do you remember teaching us about Hanukah? So I do Hanukah like this and like that'. Then I [will] have satisfaction, I [will] have satisfaction.

The advantages gained by allowing multiple voices to be heard echoed in history and in the present are summarized by Rami in the beginning of his lesson on the wedding ceremony:

> [Rami] – […] my starting point is that you have to lay clear tiers, which in my opinion are tradition. Meaning, [tradition] that tells some of the texts that are the holyday, some of the behaviors of the holyday, and of course its development. Now, why is [the holyday's] development important to me? The truth is, you do not have to know the development of a holyday to celebrate it. […] the point is that if I know it [the holyday] a bit from its developmental aspect, then it says to me something about my culture in general. Seeing a culture that develops, changes, and reacts means that that is a part of my language about our own [the actors in the culture] status. **That we are a specific stage that is also obligated to make changes and adaptations in its own way. And furthermore, when we want to check what is appropriate, we are likely to find more than once that things we see as appropriate have already existed before.** [Emphasis added]

Rami teachings resonate with the claims of many secular-Jewish scholars, that there is no new without the old. Furthermore, without knowing what already exists, i.e. the past, we cannot create and innovate in the present. Multiplicity in stances and voices provides the building block for cultural production and innovation. Nevertheless, multiplicity over time and space raises the question of authenticity, so I will now turn to authenticity and how this notion is transformed by multiplicity and inclusiveness.

Contextual Truth – The Question of Authenticity

Multiplicity highlights the idea that there is no one Truth, but simply our subjective interpretations of our shared experiences. In this context I argue that secular authenticity is disassociated from collective traditions which have been shown to be, more often than not, grounded in present-day agendas and motivations rather than a true reflection of reality as it

occurred in the past (Anderson 1991 [1983], Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Authenticity in secular context is, in fact, a subjective claim, where the only external affirmation is its acceptance or rejection by the collective; thus, secular authenticity has become a vehicle for expressions of individuality within a collective. Calling into question claims for objective authenticity by way of critical thinking creates an inclusive social space, an approach clearly stated by Rami. Here is another excerpt from the class about marriage in which Rami puts forth his ideology regarding claims for a single truth. In this excerpt I bring Rami's words following the disgruntled reactions of students to an exegesis of subtle grammatical changes between similar parts of sentences in the sixth and seventh blessings of the seven blessings of marriage.

> [Rami] – […] I think that the exegesis brings a lot of productive and beautiful ideas that we can go with. I really want to be careful and I also caution you, this is my instruction – instruction?! – my recommendation, not to grasp the exegesis as The Interpretation. There are people that say 'this was said' 'as before us' etc. By the way, in orthodox circles and in ours, a person comes and says 'this is the intention, it is clear that this is the intention'. It is exegesis. Exegesis is only one out of several options to say something: give a certain meaning to a thing. To say that 'this is the intention and that is the case', such enthusiasm is forbidden, I warn against it; because among other things it imposes on the text things that are not necessarily in it, and [imposes] on us meanings that are not necessarily essential. I can also think differently, meaning, the freedom for exegesis is contingent upon my not setting a certain exegesis as literal-meaning, as what the [author] meant to say. […] As long as I admit that it is me, and was not given like that at Mt. Sinai, [then] I think I am being cautious.

The dangers of assigning exegesis the status of literal meaning is clearly stated by Dr. Moti Arad. He grounds his reservation for such an approach to exegesis in the here-and-now, showing his students the ways in which assigning literal meaning to exegesis informs attitudes and actions in Israel's current affairs. The following excerpt is a discussion of what Moti calls the narrative of the Seven Laws of Noah, and how this narrative serves to legitimate the

discriminatory attitudes towards gentiles within Judaism. The discussion is based on an exegesis by the Tannaim (rabbinic sages from the second and third centuries B.C.) for Deuteronomy.

> [Moti] – […] well, so after they finished explaining this issue then a narrative was created. What does it say? [It says that] God made an attempt to market the Torah. [But] no nation accepted the Torah.
>
> [Nehara] – Theologically, I did not understand why he [God] gave them this chance?
>
> [Moti] – […] so they will not say 'if you have given us the Torah', 'if you have offered us we would have behaved differently, why do we deserve punishment now'. It shows up in several Tannaic places so that gentiles cannot object and say 'if we knew we would have done…' so they [Jews] tell… here is a fact: the versus say that you were told [about the Torah by God]'.
>
> [Shalev] – is it really more for gentiles then Jews and their descendants?
>
> [Moti] – No. It is more for the Jews to explain why now we can kick their butt for all sorts of things. It is an internal conversation of Jews with Jews. […] Noah accepted upon himself the seven laws before the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, and the gentiles actually accepted these things through Noah and now they do not fulfill them. […] **in order to establish all of this matter, a whole narrative was created that has no sources in the Bible itself;** but it starts form the point that, in fact, there was an opportunity for gentiles and they missed it. [Emphasis added]
>
> […]
>
> [Moti] – [following a student's comment about the fixation and lack of change in the ancient world] now look, it is not true that in general there was no change. There were people of the Halahkah that made such changes, and we will meet them. **The problem is that the moment that this text exists and it is ancient it gives legitimacy to stick […] with this text without feeling bad.** We will learn […] a dialog that exists between the former chief rabbi of the IDF, rabbi Rontzki […] and Yoske Achituv. **Rabbi Rontzki cannot grasp how come Achituv does not comprehend such a simple thing such as [the fact that] there is the moral of the Torah […] and if this is the moral of the Torah this is how it should be.** And what was it about? Rabbi Rontzki, while still the chief IDF rabbi, was asked by a medic in the IDF […] if he [the medic] should treat terrorists. […] He [answered] him 'if you can avoid it [treating the terrorists] then do so'. [Emphasis added]

Here Moti is attempting to show how the classic notions of absolute truth and authenticity encourage fixation, blocking attempts to adapt to present circumstances in the name and authority of the past. However, they do so without acknowledging the subjective nature

of history. Understanding authenticity as individual takes away from its authority and power, and leaves an opening for change and transformation. In other words it leaves a space for the production of culture.

Cultural Production

Once a knowledge base has been established and the question of authenticity has been circumvented by subjectivity there is a clear path for cultural activism and production. Cultural enterprises have been at the core of Jewish-Israeli society, and cultural production historically is part of the nation building process, as is the case with Zionism. The following are parts of a lesson taught by Muki Tsur who is a historian of the settlement movement of state of Israel and who also embodies the history of the state of Israel in his own biographical story. The theme of his course was history of Zionism, and in one of the first lessons of the semester Muki discusses cultural activism as it was viewed at the time of the establishment of the State. He states that these issues of cultural creation are in fact a core motivation in the Secular Yeshiva. He tells his students:

> [Muki] - [...the fact] that people thought we have arrived [with the establishment of the state of Israel] was dangerous. Because we have not arrived. [...] Berl Katzenelson once said 'I do not know if the state of the Jews will rise or not; it might rise but I am not sure it will sustain itself. But there is one thing that is clear to me: when they will take down the scaffoldings, what will bother us the most will be cultural distress. He wrote this before his death in '43. He said 'after they will take down the scaffoldings, the thing that will hurt will be this thing'. And here we are. For this we are meeting.

It is clear from Muki's final words above that cultural creation was, and still is, the axis on which the nation is built and, as such, a central motivation in the operations of BINA and its secular yeshiva. In the following lesson, the penultimate one in the series, Muki presented the students with the life and work of Fania Bergstein, a Hebrew poet born in Poland in the first decade of the

20th century. Fania Bergstein is most known for her nursery rhymes, and her book of nursery rhymes is the most popular children's book in Israel to this day. She first wrote these songs for her own son and kept them to herself for several years. Here is Muki's discussion of her decision to publish these songs.

> [Muki] - At the time of the holocaust she [Fania Bergstein] decided to publish her nursery rhymes. Meaning, she decided to publish now [as part of] the rehabilitation of the people.
> [Yaniv] - I have to say something […] I read yesterday that Berl Katznelson founded the Am Oved Publishing House in '41.
> [Muki] - Right
> [Yaniv] - or '42 in the middle of the Holocaust. This looks peculiar that at a time that people are being murdered, he founded such a cultural and spiritual enterprise. So this corresponds well with what you were saying
> [Muki] - In a moment you will see who much [it corresponds]. [...] Actually according to our assessment, Berl Katznelson made the decision when the Holocaust came – what I call 'we need to establish Yavne'. Meaning, much like when the temple was destroyed, Johanan Ben Zakai [made the decision to] get out of Jerusalem to establish Yavne so there is a continuity to the story [of Jewishness]. […] A publishing house is a very very [*sic*] special thing. I will say it in a very very [*sic*]simple manner: he done the first seminar for Bagatzim [reference to the Yeshiva's After-the-Army program]. He personally picked 50 persons, sat them in Rehuvut in the midst of the war [WWII …] and [taught] them a seminar in Jewishness, history, and Socialism, in all things, and one of the participants was Fania Bergstein.

Muki’s words show clearly that cultural production and activism are at the heart of the Zionist nation building enterprise, with cultural production a declared goal and perceived as a means of preservation and rehabilitation of the Jewish people. Later Muki pointed out that once the scope of the destruction of the Jewish people in the Holocaust was clear it was important not to let it win. It was important not to let this single event to be the sole source for Jewish identification, and it was this need to go beyond the horrors of the Holocaust that made the cultural enterprise all the more acute to Zionism.

Muki’s history lessons demonstrate how cultural activism became central to the Jewish enterprise in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and that cultural production continues to be central

to this day. The bluntest example of the centrality of cultural activism and production can be observed in the celebration of Yom Kippur (the Jewish Day of Atonement). The 2011 Yom Kippur celebration took place on one of Tel Aviv's roof tops, during which cultural production was marked as a goal at the very beginning of the celebration. Tova, who in addition to being the coordinator of the after-the-Army program was at the time leading holyday celebrations, opened the day with the following remarks:

> [Tova] - The ceremony has two legs, one [rooted] in tradition, traditional classical ceremonies through which [we] connect to the broad [sense of] Jewishness (to the chain of generations and communities of Israel). The second leg [is in] renewal: a want to create a ceremony that is ours, that talks about our values, and discusses our issues in the land of Israel 2011. Integration [in the ceremony] of texts by modern poets, students of the Yeshiva, and staff of the Yeshiva ...

Tova continued by asking the audience to allow emotion to be part of the deed. She noted that the Secular Yeshiva deals with the learning that leads to deed, the facilitation of the connection between learning (thought) and deed (action) through emotion. She asked the audience to allow for feelings and through them to take the journey from the head to the heart. Tova further emphasized that feelings can and should be experienced in two ways: on an individual level, each person within themselves; and through the togetherness of the community.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, cultural activism and the innovations that come along with it provide a means of engaging actors with their culture in the here-and-now. Indeed this idea of engaging actors with their culture in the here-and-now sets the tone for BINA’s public celebration of Yom Kippur. Alongside the traditional blessing of the Shabbat candles which refers to god's command 'to kindle the light of the Holy Shabbat' there is an innovative text written by Arye Budenheimer (known as Buda), another member of the founding cohort of BINA. The text includes eleven lines, of which the last four clearly state this idea of

the connection between actors and their culture as it is embodied in innovation. Here is the relevant portion of the text:

> Let us make the Shabbat in our likeness and in our image
> And let us make peace with ourselves and with our fellow men
> Let us give light in the lights
> And let us come to the Shabbat with blessing

In these lines we see how the writer, in a secular fashion, positions the actors in the center of the stage, reflecting the action in the actors and thus creating the connection between the actors and the deed.

As the ceremony continued another innovative text written by Noam Meinart, one of the secular yeshiva's former students, reflected this connection between actors, innovation and culture. In line with the principle of intertextuality discussed at the beginning of the chapter, the text echoes, in its form and use of words, the traditional text it is meant to innovate. The original prayer is part of the Ashkenazi tradition, and specific to the person serving as the emissary of the community before the lord. The traditional text is intended to distinguish between the flawed personality of the man and the burdensome duty of representing the public before god; the reader will note that the innovative text connects the actors to the here-and-now directly and to the action of cultural production.

Traditional text from the Ashkenazy Jewish prayer book	*Adopted text written by Noam Meinart former student in the Yehisva*
Here I am the impoverished of deeds unsettled and frightened of fear from the one enthroned upon the praises of Israel. I came to stand and beg before you for your people Israel who have sent me. Even though I am not worthy and decent for that. Therefore I ask of you God of Abraham God of Issac and God of Jacob; Lord O Lord merciful and compassionate God, God of Israel,	We, the impoverished of deed, unsettled and aroused from the splendor of the tradition of Israel, gather here in the secular yeshiva, to build and shape our path in the field of Jewishness. We shall try to realize ourselves and hold a Day of Atonement of our own. May our way that we walk be successful; that we shall not sin to the charge left to

terrible horrible God; Please flourish my way which I walk and about to ask mercy for me and those who have sent me. And please do not incriminate them in my sins, and do not hold them accountable for my offences for a sinner and an outlaw I am. May it be your will Lord God of Abraham God of Isaac and God of Jacob.

us by generations who have passed; that we shall not leave a poisoned fruit to the generations to come; that we shall know to hold our Day of Atonement in a way that suits us, in a way that will be us. Blessed you who say a prayer.

The traditional text is directed to god and asks god specifically to put aside the individual infractions of the community's emissary when considering mercy for the community who have sent him to represent them in front of god. The adopted text keeps the very general tone of the original text in that it wishes for a successful fulfillment of the Day of Atonement. However, the adapted text relegates all responsibility to the actors. Furthermore, it points to the here-and-now as the point of action, and then positions the individualization of the atonement process – i.e. innovative production – as a condition of its success, in a way that suits the actors to the point that the innovation will not only be suitable but will actually embody the actors.

Taking the idea of cultural activism a step further, Ari Alon engages culture as an action in itself. Ari's staff study session back in December 25, 2011 revolved around what he defined as a Zionist founding text by Haim Nahman Bialik, recognized as Israel's national poet. The text is named *Halakha and Aggadah (הלכה ואגדה)* referring to the two aspects of Jewish contemplation and writing, Halakha - that which deals with the laws that govern deeds, and the Aggadah which is an ideational discussion. Ari shows his audience that Bialik identifies an infinite process where today's Aggadah is tomorrow's Halakha, and where tomorrow's Aggadah will critique and question current Halakha leading to new Halakha and so forth *ad infinitum*. Ari claims that one of Bialik's main points in this essay is understanding culture as process, the process that is redemption, a reading in which culture constitutes an action. Bialik, according to Ari, sees going

back to the established Halakha with *Shulhan Aruh*[37] as its codex, as going back to enslavement. Bialik references the story of those Israelites stranded in the dessert after they had been freed from Egyptian servitude, in a state of wanting to go back to Egypt and enslavement rather than deal with the new and unknown. This state of slavery is contrasted by Bialik with the state of redemption which will ensue from the process itself by creation of new Halakha, itself attuned to the changing present rather than the fixated past. Furthermore, Ari notes that this process should always be grounded in action in these informative words:

> [Ari] - the state of process here is the central issue, and you always need [to be] at the level of doing. You do not need to react with infantile and stupid reactions to every imbecile that starts again this issue of 'a women's voice is indecent and women's exclusion'. We should not even be there at all…We should have been ready with 20 plan Bs: how to simply blow this out the door. […] You see this cannot be, […] they themselves [religious Jews mainly orthodox] also went through a process that was not in the Halakha. But, they do it [the process of changing the Halakha] and we are simply searching once more for another combination of another story … [This attitude towards women in public is the same as] "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt" [Numbers 14, 4 & *Halahka and Aggadah* by Bilalik - ESR] If someone had internalized these things, he would have said: all this story, all this headache of 'a woman's voice is indecent' is 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt', [this] is total enslavement on a demographic, feministic level. Someone has to talk in this manner, in this language: the processual…

Ari notes that the notion of culture as process is by no means uniquely secular, and calls for a clear statement on the part of secular Jews regarding the processual nature of culture in general and the Halakha in particular.

The perpetual cycle of Aggadah becoming Halakha, only to be challenged by new Aggadah that will soon become Halakha in itself, is modeled at BINA's seminary for group facilitators. Lilach, one of the veteran staff members at BINA, started her journey at BINA while searching to gain experience as a group facilitator, and soon found herself establishing a seminary for BINA's group facilitators. Through her work in the seminary she expanded more and more on

[37] Shulkhan Arukh is the most consulted code of Jewish law written by Yosef Karo, in Sfad Israel in 1563.

the interplay between content and process. Processing cultural content, mainly texts, informs personal and social issues, the text serving as a stepping stone for discussion among the group. In turn, the discussion rooted in the text enriches the text and/or creates new texts, an interplay between consumption and production of culture which echoes Ari Alon's reading of BiaIik's *Halakha and Aggadah* in which he stresses the perpetual dynamic interplay between Halakha (laws governing action) and Aggadah (the ideational discourse about action).

The centrality of culture production/creation to secularity is emphasized by Lilach in our discussion of secular practice. When I asked her what secular practice consisted of, she first noted that she does not think there is such a thing, but when pressed for an answer she mentioned creation/productivity as an aspiration for secular practice. In her own words: "that is, that it [creation/יצירה] will be part of what secular people do. That they find the opportunities and times to be concerned with creation that is based on an interpretation of reality or communal creation that refers to that [historical] time" Lilach goes on to stress that such creation is anchored in the community, taking place in the public sphere, engaging public, social and community issues: "…a sort of an act of community and public creation and renewal." Beyond Lilach's focus on communal cultural creation, what we see here is a new vision of what exegesis should include beyond the classic understanding of it as the interpretation of texts. For Lilach the classic Jewish practice of interpreting text, that is of exegesis, should be expanded to (but not replaced by) the communal/public sphere, and should go beyond the literary text to include any sort of contribution to public discourse, for instance in other realms such as the performing arts or plastic arts.

To conclude this section I want to demonstrate to the reader that cultural production and innovation are not applied exclusively to religious traditions, and that these ceremonies highlight

the importance attached to the engagement of actors with the process of cultural production in the here-and-now. Below I describe two consecutive ceremonies to celebrate Israel's Independence Day, the first in 2011 and the second in 2012. A comparison of the ceremonies reveals that, although the frame on which these instances build on is the same, in each year there is a level of individualization and personalization of the ceremony in accordance with the actors who produce it. These individualized patterns are the representations of the actors creating the ceremony out of their culture in their own historical present.

In both these years the Independence Day ceremony was structured similarly, with the evening starting with a period of about an hour for the guests to have a cultural experience in connection with the occasion. At 8pm, to coincide with the national ceremony taking place in Jerusalem and broadcast on national TV, the ceremony itself begins, but the time is not the only correlation between the national and BINA's ceremonies. In fact BINA's ceremonies build on the structure and form of the national version, but leave space for personalized content. The national ceremony has an annual theme chosen each year by a parliamentary committee. Each year twelve citizens, chosen in recognition of their contribution to the development of the yearly theme in Israeli society, are chosen to light the twelve torches representing the twelve tribes of Israel. .

BINA's ceremonies are similar, to each other and to the national variety, in that they too have a yearly theme and have citizens light the torches in recognition of their contributions to Israeli society; however, that is where similarities end. The 2011 BINA's ceremony included seven torches while the 2012 ceremony had eight torches. Although some of the fields in which the people of BINA chose to honor prominent actors were repeated from year to year there is no obligation to do so, and neither is there any significance to the order of the fields. The table

below offers a means of comparing those fields (marked in bold) that were repeated from one year to the next. As you can see the fields and the number of actors within a field to be honored are flexible, with those in charge of organizing the ceremony deciding on these details.

Table 1 – Independence Day Ceremony Torch Comparison

	2011	2012
First torch	**Culture and Arts**	Journalism and Media
Second torch	**Advancement of Social Issues**	Education and Sports
Third torch	**Jewish Renewal**	Social Jewishness
Fourth torch	**Contribution to the Community**	**Jewish Renewal**
Fifth torch	Army and Security	**Culture and Arts**
Sixth torch	**Contribution to the Community**	**Advancement of Social Issues**
Seventh torch	Social Legislation	Social Activism
Eighth torch	N/A	**Contribution to the Community**

The yearly theme in the national ceremony guides the choice of torch lighters, considered one of the highest honors a regular Israeli citizen can be granted. In contrast, the yearly theme in BINA's ceremonies inspires communal activities as part of the ceremony, which take place before the torch lightning. Thus, in 2011 the hour before the torch-lighting ceremony included an exhibit of presentations and installations dealing with the transition from the Day of Remembrance for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel and Victims of Terrorism to the Israeli Independence Day. The majority of these projects were headed by BINA's own secular yeshiva students, and in 2011 there were eight such projects on display. 2012 brought with it a completely new format for this time slot, with the organizers choosing to create four discussion circles, mostly headed by professionals who are either BINA staff members or work closely with

BINA. Thus we see clear cultural time/space that is dedicated to the actors and to the individual cultural configuration reflected from these specific actors engagement with their culture in the present.

A quote from the pamphlet distributed to the participants of both 2011 and 2012 ceremonies, which presents BINA and the community with which it cooperates to create the ceremony, best summarizes BINA's emphasis on cultural activism and multiplicity.

> At the center of the Independence Day ceremony is the Lighting of seven [2012: eight] torches that praise seven [2012: eight] fields and persons **who's activism** in Israeli society and in the Neve Ofer community **we ask to light*.**
>
> It is important to note that this is not an alternative to the national torch-lighting ceremony. On the contrary, **this is its multiplication and echoing**. We are adding more torches and **amplifying the light of doing**, in hope that deeds and projects that are worth walking in their light will grow**, that volunteers and activists who can take pride in** "to the glory of the state of Israel**" **will reproduce and multiply**. [Emphasis added; Translation mine] (From BINA's 2011/2 Yum Ha'atzmaout pamphlets)
>
> *In Hebrew 'light' signifies both lighting of the torches and spotlighting activism. | ** "to the glory of the state of Israel" is the sentence ending the presentation of each person honored with lighting a torch in the national ceremony.

The bold text in the above quote highlights the importance the leaders of BINA assign to activism, to 'doing'. In the paragraph above there is recognition of social activism as an act of nation building, and complementary to the recognition of social activism as a crucial force in the constitution of the state of Israel we see the actual application of the principle in the ceremonies themselves; thus, the hour before the ceremony itself is dedicated to cultural doing. Furthermore, the change in content and format of this hour from year to year is an indicator of the way in which individual creativity is respected and expressed. This time slot reflects the thoughts and creative process of those producing the ceremony, and the same individualization of a common structure is found in the variation of the torch-lightning categories. Thus, there is continuity in the ceremonies, which

resemble each other year on year, but the content is never exactly the same, giving the producers of the ceremonies an opportunity to express themselves and the way in which they engage with the cultural content.

Sovereignty

The end goal of the secular modes of operation as noted at the beginning of the chapter is cultural sovereignty, with the stages described so far – literacy, multiplicity, contextual truth, and cultural production – all serving to solidify sovereignty, in this case secular sovereignty over Jewish culture. Dr. Moti Arad, in his interview, discussed the idea of cultural sovereignty and its meaning for the secular-religious discourse in Israel. When discussing his personal 'mix and match' collage constructed from the available Jewish inventory of cultural traits, he noted that different choices had come about through different motivations. Some choices were made out of convenience, some out of social aspirations, and some out of necessity. Moti's description of his individualized Jewishness is colored in secular hues, reflecting a concentration on both freedom of choice and on the here-and-now.

In the same interview Moti offered his understanding of his own secularity. He defined himself as secular in the sense that as he has no Rabbi, he is a sovereign[38] individual; he is making his own decisions. This stated individuality does not in Moti's perception take away from his participation in the group. Furthermore, Moti perceives an anchor in belonging to the Jewish group/culture. He states "so I am in this [the group/culture] but I have an independent stand within it, that is not motivated by or under the authority of someone else" thus touching on the core issue in this thesis, the symbiotic relationship between the collective and the individual. However, Moti noted that he has been relatively stable in his choices, his macro motivation for

[38] The Hebrew words for sovereignty (ריבונות – ribonut) and the Rabbinate (רבנות – rabanut) are phonetically very similar. Thus, sovereignty in Hebrew offers a catchy and concise opposition to the rabbinate and the orthodox rabbinical institution behind it in Israel.

his choices being the continuation of tradition. He was alert to the fact that his choices are informed by his upbringing and that other people with a different upbringing will, no doubt, make different choices.

To Moti's perception, keeping with the Halakha laws is not fundamental for sustaining Jewish identification in the future, and he considers that this kind of thinking is perceived as a threat in some religious circles. By letting the national aspect of Jewishness take center stage and thus relegating religious laws to the status of traditions, resulting in opening a space for personal choice, we in fact pose a threat to the orthodox monopoly over Jewishness in Israel. Moti does not think we should automatically engage in this threat discourse. Notwithstanding, Moti is very aware of the importance of knowledge in this discourse. He states "…the more we know about the spiritual world…of which they are also apart, the more we could be educated about the place where these points of view have separated and to defend our thinking…it is important to me not to be mute in this discourse."

The debate over the ability to sustain Jewish identification outside the Halakhaic framework is not new (Ben-Rafael 2003, Blanchard 2002, Gavison 2003). As discussed in the theory chapter Tzvi Gitelman has dubbed this state of affairs "thin culture" and questioned its ability to support group identification[39]. He writes:

> ... [T]he crucial question for the future of Diaspora Jewishness is whether without substantive, manifest "thick" culture content it becomes merely "symbolic ethnicity"...or whether this type of culture is sufficiently substantive and sustainable to preserve a group's distinctiveness on more than a symbolic level (Gitelman, 113-4)

Although in Israel some of these anxieties are reduced by the embodiment of Jewishness in national identification, similar claims have been made in which secularity is characterized as an

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[39] For a theoretical discussion of the thick/thin culture debate in Jewishness and its Israeli counterpart see *Secular Principles and Jewishness* section in Chapter 2 – Theory p.42

empty wagon in contrast to the full religious one[40]. During my interview with Rami, the lecturer on Jewish holidays, I confronted him regarding the thick/thin culture debate. Rami rejected this argument of a thick/thin culture, stating that his generation[41] is the proof that reality is different. He noted that in every generation there are those who have interest in, and choose to deal with and renew classic texts, that is, to engage with their culture, and points out that in Jewishness there is such a vast body of texts that it most often weighs down attempts for innovation and renewal. In his view there is no space for the new without getting rid of the old. In other words the extensiveness of Jewish creation throughout the generations requires some level of 'thinning' to allow for renewal.

When I challenged Tova with the thick/thin culture argument, which claims that freedom of choice leads to a thinning of culture with the anxiety that the culture will die out as a result, Tova's secularist prism is clear when she states "My anxiety is not about the future. My anxiety is about the present," showing that she is much more focused on the here-and-now than on issues of continuity. As such, Tova's goals for her work with BINA's young adults are to achieve Jewish literacy among them: literacy which will foster an independent dialog between actors and their culture – i.e. cultural sovereignty. Tova, in her concreteness, believes that the more people will be in dialog, between themselves and with their culture, regarding Jewishness, the more people will engage with the question of the Jewish character of the State. She aspires to experience more cultural sovereignty in Israel's public sphere and less of the rabbinate. She goes on and points that this process starts by teaching the younger generation the method, that is "…how to learn, that it is OK to read a text and not be overwhelmed by it, that you can study with someone and not agree with that person. That it is alright to be in a state of questioning."

[40] For full discussion of the empty/full wagon argument see p. 42 in the *Secular Principles and Jewishness* section
[41] Rami was 63 at the time of the interview. His parents were European Jews who were settlers in Israel in its pre-state era.

Tova's contemplation of the issues that Israeli Jewish society is facing highlights several secular principles: the here-and-now as the focus of action; literacy as the gateway to the cultural treasures of Jewishness; the right to individually choose; and the spirit of inclusion through multiple voices. But most relevant to us here is her clear call for secular Israelis to take charge over their culture. In other words, to assert cultural sovereignty.

Sarit, the head of the IDF department at BINA, at the very beginning of our interview discussed the fact that she, as a [self-defined] religious person, chose to work at a place that defines itself as secular. She noted that although she defines herself as religious she has many secular elements in her life, for instance, her interest in learning the scripts from both religious and academic perspectives. She pointed out that much of her world of leisure is secular although not exclusively so. She emphasized that she is strict in using the term 'religious' to mark herself. This is in contrast to the more in-between terms such as religious-light or ex-religious, her reasoning for this strict marking being that religion has influenced her life beyond religious practice: she identifies and belongs to the religious public, and her children will be the same if it is up to her. She was aware that some in Israel chose to identify as religious-seculars, but admitted that she could not find herself in this term either. She noted that she has to clearly state to people that she is religious because nothing in her appearance or actions will denote this fact. Her answer as to what marks her as religious was "because I choose to define myself as such [religious]…the choices I make in my life". Sarit's answer is a clear affirmation of sovereignty over her Jewishness and of her secularity. In her answer Sarit show herself to be an in-between of religion and secularity, representing an individualized combination of the two.

Coming Full Circle

At the start of this chapter, having described the chart flow that guided the structure of this chapter, I noted that in favor of reading comprehension I had chosen to present the data in a linear two-dimensional chart. In this closing section I would like to revisit a couple of the quotes which also pertain to the discussion in sections other than those in which they originally appear.

In the first section dealing with literacy and intertextuality I quoted Noa, of the education department at BINA, in which she describes her own journey since coming to BINA, her “home”: "my personal process at BINA that is highly significant…is that I speak secular Jewishness without confusion … I can say on several different levels I am Jewish without keeping the religious laws or encompassing the entire world [Jewish literary world]." In revisiting this, I want to emphasize the way in which the sense of individual sovereignty and cultural sovereignty are evident in her words. Cultural sovereignty is not exclusive to one heritage or other, and can be exercised to establish social identification that is a subjective mix of heritages. Thus, Noa notes, that after going through a process of personal development at BINA, she is now as well versed in secularity as in Jewishness, and is able to confidently own and present the identification Secular-Jew. In her words, she states what I have identified as a goal for the Jewish secular institute, the legitimization of current secular Jewish practices. Noa indeed notes that she is now capable of asserting her Jewishness beyond the religious framework.

The second statement I wish to revisit is that of Dr. Moti Arad, another person in BINA who connects literacy with sovereignty. I will bring here a single sentence out of the earlier longer quote in which Moti discusses the importance of distinguishing exegesis from original text. In Moti's words, " To be a secular Jew in our age, from my point of view, is to be a person how chooses sovereignly", implying that choosing and sovereignty are highly connected, and

here I understand ‘choosing’ in its very basic grammatical usage as a verb, as denoting action. Cultural sovereignty is not just an issue of self-determination or identification: it is as much about cultural activism as cultural identification. Culture sovereignty goes beyond the right to name cultural objects as pertaining to one heritage or another; it is about the right to act, innovate, and transform a given cultural heritage. Thus. Dr. Arad points to the act of choosing as an expression of sovereignty. I wish to note that the act of choosing in cultural context implies transformation and change, and to observe that this also means considering those things not chosen and thus left in the shadows of history, transforming the historical present by their absence.

This chapter has offered an ethnographic account of the ways secular modes of operation, and through them secular principles, influence BINA’s teaching both in content and method, and has also demonstrated how the secular advances the goal of cultural sovereignty. The next chapter is an ethnographic account of the way in which the same secular modes of operations and principles influence BINA’s operations as a cultural institution, advancing individualism while maintaining group cohesion.

Chapter 5 – Ethnography: BINA's Operations

Secular modes of operation, by their definition as principles that guide action, are not restricted to the world of learning. Expressed in modes of operation the secular has influence and can be marked in varied spheres of human action. Thus, after concentrating in the previous chapter on expressions of the secular in scholastic context, this chapter is dedicated to marking the secular in the institutional operations of BINA. In the simple flow chart I used to organize the data, I started with the concept of literacy as a way to advance a multiplicity of voices, a multiplicity which, by positioning competing narratives side by side, showcases the idea of contextual truth. The secular principle of the here-and-now is another aspect of contextual truth, and I connected the notion of activism grounded in the here-and-now in the attainment of the ultimate goal of cultural sovereignty.

In this chapter I present the operational side of BINA as an educational institute, using the same two-dimensional flow chart: literacy as a tool for exposing multiplicity of voices; in turn multiplicity of voices requiring the consideration that truth is contextual; adding to the idea of contextual truth activism resulting in innovation and change, which are in fact expressions of cultural sovereignty. However, when looking at the institutional operations of BINA, while the process remains the same, the end goals are different. In relation to the scholastic realm I claimed that the goal of the teachings was to legitimize secular Jewishness and Jewishness as culture, in other words attaining cultural sovereignty. In the case of BINA's operations as a secular institute, I claim that the goal is to achieve an inclusive institutional atmosphere, the idea of inclusive here being in the context of the symbiotic relationship between individuals and the collective. By inclusive I mean allowing for individual voices to be expressed and be influential, empowering differentiation, and leveling as much as possible unequal powers in group setting; in other words, the goal is to achieve individual sovereignty within a communal social setting.

As before, I start my account with a survey of institutional literacy, which is knowledge of the language and mindset of the institution. Literacy is used as the basis for communication and communality in the face of differences and disagreement. Multiplicity in the context of institutional operations creates an accepting space for individualism and differences to be expressed and negotiated. Multiplicity is joined by the principle of contextual truth, and the two create an atmosphere in which freedom of choice and freedom of thought, individualism and differences respectively, are at the same time both vehicles and markers of inclusion. This inclusive communality when coupled with the secular principle of the here-and-now leads to activism becoming the highest priority for the institution. The aforementioned secular modes of operation contribute to the end goal of individual sovereignty, defined in the Mirriam-Webster dictionary in its classic national context as “a country's independent authority and the right to govern itself” (Merriam-Webster 2015). In this case, however, I wish to apply this definition to individuals in a group setting, thus defining individual sovereignty as an individual’s independent authority and the right to govern herself within a collective. My emphasis is on personal choice as a means of self-governing.

Literacy

Literacy is pivotal to the operations of BINA as an inclusive institution. As I noted above, institutional literacy, that is, knowing the mindset of an institution, serves as a common language between members of the institution and is the basis for fidelity to the institution. Moreover, a shared knowledge of the institution is the basis for fostering communality among its members. Shared basis for communality and communication are important for any institution; however, in an inclusive institution that embraces individualism and differences, literacy and the communality emanating from it counter the potential divisive forces arising from individualism. This argument is supported by BINA’s institutional decision in the academic year of 2011-2012

to exchange the biweekly staff meetings for a monthly study session for the entire staff (Limud Tzevet = לימוד צוות= lit. Staff learning).

In the social sciences it has long been established that language in general and discourse in particular, is one of the main axes of identification[42]. Thus, the level of literacy in a specific language can be conceptualized as a representation of the relationship the literate has with that language's social group (Bauman and Briggs 2003, Bhabha 1994, Fairclough 2001). The following excerpts showcase how BINA's own core staff assign language a special status as an 'identification card', and moreover exemplify the conceptualization of literacy as a pivotal skill in mastering language, in this case the language of BINA, which in turn marks that which is *'of BINA'*.

Limud Tzevet sessions took place monthly, at the beginning of the work week, on Sunday mornings. All the staff, from the CEO to the newest part-time employee, were expected to attend the majority of these study sessions, which were considered part of the working day. In the last session for that year Eran and Tal, who were respectively BINA's CEO and Vice President at the time, asked participants for feedback regarding the new format. All those who commented on this have noted that the basic format of staff study session was warmly welcomed, and suggestions were made as to the content and the level of engagement with the materials.

A typical three-hour staff study session consisted of two parts. The first part was usually led by a member of BINA's think tank called The Center for Contemplation and Creation while the second part, which was formatted as a discussion, was led by one of BINA's senior staff members. At the first session Eran stated that the objective in creating such an inclusive forum, where all of BINA's departments get to know each other, is to have 'a constant discussion of the

[42] For in-depth discussion of language and identification see p. 47.

vision and values of the educational organization BINA'. At the last session of the year Tal described the staff study session as follows:

> [Tal] – So this year we really made change compared to previous years. When I say we did then Lilach, Mazal and I are responsible for the study. And indeed from a format of staff meetings every other week, where we usually discuss current affairs, we turned to the direction of a monthly meeting of all all all [*sic*] of BINA's staff, which is comprised of one part study… This year [it was thought by] the members of The Center of Contemplation and Creation. The thought was really to enrich ourselves in a study for the sake of [study]: we are an organization that deals with learning. And also, a bit about the things that… Eran and Lior…you talked about … **to create again a space that has common language, new universe of terminology, and some kind of ideological investigation is made in it.** And the other part was done in small groups with acquaintance as a goal … [This year] the staff grew significantly and there is a [larger] scope of opinions… [Emphasis added]

Both of these statements make discussion in itself an institutional goal, a discussion which is reliant on the use of a common language, BINA's language. Furthermore, these sessions were meant to develop, through debate and discussion, a common understanding between BINA's staff about the essence of BINA as an educational organization working through the Jewish prism. Indeed, the second part of the seventh session (out of ten that year) was the first step towards the creation of what was dubbed 'BINA's Haggadah'. This title is a reference to the Passover Haggadah, read at Passover Sader dinner, which tells the story of the exodus from Egypt and the becoming of the Jewish people. In fact the session took place during the month of Passover, and the first part of the session was an exploration of a new kind of Passover Haggadah, one written by and dedicated for women.

In the second part of the session the idea of creating BINA's own Haggadah was contemplated. The booklet, BINA's Haggadah, meant to represent the vision and values of the organization and, through the texts included in it, was intended to open a window into BINA's

ideological world. It is important to note that these objectives were not immediately clear. They were eventually illuminated through the process of debate during the session, as a result of the individual visions for the Haggadah brought forth by individual staff members. The booklet ended up structured around the principle values that guide BINA: secularity, pluralism, peoplehood, learning, and social justice/community. The texts in it did not come from any specific genre, but included academic articles, Modern Hebrew poems, Talmudic passages and, original pieces written by BINA's own people.

Discussion over the content and structure of the booklet was first done in small groups. That is where individuals had a chance to present their vision for the booklet, and to express their expectation from such an endeavor. That is where differences in both objectives and structure surfaced and at times were resolved. Later, the general assembly reconvened and representatives of each group presented the thrust of that group's discussion, including any differences and – if reached – their resolution. Nevertheless, those individuals who during the general assembly discussion felt it important to communicate a personal point of view also had the opportunity to do so.

In the small group discussions regarding both content and structure of the booklet, Tal, then the VP of BINA, suggested one of Muki Tsur's letters written for Yom Kippur. Her reasoning was her attempt to give future BINA employees 'the language' of BINA. She noted that she was trying to find those texts which illuminated what is BINA about BINA, which identified that extra ingredient which makes something not just Jewish-Secular or Jewish-pluralistic, but makes it particularly of BINA. Indeed the next argument presented by Noga, then the head of Foreign Relations and Partnerships, supported this emphasis of the BINA'ic element. She noted that the Talmudic stories should not be presented in the booklet in their crude state but

should be accompanied with the study guidelines created by the department of Batei Midrash (the department responsible for education activities for the general public). We see that Noga's suggestion that canonic texts will be accompanied by BINA's study guides is a strategy to transform the canonic text to a text 'of BINA', telling of BINA's attitudes about the matter at hand.

The following excerpts are the discussion at the general assembly at the last part of the study session in question. From this discussion it is evident that there is differentiation among BINA's core staff at the time in regards to the editing of the booklet. The debate revolves around both literacy – i.e. achieving literacy through 'experience of' or 'learning about' the text; and intertextuality – i.e. using the raw text or adding references and interpretations to make it more 'of BINA'. Literacy is addressed when the question of the subject matter of the booklet is discussed. Rami, one of BINA's core staff members, argued most clearly that which others also expressed, that the booklet is an identity card of sorts. Through language the booklet is conceptualized as a pathway to the BINA mindset.

> [Tal] – Out of what you [the assembly] brought up I want to ask a few more questions that seem to me relevant to all [discussion] groups. Is it important to us that this booklet, which is an entrance booklet to a position at BINA, will be composed of theoretical articles related to the vision? Is it important to us that all parts of BINA's vision will be expressed? Or are we going for something that […] is more sentimental […] because when we say about someone that he is 'of BINA' … he is 'of BINA' not because he read Malkin's […] article on secularity, but because there is … how do we discuss this 'of BINA' in the booklet? Does it need to be in theoretical articles? Or in things that people within BINA wrote? Or simple in texts that are [used] for years?
>
> [. . .]
>
> [Rami] – I would like to add something. I assume that the base for this booklet is not articles 'about', but you are talking about an identification card. By the way, the identification card is the language, and the language is … what are

the texts, what are the stories, what are the poems that people know? Because we suppose that it is important. It will be the basis for the booklet.

[Noga] – It is correct that all of these things should show, and a bit of what Tal said…the things that circle around here, the sentimental texts [written by BINA's own]. But I think that this is also the place to give…to put a bit of order in our doctrine …I am for all kinds of genres. Explanatory academic articles as well. […] yes, an academic article so we know what is pluralism, a word that is used a lot here, and not everybody necessarily knows to say three intelligent things about it. And I think it is not just one [gener]. I can talk about the word pluralism through some Midrash* in order to understand, to explain to ourselves […] so I think that integration is right. Do not forget that many of the Midrashim**, that is what came up [in our group], it is not enough to bring the text. We must bring […] explanation to this text and why…

[. . .]

[Lior] – Everybody can put in half an hour and write his two paragraphs about the text they brought and explain it nicely. It is, like, my welcome to people coming to the organization.

[Eran] – This is your method of doing this like this. I think Noga was talking about something else.

[Noga] – I think your idea is beautiful and engaging but this is not it. […] I had a more structured approach to this thing, that does not contradict bringing these texts, again, that run [around here]. But to think what are our building blocks here of the vision, and try and make sure that we have an article/Midrash*/something [about each]

[. . .]

[Maya] – I think that no distinction was made between academic [text] and original text, let's say, but part of them are texts that give visualization, give us the ability to talk the terms, talk community, talk pluralism and multi-culturalism; and among those we need the texts that are the blowing wind [in our sails]. […] the personal words [to accompany selected texts] are less interesting to me, because they are a snapshot of BINA, which is less of what this thing is about. This will be here long after [this snapshot]. It is true that there are people here that what they wrote deserves to be here […] because I think that in the way they write they bring BINA [to it]. It is easy to read it and say it is 'of BINA'. But my few words about why I chose [a text] I feel that is less interesting to me

[Lilach] – The format that I think of has to be very structured. I think that we need to think of some central themes that we want to discuss in this booklet, community, secularity, pluralism, social justice, bla, bla, bla, learning. Each

such theme needs an article that conceptualizes our approach in this regard or at least our dilemma in our approach to the matter. After that it is possible to exemplify how a Talmudic, biblical, current literature text that we use a lot brings this matter to the surface. For example […] about learning […] so there is a text that clarifies concepts about learning and after that it is possible to take Hilel at the Chimney***, and it is not sufficient to take Hilel at the chimney but a few words by someone that writes about how do we work, about what he has to say about learning, Hilel at the Chimney. […] in respect to structure this is how I would want to see it. That it gives both the spirit of how [things] work here and also the conceptualization.

[. . .]

[Sarit] – […] but I want to say a word about the previous discussion, about structure. Because […] as a relatively new person, every time I would hear about […] this article, and this article…and I am missing the full articles, fundamental, on which things sit. I think that the exemplifications are very important, but, I am still in lack of the full things, how they show in the original [text]. Because for me it is something that I really miss…both receiving the full list [of articles] and actually reading them…

[Eran] – This is a very hard work for the editing team… a myriad of ideas are raised about the manner of organizing the material […] be careful, a person will come to the organization and you will throw at him a volume of 709 pages with additional bibliography list, he will say to you – thank you very much, and Shabbat Shalom.

[Noga] – I want to say something about this. I, in fact, am not scared of this. I think it is clear that it is not read in its entirety before the first day starting work. It is something that needs to accompany an employee and not just new, by the way, I think that every BINA employee, always come back to it…I think it will be a useful tool for everybody. The fear of, supposedly overburdening them should not lead us.

* Midrash is the Hebrew name for homiletic stories from the Talmud. |** Midrashim is plural form of Midrash | *** Hilel at the Chimney is Midrash about the value of learning

The discussion quoted above suggests that in creating the booklet, BINA as an organization has made a point that it is not enough to be literate in the subject matters that are at the center of the organization's operations, but that it is important to be literate in the organization itself, in what is 'of BINA'. It was made clear that it is important to know BINA's language and codes, and the proper terminology with which to communicate its values to others.

As Noga, Lilach and Maya stated, it was important for them that the booklet would present the organization's general orientations in relation to the building blocks of its vision.

The discussion regarding genres of text is important to note. Beyond structure the next central theme in the discussion brought above was the kind of text to be included in the booklet. This is an indicator of how intertextuality is 'of BINA'. The discussion above exposes how to BINA's staff a notion cannot be fully comprehended without being illuminated through different types of text. In other words a greater understanding is achieved through cross referencing different sources. Thus, we can see that intertextuality in BINA goes beyond being merely a tool for learning, but is in itself 'of BINA'. Moreover, this approach highlights multiplicity of voices as a tool to gain greater understanding of a given matter, so we now move to an exploration of multiplicity and the way in which it contributes to inclusive groupness.

Multiplicity – Acceptance, Debate, and Negotiation

This subsection is about the way the secular mode of operation multiplicity facilitates an inclusive institutional atmosphere through its promotion of acceptance following debate and negotiation. In the ethnographic account of secular principles in BINA's teaching I refer to multiplicity of voices. In the case of BINA's operations I discuss multiplicity of attitudes that results in differentiation, and then I mark debate and negotiation within multiplicity; these two serve as paths to the acceptance of differences, hence creating an inclusive institutional environment.

The crucial role of multiplicity in creating inclusion in a diversified social situation has been discussed in depth elsewhere in this work (see *Secular Principles and Group Identification* section in Chapter 2 – Theory.) Here I want only to restate the assertion that multiplicity of points of view or voices is the avenue by which individuality and differences are expressed and

negotiated. They are the building blocks of collective individualism based on inclusion, such as secular groupness, of which Eran's words from our interview are a clear statement. Eran stressed that all learning in BINA is done in circles, thus encouraging dialog and discussion, and that the variety of people in the group, the variety in mediums for learning, and the variety in the teachers' backgrounds all augment the learning experience. "One of the key words here is community. Also the learning in BINA, in the yeshiva is very communal. The group has a very strong place….it is all in circle. The group is a tremendous lever for learning." Thus, according to Eran, the group as a collective of multiple yet different voices is central to the learning process at BINA, as well as being a reflection of multiplicity as a characteristic of BINA.

Multiplicity is not strictly applied to the most expected situations, such as ideological differences. Below I bring forth four separate examples of how this principle is applied at BINA.

1) The communal Shabbat celebration of the After-the-Army cohort of 2011-12.

2) Multiplicity in BINA's staff study sessions.

3) Multiplicity in circles of identification as referential frameworks.

4) Disagreement as one of BINA's modus operandi.

My first example of how the principle of multiplicity is played out in BINA actually concentrates on the structuring of the Shabbat by the After-the-Army. The following are excerpts from individual interviews I conducted with members of the After-the-Army cohort. The Shabbat at BINA in general, and the yeshiva in particular, holds a special place, as might be expected. It is customary that all the various fractions of the yeshiva celebrate communally the Shabbat a couple of times throughout the year. In addition, each particular program, such as the After-the-Army, is expected to celebrate the Shabbat several times during the course of the program. In the

case of the After-the-Army cohort of 2011-12 BINA's staff expected the group to celebrate the Shabbat as a community four times throughout their program.

Mor, a member of the 2011-12 After-the-Army cohort, recalled the evolution of the group and the meaning of Shabbat to the group, through the cycle of the required four Shabbats throughout the year-long program. She stated that the first Shabbat, at the start of the year, was awkward: she termed it 'a narrative Shabbat' – a starting point, before they, as group and as individuals (at least some) had a full grasp of what the Shabbat meant to them. She continued saying that it was fun yet did not involve any insight into what the meaning of Shabbat was for them.

The second Shabbat of the four, in the middle of the year was 'not good…its process was not good' according to Mor. It was a harsh experience as a group, and to the individuals in the group. The third Shabbat was cancelled altogether, but the fourth and final Shabbat was all it was supposed to be. They all went to a kibbutz in the north for the weekend, where each of the participants fine-tuned their own ideas regarding the way in which they wanted to celebrate the Shabbat. According to Mor, part of the success of the Shabbat was the fact that by the end of the year the individuals had integrated into a group, and as a result were feeling intimate enough with one another to share a Shabbat. Mor stressed that, after debates, for this last Shabbat the group had chosen to go on with it. The element of choice influenced the general mood of the event since they all participated with good spirits after choosing to do so, or in other words exercising their sovereignty within their group and their culture.

A major issue rising form Mor's description of events is the importance of community to the Shabbat as a ritual and to BINA as an organization, echoing Eran's statement about community and its importance at BINA which I quoted at the beginning of this section. As we

might expect of an inclusive groupness, not all members share BINA's enthusiasm about community and communality. BINA's communal approach was lost on Ofer, another member of the 2011-12 After-the-Army cohort, and in her interview Ofer noted that she did not feel she was part of a community, and thus the attempts to create communality – i.e. doing Shabbat – seemed to her somewhat forced. Yet, by the end of the year, during which communality had developed organically and out of choice, she had no problem participating in the last Shabbat celebration of the program.

From the above we see that in this inclusive secular environment even the 'required' is up for debate, and there is great significance if things are done out of obligation or through choice, and this was certainly the case with the first and fourth Shabbat for the After-the-Army cohort. Mor also noted that BINA as an institution allows its junior members to produce, to create. She goes on to note that throughout the creation process she was able to look into a more intimate truth within herself. At BINA, the institution required celebration of the Shabbat; however, each cohort, thought of as a community, personalizes the ritual to the point that they can relate to the ritual as a group, and as individuals. Personalization is achieved through negotiation of the multiple attitudes within the group, and between the groups that comprise the institution.

Timna, Mor's peer, in her interview offered the way in which the After-the-Army program's Shabbat was handled as an example of what is secular about BINA. She noted that what is secular about the yeshiva is that it creates a communal existence that allows for and facilitates differentiation and diversity, and the issue of the Shabbat was raised as a practical instance of this approach. Timna recalled how Eran insisted that they would celebrate the Shabbat, and they had free reigns as to how this Shabbat will be conducted. Allowing for the Shabbat to be experienced differently from the norm meant a lot for Timna. According to her,

this fact made individuals in her cohort think how they, as secular persons, see the Shabbat; it made them conscious about the Shabbat.

My second example turns to a different aspect of BINA's operations altogether. In this example multiplicity was integrated into different elements of BINA's staff study sessions. In the academic year 2011-12 there were 10 staff study sessions, all dedicated to the general theme set for the year, 'Vision, Dream, and Purpose'. Each session approached the general theme from a distinct point of view. These included an investigation of the idea of the *vision* through the following prisms: Zionism, Jewish mysticism, Jewish philosophy, art, poetry, and feminism. Moreover, one of the sessions was a physical tour of Yafo, the impoverished southern part of Tel-Aviv, and these distinct points of view were meant to illuminate the notion of *vision* and to promote a discussion on the matter.

The reader will recall that each staff study session was divided into two parts: a lecture, usually the first part, by one of BINA's think tank members; and a more interactive part led by one of BINA's senior staff members and intended to allow for an internal debate. For these more interactive sections, on most occasions a set of questions was presented to the participants for them to contemplate by themselves, and in small groups. These questions generally addressed multiple circles of identification, most commonly those of self, institutional, and at times even national identification. Reflection on multiple circles of identification as a standard practice is evidence of BINA's commitment to give equal consideration to the individual and the collective. In the first session, in which the yearly theme was presented, the work was divided to three steps. Firstly, participants were ask to contemplate internally, and then write something, about the notion *simple truth*; once completed, participants were divided into small discussion groups in which the debate about *simple truth* was mediated by the individual passages that had been

written earlier; finally, participants came back to the general assembly where a discussion of truth, simple or otherwise, ensued. The discussion further developed into a debate regarding the place of truth in the operation of BINA as an institution.

The end of the discussion has brought out important issues regarding the way BINA conducts itself as an institution, issues that will be brought up again at the last staff study session of the year. Tova, then head of the After-the-Army program, stated in the general assembly that at BINA they talk in question marks, and pointed out that at times they are required to give answers. To her that posed the following question: as an organization when should they end a sentence with a period rather than a question mark? To that, Noa, part of the educational department, answered that ‘our truth’, that is, the truth of the organization, is in the question. Ending up with a question is a principle. Eran reinforced Noa’s comment and noted that answers should come from within and not from outside the person. According to Eran the state of questioning is the challenge of secularity, of pluralism.

Two more examples are available to us regarding multiple identification circles with which people at BINA are expected to engage. On the third staff study session participants were asked to contemplate how the material from the three sessions that took place previously speaks to them on the personal level, and on the level of their activism at BINA. In the staff study session that took place in December 2011, just around the time of Hanukkah, the lecture starting point was the Menorah at the temple. As the general assembly separated into small discussion groups, participant were asked to consider the following questions regarding the Shamash[43]: Who is it? What does it do? How does he do it? The staff as Shamash? With what light are you

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[43] Shamash – Hebrew for servant or the one who functions as a servant. Most commonly refers to the ninth candle which aids in the lighting of the other candles in the menorah.

working? With what darkness BINA is dealing with? As before, we encounter several levels of contemplation that the staff is asked for: abstractly, personally, and relating to BINA.

Another example comes from the last staff study session in June of 2012. It was devoted completely to the discussion of *disagreement*. The choice of disagreement as the theme of the last session is testimony to the essential role *disagreement* has in distinguishing BINA as an inclusive institution. The session started with a debate over disagreement: when is it a good thing and when is it detrimental to a situation? Classic Jewish sources where used to highlight different aspects of the debate. Issues such as motives for disagreement (belief vs. power), and the combination of motives with social factors such as political power where considered. In the passages that Eran chose to bring to the debate it was clear that, as always with Jewish sources, support can be found for all sides of the debate. Later the discussion developed and engaged with the question of how disagreement should be handled. Here I will bring excerpts from the exchange debating the place *disagreement* has at BINA.

> [Eran] – …I think that our staff study sessions are pretty much meant to bring disagreement to here. I think that if I perceive staff study as fruitful, effective and meaningful it is a source…as I said, by definition…everybody knows this…to manage three people in a team and you got disagreement. The question is whether you give it [disagreement] space? The question is whether you have a culture of debate over the subject of this disagreement, and if there is an ability to go deep and see the disagreement on all its shades [or whether] it stays at the level of […] 'let's wrap this up and move on'. I think that one of the jobs that I see for the staff study, and in a minute we will do a discussion here about next year, and I do not know if we are successful in doing it for the meantime both from the standpoint of time and the standpoint of focus […] it is how do we bring the significant disagreements that we have among the staff regarding the topics we deal [with] here, regarding educational topics, and our goals in our actions, all sorts of things we have, god bless, disagreement about. We know and this is part of our culture, how do we succeed in creating a learning that exposes this disagreement; that creates the debate, sometime even a bit heated [debate] in this matter. Because this is the place to sort things out, this is the right place.

[Lior] – Are you saying it in the Rabbenu Yonah sense or rabbi Obadiah of Bartenura*? At times I sense some sort of a problem. Let's say it like this: in front of most of the world, I want of Rabbenu Yonah, but when I am within BINA's staff – there is a study, and successful [presentation] of disagreement – I also want the truth to become clearer to me out of the debate. In the sense that BINA needs an agenda on a lot of topics – we need to say this is the [guide]line, and we have a saying here. We are not only in disagreement because [if that was the case] we have no saying beyond the saying that disagreement is important. And I feel that we are all the time at Rabbenu Yonah and sometimes the staff study should take us to Bartenura.

* Earlier in the session two outlooks on disagreement for 'the sake of heaven', that is, a disagreement motivated by faith or strong belief, were presented. Rabbenu Yonah argues that disagreement for the sake of heaven will keep on as disagreement forever. In contrast Bartenura argues that this kind of disagreement will go on until the truth emerges.

[Eran] – It is a debate. That is one of the questions we should discuss…it is a very complex question. I think there is no doubt that we play with Halakhut [laws]. Every one of the department heads today builds a working plan, he prioritizes, he decides what to do and what not to do. Every other day someone here builds a plan

Anonymous – Heads of disagreement **

**this is a play of words in Hebrew. Department=Mahlaka=מחלקה Disagreement=Mahloket=מחלוקת. With a change of one vowel in Hebrew, departments become disagreements

[Eran] - …and everytime someone here sits and builds a plan for a seminar or weekend or …then he builds some sort of a saying, some sort of an agenda, what type of lecturer he wants to bring, what panel … like, all the time we do this story of the practices. I think that here …here the acuteness of the saying or the complexity of the saying needs to be clarified.

[…]

[Lior] – . . . I am in favor that it [study sessions] will have much more in it […] clarification of the stand that raises from the disagreements, and not just clarification of the disagreements. That clarification [of the disagreements] we will do; but also clarification of BINA's stand out of the disagreement of core subjects, in those fundamental subjects. One of the things we learned, I think, in recent years is that even in subjects that are unmistakably BINA there is a serious disagreement among people, and we need to formulate a main manuscript. I do not know who to name it. [The manuscript should] not be in details because everyone is left with himself, with his or her identity, but something that is the [guide] line.

[. . .]

[Uri] – …I think we do not need to look for answers for […] the 'how' answers here in this forum. I think that the 'how' answers are given, and should be given, in the departments. This is how it should be, even more so, in a large organization. I think that here it is proper for this place to be more of…kind of a center – a spiritual center…

[. . .]

> [Mira] – …as usual, I am very angry with Lior about the clear saying. It will reduce the living space of many people here. I further go with Uri: I think this is definitely a spiritual center that allows a conversation on the ideological level with ideational expression. [It is] hard, but people can still bring a multiplicity of voices and this will still be very much of BINA in my eyes. Since we work in a framework where not everybody should be [in], it is not right for everybody, and the discussion is keen, but still […] brings multiplicity of voices

At this stage I want to emphasize three points that emerge from the excerpts above. Firstly, note both Eran's and Lior's clear statements that disagreement is part of BINA, that it is part of its culture. However, Eran's statement goes beyond the mere recognition of disagreement as part of everyday communication, as he notes that every department of three or more people is a locus of disagreement. There is nothing unique about that, but what is significant is the way in which a disagreement is handled. It is the culture of discussion and debate that is 'of BINA', rather than disagreement, which is itself prevalent in most social situations. As if to prove the point that disagreement and discussion is indeed 'of BINA', Mira's words exemplify how disagreement and discussion in themselves become the topic of disagreement and discussion. Lior is the one to point out that disagreement, although pivotal to BINA, cannot always be left as disagreement. He notes that at times a resolution has to be at hand in order for a clear agenda to be set. Uri raises the question of the nature of the right forum in which to resolve disagreements. He also reflects on the issue of the expected outcome of a discussion. As he says, if we are looking for resolutions these should be found within the departments; if we are looking for discussion and debate then a larger forum, such as the staff studies, is more appropriate.

At the end of this June staff study session, a discussion over the state of affairs of refugees in the southern neighborhoods of Tel-Aviv transferred the issue about the tension between disagreements as a cultural principle on the one hand, and the need to set a clear agenda on a topic on the other, from an ideological discussion to a practical one.

This second part of the same study session was dedicated to an oral report by two of BINA's employees who were also residents of the southern neighborhoods of Tel-Aviv. The session, held on a Sunday, followed a weekend of attacks and violent demonstrations of local residents against the growing number of African refugees that the government has transferred to these neighborhoods in recent years. Here are excerpts from the discussion that took place.

> [Dori] – [one of the employees who was also a resident of southern Tel-Aviv] …I can, as someone that guides some of these tours [in the neighborhoods directed by BINA], so I feel that I have these automatic answers that we always say […] from here stems that question: what is our saying? I think that …the poor of the city*…which is this automate [answer] of the tours was relevant a while ago to the reality back then. … I think that it is important to ask the questions: What? What did we determine? What are our goals and stands in regards to the current reality, the reality that is near [us], not the reality that was a year or two ago.

* This is a reference to a Talmudic passage which orders help to be given to the needy according to their proximity to the giver. Thus, the poor of your own city come before those of another. Here it is referring to the question of where BINA stands with the local residents or with the refugees

> [Lilach] – It seems to me that this actually summons us to go up a step. Because we can say of this [the reality] in the sense of what happens in the complexity…apropos political power […] and it is enough that people who think, learn, know the ground, and believe that they have a moral alternative to offer, should start to define what alternative they want … we already know to criticize that they [refugees] arrive […] and we know to say that we are not a political party […] but still, is it our mandate […] to produce some kind of a mechanism for the solution: not a mechanism but a suggestion…some sort of a stand that says we think that we should do this, this, and this [*sic*] and that this is the solution
>
> [Elad] – [employee and resident of the neighborhoods] by the way, one of the things we try to do now, as the [neighborhood] board, is to really focus our doing, and try and produce a manifesto.
>
> [Lilach] – It looks to me that what also happened in [summer 2011] … apropos last year, in going out to the tents* […] was that in the right moment there was [someone] who said: there is a need here to produce a manifesto that says what needs to be done, 'this is not OK', and 'this is not OK' […] and 'these [people] are liars', but we also have to say something about the how, what stand [do we have]. Because this is the question we face as teachers. This organization is supposed to produce a manifesto regarding the vast complexity [of the reality], that still understands there is a need. Just because we see the complexities and believe in human rights and at the same time operate within the neighborhoods and see their condition, we need to say OK, so what do we believe needs to be done and advanced?

* In the summer of 2011 there was a vast social protest in Israel promoting social justice and equality. That summer's symbol was the tents people slept in as protest, situated at the heart of Tel-Aviv's business district, Rothschild Ave.

[…]

[Rami] – I want to join. First of all an example should be brought. Six or seven years ago, when the question of leaving Gaza was raised, we also tried to keep a [guide]line let's call it apolitical. But there was a clear saying. This way, we showed up at the protests, the bridges, and at all sorts of places with a clear saying. Here and there there are topics on the agenda where the saying is political. I think that we have no choice but to do it […] there is an organization here that makes a living form it, meaning we have tours. We have an organization that gained, due to its doings, a high level of involvement and expertise and knowledge and if…and if we do not take a political stand here, not partisan, political then we are chickening. […] The talk about complexity, between me and you, is bullshit. Reality is complex, of course it is complex […] inevitably, we have no choice if we want to be in any way honest with ourselves […] so we should say we are [not a part] in this story, or at least we should continue helping there etc. But all those tours they are just not to the point.

[Tal] – […] I ask myself in this regard, there is the manifesto and BINA's saying, and there is the doing, meaning in the day to day BINA is active …

[Eran] - But there is no, there is no stand [other's joined Eran in this argument]

[Tal] – […] we are now raising the question if BINA should come up with a manifesto and then I also add who is BINA in regards to [its] manifesto verses its the doing on the ground. [On a different note], I remember when we asked ourselves what we want in the matter of women's exclusion in the army: if we go out and say something. And then we asked, what does it mean?!, we are doing: we are doing Shabbat celebrations and include women. We are women teaching Talmud. [So does] BINA need to come out with a saying and a manifesto, or it [BINA] does the practice?

[Rami] – not good Tal, not good […] one word, the story of the exclusion of women is chickening, because we said that we wanted to continue working at the army and if we come out with this, directly, we will be [banned from] work there. We cannot use this as an example.

[Tal] – No, but I am saying, where do you influence more? when you take out a manifesto or when you do? When you take a tour out to Shapira neighborhood […] or Neve Shaanan and you tell the story of Shapira neighborhood not from a place of impoverishment but form a place of empowerment, so in this thing you are doing something that changes reality.

[Rami] – No, no reality is changing, you are making a living and providing interest to many people.

[A heated discussion with multiple people talking over each other erupts]

This discussion sheds light on what elsewhere in that staff study session was marked by Lior as paralyzing, that is, the terminal state of disagreement. At the very end of this study

session Lior noted that being cautious of making a clear statement may bring about a state where no action can be taken. In the discussion above we can observe how a disagreement about whether BINA should have a clear stand on the refugees issue had bifurcated into a discussion on whether BINA should have a political stand on the matter; from there Tal had wondered which manifestation of BINA would be represented by this stand, political or not. Other issues that were raised included: what constitutes taking action? Guiding tours? Volunteering? Creating a manifesto? If a manifesto is the answer, then the question arose as to what it should be about: human rights in general? A concrete action plan? A comprehensive solution? With all these questions piling up, and considering the culture of discussion and debate as a strategy to managing disagreement, it is easy to see how a state of paralysis can be reached. However, as Tal suggests, the paralyzing effect of constant questioning and discussion is countered by the commitment to activism in the here-and-now.

Hai, then part of BINA's IDF department, used the word complexity as a defining aspect of BINA, and indeed complexity is a good way to think about a culture that embraces disagreement. As part of his description of the challenges of his work Hai noted that IDF as an army is all about clarity in answers, hierarchy of operations; "…and BINA is very facilitating, very open, very much in dialog, very unclear…BINA produces a lot of complexity…"

It is the awareness to the complexity of reality and life that is a guiding principle at BINA. It is the embracing of complexity as a positive rather than negative aspect of social life that facilitates inclusion of multiple voices. Noa expressed these sentiments in her interview, noting that multiplicity and diversity are advantages. She quoted the phrase "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" as a way to conceptualize the advantages that complexity brings with it. In her mind multiplicity has great value since it allows one to see through several prisms,

simultaneously gaining different perspectives of the same issue. Noa pointed to the connection between communication and complexity, and her argument reinforces the idea that awareness to multiple truths is fundamental for communication in an inclusive environment.

Noa's contemplations about the connection between the complexity of multiplicity and inclusive environment are echoed in the response of Timna – part of the 2011-12 After-the-Army cohort –to my question about what is secular about the secular yeshiva. Timna noted that secularity is evident from the mere fact that the yeshiva serves as shared community to different people that do not necessarily share a vision of Jewishness, yet they do feel connected and belonging to the same place, the Yeshiva. In other words, what is secular about the yeshiva is that it creates an inclusive communality that allows for, and facilitates, differentiation and diversity in the Jewish context.

Just how much multiplicity is 'of BINA', can be deduced from the words of Eran and Lilach, both key personalities standing at the core of BINA's operations since its beginnings. Personal interviews included a section of free associations, with Eran offering the term running water (מים זורמים) as one of three free associations to the term secularity. When I asked for clarification, Eran explained that water is a known metaphor for the Torah: still waters are stagnating, and it is clear that for Eran dynamic movements are a sign of life, while fixation leads to stagnation. This is precisely Eran's approach to his legacy at BINA, and his hope is that BINA will keep its resistance to definitions, that there will always be discussion. "[A]t the moment that, in several years, a researcher such as yourself will catch five people from BINA's staff; and they will try to define BINA in three sentences; and all three sentences will be identical for all five people: that will be failure." Thus, according to one of its founders and current director, debate, change and multiplicity are the heritage of BINA. Yaniv, a member of the After-the-Army cohort

of 2011-12, in his interview seems to reinforce Eran's vision of what constitutes success at BINA. He stated that to him one of BINA's successes is that no cohort is like its predecessors, and that the teaching is in constant change. An inevitable consequence of existence in difference is the realization that truth is contextual, with truth as a narrative grounded in a subjective perception of reality and thus having to be understood within the context in which it was constructed.

Contextual Truth

Holding the view that there is no one truth is crucial to an inclusive society. It creates a space were individual ideas can co-exist, since none can claim supremacy or authenticity over another. Moreover, it allows for transformation and change over time and space. Noga's understanding of pluralism as discussed in her interview is informative. She noted that pluralism is not an invitation to silence individual voices or for anarchy, but that within pluralism individuals should be able to stand and 'fight' for their own ideas and still be able to be pluralistic. What makes a person pluralistic is the understanding that although one strongly believes in their own ideas one also understand that different ideas exist. Moreover, a pluralistic person understands that these different ideas held by other people are worth 'fighting' for by those who believe in them. Noga pointed out that society at large is enriched by pluralism of ideas, by the multiple voices and the fight for them. She reduced it to a secular essence: "I do not need to nullify my voice for … a pluralistic aspiration." In other words, individual voices can be heard and still be part of the collective.

As I mentioned earlier, in the first staff study session for the year the notion of *simple truth* was the starting point for the discussion in the first staff study session for the year. True to BINA's commitment to individualism and multiplicity, each participant was asked first to write

their own contemplation of the notion of *simple truth*, and these perceptions of truth were then discussed in small groups. One of the main points of discussion was, is there such a thing as simple truth? The other main point was, is there one truth?

Later on, during the last staff study session of the year, participants were asked to provide their opinion on formatting, timing and composition of the staff study sessions. As I noted in my discussion of multiplicity section the discussion also debated whether BINA should commit itself to a particular perception of its truth. This issue was raised as a general concern and then in relation to a concrete issue – the refugees in southern Tel-Aviv.

To this ethnographic context I want to bring the continued conversation between Lior and Mira. These excerpts are a direct continuation of their exchange regarding Lior's suggestion that some sort of clear statement should be made by BINA about the core subjects that are the heart of the organizations' activities. Mira in turn saw such a move as limiting the range of voices that comprise BINA. We pick up the conversation at the second part of the study session, where a debate developed over the question of whether BINA should produce a manifesto expressing BINA's stand about the refugees' crisis in the south of Tel-Aviv.

> [Eran] – I am trying to think…I do not say it from a place of opposition, let's say that we set up a team, thirty people is a lot, of five people let's say, that sit with Elad, and sit with I do not know who, Bougie Herzog [a politician] I do not know who, study the matter and come out with a manifesto. That is the thing we need to do now?
> [Mira] – Yes!...and it came up…this issue came up in department heads [meeting]
> [Lior] – Interesting, in the previous discussion you said the opposite.
> [There is a mix of voices out of which Rami's voice raises above all to asking Lior not to tease]
> [Lior] – I said this and that and you said that people will find themselves [without] pluralism. No, it is interesting that on certain matters we are saying 'I want to be sharp'. And on matters that we deal with the most, in those we say 'no, no, be careful it is forbidden'. So this is an issue here.
> [Mira] – I will answer you about this thing. And I think we have responsibility not just for the group, but for our students, and our students expect us…and the Yeshiva has alumni and students that right now stand in the firing line and

> ask these questions. And when we are afraid to say things […] I think that we do say it in tours, but if there was some sort of production of a clear manifesto then… not manifesto, some guiding principles, [like] no to racism! No to racist utterances! […] that that is one of the social issues that we do not have [disagreement]. It is, in my eyes, a sin not to come and state this. This is not opposing complexity, this is part of the fundamental beliefs about these things. […] there are a few things that when we do not say anything about […] it is not comfortable for me. I feel that, in fact, I need all the time to hide behind words: to say things in an obscure manner. When in fact there are some specific things that should be said [clearly]. […] I do not think that BINA needs a full pledged articles of organization, because I think that this place of multiplicity of voices is really important. Nevertheless, I do know [that this is a] matter of prices, how do you pay the price when you say clear things

The exchange between Lior and Mira is an instance of the way truth changes with changing circumstances. Although it seems that Mira changes her argument with no rationale behind her change of heart, her explanation exposes the importance of context. Mira notes that some subject matter is beyond disagreement, in this case the negation of racism in all its forms, and that a clear stand should be made about these issues. Lior raises the question of why some matters should be clearly stated and some should be left as space of multiple voices. If we consider the points of view in the two parts of the conversation, however, we can find resolution to the apparent dissonance. The first part of the exchange was in the context of debating the vision of BINA, its goals and aspirations, in other words a stand was to be made facing inward, by and for the members of BINA. In the second part of the exchange the context was the proposition that a stand on a specific issue be presented outside of the organization. It is the target audience that makes the difference here. To Mira on the inside there should be no clear stand, no one truth that will decrease the space for multiplicity of voices, while on the outside on issues that are mostly in agreement in BINA Mira sees no reason not to have a clear stand.

The importance of context to what is perceived as the truth was repeatedly expressed by BINA's staff members in their individual interviews. Eran, when asked to identify himself by a

specific title, i.e. Israeli/secular/traditional etc., simply stated that this depends on who he is talking to, and in what context. Sarit, the head of the IDF department at BINA during my time there, defined herself as religious in our interview, but when challenged on whether the religious public would consider her one of their own she answered ‘it depends who you ask, but yes.’ This example of contextual truth is paralleled by her response when I asked her to order her circles of belonging – i.e. Israeli, religious, Jewish, pluralistic: her answer was that it ‘depends on who is asking, and in what circumstances…and in what stage I am in my life’, and again when asked about her political orientation. ‘…depending on what issue you are asking me, [is] what I am [politically].’ Lilach is one of BINA’s most veteran employees and helped through the years create and develop the training program for BINA’s group facilitators; when asked to choose a descriptor such as secular/religious/believer etc. Lilach noted that this is a dynamic notion that changes constantly. She acknowledged the different components that could be said to form Lilach, but rejected the idea of being defined by any single component.

An important point in understanding the way contextual truth affects BINA’s institutional operations is the idea of inspirational models rather than models for imitation. In her interview when discussing individual creativity versus institutionalization at BINA, Lilach pointed to a process of oscillation between the two. Lilach saw creation and institutionalization as a sort of yin and yang; in her mind institutionalization and tradition are the engines for interpretation which is the path for creation. "….if I understand that the reason I created an anchor – specific time or system for things – is to facilitate creation, interpretation, change, dynamism" than tradition and institutionalization can sustain individual creativity. This is the operational aspect of the nature of process of the Halakha noted by Ari Alon [44]. Where things get tangled according

[44] See page 109 in Chapter 4 – Ethnography –BINA’s Teachings.

to Lilach is when we think that the anchors are here for preservation rather than to facilitate creation.

A concrete example of such an approach to cultural creation is the story of the establishment of the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem. At its inception, Ariel and Avishi (co-founders of the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem) felt that the term secular yeshiva was the most fitting to their vision, a place with intensive learning at its core. With their knowledge of pre-army preparatory programs, they realized that, although these programs teach Jewish thought, it is superficial. Their vision was to create a place for those that are interested to expand their knowledge once their army service had been completed.

In addition to learning, another motivation was making Jewish thought, classic and modern, appealing to young adults. Indeed the very first cultural events they organized took place at the heart of secular life in Jerusalem – a well-known night club, a theater, coffee houses and pubs. Attendance at these events was high enough for them to realize that there was a want and need in Jerusalem for such activities. The need did not come from those who wanted to strengthen their religious beliefs, but from those who were curious about their Jewishness. Another audience sector that showed interest in their activities were liberal or modern religious Jews who were thirsty for a different voice from that of the orthodox monopoly.

In its initial stages the yeshiva in Jerusalem was a grass-roots project headed by the two young teachers. Once the two had recognized the need in Jerusalem Ariel, who knew about BINA and the secular yeshiva in Tel-Aviv, decided to approach BINA to ask whether they would be interested in the project. In response Eran, the head of BINA, asked them if *they* would like to be part of BINA. Since then approximately two and a half years had passed and at the time of the interview they were the Jerusalem branch of BINA. Approximately the first one and a half years

were dedicated to discussion. Most of the debates were not about values or ideologies, about which it was obvious there was fidelity[45] among on all sides, but concerned the question of whether they, as a grass roots organization that had been established independently rather than out of a strategic decision by BINA to expand its operations to Jerusalem, wanted to be part of a larger organization, or to keep their independence. Discussions revolved about what Ariel and Avishi saw as similarities and differences between the yeshiva in Tel-Aviv and the one in Jerusalem. What would be the common core between these two institutions and what was important for them to keep as unique markers of the yeshiva in Jerusalem? A good example would be the discussion about social justice and activism, something that is at the core of the yeshiva in Tel-Aviv but which was a crowded scene in Jerusalem. To Ariel and Avishi it was clear that what was missing in Jerusalem was cultural activity, and they knew that in order to strengthen young secular audiences they had to be present at cultural events and activities targeting those crowds. Indeed the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem produces the biggest Independence Day celebration in Jerusalem, aside from official state ceremonies, to this day. In contrast, one of the biggest events of the year in the yeshiva in Tel-Aviv is Yom Kippur, one of the holiest days in the Jewish religious calendar.

The program offered in Jerusalem targets the same crowd as the After-the-Army program in Tel-Aviv but is different almost in any other aspect from the one in Tel-Aviv. It is an intensive four-month residential study program that puts Jerusalem the city in its center as an urban space, as an historical location and even as a text. The motivation is to strengthen the secular young adult cohort in the city, a goal set by the Jerusalem municipality as well. Ariel noted "there are people that just knowing that there is a secular yeshiva in Jerusalem tells them – yes, the place is

[45] For a comprehensive discussion of the term Fidelity and its relation to inclusive groupness see Theory chapter.

still sane, and livable, and there are people that are doing things that relate to me and there is a future here."

The whole process of the creation of the secular yeshiva can be seen as an open source project. Open-source projects take what they want out of similar projects, while what is taken is changed and built upon while creating something new[46] (Weber 2004). Out of the available knowledge accumulated at BINA the young activists created their own model through negotiation and debate, with adjustments made according to need at the local level. Furthermore the process highlights secular modes of operation that have been discussed in this work such as negotiation and debate, individual expression and creativity, all the while keeping in mind the here-and-now.

The secular yeshiva in Tel-Aviv was not considered, either by BINA or by Ariel and Avishi, as a blueprint for the formation of the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem. It served as inspiration and as a starting point, or, to use Lilach's words, as an anchor. This anchor, combined with individual creativity and adjusted to local needs, produced a new variety of secular yeshiva. Nevertheless this new secular yeshiva has its roots in the old, and in his interview Muki, historian, teacher and co-founder of BINA and a member of BINA's think tank, has stated this principle of the past serving as inspiration for the present rather than as an imitation model.

During the interview our discussion led us to observe that paradox was present in Muki's understanding of religion, secularity, and democracy. It led Muki to note that 'the whole story is managing the paradox in life'. To Muki managing paradox is life, and he goes on to say that "…if his [paradoxical] story can be meaningful for someone else, in a different manner…it is okay, but I have no inspiration … I am not doing [this] to be a model for imitation."

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[46] For full discussion of inclusive groupness as an Open-Source project *see Secular Principles and Group Identification* section in Theory chapter p. 46

Activism

Literacy and intertextuality are the knowledge base that facilitates discussion and debate within a communal framework. Simply put, one have to know what one is talking about in order to make a meaningful utterance. Multiplicity stands at the basis of all debates, and the negotiation of differences in points of view and/or in power are the premise of an inclusive society; these negotiations are meant to serve as a way to overcome the friction inherent in situations of multiple voices (Tsing 2005). Out of the need to facilitate the co-existence of multiple voices, be they of individual creativity or of competing ideologies, movement is created, and it is the here-and-now which informs this movement and sets the agenda for activism. It is at this point of the secular institution story that this section begins, with activism in this story serving both as an expression of the advancements achieved through negotiations and as a channel to assert sovereignty in the here-and-now.

A vignette about the 2011-12 After-the-Army cohort is a succinct example of how friction due to multiple voices leads to innovation and activism. Elsewhere in this chapter I have described the process regarding the communal Shabbat celebrations experienced by the 2011-12 After-the-Army cohort. As the reader might recall, the third Shabbat that was expected to be celebrated communally by the cohort but was cancelled since no consensus was reached within the cohort as to the character of the celebration. But out of this crisis of disagreement, and as part of the negotiations to reach resolution, another cultural creation came into being: the Hami'Tish*[47]. The Tish is an orthodox Jewish tradition in which the rabbis host their disciples while having dinner involving singing prayer and orations. In the secular spirit, this tradition was taken by the After-the-Army program members and recreated in their own image, in an

[47] Hami'Tish – this is a combination of the Hebrew word for Tursday=Hamishi=חמישי and the Yiddish word for Table=Tish=טיש. Put together you get Hami'Tish.

innovation by the 2011-2012 cohort with the hope that it would continue in subsequent years. As far as I can ascertain, this celebration survived on BINA's event schedule until mid-2013. The motivation behind the creation of the Hami'Tish was to produce something dealing with Jewishness, their own Jewishness. Mor, member of the cohort, noted that a general attitude at BINA was 'learn, feel and do something with it'. What we see here is that out of the friction over the Shabbat between the After-the-Army program members themselves and between them and BINA as an institution came innovative action, and a night of study in a leisurely setting was born.

The word 'process', which inherently denotes action, is common at BINA. Noga, while discussing her Jewishness during her interview, noted that the terms 'process' and 'complicated' are a great part of BINA. In her own words: "…without saying these two words [process and complicated] you are not really at BINA." Indeed at the last staff study session, when participants were asked to give feedback on the monthly meetings both Lilach and Noa stated that they would want to see these meetings arranged more around a process rather than content. Another testament to the centrality of process to the world of BINA is a slogan used by its staff. While interviewing Hai and Noa, both noted that at BINA 'the medium is the message[48]', in other words that it is the educational medium rather than the content of an educational workshop that is of consequence. Thus Maya, then head of the Educational department, stated that the goal of her department is to make Jewishness present, relevant and influential in everyday life. There are no expectations regarding what participants should produce in response to the workshop, and in fact Maya was very proud of the fact that outcomes were varied as the participants echoing the centrality of individualism. To her the goal was to facilitate dialog grounded in Jewish texts, and

[48] The phrase 'the medium is the massage' was coined by Marshall McLuhan and serves as the title of his book. In this context the phrase is a translation from Hebrew and was not directly quoted. Neither interviewee mentioned McLuhan or is work therefore I am not offering a directly reference.

here I would like to stress the use of the word dialog, another word which, as with process, functions as both verb and noun to connote action.

'What is secular about the secular yeshiva?' was a question that I asked regularly in interviews. When challenged to define the secular message which the secular yeshiva transmits to its students, Lior, then head of the Mechina, the pre-army preparatory program, answered that it was 'in the way things are done' – i.e. in the process. Lior pointed out that the whole idea behind secular Jewishness is being in a dialog, that is, changing and being changed by this cultural corpus, a dialog as it is contrasted with the unilaterality of the transcendental. Humanism and in it individuality are the central core of this world view and inform all interactions with Jewish culture, according to Lior. He goes on to state that even though there are classes that focus on human freedom and autonomy, the essence is in the processes that students go through, with each aspect of this process reflecting this secular world view. According to Lior there is no need for a specialized secular content since secularity as a life style is present in anything and everything BINA is involved in.

Eran's response to the same challenge echoes Lior's response, when he says that the secular character of the yeshiva is in the setting, not in the content. He remarked on the choice of teachers, the liberal atmosphere, the questioning culture, and the constant debate and dialog as the secular characteristic of the yeshiva specifically, and BINA in general. He elaborated on this by stating that in BINA there is no authoritarian figure, no truth that exercises authority, and that there are no strict demands from the students or the teachers. One of the reasons for not having a defined secular curriculum according to Eran, is that students coming to a place like the secular yeshiva want to experience and learn, and BINA has to provide them with a secular experience. Once more I want to emphasize Eran's use of *experience* as the axis of interaction between the

institution and participants, another expression of secular modes of operation activism in the here-and-now.

Indeed, as if to collaborate Eran's and Lior's understanding of the yeshiva's secularity Timna, a member of the 2011-12 After-the-Army cohort, had the following response when asked if she would want more secular specific content in the program. Timna noted that she does not think so since the institution and the people themselves embody secularity; to her, secular discourse is omnipresent in all of the yeshiva's doings. Secularity can be found in the people that are at the yeshiva, in the way these people take part and express their actions. She specifically pointed to the variety of approaches to the study of the same subject matter: "…the teachers […] each one approaches the text, the subject from a different place. Some of the teachers demonstrate more faith, belonging more to a specific Jewish stream […] and others are completely secular and it is more of an intellectual endeavor [for them]." To summarize Timna's understanding of the yeshiva's secularity, we can go back to the notion of inclusion. As stated above, for Timna secularity was evident from the mere fact that the yeshiva serves as a shared community to different people that do not necessarily share a vision of Jewishness, yet they do feel fidelity and connection to the same place, the yeshiva. This concept brings us back full circle to Eran's words as he continues his contemplation about the experience expected by students:

> …they [students] come to experience and learn. You need to give them the [tools] with which they will experience a kind of learning that is secular and a community that is secular. One of the key words here is community. Also the learning in BINA in the yeshiva is a very communal learning. The group has a strong place. It is not…graduate seminar where everyone sits with their own chair in front of the lecturer and goes home. It [learning at the yeshiva] is all in a circle. The group is a great leverage for learning. Also the diversity in the group.

An illuminating anecdote regarding the importance of activism in a secular environment is Muki's words dealing with his legacy at BINA and with the way he defines himself. Muki is

not only one of the founders of BINA but, in fact, is one of the founders of the Jewish renewal movement in Israel of which BINA is part. Muki, when asked to name himself on the secular-religious continuum, chose a verb instead of a noun – a verb attesting to activism as his referential framework rather than titles and definitions: "…I am a recalcitrant of names, I think that I see myself as a continuer of the Jewish tradition, which includes in itself also the tradition of the emancipation, also the Zionist tradition and also the tradition of the pioneers." Thus instead of affixing himself to one of the markers on the secular-religious continuum, Muki sees himself as an active actor in his culture.

In the previous paragraph I showed how the notion of activism is expressed in Muki's self-perception. In the following I want to show how the same principle of activism is expressed in relation to his perception of BINA. Responding to a question regarding his legacy at BINA, Muki marked two issues; one is cultural production – e.g. his aspiration for Jewishness into which the Israeli story has been integrated. "I want the Israeli chapter to be integrated into Jewishness: That Hebrew songs will be [integrated] into the orthodox prayer book, and that chapters from orthodoxy [culture] will enter the Israeli social life style." His second issue had also been about culture production, and was formulated as a slogan, 'no transmission without creation', behind which is the idea that one cannot transmit something to a future generation without creating something in the process.

Sovereignty

As I have noted elsewhere, I have created this simple flow-chart in which each element facilitates the subsequent one, starting with literacy, working through multiplicity and the idea of contextual truth, activism and finally the assertion of sovereignty. This two-dimensional scheme has functioned as an organizing tool for the presentation of data, but in this section I want to

expand on the way I conceptualize sovereignty in the context of the institutionalization process. In this context I understand sovereignty as it relates to communality and groupness. Thus, in the following I wish to present to you how BINA – through literacy, multiplicity, accepting there is no one truth, and activism – assert communality as being based in fidelity, and yet inclusive of differences and welcoming individual creativity.

An important aspect of sovereignty is the right to control one's own representations and choices. In the case of Israeli society where an orthodox monopoly is the status quo, the right on one hand and the ability on the other, to choose how to 'do' and 'speak' Jewish are in themselves proclamations of sovereignty over Jewish heritage. I have discussed this issue in the chapter about BINA's teachings, and here I wish to show how members of the After-the-Army cohort have embraced their individual sovereignty with the help of BINA.

Several members of BINA's After-the-Army cohort of 2011-12 expressed this sense of ownership as both a goal and an achievement for their participation in the program. When I asked Ofer, then a waitress contemplating her academic future and a self-titled secular, what she gained from attending the After-the-Army program, she noted that it gave her legitimacy to engage with what is commonly classified in Israel as part of the religious realm. Even more important in the context of sovereignty, it gave her freedom to choose the terms of engagement with Jewishness. In her own words: "[this] conception of secular Jewishness…it is not something that was in me…I did not use to say things like 'religion has put its hand on and taken these things that do not belong to it at all'. Suddenly I felt legitimacy to take [these things] for myself without the need to explain [myself]". Apart from her proclamation of Jewish sovereignty I wish to note that the program gave her individual sovereignty within the Jewish community. She not only came out of the program literate enough in Jewishness to be able to make informed choices

and claims regarding her Jewish practice – that is, asserting cultural sovereignty; she also came out of the program equipped with arguments legitimating her individuality and thus the individual choices she makes within the realm of Jewishness – that is, asserting individual sovereignty.

Avigail, part of the After-the-Army cohort and at the time of the interview a pre-school teacher, is a self-titled religious. Nevertheless, she expressed the same appreciation for choice as did Ofer. Avigail observed that she is trapped in her perception of secularity as the negative expression of religiosity. Thus, throughout the interview she reached to the same assumption that for her, secularity is non-believing. This is the primary reason she could not define herself as secular. She subscribed to the term 'religious' as a descriptor, but at the same time attested that she does not like ideas forced on her[49]. Throughout the interview she repeatedly used the verb 'choose' to describe her actions. She specifically talked about her type of religiosity which entails the creation of personalized traditions. Notwithstanding this, she has great appreciation and need for conventional traditions, noting that "I am not a religious person but I am a very Jewish person. [I] construct myself some kind of my own religion, my own tradition out of what the culture, the tradition and religion offer." I asked her why she had decided to attend the secular yeshiva if she is religious. In her answer she mentioned that the more religious institutions were too constricting for her. It is worth noting that she was not sure about BINA; only at the middle of the program did she realize that BINA has plenty to offer her and that she "… does not need to be on the defense" as a religious person. Again in Avigail's case we see her aspirations for individual sovereignty and that BINA created a space where she did not feel she needed to defend that sovereignty.

[49] Her discussion is a reflection of the general Israeli tendency to equate orthodoxy with religiosity. This phenomenon is a result of the monopoly Jewish orthodoxy holds over Jewishness in Israel.

Timna, a peer of Ofer and Avigail, expressed the same sentiments regarding choice as an axis for secular life style. In her reflection about secular institutes and her motivation in choosing secular Jewish institutions for her studies, she noted that the course of study had to avoid any preconceived direction. Studies for Timna were about broadening her horizon, not about subscribing to a specific fraction of Judaism. Moreover she had to feel comfortable in the place in which she intended to learn Jewishness. BINA answered all of her expectations, and she gained some sort of basic vocabulary that allows her to take part in the Jewish cultural sphere; she is not intimidated any more by the Jewish sources. In addition to becoming Jewish literate, it was important for Timna that the conversation would be 'fruitful and fertile', again attesting to the importance of dialog, and BINA was also successful in providing this.

Or, another member of the 2011-12 After-the-Army cohort, expressed in her interview her attitude towards tradition. Or noted that she has a great deal of respect for past traditions. However, to her this respect does not mean accepting tradition as is; but rather "…polish them [traditions], check where they fit you, learn from them." Later in the interview she expanded on the notion of change and adaptation. She said "so, this changing is in the sense that I can customize for myself…so this is the flexibility. To take what you see fit, what is suitable for you, sometimes this way sometimes another way." In Or's world view, keeping all of your options seems to be the defining essence, non-commitment – i.e. choice. It is choice that, according to Or, separates the religious from the secular. When I asked her to pinpoint what is secular about BINA she immediately noted pluralism of thought: "there is more than one truth…that anybody can interpret…including sometimes [being] disrespectful to the text". Her words support my claim for cultural sovereignty over Jewishness as a secular person, and multiplicity as part of exercising this sovereignty. The other secular point in BINA, according to Or, is that god is not a

central axis, god is debated but is not an essence; there is no awe surrounding the discussion of god. There is no contradiction in Or's eye between the religious and secular, as to her there are conscious people in both. Conscious meaning "…to think about the essence, and to check yourself, and choose again and again, and to know how to stand against the flow [go against the grain]". Conscious choice is a practical expression of individual sovereignty.

The voices I have introduced above are those of BINA consumers, and I will now complement this by introducing the voices of those in BINA who mark individual sovereignty as an aspiration; those who de facto chart the ideological path of BINA and its secular yeshiva. In the following section I will demonstrate how the two echo and support each other’s ideas regarding sovereignty in Jewish context.

Ayala, in charge of education to the general public, did not seek to reject rabbinical expertise in sole favor of individual intuition. Her own Jewish journey had made it clear to her that a solid knowledge base of Jewish traditions was critical to her ability to connect and be active in Jewishness. However literacy, according to Ayala, is not sufficient for the production of culture, her thought resonating with those of Or. Ayala noted that a level of intimacy that comes from personally relating to the subject at hand is needed to motivate action, and both Or and Ayala see individualism as pivotal to cultural activism. Ayala clearly stated that for her secularity is sovereignty, with responsibility both to yourself – i.e. individual sovereignty, and your community – i.e. cultural sovereignty.

Another example is Tova’s outlook on secularity and its connection to sovereignty. Her outlook was influenced by her own biography. She was born and raised within Jewish orthodoxy in Israel, but her love of the theater and acting drew her out of orthodoxy into the world of secular Jewishness. Her words highlight another aspect of sovereignty as it is understood in

secularity: it is unmediated and is inferred directly from the social actor, that is, individual sovereignty. The following is part of a conversation we had about the educational message of BINA. "We are communicating messages. A message of asking questions. Message of learning texts without arbitration, a message of connection, an attempt to find an authentic connection with my culture." I want to note that in this context authenticity is a very intimate personal notion, verifiable and applicable only individually.

Indeed Tova has no aspiration to produce more 'good' Jews in the orthodox sense. She wants that "…at the end they will be able to develop out of this [learning experience] and later be more thinking and truer persons." It is important to note that critical thinking is in complete contrast to Tova’s early experiences in the orthodox educational system. She admitted that in twelve years of schooling within the orthodox system she was never even once asked for her opinion. According to Tova learning in the orthodox world is about hierarchy, of both subject matter and expertise, the method of learning in the orthodox world being memorization. Further along in her interview she noted that in her religious environment "[t]his thing of choosing what is right for me was not something that was acceptable and it was not legitimate in any form." Thus we see from Tova’s words that individual sovereignty is a foreign notion to religious orthodoxy.

In the following excerpt I bring Tova’s own description of what she hope to achieve with her work at BINA and specifically as the coordinator of the After-the-Army program at the time of the interviews.

> [Tova] - that they [students] will feel that the Jewish cultural door is open to them … to learn … to create in it … to from a world view … and that they learn in this year [at BINA] how to learn and how to be in real dialog with the text and their partners, and the world … I am not preoccupied with this or that material that I want them to learn, because in my eyes the message is what is important. … at the end of it, it is important to me that they will be people

> with social awareness, and involved, that they will find opportunities in their life to learn … and that the Jewish holidays will have meaning for them. … and whatever they chose that they will be conscious choices.

In her words can be seen a bringing together of consciousness or awareness and personal choice to reflect the idea of individual sovereignty, and ownership of Jewishness to reflect cultural sovereignty.

Sarit, the head of the IDF department, self-identified as religious. If the reader recalls, in her interview Sarit noted that she has to declare that she is religious because nothing in her appearance or actions marks her out as such. Being marked as religious was her choosing, which in itself marked her also as secular, so that although she did not identify with social categories such as religious-secular, she is an example of the concurrency of the religious and the secular. She and other individuals I met during my research have grappled with the seeming paradox of being both religious and secular, at times feeling the need to choose a "side". Nonetheless they stand as proof that the two are not mutually exclusive.

I have discussed personal choice as a marker of individual sovereignty and as a pivotal element of secularity. However, choice is a problematic delimiter of secularity, as the common argument against equating secularity with choice is that religious people exercise choice too. They chose to put their faith and lives in the hands of the transcendental and its emissaries, and this argument goes on to claim that the religious, by choosing the transcendental, are no different from those who claim to be secular. Lior, the head of the pre-army preparatory program, had a refining distinction between different types of choice that help counter this argument: he distinguished the basic notion of 'freedom of choice' – available to everybody – from choosing autonomy, which only secular people do. So the distinction for him lies in what you choose, the transcendental as a religious person or autonomy as a secular person. Choosing autonomy, here,

means choosing to be autonomous in life's choices, that is exercising individual sovereignty. I would add to Lior's distinction that secular individuals not only choose autonomy but choose to choose over and over again in the context of the here-and-now, while the religious choice is supposedly made for life and in the context of the after-life. Constant choice enfolds within it several secular modes of operation, involving as it does critical thinking, multiplicity, consideration of the here-and-now, and in itself embodying action.

As a final point I bring Noga's own process of transformation in self-identification on the secular-religious continuum. Before her years at BINA Noga self-identified as religious reformist, less out of conviction and more out of a need to make a statement about her Jewishness and the place it had in her life. She noted that using this marker was also part of an attempt to counter the orthodox monopoly on religion in Jewish Israel by declaring an affiliation with the reformist movement. This was also a way to make a statement about belonging to a community, because in saying she was reformist she in fact affiliated herself with a specific community. However, at the time of the interview she self-identified as secular. The change in identification occurred after spending several years at BINA, during which she learned that the term secular is not void of meaning – i.e. thin or empty – in context of Jewishness or communality. Thus, she no longer had any need to use the term reformist to make a statement about the place Jewishness and community have in her life. The secular marker, thanks to her years at BINA, turned into a valid marker that concentrates on the cultural aspects of Jewishness without negating their religious origins. Noga pointed out that the change she had gone through since arriving at BINA was much less concerned with her everyday practices, and a lot more about the way she is sociologically defined.

Home Sweet Home

As closing remarks to this chapter dealing with secular principles and the way they help create an inclusive institution, I wish to put the spotlight on a sentiment expressed by many of BINA's staff members – BINA as home and family.

When discussing group boundaries Ariel, the co-founder of the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem, set the spotlight on self-determination – i.e. sovereignty, which he attributes to what he dubbed the secular revolution. He noted that one of the consequences of this revolution is that there is no single authority, and belonging has become a matter of self-assessment. Ariel found the notion of family helpful in this matter: beyond the obvious correlation between a family and a social group, Ariel noted that the idea of family, as a cohesive social unit which may have frictions and arguments among its members, is yet a useful metaphor for dealing with diversity. It is no surprise that the terms family and home regularly recurred in interviews and casual conversations regarding the place BINA has in its employees' lives.

At the January 2012 staff study session two employees were finishing their tenure, of whom one was Hai, part of the IDF department, and the other was an employee of the organization behind BINA, which worked closely with BINA on allocation of budgets. Both have used the word family to describe their sentiments working at and with BINA.

Maya, the head of the educational department at the time, talked about the investment in human resources that attracted her on BINA. She recalled fulling in love not only in the organization approach to Jewishness, but "also in Lilach as a representative of the organization that invests two hours in a conversation with a person she had not met [before] in order to learn whether he would fit the organization. And I've been here ever since. Five years already."

Noa recounted a similar first impression of BINA, feeling that when she first started at BINA she had arrived home. Noa noted that BINA was the first job she had stayed in for such a long time, and at the time of the interview she had been with BINA for at least five years. Contrasting her experience in the corporate world, where she described a feeling of total alienation between employees, Noa described her first day at BINA as follows "…I will not forget it, at the first day of the group facilitator training there was lunch and people that did not know each other before arranged the tables together and sat to eat lunch together".

The staff of BINA feels that the organization sees them as a valuable resource rather than simply as a tool to be used. They know that the organization is invested in them, and feel some commitment to repay this investment; this mutual investment from the organization and its employees is in fact the backbone of the organization. Continuity in such a dynamic organization should be attributed to the employees of the organization rather than to any specific policy or manual, and the feeling of 'being at home' for employees is due not just to the subject matter or the social orientation of the organization but also to acts that are categorized as more intimate than the usual work-related activities. Thus, in the staff study sessions birthdays of employees were celebrated with candles, flowers, and photos. Furthermore, employees are paid for their training and encouraged to continue their intellectual development through projects such as the staff study sessions.

I will close this chapter with Eran's contemplation on the integration of individualism in institutions. When challenged on how an organization can function as such, achieving some level of institutionalization and still allowing for individualism and dialog, Eran noted that the stability and continuity of BINA is grounded in its staff. He pointed out that at BINA there was a handful of people that have been employed there for over ten years, and a broader group that has been

with BINA for at least three years. These people feel that BINA is their home and that there is pride in belonging and, as I have shown, this stable group of people allows for an ongoing internal dialog regarding goals and objectives. Furthermore, the staff are empowered, managers give their employees plenty of room to operate, and they also provide space for individual creativity. This, according to Eran, allows for expressions of individualism in their actions.

Conclusions

Two themes have guided my investigation of BINA: the ways the secular informs its operations as a Jewish educational institution, and the relationship between the collective and the individual in the secular institute. My point of departure for this investigation was a historical theoretical survey of the secular based on the principles of individualism, flexibility, multiplicity, and critical thinking. I have claimed that one of the main objectives of the secular is the achievement of sovereignty, which itself comprises the right to be different and still be included, to change and be changed at any given moment. With sovereignty as a secular goal in mind, I have marked five secular modes of operation: literacy, multiplicity, contextual truth, activism, and the here-and-now, and have offered a simple chain of reasoning connecting the five modes of operation as they promote sovereignty. Literacy allows for multiplicity of voices to be expressed; in turn multiplicity of voices requires the acknowledgement that truth is contextual rather than absolute; activism provides a means of coping with friction created by the concurrency of different truths and is grounded in the here-and-now, and finally sovereignty is claimed through activism in the here-and-now.

In the context of BINA's secular Jewishness, sovereignty refers to culture, through which BINA aims to assert its Jewish sovereignty, challenging the Jewish orthodoxy which monopolizes claims to Jewishness in Israel. In the context of the tension between secular individualism and group cohesion as it is worked out at BINA, BINA's secular attitudes allow individuals within it individual sovereignty without risking the disintegration of the group. In both social contexts, Jewishness and group identification, I have argued that secular modes of operations and the secular principles behind them, promote a new model for group identification that is more flexible and thus more inclusive, and have introduced and explored the notion of

inclusive groupness as a voluntary collective individualism, which achieves group cohesion through its very dynamism, flexibility and ability to foster change.

The model of inclusive groupness is based on two principles: fidelity, and debate and negotiation, and in the current model – based on Barth's seminal work (Barth 1969) – groupness is conceptualized through its boundaries, and the power struggles over these same boundaries. Groupness is reflected from the relationship between *us* and the *other*, with inclusive groupness shifting the focus of groupness to its communal core – i.e. fidelity to shared values. In this model, once fidelity to the common core has been established, issues of power within and between groups are addressed through debate and negotiation, ideally leading to complete resolution. However, when shifting the focus of groupness from outward – *us* as it reflected from the *other* – inward – communal core – boundaries lose their authority as group delimiters and the group boundaries need no longer provide clear borderlines. In turn they become flexible, better conceptualized as porous range of options. As a result they are also much more dynamic, better adapted to reflect the here-and-now in which they are negotiated. In this inclusive model for groupness, differences become expressions of individuality rather than grounds for exclusion; however, secular individualism is potentially a fragmenting force which threatens groupness, and the challenge of a secular model of groupness is how to maintain and foster group cohesion alongside individual sovereignty. Fidelity to a common core serves as the counterforce to individual fragmentation, but debate and negotiation are the mechanism by which friction, resulting from the cooperation of multiple individualities, is expressed and resolved.

The following question has been presented as the central theme of this work: what precisely is that secular image which is to mold Jewishness into a contemporary frame of reference? BINA, in both its teaching and it operations, has answered this question by providing

a secular alternative to Jewish orthodoxy. The individuals who make up BINA hold fidelity to two core values: Jewishness and Humanism, but as a collective BINA also shows diversity in the implementation of these values. This diversity results from the multiple individualities of which BINA is comprised, and of concrete circumstances in the here-and-now. BINA's diversity is possible due to its dynamic, flexible approach to groupness making it adaptable to change. BINA's diversity, in all of its manifestations, is what defines it as secular. It is a secular inclusive Jewish groupness.

BINA's secularity is not in opposition to religiosity at large. On the contrary, BINA as a product of kibbutz culture was conceived out of the realization that the complete abandonment of Jewishness is unsustainable and detrimental to secular society in Israel. I argued here, both in the theory and in the ethnography that the secular is concerned with contextual truth, with heterodoxy. Bourdieu defines orthodoxy in its opposition to heterodoxy. He writes "Orthodoxy, straight, or rather *straitened*, opinion … exists only in the objective relationship which opposes it to heterodoxy, that is, by reference to the choice – hairesis, [*sic*] heresy – made possible by the existence of *competing possibles* [*sic*] … (Bourdieu 1977, 169)" Thus, BINA's secularity, and the secular in general, challenges orthodoxies at large by promoting heterodoxy as a life style and mind set. BINA has served in this work as a model through which I have examined the secular. As a secular Jewish institute it exists as an in-between; it constantly negotiates its own structure, purpose, and paths to fulfill its goals. However in all of these negotiations, its fidelity as an institution and as a community to the continuity of Jewishness and to the values of humanism is never in doubt.

In Israel's socio-political atmosphere orthodoxy has become equated with religiosity, leading many to believe that secularity and Jewishness are mutually exclusive. However this

study has shown that the ethnographic findings about BINA prove otherwise. It shows BINA's engagement with Jewish texts and Jewish holydays and, moreover, it shows BINA's application of Jewish methods of learning. This engagement clearly marks BINA as Jewish. BINA was also shown to be clearly secular. Thus, engaging narrative critically, using multiplicity of voices as standard of operation. BINA is dynamic and flexibly changing. BINA proudly claims its in-between status, representing both the secular and Jewishness, not as oppositions but simply as different cultural frameworks coming together to form BINA, and in turn these frameworks are being reimagined through BINA, embodying the processual nature of culture.

The state of constant change brought about by the organic development of a group induces anxieties about change beyond recognition – i.e. change that will challenge the defining core to which fidelity is held. In recalling the doomsday proclamations about both the kibbutz and Jewishness, it can be seen that these proclamations are expressions of the anxiety of living in constant doubt, but not necessarily rational observations. Indeed doubt, dynamism, and multiplicity accentuate the risk of survival; however they do not necessarily accelerate the process of demise. In any case, any changes within the secular milieu evolve organically and thus are much less likely to lead to rupture and crisis: assigning the term secular with positive values and principles helps distance the secular from its presumed nihilism.

How then this apparent paradox of secular religiosity is to be explained? A clear distinction between religiosity and orthodoxy is in order. The secular challenges religiosity only insofar as it is represented and monopolized by orthodox doctrines. Understanding secularity in the context of orthodoxies rather than religiosity sheds light on the alliance between nationalism and religion in their opposition to liberalism, both in Israel and beyond. The two camps underlying commonality contain the idea that their own way of thinking is singular in that it is

‘true or correct’. The two aspire for their discourse to be ‘naturalized’ and unquestionable – i.e. to be doxa: the same doxa that once exposed as such, transforms into orthodoxy as the ‘conscious systematization and express rationalization’ of doxa (Bourdieu 1977). Nationality, with its clear boundaries, both physical and social, and institutionalized religion with its claim to the truth, offer no flexibility, leave no room for dynamism, and stifle individualism with demands for collective conformism. All of these arrest organic change as it emerges out of necessity in the here-and-now.

The secular as it emerges in the context of orthodoxy offers a conceptual shift. A shift from: focused to unfocused, from stable to dynamic, from fixed to flexible. It is a shift from an orthodox to a secular heterodox mindset, with the motivations behind one’s creations not the creations themselves being the essence in this mindset.

As a final note here are some possible applications of this conceptual shift. In the field of secular studies it will be most interesting to see how secular principles and modes of operations as defined here inform other vernacular instances of the secular such as in Turkey and India, or among Muslim Israelis. These groups and communities in general have not experienced a complete disassociation from religion, as has been the case in Western secularism. The consideration of the secular as the negation of religion has prevented it from being fully understood and explored in a religiously rich social context. It will be interesting to see what else can be exposed about the secular by comparing and contrasting its individual instances using groups’ modes of operations and motivations rather than their attitudes towards religion. Furthermore, now that the secular has been shown to have been neutralized from religious associations it might develop more organically in religiously saturated societies. By the same

token, this understanding of the secular will allow religiosity to be more organically incorporated and investigated in secularized societies.

In the field of Jewish studies, secular identification is a long overdue model of Jewishness that breaks away from the primary understanding of Jewishness as a religious identification defined by the three B's – Belonging, Belief, and Behavior. Furthermore, as the secular is realigned as challenging orthodoxies rather than religiosity, secular Jewishness becomes a viable alternative. The co-existence of secularity and religiosity offers a more holistic approach suited to modern free thinkers, allowing them to actively influence and take part in Jewish continuity.

In the introduction I have mentioned the link between state boundaries and those of its society. The strong links between state boundaries and social boundaries deem civic society fragile at times of conflict, at which point people tend to fall back to their national societal ties (Migdal 2001). Israel and some of its neighbors in the Middle East have been experiencing conflicts over state boundaries for decades, resulting in evermore national societies with clear tendencies towards doxa and orthodoxy. Secular inclusive groupness by abandoning boundaries as a defining marker of groupness, creates an opportunity for civic society to maintain itself in the face of state borders fluctuations. It does so by concentrating on the common – i.e. fidelity, and on mechanisms for working out differences – i.e. debate and negotiation. Israeli secular groupness can serve as both model and analytic framework for social formation in other states experiencing prolonged periods of boarder related conflicts.

Secular inclusiveness is a model for group identification that develops organically out of negotiations grounded in present circumstances. It has a mechanism in place to level power structures and hierarchies as much as possible, and as such can serve as an analytic frame within

which to explore groups that are either excluded, resist definition and/or transcend conventional identification, such as minorities within nation states, or transnational identifications as in the case of LGBT identification. Furthermore, such a model could allow the comparative study of groups that seem far removed from BINA: one example which has already been contemplated in this work is that of a community of online open source developers, and the way it has informed our understanding of a secular Jewish institution.

Conceptualizing the secular as promoting individual sovereignty, flexibility, dynamism, and the perspective of the here-and-now, rescues the term from its position as a disciplinary niche of religion. The reorientation of the term as a mode of operation opens up possibilities for its use in areas completely disassociated from either the national or the religious. While the national and the religious are the historical context from which the secular has formed in modernity, it can finally leave these links in the past and, as secular studies mature and develop, develop into an appropriate frame of reference to a social landscape that is now more flexible and dynamic than it was only a few decades ago. This model is thus an alternative to orthodoxies suitable for a new age of non-commitment and high social mobility. Finally as an identification model that is gazing inward and based in modes of operations it offers a theory which could be applied to all levels of social groupings, from the individual as the basic unit, through different levels of association, nations, and finally humanity as the ultimate social group: a fitting model in this age of globalization.

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