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The Media and the Guttman Report

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This chapter and the chapter that follows survey how two critical sectors of the Israeli public, the media and the academic community, greeted the Guttman Report. The media and the academics are very important because they serve as the major conduits through which the results of the Guttman study were communicated to the general public. Both the full text of the Guttman Report and a summary of the report, published as a separate pamphlet under the title *Highlights from the Guttman Institute Report* (hereafter referred to as *Highlights* and reprinted in this volume as chapter 1) were on sale to the public. But the distribution facilities of the Guttman Institute and the Avi-Chai Foundation border on the non-existent, and the public is not accustomed to purchasing material of this sort anyway.

THE GUTTMAN CONCEPTION

The media's interpretation is critical in the short run; the academic community is probably more important in the long run. We turn our attention first to the media. In doing so, this chapter is not only attentive to the text of the media reports but to the more subtle question of how the results of a scientific report become popularized and the attendant and inevitable distortion that accompanies that popularization.

Barbie Zelizer, relying on earlier scholars, describes journalists as an interpretive community. She observes that

journalists present events through explanatory frames that construct reality but do not reveal the secrets, sources or methods of such a process. Audiences tend to protest this only when they

dislike what is being portrayed . . . the selection, formation, and presentation of events ultimately hinge on how journalists decide to construct the news in one way and not another. . . .¹

Avi-Chai, with Guttman Institute approval, prepared a press release that it distributed together with *Highlights* to all Israeli newspapers. Some reporters did request and thereupon received copies of the full report. However, coverage of the Guttman Report in the press and on television and radio suggests that, with some exceptions, reporters and editors relied heavily on a press release for their basic information of the report's contents. The press release comprised five and a half single-spaced pages of text, so even though the media was in fact reporting on a press release it had to select from among the wealth of information reported in the release. *Highlights* facilitated the journalists in this regard as well by quoting three key statements from the report on its front cover. The quotes really constituted a shortened version of the press release. The first three paragraphs of the press release were as follows:

"The rhetoric of secular and religious polarization used to characterize Israeli society is highly misleading. It is truer to say that Israeli society has a strong traditional bent, with a continuum from the 'strictly observant' to the 'non-observant,' rather than a great divide between a religious minority and a secular majority. Israeli Jews are strongly committed to the continuing Jewish character of their society, even while they are selective in the forms of their observance. They believe that public life should respect tradition, but they are critical of the 'status quo' governing State and Religion."

These are some of the conclusions of this most detailed and in-depth study ever done in Israel, encompassing 2,400 personal interviews, on the subject of "Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction among Israeli Jews" carried out by The Guttman Institute of Applied Social Research, at the initiative of the AVI CHAI Foundation in Jerusalem.

AVI CHAI is a private foundation which focuses in Israel on efforts to encourage mutual understanding and sensitivity among Jews of different religious backgrounds and commitments to observance. The study was carried out under the direction of Dr. Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn, and Prof. Elihu Katz, Scientific Director of the Institute.

The three paragraphs found on the front page of *Highlights*, designed to look like direct quotes from the report, are also to be found in the first paragraph of the press release. They are reproduced here in their entirety:

. . . the rhetoric of secular and religious polarization generally used to characterize Israeli society is highly misleading.

. . . Israeli society has a strong traditional bent, and, as far as religious practice is concerned . . . there is a continuum from the "strictly observant" to the "non-observant," rather than a great divide between a religious minority and a secular majority.

Israeli Jews are strongly committed to the continuing Jewish character of their society, even while they are selective in the forms of their observance. They believe that public life should respect the tradition, but are critical of the "status quo" governing State and Religion.

These statements represent a conception of the Guttman Report results. They condense a 136-page report with additional tables of roughly the same number of pages into a very concise package that conveys, explicitly and implicitly, a very clear message. To paraphrase the message and condense it even further, it says:

. . . contrary to what everyone thought, the religious and secular in Israel are not polarized. Virtually all Israelis tend to be traditional in their religious practice. They are also committed to the Jewish character of Israeli society although they are critical of the religious status quo.

This is how the authors of the report, in subsequent interviews, summarized their message. We will call this the Guttman conception. The term is not meant to suggest that this conception is unfair or biased. My own sense is that, with one caveat, it is a fair conceptualization of the report. However, the public also assumes that that which is currently true is likely to continue to be true. As we shall see in the final two chapters, evidence in the report itself suggests that this is not the case.

Most journalists who reported the results of the Guttman study copied or slightly revised the key statements from *Highlights* or similar statements from the press release and thereby reinforced the Guttman conception. Alternate conceptualizations did emerge, more often among intellectuals (see chapter 3) than among journalists.

THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE MEDIA COVERAGE

The Guttman Report enjoyed extensive coverage in the media. There were over fifty-six references to the report, most of them major stories, in the press and on radio and television over a six-week period from December 6, 1993, to January 21, 1994.² This probably represents wider coverage

than any previous survey research report had ever enjoyed. Every one of the nine Hebrew- (and English-) language daily newspapers, except *Ma'Ariv*, carried a lead story about the report and/or a major feature story. The one national weekly then in print and many of the local weeklies did the same. All five radio stations and the major Israeli television channel described the Guttman Report; two television programs and one radio program utilized the report as the basis for extended discussions.

The extensive nature of the coverage deserves some mention. In one sense it confirms that which the Guttman Report asserts; Israeli Jews, who constitute over 80 percent of Israeli society, are committed to Jewishness, if not to Judaism, and, consequently, a report about the beliefs, attitudes, and observances of Israeli Jews is deemed interesting. That is probably part of the answer but not, I suspect, the whole one, because the Israeli press does not, under ordinary circumstances, pay much attention to the prosaic side of Jewishness. It is my impression that by and large the nonreligious media report challenges to Jewish life and tradition in a favorable light and describe efforts by the religious establishment to impose religious forms of life in a negative light.³ The media do this because most journalists are secular rather than religious and also because journalists believe they are mirroring what most Israelis want to hear and read. If this is true, then the media, implicitly if not explicitly, saw the Guttman Report as a challenge to its own conceptions or assumptions about the nature of Jewish life in Israel and the norms and values of most Israelis. The Guttman Report, more precisely the Guttman conception of the report, contradicted that which journalists believed to be true. To their credit, perhaps because of their curiosity about whether their own perceptions were correct, or because journalists like to stir up controversy and they believed they had a story likely to arouse controversy, but perhaps as a sign of their indolence, most of the media descriptions were presented in terms of the Guttman conception.

Not every reference described the report in whole or in part. A number of the media reports mentioned the Guttman data to make some point that bore little relationship to the report itself.⁴ But even peripheral mention added to the prestige of the report. This was especially prevalent at the second or third mention of the report, from mid-January through mid-February. After that, references to the report virtually ceased.

In deciding how to treat the story of the Guttman Report, the media, consciously or unconsciously, had to choose between a number of options. The first option, the easiest way out as we noted, a course that most of the media followed, was to publish or rewrite the first few paragraphs of the release or the statements on the cover of *Highlights*. The hook that the media utilized, more often than not, to attract reader attention was the surprising nature of the findings. The terms "shocked"

and “astounded” were often employed. The media did not always specify who it was that was shocked or astounded. When it did do so, the most common reference was to scholars.

When journalists reported the results of the Guttman Institute study by copying or slightly rewording the opening paragraphs of the press release or the cover of *Highlights* they were accepting, as we said, the Guttman conception of the Guttman Report. There were four other options that might have been exercised by the media or by anyone wishing to bypass the Guttman conception.

In a few cases journalists simply selected the data that fit their own preconceptions about how Israeli Jews behave or ought to behave and limited themselves to reporting this data. This seemed to characterize some of the radical secularists among the journalists.

A few others, also unhappy with the results, challenged the results of the report by suggesting that the methods employed in administering the survey were inappropriate or biased. Since this meant challenging the highly prestigious Guttman Institute, which undertook the survey, this option could only be chosen by journalists of great hubris or profound ignorance of survey research.

A third option was to reinterpret the Guttman data. The data could then be presented as confirmation of a different conceptual framework without explicitly challenging the Guttman conception. This was the option that the religious media, in general, and the *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) media, in particular, chose.

The fourth and most sophisticated option was to challenge the Guttman conception in explicit terms. This was rarely attempted by journalists. It was more commonly undertaken by academics, as we shall see in the following chapter, and in the essays of the Van Leer participants, which are reproduced in the Appendix.

The media coverage is presented here, more or less in chronological order. As will be seen, all of the options described earlier found expression in one media report or another.

THE HAREDI PRESS AND THE GUTTMAN CONCEPTION

The Guttman Report was completed in the summer of 1993, but its release was withheld. The summary, *Highlights from the Guttman Institute Report* (reprinted in chapter 1), was distributed, in confidence, to about sixty academics who indicated they would attend the Van Leer conference described in the next chapter. Apparently one or more of the conference participants leaked a copy of *Highlights* to *Davar*. At the time, *Davar* was the daily paper published by the Israeli Labor Federation. It no longer exists.

The first news of the Guttman survey appeared on December 5. The Labor newspaper devoted two stories to the report. The front page story was headlined, "In Israel They Believe They Are Members Of A Chosen People" (alluding to responses to one of the survey's questions on belief). The *Davar* story was written without the benefit of the press release that had yet to be formulated, but it followed the same general outline as the Guttman conception. It emphasized the survey respondents' sense of the central role that the state of Israel plays in contemporary Judaism and the strong ties that Israelis have to all the Jewish people. The story then focused on selected aspects of the beliefs and attitudes found in the report. The word "they" in the headline seems to exclude the journalist and his audience. But the somewhat abrasive tone of the headline, suggesting wide-eyed superstitious masses who do not share the values of the writer and his readers, was not at all typical of the article's text.

A second story on page 5 was headed, "There Is A God."⁵ It began as follows:

Contrary to the notion that the general tendency of the public is to secularism, two-thirds of the Jews in Israel observe the tradition.

The remainder of the story followed that vein. The hook was obvious—we thought one thing was correct, but it turns out that something different is correct.

There is an additional point worth noting about *Davar's* coverage. References are to Jews in Israel; "Jewish residents of Israel" is how the front page story refers to them. As we shall see, some of the media made no distinction between the survey sample, composed of Jews in Israel, and all Israelis. This reinforces the point to be made in the final two chapters concerning the taken-for-granted status of Judaism and Jewishness in Israel, even among those who feel alienated from the Jewish tradition and would prefer to deJudaize the public forum.

The stories in *Davar* were picked up the following day by *Ha'Modia*, the oldest and best established of the three *haredi* dailies.⁶ The first story appeared under a front page headline, "Jews Believe." *Ha'Modia's* treatment is significant because of the way in which it conceptualized the Guttman Report and its implications—a conceptualization that all the *haredi* press was to adopt. The lead story, based according to its author on the story in *Davar*, emphasized that the report vindicated *haredi* leaders in their assertion that most Israeli Jews, "the nation residing in Zion" (*ha'am hayoshev b'tzion*), support religion and observe Jewish tradition. But, *Ha'Modia* continued, the secular media conceal or distort this fact. This and subsequent stories provided corroboration to a basic *haredi* message—the demonic behavior of the secular media.⁷

The secular press along with a handful of politicians whose names are not always specified, play a prominent role in the *haredi* worldview. *Haredim*, on the one hand, decry the Israeli environment, which is characterized by violations of religious prescriptions, deliberate and blatant disrespect for Jewish tradition, and general licentiousness. On the other hand, wholesale condemnation of other Jews is contrary to the Jewish tradition and far less acceptable since the Yom Kippur War. Since that time, as I have argued elsewhere,⁸ a process of integration and at least partial legitimization of *haredim* in Israeli society has been taking place. This process has proven most beneficial for *haredim* in gaining access to public funds. But no less and probably more importantly, it fits the reality that many and probably most *haredim* themselves sense. In their own eyes they both are and are not part of Israeli society. The balance between being “part of” and being “isolated from” differs from one *haredi* to another, from one context to another, and from one period to another. But the sense of being “part of” has been growing among more and more *haredim* and in more and more contexts.

Nevertheless, the *haredi* paradox remains. They live in an Israeli Jewish society that they would like to affirm and an environment that they insist on viewing as demonic, both because much of what takes place there is an anathema in their eyes and because if they were to desist resisting the environment they would undermine their cultural autonomy. The solution, heretofore, was to explain and thereby excuse the behavior of the vast majority of nonobservant Jews as a consequence of their ignorance. Blame is attributed to the secular media and a handful of “leftist” politicians who deliberately promote this ignorance and its consequences.

The Guttman Report permitted the *haredi* media to carry their argument one step further. The report demonstrated that the public was not necessarily composed of sinners who acted out of ignorance. On the contrary, the public was composed of Jews who acted properly, but the secular media deliberately kept this a secret. And lest one suspect that this was an invention of a *haredi* mind, the reader is reminded each time the Guttman Report is described in a *haredi* publication that the authors of the report are secular Jews.⁹ Indeed, illustrating another of the paradoxes that characterize the *haredi* world (*we haredim* are the source of truth and secularists are deceitful if not misguided, but somehow the secular world is more objective), the author of one story reminds the reader that the research that he is reporting was not undertaken

by a *haredi* or religious institution. Therefore one can relate to its findings and conclusions as highly objective.

The first story in *Ha'Modia* maintained that the Guttman Report vindicated *haredi* leaders who had always maintained that Israeli Jews

tended toward observance. In contrast, a second story acknowledged that the secular are more observant than we *haredim* had thought. And, the author goes on to add, those who do not observe, act that way from ignorance. After reminding readers that the authors of the report are not religious, the journalist arrives at his main point. The worst enemy is the media who provide an image of a secular majority and thereby serve the secular “exactly as it serves the left, as though the majority of the citizens of the state of Israel were left wing.”

The notion that the religious public constitute a majority of the society but are misled by the secular media into the belief that they are a minority is also found in the weekly pamphlet published by Habad (the followers of the Lubavitch *rebbe*) and distributed in many synagogues throughout Israel. Its December 13 issue notes that the Guttman Report challenges the notion that there has been a growing alienation from the values of Judaism in the last few years. This misconception is attributed to the media “controlled almost entirely by people of extreme secularist ideology.” They incite the public against religious institutions.

This attack on the secular media was comparatively mild. Two examples of more vituperative attacks are of particular interest. On December 10, *Ha'Modia* utilized the Guttman Report to further develop its conceptual scheme. The report served as the basis for an attack on Israeli democracy or the lack thereof. Israel, the journalist claimed, pretends to be a democracy. But the

vast majority of the public is ground down under the nailed boot of a tiny minority, a handful of leftists who arrogantly captured all the media outlets, and do as they see fit to the public.

The author then points to the recent closing of an afternoon daily, *Hadashot*. That newspaper, so it was claimed, had lost many readers after it violated censorship regulations by publishing material demonstrating that Israel's secret security forces had lied. The writer cited the loss of readership as evidence that

the Israeli public, even the secular, is pro-Jewish, pro-religion, in favor of tradition. It isn't left-wing, Arabist, and also not Sturmerist [a reference to *Der Sturmer*, the antisemitic Nazi newspaper].

Further evidence that the majority of the society is pro-Jewish is then introduced by the Guttman Report, which the journalist reminds his readers was prepared by “a staff of secular professors” and published in the “known Canaanite paper, *Davar*.” The author chooses bits of data from

the report that best support the argument for high levels of observance among the public and concludes that the media, along with a few leftists, distorts and misleads the public.

An association of the secular media and the political Left is vividly expressed in a similar story that appeared a few weeks later in a *haredi* weekly, *Yerushalayim*. The author of the article cites the Guttman Report figures as so startling that even the Israeli media could not ignore them. The data demonstrate, says the writer, that the charge of religious coercion “is a big ugly lie.” [Apparently the writer’s train of thought is that since a majority of the society is religious, religious coercion cannot, by definition, exist.] The “atheist leftists . . . haters of religion and anti-semites” who scream against religious coercion are a tiny minority, the writer affirms. If Israel were a democracy this could not happen, but Israel is not a democracy and the “haters of religion and the leftists” rule “without restraint.” They control the media and thereby create the false impression that the observant are a minority.

The *haredi* articles lend themselves to an analysis that takes us too far afield from our present concerns. Nevertheless, a couple of points beg mentioning because they are relevant to developments in Israeli Jewish life to which we return in the final two chapters. First, by attacking Israel because it only pretends to be a democracy but really is not, the *haredi* press has, by indirection, offered some legitimacy to the label democracy; although it is equally clear that it has little understanding that democracy also includes protection of individual rights. Second, the demonization of the political Left is especially characteristic of the *haredi* world in the last few years. Indeed, it is another sign of its integration into Israeli culture—albeit into one segment of that culture. The association of radical secularism with radical leftism (an association that has a great deal of truth though hardly all the truth) serves the same purposes as the demonization of the secular press but also provides a legitimation for *haredi* alliances with the secular Right. Finally, what is most striking about the *haredi* media treatment of Jewish-Israeli society is its reification of “the nation.” That is, the concept “nation” is reified to the point where the notion of a divided nation is inconceivable. Whereas the Guttman Report talks about the continuum between religious and nonreligious, or more observant and less observant, and points to rather sharp divisions on issues of religious politics as opposed to religious observance, the *haredi* press seems unwilling, more likely incapable, of making such distinctions.

Yom L'Yom, the daily paper of Shas, the Sephardic religious party, printed a short story on December 21, under the headline: “Survey Results: No Split Between Religious and Non-Religious.” Shas is led by Sephardic *haredi* rabbis, but many of its voters are traditional rather than

strictly observant. Indeed, the Sephardim represent the core of religiously permissive traditionalists whom the Guttman Report finds to constitute the majority of Israeli Jews. They are the constituents and potential constituents of Shas, and it is no surprise that Shas was pleased by the results of the report or that the Guttman conception suited its needs. The following day, December 22, the paper carried a longer story under the headline, "This Is Secularism?," which adopted the same conceptual framework that first appeared in *Ha'Modia. Yom L'Yom*, however, employed far more moderate tones, as is appropriate to a party that was an on-again, off-again coalition partner of the government elected in 1992. The first paragraph noted that the notion of a "secular majority" was undermined by the Guttman survey. After presenting a few figures about high levels of observance, the paper reminded its readers that the survey was not conducted by "Shas or other religious, so there is no room to accuse anyone of forging the figures." The article concludes by saying that we now know how to relate to those who would erase the Jewish character of the state of Israel in the name of an ostensible secular majority.

THE SECULAR MEDIA AND THE GUTTMAN CONCEPTION

At the time of the Guttman Report publication, five Hebrew-language radio stations reached a national audience. Four of them were under some form of government control; one, the IDF channel, was geared especially to an army audience. The fifth station, "Channel 7" was a pirate channel identified with the political Right and with a militant version of religious-Zionism.

On December 7 one of the government stations broadcast news of the Guttman Report based on the story in *Davar*. It borrowed its lead from the cover of *Highlights*: "there is no basis to the rhetoric of secular and religious polarization in Israeli society." The broadcast provided some additional statistics on observance of the tradition and the responsibility that Jews feel to the entire Jewish nation. The statement that Israeli Jews believe that the tradition ought to be respected was balanced, as it was in *Highlights*, by the statement that Israelis are critical of the status quo concerning religion and state. (I suspect that the radio station obtained a copy of *Highlights*, perhaps *Davar's* copy.)

A second government station carried the Guttman Report story on its news broadcasts the following day. (In both cases references were to Israeli and not Jewish-Israeli society.)

The December 19 news report on the IDF channel adopted its own interpretation of the Guttman Report. It began its coverage by highlighting the fact that 90 percent of Israeli citizens (once again ignoring the non-

Jewish population) supported the drafting of yeshiva students. One might have explained this bit of selectivity by recalling that it was broadcast by an army station, and anything affecting the army presumably took priority. But the next statistic the station presented was that a “majority of the public supports public transportation on the Sabbath and opening more movie theaters on Friday night.” A more detailed report then followed. It repeated the figure of massive support for drafting yeshiva students and added the additional figure of 70 percent in favor of drafting religious girls, 42 percent in favor of separating religion and state, and two thirds reporting they would like to use public transportation on the Sabbath and attend more movies on Friday night. The announcer then pointed to the survey results indicating that Sephardim (Jews of Eastern origin, primarily North African) were more positive toward religion than Ashkenazim (Jews of Western, primarily European, background), and that whereas 40 percent of the population favored instituting civil marriage ceremonies, only 16 percent preferred a civil to a religious marriage ceremony.

There was nothing inaccurate in any of the details of the broadcast, but it certainly misled the listener with regard to the overall findings of the Guttman Report. The Israeli news agency, *Itim*, adopted the same strategy. It distributed a short news story that focused on the 90 percent figure in favor of drafting yeshiva students. On December 27, that story was also published in *Al Hamishmar*, the left-wing daily which since then ceased publication, and in *Yediot Aharonot*, Israel’s most popular daily. But the story in *Yediot* was a supplement to a much lengthier and more complete story that had appeared a few days earlier.

The Avi Chai press release was finally distributed on December 20 and 21 and led to broad coverage of the Guttman Report during that week. In most cases, stories in the press and on radio featured those aspects of the press release found in *Highlights*, but the headline in each paper reflected slightly different orientations. “Most Israeli Jews Observe Some ‘Mitzvot’” was the cautious headline in the English-language daily, *Jerusalem Post*. The lead sentence was also carefully balanced:

Two-thirds of the country’s Jews mark shabbat with some form of ritual observance and more than 70 percent fast on Yom Kippur, but almost half say that they either do not know or barely know how to pray from a prayer book.

Not surprisingly, the *Jerusalem Post*, read by Israel’s foreign colony as well as tourists, made note of the fact that the survey was confined to Israeli Jews.

The religious-Zionist daily, *Ha’Zofe*, kept very close to the press release. This is not surprising since in ideological terms, the Guttman conception of

the report should have been most satisfying to the more religiously moderate religious-zionists. The same was true of the pirate station, channel 7. Since the unity of Jewish society is an especially important theme to its sponsors, the press release's emphasis on the absence of divisions among religious and secular Jews coincided with the station's ideological orientation.

Yediot Aharonot is Israel's largest-selling daily. Its first report of the Guttman study appeared December 21 and relied heavily on the press release, both in content and in conception. For example, the headline read "80 Percent Observe Tradition." The writer, however, did uncover an inconsistency and called the Guttman Institute's attention to the fact that according to the report the percentage of those who reported that they pray regularly is identical to the percentage of those who reported that they recite the prayer for the welfare of the state of Israel. Since few *haredim* recite this prayer, it suggests that they are grossly underrepresented in the sample. Elihu Katz responds to this point in chapter 4.

A national weekly (*Shishi*) and local weeklies, some independent and some sponsored by the national press, also carried the Guttman Report story in their weekend edition. They generally followed the tone of the press release. The lead-in, as we noted earlier, was often the surprising nature of the statistics on belief and observance. A number of the weekend stories stressed the "surprisingly" or "startlingly" high rate of belief and observance—sometimes specifying that it is the researchers who are "in shock," but in one case, suggesting that it is the journalist himself. The writer in the weekly *Shishi* (the paper, now defunct, was a successor to *Hadashot*), for example, seems quite genuine in referring to the "startling findings" that 63 percent of Israelis (note the inclusive and inaccurate term "Israelis" rather than "Jewish Israelis") "fully believe there is a God." He suggests that it is he who is astounded and then offers his interpretation, one that is quite consistent with the *Highlights* and the press release. He says:

If I understand something about the data, the results of the study tell us about the very close tie between the citizens of Israel and Judaism and religion, including the laws of the religion. This tie does not dictate full observance of the religious commandments.

The best-researched story along these lines, despite the inaccurate headline, "We Fast on Kippur (But Only Because of the Diet)" appeared in the Jerusalem weekly of *Yediot Aharonot*. (The two largest Israeli papers print their own local supplements on the weekend.) The secondary headline read:

A new and surprising study by the Guttman Institute reveals that Israeli society still views itself as traditional, despite objection to the interference of the religious establishment in private lives. The *haredi* are celebrating, learned researchers are in shock, but there are those who see the data as testimony to the maturity of the average Israeli, who lights candles but doesn't ask why. . . .

The story, other than a lead paragraph that likened Israel to Saudi Arabia, was devoid of sensationalism. After reporting some of the data and the celebration of the report in *haredi* circles, the writer reports the responses of a number of Israelis (including a *haredi*) deemed knowledgeable about the nature of Jewishness in Israel. The journalist concluded by challenging the conclusion found in the press release and the *Highlights* about the absence of a split between the religious and the secular. He noted that according to the report itself, religious-secular relations were problematic.

Only a few journalists pointed to this apparent inconsistency, but the theme reappears among the academics discussed in the next chapter. As we noted, the press release and the cover page of *Highlights* stresses that: "the rhetoric of secular and religious polarization generally used to characterize Israeli society is highly misleading." A closer reading of *Highlights* itself, as seen in chapter 1, illuminates the meaning of this statement. What the authors mean is that the term *polarization* is inaccurate because, in the words of *Highlights*, "there is a continuum from the 'strictly observant' to the 'nonobservant,' rather than a great divide between a religious minority and a secular majority." Most Israeli Jews are not bunched at the two ends of the continuum, so, technically speaking, there is no polarization. If one reads the text of *Highlights* one understands this. But the statement as it appears in the press release and on the cover of *Highlights* is misleading for two reasons. First, many Israelis, including as we shall see not only journalists but academics as well, understood the assertion of an absence of polarization as denying the existence of deep divisions between Israeli Jews who are labeled "religious" and Israeli Jews who are labeled "secular." The categories "religious" and "secular" are meaningful categories to Israelis and, in fact, are terms that the Guttman Report itself utilizes. Had the authors of the report or the press release carried their argument about the absence of polarization or the existence of a continuum to its logical conclusion they could have argued that the very terms *religious* and *secular* are misleading. After all, if there is a real continuum of observance, where is one to draw the line? But such an argument would have been unrealistic given the widespread use of the terms in Israeli public life. So the authors continue to use

the terms *secular* and *religious* but then deny that these terms are meaningful in distinguishing between levels of religious observance among the vast majority of Israelis. Second, contrary to the intention of the report, the assertion of an absence of "secular and religious polarization" was interpreted by many, I suspect by most journalists themselves, to mean that there is no polarization at the social or political as well as the religious level between those who are defined as religious and those who are defined as secular. Anyone who reads *Highlights* or even the press release carefully would realize that that is not what the report is affirming. But the fact is that even scholars who, one hopes, read texts carefully misinterpreted what was said. A lengthy *Jerusalem Post* story describing the Van Leer Institute conference was headlined: "Survey Says No Religious-Secular Gap; Academics Differ."

The deliberations of the December 26 Van Leer Institute conference are the subject of the next chapter. Besides the major story in the *Jerusalem Post* referred to here, the media ignored the substance of the conference. Perhaps there was no press release upon which they could rely.

ALTERNATE CONCEPTIONS

The media reports and feature stories that appeared before December 27, with the few exceptions already noted, accepted the Guttman conceptual framework, especially the notion that Israeli Jews were by and large united in their traditional beliefs and religious behavior. The major exceptions were the reports that selected out a few bits of data, especially the fact that 90 percent of the public favor drafting yeshiva students, ignored the conceptual framework of the press release, and allowed the selected data to speak for themselves. The *haredi* press offered its own interpretive or conceptual scheme, and whereas many of their stories also chose the data selectively, they built upon rather than rejected the Avi-Chai conceptual framework. The first explicit challenge to the report came on December 27, from the distinguished historian and Arabist, Emmanuel Sivan, writing in the pages of *Ha'aretz* under the heading "The Gulf Will Widen." Sivan criticized the report at three levels. First, he noted, as the *Highlights* themselves indicated, most respondents were selective in their observance of religious ritual. This selectivity, Sivan pointed out, bore no connection to the centrality of the ritual, from a religious point of view, but rather to the frequency with which Jews were required to observe it and the difficulty or inconvenience involved in its performance. For three quarters of Israelis, Sivan concluded, observance was tied to Israel's national culture not to the Jewish religion.

Second, Sivan argued, in addition to the different meanings and levels associated with religious observance, the report itself indicated that deep divisions existed between religious and nonreligious at the social level. Israeli Jews, Sivan maintained in accordance with the report, do not interact with those whose religious lifestyles are different.

Sivan's third and final point was that the most serious and potentially threatening gulf between religious and secular was at the political rather than at the religious or even the social level. In a somewhat polemical tone, Sivan maintained, independently of the report, that the most serious division in Israeli society is between the West Bank settlers and their religious supporters and, by implication, all other Israelis. He identifies the former as those who place "one religious commandment—the commandment of settling the entire land"—as the supreme religious principle.

Sivan's points, as we will see in the chapter that follows, are repeated in the presentations of a number of academics. However, Orit Shochat, a columnist for *Ha'Aretz*, responded to Sivan the following day in an article that rephrased the Guttman conception in more dramatic and far-reaching terms than the authors themselves might have dared.

The article was subheaded:

Most Jews living in Israel are religious in one way or another. Even if they would be allowed to marry in a civil ceremony they wouldn't want to. They only want the option to decide.

The first paragraph praised the report as a serious, in-depth study. The key lines read as follows:

After one hundred years of secular zionism, after it appeared that Israeli culture was dominated by the ethos of the secular-sabra who negates diasporaness and celebrates the army . . . [and after it appeared that] the religious are only a small shrill minority, it now appears that the cutting off of *peot* [a reference to the anti-religious coercion of Yemenite immigrants in the first years of statehood] didn't succeed. The Jews living in Israel feel that the Jewish tradition is the force that united them and is responsible for the fact that they live in this land and not elsewhere.

Shochat then refers directly to Sivan's column of the previous day. Ignoring many of his points, she argued that his distinction between observing the tradition and observing a religious commandment is a philosophical question. Furthermore, she argued, Sivan's formulation suggested that religiosity was a matter of all or nothing, and this is contrary to the findings of the Guttman Report itself.

Another alternative conception, one far less sophisticated than Sivan's, emerged in an article in *Ma'Ariv* on the last day of the year. Under the heading "Since We Are Already Talking About Religion," the journalist, picking up on a minor thread in an article in the weekly *Shishi* referred to earlier, concluded that the upshot of the Guttman Report was that Israelis are Reform Jews. "We are Reform because we know that it is possible to be a Jew even without a *streimel* [a fur hat worn by a few though hardly all *haredim*]." The article seems too farfetched to merit further attention except for two facts. One, this is, as far as I can tell, the only mention of the Guttman Report in *Ma'Ariv*, the second-largest daily in Israel. Two, the story was picked up by a radio announcer who used it two days later as the focus of an interview with a Reform rabbi from Haifa who endorsed the journalist's conclusions.

One more alternative to the Guttman conception was offered by the media before the topic of the Guttman Report disappeared. It began with a column by the distinguished columnist from *Yediot Aharonot*, Nahum Barnea, in the January 9 edition. Barnea did not challenge the Guttman conception, indeed, unlike prior journalists he argued that the "general findings were to be expected, practically obvious." But, he argued, the details were wrong. His evidence to refute the details were based primarily on "common sense" and an appeal to the reader's own behavior. Barnea's second point, repeating in part what Sivan said and duplicating what many of the Van Leer participants felt, was that it was inappropriate to label the observance of practices embedded in Jewish history or Israeli society as the observance of religious norms. It was impossible, according to Barnea, to find an appropriate label for this behavior. "Anyone who tries to measure the religiosity of Israelis is destined to confound himself in a maze of internal contradictions."

The effort to belittle the report—the general conclusions are obvious and well known, the details are wrong—was followed, a few days later, by a more serious attack on both the report and the Guttman conception. The noted satirist B. Michael, in his January 14 column, slammed the Report under the heading "We are all 'Religious'." Michael used the derogatory term *dosim* instead of the Hebrew word *datim* for "religious." (*Dosim* is the Ashkenazic pronunciation of the word, but its usage is heavy with pejorative overtones. It is, in many respects equivalent to the term *nigger* for an American black or *redneck* for a white southerner. It connotes, at its kindest, a caricature of a *haredi*.) The author is distressed by the fact that the Guttman Report "raised concern and depression in the heart of the secularists" and that "a number of respected journalists even relied, sadly, on the result of the research to bewail the death of secularism." Michael charged that the Avi-Chai Foundation, which commissioned the report,

has a religious ax to grind and that the authors of the report formulated their conclusions to suit the Avi-Chai Foundation's religious agenda. Michael refrains from mentioning the fact that the report was produced by the Guttman Institute. Since the Guttman Institute's reputation for impartial survey research is unimpeachable, it seems likely that he chose to confine himself to the Avi-Chai Foundation for polemical purposes.

Michael cites Barnea and agrees that the accuracy of the report's figures are doubtful. He seeks to demonstrate that the questions were biased and therefore led to the findings of high levels of observance. The alternative conception was expressed in the concluding section under the subtitle "So what are we?" It read:

We are just a plain nation. With one quarter religious and three-quarters non-religious. A nation that enjoys participating in its ethnic folklore, like every other nation, whether it is called Christmas or whether it is called *Hanukkah*. A nation, that like any other nation has its superstitions, whether it is a mezuzah against traffic accidents or a cross against vampires.

THE END OF THE STORY

During the last week in December a few weeklies that had not carried the Guttman story before did so now. Most followed the outlines of the press release. Further mention of the report in the daily press or on television was generally a hook to a discussion of some other topic, such as the nature of secularism in Israeli life, civil marriage, or the issue of burying a non-Jewish army officer in the Jewish section of a military cemetery. This last issue aroused some excitement toward the end of the year. The *haredi* press defended the decision to bury the deceased in a plot distanced from Jews by referring to the Guttman Report finding that the majority of Israelis prefer to be buried in accordance with religious norms. Tom Segev, a well-known journalist, also made the connection in his weekly column in the December 31 issue of *Ha'Aretz*.

In January, *haredi* Knesset member Avraham Ravitz requested a discussion of the Guttman Report on the floor of the Knesset. He raised the issue, he claimed, so that in the future, Knesset members would no longer refer to the religious as a minority and to the secular as the majority. Only the *haredi* press reported that story.

The argument that religious Jews constitute a majority in Israeli society, which the *haredi* press, and Ravitz in its wake, reported, had additional consequences. If the religious are really a majority, then *haredi* leaders and the *haredi* press have a responsibility for Israeli society that

they had, heretofore, eschewed. *Haredi* writer Moshe Grilack, writing a guest column in a secular weekly on December 30 and basing it on the Guttman Report, concluded that:

As long as we [*haredim*] believed that the secular majority abhors the Torah of Israel and us, the small minority of religious, we despaired of any chance of a positive tie with them. We abandoned all our ties to that public [leaving these ties] to the politicians and functionaries. And they, quite properly, devoted all their efforts to obtaining benefits for the minority of religious, ignoring entirely the deep spiritual needs of the majority about whom we knew nothing. The survey requires us, therefore, to rethink our priorities. To recall that the general public is much closer to us than the noise of the politicians and newsmen had allowed us to imagine.

The same point, albeit more judiciously expressed, was made the following day in *Ha'Modia*. The author maintained that since the *haredi* press is now shown to represent the vast majority of society, its responsibility is a heavy one, demanding nothing less than "professional retraining" and a new attitude to public controversies.

Soul searching was not limited to the *haredim*. An article in the leftist daily *Al Hamishmar* on December 31 appeared under the heading "The Secular Minority." The writer noted that the religious are a minority, but, as the Guttman Report demonstrated, real secularists, like himself, are also a minority. A lengthy and thoughtful article in a local weekly, *Tzfon Ha'Yr*, under the heading "There Is A God" sought to understand, from a secular point of view, the need for religion that the Guttman Report demonstrated. The author concluded that secularists have no explanation for Jewish history or Jewish survival.

On March 6, *Ha'Aretz* published a review of the Guttman Report by Yitzhak Roeh, a journalist and faculty member of the Hebrew University's Department of Communications. The review was written in a polemical tone. Leaving that aside, and his charge that the survey's questions were biased, Roeh repeated the same arguments raised by some of the participants at the Van Leer conference of December 26. These are discussed in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.8.

2. This survey is based on material submitted to the Avi-Chai Foundation by a press clipping service commissioned for that purpose. My hunch is that almost but not quite everything was collected by the press clipping service. I have no doubt, however, that even if a few references to the report were overlooked, nothing of major importance was omitted.

3. An important exception to this rule was during Shulamit Aloni's tenure as minister of education and culture. Any statement, reference, or even innuendo by Aloni that might have been interpreted as challenging the Jewish tradition or the Jewish nature of Israeli society was seized upon by the press in full knowledge that this would be a matter of embarrassment to the minister.

4. For example, a story on February 10 in *Ha'Modia*, one of the *haredi* dailies, described in troubled tones the phenomenon of nonreligious and Jewishly ignorant Russian immigrants with calligraphic skills seeking to make a living by preparing parchments for *mezuzot*. A *mezuzah* is a parchment in which words from the Torah are inscribed. Jews are commanded to attach a *mezuzah* to each of the doorposts of their home. The journalist makes a passing reference to the Guttman Report, which reported that over 90 percent of Israeli Jews attach *mezuzot* to their door frames.

5. This phrase, a biblical adaptation, resonates among Israelis with good political memories. *Davar* readers, many if not most of whom were political functionaries of one kind or another, no doubt possessed good political memories. It recalls the 1982 postelection television broadcast. As the polls closed, the only Israeli television channel at that time announced that exit poll results forecast a Likud victory. The cameras then switched to Likud election headquarters where a Likud supporter shouted, "there is a God."

6. Each of the dailies is associated with a different *haredi* party. For purposes of this chapter, the differences among the *haredi* parties are of no substance. They all portrayed the Guttman Report in the same manner.

7. See Amnon Levy, "The Haredi Press and Secular Society," in Charles S. Liebman (ed.), *Secular and Religious: Conflict and Accommodation Between Jews in Israel* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1990), pp. 21–44.

8. Charles S. Liebman, "The Entry of Haredim into the Government Coalition in Light of their Responses to the Yom Kippur War," *Iyunim*, vol. 3 (in Hebrew), pp. 380–93, and in English "Paradigms Sometimes Fit: *Haredi* Responses to the Yom Kippur War," *Israel Affairs*, no. 3 (Spring, 1995), pp. 171–84. Reprinted in Robert Wistrich and David Ohana (eds.), *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Memory, Myth and Trauma* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 171–84.

9. It is unlikely that the *haredi* journalists who reported the fact that the authors were all secularists actually bothered to check their facts. In

fact, it isn't true; certainly not by the Guttman Report's criteria. Rather than suggesting to me that the *haredi* journalists were careless, I suspect it is a sign of the compartmentalization that is so basic to the *haredi* mentality. Non-*haredi* Jews both are and are not part of an authentic Jewish world depending very much on the context. When individuals function in their capacity as academics, as social scientists in particular, they are assumed to be outside the "real" Jewish world unless they identify themselves as part of it. Curiously, however, it also shows how the *haredi* press didn't really internalize their own conception of the Guttman Report findings.