Religion and the Israeli Welfare State: The Case of Burial Services

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Abstract: In recent years, the welfare state literature has been witnessing a "religious turn," (re)reminding us the pivotal role of religion in shaping the modern welfare state. Notwithstanding its theoretical importance, this turn has been largely confined to European, North American, and antipodean settings. By drawing upon the historical case of Israeli burial services, this study seeks to make a modest step in closing this theoretical and empirical gap. Specifically, its findings point to the historical role of the Judaism in establishing universal burial services, funded by the state and operated almost exclusively by religious burial societies. Moreover, this policy legacy, which already had its roots in the British Mandate rule, is still at work, even in an era of "permanent austerity." These findings problematize mainstream historical observations, which view the Israeli welfare state as a secular project, by suggesting a more nuanced and progressive role for Judaism in its history.

INTRODUCTION

Given the historical and current political impact of religion (Grzymala-Busse 2012), it is surprising that welfare state scholars have been slower to take religion seriously, and tended to underestimate its role in shaping the modern welfare state. During the last decade, however, social policy literature has been witnessing a "religious turn," reminding us of the nearly forgotten obvious: that religion and religious cleavages have always been part and parcel of the modern welfare state (Morgan 2006; Manow and Van Kersbergen 2009; Markkola and Naumann 2014). Although providing us with a fresh and productive lens to

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analyze welfare state stability and change, until recently this turn has been largely confined to European, North American, and antipodean settings, ignoring the potential unique role of non-Christian regions, including the Middle East (for exceptions, see, Jawad 2009; Gal 2010; Jawad and Yakut-Cakar 2010; Zehavi 2013; Eseed 2018). Similarly, and quite surprisingly, despite the importance of Judaism in shaping public life in Israel, it has been largely marginalized in the historiography of the Israeli welfare state.

The current study seeks to narrow this gap by examining the historical development of a specific policy domain: Israeli burial services. The choice of this case study was guided by two main considerations. First, although integral of the welfare state "cradle to grave" ethos, burial services has always been a neglected area of study (Valentine and Woodthorpe 2014). Second, hitherto most religious-based research has been largely based on a macro-scale perspective, with relatively little place given to domain-specific analysis. Since the impact of religion is not universal but contingent on its particular historical involvement in each domain (Markkola and Naumann 2014; Pavolini, Béland, and Jawad 2017), such domain-specific analysis can be of great potential. This is especially the case in policy areas that do not directly involve class conflict (Manow 2004) and where historically religion had a say, making the "burial industry" a leading candidate. Using a domain-specific analysis will allow us to better understand "annoying outliers" (Van Kersbergen 2003)—cases that do not follow the well-known Esping-Andersen's (1990) threefold welfare states typology: liberal, conservative, and social-democratic regimes. In our case, this will enable us not only to understand why the Israeli welfare state, with its liberal tendency, was unique in providing universal and generous burial services, but also why this universal structure was immune to retrenchment measures during a period of "permanent austerity" (Pierson 1998). The answer to this puzzle, I argue, lies in the pivotal role of Judaism in shaping these services.

To develop the argument, this paper first highlights some of the main approaches to welfare state formation and change, and then proceeds with a detailed discussion of the interrelated political, institutional, and ideational role of religion in these processes. Following this discussion, it outlines some of the theoretical prisms through which the Israeli welfare state has been addressed, and emphasizes the limited role given to Judaism in these accounts. The paper then stresses the varied responses of the modern welfare states in relation to burial costs. Next, the Israeli

case is presented, based on various archive and library sources. The paper concludes with a discussion of the research findings and its limitations.

Religion and the Modern Welfare State

Various welfare state theories have been put forward to explain the historical development of the modern welfare state. Employing the power resources theory, many scholars have pointed to the importance of class politics, highlighting the working class's ability to mobilize and gain political influence (e.g., Korpi 2006), as well its ability to build alliances with agrarian and middle-class interests (Esping-Andersen 1990). Others have emphasized the significance of institutions and their self-reinforcing processes, often leading to path-dependency and stability (Pierson 2000). In recent years, a growing number of scholars have also underscored the role of ideas (e.g., Béland and Cox 2011). This ideational causal pathway can be realized in a broad sense where ideas are defined as road-maps or paradigms and serve as an "intellectual path dependency" (Holler 2017) that reproduces institutions and policies over time. Simultaneously, it can also be realized more narrowly, where ideas are defined as concrete solutions and behaviors.

Despite their merits, until recently these approaches have failed to take religion seriously, either neglecting its role in shaping social policies (Van Kersbergen 2003; Morgan 2006; Manow and Van Kersbergen 2009) or associating it with regressive sentiments (Jawad 2009). Fortunately, during the last decade, the social policy discipline has been witnessing a "religious turn," which reminds us that religion has always been central to the modern welfare state (Cnaan et al. 2002; Morgan 2006; Markkola and Naumann 2014). In the burgeoning literature on religion and social policy, one can find three interrelated mechanisms by which the former influences the latter. Although not always identified as such, these mechanisms are in tune with the abovementioned political, institutional and ideational frameworks, only now they have a religious "twist."

First, religion exerts its influence by being a central actor in the partisan arena, often comparable to that of its social-democratic counterparts. Indeed, in contrast to the (tacit) premise of the power resources theory, citizens are not always mobilized politically along class lines, but rather along different kinds of social categories, among them their religion affiliation (Stegmueller et al. 2012). Importantly, however, the dominance of the religious cleavage and its manifestation in politics is not a universal

phenomenon but is rather contingent on a historical and institutional legacy, which in the European case dates back to the nineteenth-century national revolution (Lipset and Rokkan 1967).

Second, religion takes part in shaping the modern welfare state by being a key stakeholder and by providing welfare services through faith-based organizations. For example, as Morgan (2006) convincingly demonstrates, religious divisions in nineteenth-century Germany led to the establishment of a strong, religion-based voluntary sector, which soon became a key player in the provision of preschool programs and an influential voice in future political debates.

Third, in addition to its political and institutional influence, religion has an impact on society through ideas and values. For example, Kahl's (2009) comparative-historical analysis of modern poverty policy points to the important role denominational social doctrines played in shaping both perspectives and solutions to poverty, even long after the latter became the responsibility of the state.

Finally, note that these three mechanisms are highly interrelated. In fact, it is rarely the case that religion (or any other social category) shapes social policy development by a single mechanism. A good example is the impact of Christian Democratic parties, which was grounded in both political interests (e.g., seeking the working-class votes) and in Catholic social doctrine (e.g., helping the poor and stabilizing society) (Manow and Van Kersbergen 2009). As detailed below, this complex set of mechanisms is also evident in the Israeli case.

The Absence of Religion in the Historiography of the Israeli Welfare State

Judaism has historically played an important role in public life in Israel. Quite surprisingly, however, it has been largely marginalized in the historiography of the Israeli welfare state. This historiography has offered us several main perspectives. The first has viewed the development of the Israeli welfare state as resulting mainly from a class struggle, attributing its formation to the hegemonic power of the Zionist Labor Movement (e.g., Kanev 1964). This narrative has often been accompanied by a functionalist, modernist, and optimistic logic according to which the Israeli welfare system, and its origins in the British mandate period, was a necessary reaction to the growing needs of the Jewish community in Palestine, given the inability of faith-based systems to address them.

Interestingly, later scholars employed this class prism to underscore some of the limitations of the early Israeli welfare state, including its over-emphasis on wage labor and its reluctance to provide a rights-based safety net to working age citizens. By adding an ideational perspective, they depict the Labor Movement's ideology of work ethic as a major force behind this limited social protection (e.g., Doron and Kramer 1976).

Critical research has added national, ethnic, gender perspectives. Shalev (1992) and Rosenhek (2004) emphasized the Zionists' nation-building and class interests as a major force in shaping the Israeli welfare state (see also Gal 2008). Maryoma-Marom (2010) stressed the internal conflict between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews (from Europe and North America, and from Asia and Africa, respectively). Helman (2011) underscored the pivotal role of ideological discourses around gender roles (see also Ajzenstadt and Gal 2001; Herbst and Benjamin 2012). Other critical scholars noted the role of actors such as the middle class and bureaucrats (Gal 1998), business firms (Gal 2005), and the state's economic interests (Koreh 2017). Finally, various scholars sought to explain the recent restructuring of the welfare state by addressing the rise of the neo-liberal project (Maron and Shalev 2017), the declining power of the Labor Movement and the growing emphasis on multi-culturalism and identity politics (Doron 2007).

Despite the important contribution of these narratives, they all tend to marginalize, if not exclude, Judaism and religious cleavages from this complex history. These studies have either ignored the organizing power of Judaism in shaping the Israeli welfare state or ascribed a regressive role to it. The current study seeks to narrow this theoretical and empirical gap by demonstrating the significant and even progressive role of Judaism and the religious cleavage in shaping the Israeli welfare state, at least in some of its aspects. I will examine this claim through the case study of burial services.

Burial Services and the Welfare State

Burial and funeral services are a major source of economic hardship fol-lowing the death of a family member. Considering the additional, indirect costs of death and the potential loss of income due to this event, they are an immediate financial concern, often pushing families into debt and even poverty (Foster and Woodthorpe 2016). This is where the modern welfare state comes into play: "while funerals are created by death, they are regu-lated by social factors" (Pine and Phillips 1970, 414). From the scarce

research available, it would appear that like other policy areas, there is significant variation in the level and nature of states' support for burial costs. In a recent comparative analysis of 12 capitalist democratic societies, Valentine and Woodthorpe (2014) suggest that this variation corresponds to Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology.

Specifically, in social-democratic welfare states (e.g., Sweden and Finland), market forces play a relatively marginal role, with the state being responsible for funding, and sometime operating, universal services. This kind of state involvement also characterizes corporatist countries (e.g., Germany and France), but in these cases the involvement is mainly channeled through workplace insurance policies. In liberal welfare states, on the other hand, burial services are market-led with only residual and stigmatized state-subsidized schemes for the very poor. A prime example is the UK, where in the late 1980s the Thatcher Welfare Reform abolished the Death Grant—a universal scheme covering the costs of all families—and replaced it with the Funeral Payment: a means-tested program for the poorest.

Unlike other liberal welfare states, the Israeli burial industry is heavily and universally subsidized and regulated by the state. Specifically, the National Insurance Institute (NII) pays full burial expenses for *every person* buried in Israel, and for every *Israeli resident* who dies aboard. The goal of the current study is to explore the development of the this welfare system and to understand why in contrast to other liberal welfare states, Israel burial services have been constituted as a social right. To do so, I will refocus the analytical frame on the unique role of Jewish religion in Israeli society.[1]

THE CASE STUDY: BURIAL SERVICES IN ISRAEL

The State-Religion Nexus

Several features are central to the powerful state-religion nexus in Israel. First and foremost, despite the fact that the religious community is a minority among Israeli Jews (Arian and Keissar-Sugarmen 2011), Jewish religion has always played a central role in both the private and public spheres (Fox and Rynhold 2008; Rubin 2013), leaving Israel with a low level of separation of state and religion.

Second, in line with other Continental countries, religious parties, established already in the pre-statehood period, were (and have remained) part

and parcel of the Israeli political system. Relatedly, given the Israeli proportional electoral system, it has been historically difficult to form governments without a multiparty coalition, enabling small parties, particularly religious ones, to wield disproportionate power. Thus, at least one religious party has nearly always been part of coalition governments (Don-Yehiya 1975; Rubin 2013).

Third, Israel's religious community is far from unified, with the central distinction being between the ultra-Orthodox and Zionist-Orthodox groups. The linking of Zionism and Judaism has turned the latter into a political mainstream group, and parties representing this movement continuously formed part of the ruling coalitions, led by Mapai, the labor party, for the first three decades after statehood (Rubin 2013). Under these coalitions, the Zionist-religious party was given control of the ministries most relevant to its concerns, including the Ministry of Religious Services and the Ministry of Social Welfare. The former, in particular, was pivotal in shaping burial policy.

Fourth, historically, the religious cleavage in Jewish Israeli society has been regulated by a "status quo" agreement. Originally aimed at ensuring the collaboration of the religious communities with the Zionist project, this agreement is a tacit compromise whereby state institutions remain formally secular while some major private and public areas, such as marriage and public transportation, are governed by Jewish religious principles and when necessary, administered by religious bodies (Ben-Porat 2013). The agreement calls for the preservation of the institutional landscape and rejects any unilateral attempts at change. Although this consociational agreement has been variously interpreted throughout the years and strained by social and technological developments (Don-Yehiya 1975), it is still the basis for religion-state relations in Israel (Rubin 2013). As will be see below, it also applies to burial services.

Fifth, although the Zionist project was originally a national, secular project and even a revolt against "Diaspora Judaism," it soon became clear to its supporters that in order to accomplish its goals, Jewish nationalism had to be defined in religious terms, rather than civic ones (Ram 2008). Consequently, although many Israeli Jews define themselves as secular, or non-religious, there is strong legitimacy among them for a religious public sphere (Fox and Rynhold 2008). Here too, the burial industry is a prime example.

Finally, despite the legitimacy of the religious-based public sphere, religion has deeply divided Jewish-Israeli society (Blackstone, Matsubayashi, and Oldmixon 2014). Throughout the years, the implementation of the

status quo agreement, the compromises it has required, and its ongoing revisions, have all antagonized religious and non-religious Jews (Don-Yehiya 1975). Interestingly, this religious conflict—evident also in the burial services context—has tended to mask the traditional class division.

Jewish Burial Traditions

As may be gleaned from the story of the burial of Sarah the Matriarch,[2] Jewish burial was originally a private family affair. However, by the Talmudic period (circa 70–640 CE) burial ceremonies became community affairs, and by the Middle Ages there is evidence of institutionalized ceremonies held by religious local burial societies, termed Hevra Kadisha (literally, "holy society," Hevrot Kadisha in the plural) (Wachtel 1999).

A key characteristic of Jewish burial, particularly pertinent to our purposes as it distinguishes it from Christian burial customs, is the relative uniformity of ceremonies for people of different classes (Wachtel 1999). This egalitarianism is manifested in different ways, from the simplicity of the preparations, through the simplicity of the ceremonies, to the simplicity of the tombstones. All these tend to make Jewish burial relatively economically accessible.

Jewish Burial in the British Mandate Period

Much like other policy domains, Jewish burial service system in Israel developed within an institutional legacy. On the eve of statehood, they were provided almost exclusively by the traditional local Hevrot Kadisha that operated, institutionally, as private, non-profit local organizations, and were headed by Orthodox Jews, Zionist, and non-Zionist alike. This arrangement was based on British Mandate legislation, which itself was a heritage from Ottoman Millet system (Don-Yehiya 1975), and had important implications.

First, it meant that Jewish burial was almost totally dominated by Hevrot Kadisha with their Orthodox religious customs, as it still is. Thus, in keeping with Jewish tradition, burials tended to be characterized by simplicity and uniformity, with only minor differences of social and economic status. Second, due to ineffective regulations, these burial societies were autonomous and almost completely independent of control and supervision by official Zionist bodies, including religious ones. This lack of regulation also meant that this was a multi-player system, with several

Hevrot Kadisha often operating in the same town, mostly based on ethnic or religious-organizational affiliation (Interministerial Review Committee Report on Burial Arrangements in Israel 1958).

A third implication is that financially, throughout the Mandate period burial services were provided in return for private payment by family members, the smaller part of which was given for the funeral service prior to the actual burial and the larger when the tombstone was placed. The amount was usually determined by the burial society based on a Jewish progressive principle (Letter from Zerach Warhaftig 1954).[3] This form of charging for services, that was based largely on subjective estimation of the family's economic means and was devoid of any effective regulation, raised considerable objections, mostly among the secular Zionists who felt that the religious burial societies were exploiting people in their hour of grief (Davar 1943).

Burial Services in the Early Statehood Period

Israeli statehood was accompanied by the creation of a social security system, the cornerstone of which was the NII, founded in 1954. Based chiefly on the British model (Gal 2010), this system was designed to provide protection against the crises of life, including unemployment, sickness, old age, and death (Doron and Kramer 1991). The latter was to be achieved, inter alia, through a burial grant scheme. However, as with other NII programs, the attempt to establish the burial grant scheme met with multiple difficulties. The key difficulty being that the new player on the block threatened previous players that had provided such protection prior to statehood. In contrast to other policy schemes, such as health insurance, this difficulty did not lead to the program's exclusion from the NII legislation, but to its implementation in a way that did not unduly compromise the interests of current service providers—the Hevrot Kadisha—and the religious status quo they represented (Doron 1967). To achieve this, policy makers had to address two major legislative questions: who would be the direct beneficiaries of burial grants and how they would be administered.

Regarding the first question, policy makers were faced with three options. The first, copied directly from the British model as established following the Beveridge Report (Valentine and Woodthorpe 2014), was to provide a lump sum grant directly to the families, enabling them to purchase burial services in the free market. Although this option had been

suggested both in the Kanev Report (Interministerial Committee for the Planning of a Program of Social Insurance 1950)—the Israeli doppel-ganger of the Beveridge Report—and in the first drafts of the NII bill, it was quickly pushed off the table as the new state wished to tighten its supervision of burial societies (Minutes of the Knesset 1953).

This left the planners with two options: nationalize all burial services, or leave things as they were and settle for (partial) subsidization of Hevrot Kadisha services. The first option was supported by secular parlia-mentarians who opposed the practices of religious burial societies and saw in the envisioned NII with its burial grant program an opportunity for radical reform. For example, Ben-Zion Harel—a representative of the liberal middle-class General Zionists party—argued that "this opportunity must be used to do away with all those 'Hevra Kadisha' [sic]" and their tendency to bargain with families in the difficult moment of having lost their loved ones (Minutes of the Labour Sub-Committee for the National Insurance Bill 1953a). Many Jewish citizens subscribed to this sentiment, as they considered the practices of Hevrot Kadisha inappropri-ate, if not corrupt (daily newspapers, e.g., published numerous negative reports on Hevrot Kadisha, their fees and alleged corruption, e.g., Blum 1950). The fact that the new state considered subsidizing burial services represented for this constituency a historical opportunity for altering the status quo.

In face of staunch opposition by the religious parties and the Hevrot Kadisha, the Ministry of Labor, led by the dominant Labor Movement party Mapai, opposed this option, arguing that the state had no justifi-cation or authority to change the status quo and to secularize the burial services "through the back door" of the NII bill (Minutes of the Labour Sub-Committee for the National Insurance Bill 1953a). This typically pragmatic approach recognized the political conflict involved in changing the status quo and reflected the ministry's desire not to have the NII legislation encumbered by this supposedly minor issue. Consequently, the second option was chosen: Hevrot Kadisha will continue providing burial services while the NII will subsidize them directly.

After resolving the ownership issue, the battle over the second question began: how to administer the scheme and particularly, whether, and how much, burial societies would be allowed to charge in addition to the burial grant. Indeed, another demand raised in the course of the legislation process, mainly by secular representatives, some of them laissez faire lib-erals who otherwise oppose state's intervention in the market, was to cap

this charge or even prohibit it completely (Minutes of the Labour Sub-Committee for the National Insurance Bill 1953a). Conversely, the societies demanded maximum latitude to charge additional payments, mainly for buying the burial plot and for the license to place a gravestone. These payments had been collected for decades, and the societies argued that the grant proposed would not cover their costs, and that this could only be done through such private payments. This argument was supported by representatives of the Ministry of Religious Services, who feared that any limit on these private payments, let alone their prohibition, would "destroy the Hevrot Kadisha" (Memorandum sent to the Deputy Minister of Religious Services 1955).

This issue was raised during parliamentary debates but as with other conflictual religious issues(Galnoor and Blander 2013), in order to avoid disagreements, the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) committee decided to postpone the decision until after the creation of the NII and pass this hot potato on to the regulatory phase (Minutes of the Labour Sub-Committee for the National Insurance Bill 1953b). There, in view of the societies' resistance on the one hand and the disinclination of the NII representatives to raise the burial grant to cover the entire costs on the other, the latter compromised and agreed to allow the societies considerable independence. Accordingly, the societies could continue charging extra for two services: choosing the grave's location and the gravestone license—without any upper limit. These payments, it was proposed, could be charged only after the actual burial, to prevent any extortion from the family in the immediate aftermath of its disaster.

This compromise by the NII officials was motivated by their realization that no regulations could be applied without taking the religious parties and burial societies' position into account. Not only was the consent of the Knesset Finance committee (which included representatives of these parties) required, but on a practical level, NII officials realized that successful implementation of the law would require smooth cooperation with the multiple burial societies throughout the country, and that their acceptance of the new regulations was essential for that purpose. Just as important, it was also clear to NII officials that the Ministry of Religious Services was a key mediator between them and the burial societies, and that the new regulations need to be acceptable to it as well.

The Consolidation Period

The NII Law, and with it the burial grant scheme, was finally approved in the Knesset in late 1953, with the relevant regulations finalized in the Finance Committee in May 1955 (Minutes of the Finance Committee 1955). The scheme's acceptance enabled, on the one hand, the maintenance of the status quo, thereby allowing the Hevrot Kadisha to continue operating as a quasi-monopoly service provider for Israeli Jews. On the other hand, unlike the Mandate period, this service was now under tighter state supervision.

All of these had three major implications. First, the Israeli public, and in particular its Jewish sector, began viewing burial services as a public good they were entitled to by virtue of their national insurance. Second, the state itself began taking responsibility for this area. Third, and just as important, the law produced a relationship of mutual dependence. In that sense, like the Israeli public, the burial societies, some of which were headed by non-Zionist Ultra-Orthodox, now regarded state as an entity they could turn to with demands, including financial ones.

Following the establishment of the NII, the Israeli welfare system went through a prolonged growth process, reflected in the establishment of new social security schemes and in the expansion and rationalization of existing ones (Gal 2004). The burial grant scheme was no exception. In the 1960s, and mainly in the 1970s, the law and its entitlements were greatly expanded and rationalized. This was first manifested in the number of grantees. In 1962, it was determined that the right to burial grants would not be denied due to debts to the NII (Sade 1962), and in 1969 it was decided that everyone who died and was buried in Israel, as well as insured residents who died outside Israel, would be entitled to burial grants. These extensions toward universality of the scheme were unusual in comparison to other NII schemes (National Insurance Bill 1969).

Another, more significant expansion was the increase of the burial subsidy. The legislation and regulation did not meet the public need, or the interests of the various stakeholders. As far as the burial societies were concerned, it quickly became clear that the law did not resolve and, to a certain extent, even exacerbated the friction between the societies and the public, who felt there was no justification for any additional, unregulated, and unlimited private payments (e.g., Zartal 1966). Given the constant pressure by Hevrot Kadisha and their Orthodox political sponsors, the NII and the Ministry of Religious Services began negotiating

with them based on the agreed-upon principle that the burial grant would be significantly increased and extra family payments reduced. This negotiation, mired by considerable suspicion by both parties, continued for several years. The parties' inability to reach an agreement led them to petition the High Court of Justice, which eventually led to a compromise agreement in June 1976. With minor changes, this agreement became law and in the following August, the new regulations were approved by a Knesset committee (Minutes of the Finance Committee 1976).

The new regulations included several key changes. First, burial grants were significantly increased to cover direct burial costs, and were linked to the average wage. Second, in return the societies were no longer allowed to charge the families for a gravestone license. Third, since the agreement was designed to cover only direct costs and it was clear that the increase would not cover all the costs incurred by Hevrot Kadisha, they were allowed to charge extra when the cemeteries were crowded, for burial in special plots, and for buying plots before death.

Burial Services at a Time of "Permanent Austerity"

As with many other Western welfare states, since the early 1980s the Israeli welfare state has experienced strong pressures for restructuring and even retrenchment, leading to several major changes, including tightening eligibility criteria, expanding the use of income-testing and reducing benefit levels (Gal 2004). However, the burial grant scheme was an exception.

First, in contrast to other liberal welfare states (Valentine and Woodthorpe 2014), throughout this period of "permanent austerity" (Pierson 1998), the restructuring of the Israeli burial scheme, and basing it on more selective foundations, was not even on the political agenda. The fact that the Israeli scheme was an in-kind benefit delivered directly to the Jewish burial societies, and the fact that its gradual expansion turned it into a substantial program for most Israeli citizens, made its restructuring politically unrealistic.

Second, changes made in other related bills expanded the social right to burial services. A major expansion had to do with regulating private family payments. As mentioned above, the 1976 agreement allowed the societies to charge payments in several special cases, particularly when buying a plot before death. This meant that anyone interested in being buried near his/her deceased partner—a highly common practice in

Jewish-Israeli society with roots in Jewish law—had to pay extra to the burial society with these payments unregulated by any state entity. In July 2001, following a long period of public demand, a new bill was enacted, specifying the amount of fees each Hevra Kadisha was allowed to charge (Minutes of the Knesset 2001).

A key factor behind for this expansion was the fact that it required no additional state funding. Another had to do with the resentment felt by many secular Israelis toward the ultra-Orthodox establishment and the burial societies in particular. The fact that the societies have been historically funded by the state and that the Israeli public considered them a social right only exacerbated that resentment, leading public representatives—many of them neoliberals otherwise opposed to state intervention—to support greater regulation in this areas (Minutes of the Knesset 2001). A third, somewhat surprising, factor was the support of the ultra-Orthodox parties. Although during the first years after statehood their public was isolationist and highly suspicious of state authorities, by the 1980s its representatives, especially the newly established Shas party (Sarfati 2013), have become an integral part of the government and its institutions and were no longer afraid that state intervention would compromise the religious nature of burial services. At the same time, they realized that without proper regulations, the friction between the societies and the secular public would only exacerbate (Minutes of the Knesset 2001).

Finally, during the recent decades of "permanent austerity," Jewish burial services became diversified, with growing numbers of families consuming secular services in the free market (Ben-Porat 2013). Due to various factors, including huge number of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (a third of whom were not recognized as Jews by the ultra-Orthodox establishment), the growing consumer culture, and society-wide processes of individualization, there has been growing demand for burial services that are not based on harsh Orthodox principles or indeed any religious principles at all. As Ben-Port (2013) notes, this demand has been increasingly met by the free market.

Most importantly, however, this commercialization process has not eroded the state's involvement in burial services and has not led to it being dominated by a neoliberal imperative. First, these kinds of civil burials are still the exception, mainly because of the fact that the vast majority of Jewish-Israelis, including secular, still favor a religious burial service (Arian and Keissar-Sugarmen 2011). Moreover, the demand for civil services and increased freedom of choice is coupled with a demand for growing state intervention and for expanding the

social right for burial services. In the mid-1990s, the Right to Alternative Civil Burial Law, 5756-1996 was passed, acknowledging the right for civil services. As in the case of religious services, and as part of an attempt to equalize the conditions of both service types, the law determines that civil services be provided through private NGOs, licensed by the Ministry of Religious Services and funded by the NII. Despite the law's limping implementation, largely due to the ministry's initial opposition, insufficient allocation of lands for civil cemeteries and, of course, the religious burial societies' opposition, secular organizations, and the NGOs that offer this services have won a series of political and legal battles and have been gradually turning this right into a reality (Almo 2019). Although still on a rather limited scale, civil burial is becoming public.

DISCUSSION

This paper builds on the work of recent welfare state scholars who have reminded us of the important role of religion and religious cleavages in shaping the modern welfare state. In line with this recent "religious turn," our findings suggest that when it comes to burial services, "God is most certainly not dead" (Grzymala-Busse 2012, 433). Specifically, these findings highlight the political, institutional, and ideational role of the Jewish religion, which jointly enable us to understand not only why the Israeli welfare state, with its liberal tendency, was unique in providing universal and generous burial services, but also why this universal structure was immune to retrenchment measures during the last decades of "permanent austerity" (Pierson 1998).

At the *political* level, the fierce religious cleavage dating back to Zionist nation-building efforts, the formation of Jewish religious parties, and their ability to enforce the status quo, have all led to the establishment of universal burial services, funded primarily by the Israeli state and operated almost exclusively by Orthodox Jewish burial societies and in accordance with religious Orthodox rituals. Note that historically, Zionism not only competed with the religious establishment and culture, but also leaned on them. In building the Israeli nation, Zionism depended on Jewish symbols, sources and boundary-work informed by religious principles for three main reasons: Judaism's dual nature as a national as well as a religious group (Kimmerling 1999; Ram 2008); the need to justify the Jews' right to settle in Palestine, "The Land of Israel" (Kimmerling 2001); and the related need to justify the displacement of the indigenous

Palestinian population both internally and externally. This unique characteristic of the Israeli nation-building project was also significant in the process of constructing its welfare system. The case of funerary services is highly instructive in that regard. A monopoly was granted to the religious burial societies not due to the weakness of the new state vis-à-vis the religious establishment, but out of the political leaders' realization that successful construction of the Israeli nation would require integrating that establishment in the emerging fabric of public life.

Another key political factor has been the ongoing participation of religious parties in governing coalitions, including the historical alliance between the Zionist-religious party and Mapai—the Israeli labor party. This reminds us that the (hi)story of the welfare state is very much a story of political class coalitions, and whereas in some cases this has been a red-green coalition, in others, as with the Israeli experience as an extreme example, it has been a red-black one, between Social Democratic parties and religious parties (Manow and Van Kersbergen 2009). Importantly, in contrast to the European "parties of religious defence" which confined themselves mainly to defending the autonomy and interests of church institutions (Manow and Van Kersbergen 2009), Jewish religious parties have historically been more ambitious. They participated in government coalitions in order to radically change Israeli society and leave "the imprint of religious Judaism on the state as a whole" (Don-Yehiya 1975, 102). As our case illustrates, burial services were an essential part of this vision.

Interestingly, the political influence of religion was expressed also in its reshaping of the political interests of the various actors. Specifically, it turned secular free market advocates into supporters of state intervention. From their point of view, such intervention was supposed to counterbalance the political power of the religious actors in the welfare arena.

At the *institutional* level, the fact that on the eve of statehood the Jewish burial industry was led by religious burial societies, serving as a powerful interest group trying to move its interests and vision forward, had a long-lasting legacy. Moreover, and in relation to the political level, this path-dependency mechanism reminds us that religion exerts its political influence also through more informal channels, including interest group politics (Markkola and Naumann 2014). Finally, our findings suggest that this kind of policy path-dependency (Pierson 2000), which had its roots in the British Mandate rule, is at work even today. Not only were burial services able to avoid retrenchment measures during a period of

"permanent austerity," but additional changes made in this period expanded the state's involvement.

At the *ideational* level, religion set its tone first by providing the underlying framework through which most Jewish Israelis, including secular Jews, relate to death. Second, and very much related to the institutional pathway, our case also highlights the important role of the "status quo" agreement which in many senses has served as a roadmap and an "intellectual path dependency" (Holler 2017) guiding negotiations between religious and secular policy makers (Ben-Porat 2013). Finally, in a more concrete definition of ideas, the egalitarianism of the Jewish burial customs was another major ideational factor in shaping the Israeli burial industry.

These findings regarding the centrality of Judaism in shaping burial services in Israel problematize the common historiographical view of the Israeli welfare state. Perceiving it as a secular and modernist project, that traditional reading has tended to overlook the role of religion in its development or to view it as regressive. In particular, in most historical observations, the narrative has been that of a modern, efficient welfare system—established first by pre-state Zionist institutions and later by the Israeli state apparatus—designed to replace religious, fragmentary, charitable, and clientelistic ones. The findings of the current study give cause for questioning this regressive narrative of religion by suggesting a more nuanced, complex and even progressive role for Judaism and for the religious cleavage in the history of the Israeli welfare state.

This observation joins recent calls (e.g., Gal 2010) to (re)situate the Israeli welfare state within the context of other similar welfare regimes. One prime example is the Mediterranean family of welfare states, in which religion has a pivotal historical and current role. In addition, this observation underscores the necessity of future studies to unpack similarities and differences that might exist also between Israel and other, relatively higher-income welfare states located in the Middle East (e.g., Turkey, Iran, and Lebanon), "the religious capital of the world" (Jawad 2009, 2). Note that similar to the Israeli case, religion, with all its political interests, institutions, and doctrines, has historically had a dominant role in shaping social policy in all these countries, although such impact might be played out differently (Jawad and Yakut-Cakar 2010; Jawad and Gal 2019). Moreover, in these countries, including Israel, organized religion has been highly connected to ethnic and socio-economic cleavages (Sarfati 2013) and its social welfare goals are often part and parcel of its political strategic (Davis and Robinson 2012; Eseed 2018).

Besides reconsidering the common historiographical view of the Israeli welfare state, the findings of the current study also suggest several broader insights with regard to religion and welfare state research. In particular, they point to the importance of domain-specific analysis in studying the role of religion in shaping the modern welfare state. This micro-scale perspective enables us to better understand the conditions under which the role of religion in shaping social polices becomes substantial.

The current study already charts several promising directions for exploring these conditions. In terms of *history*, our case suggests, for example, that a key factor in shaping the role of Jewish religion in funerary policy is its historical involvement in this area, prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. Another, related direction has to do with *timing*—our case suggests that the timing of establishing the state service—when the state and Orthodox Jewish institutes were still mutually suspicious—has also shaped the role of religion. Accordingly, it may be hypothesized that had policy-making in this area occurred in a different period, after state-religion relations have already been institutionalized, then the role of the latter might have been different, or even reduced.

A third direction is related to *content*—mainstream welfare state scholarship has tended to focus on certain "usual suspect" areas, such as employment-related social policies, leaving relatively untouched other policy areas, in which historically religion has been particularly active. Consequently, as Markkola and Naumann (2014) rightly argue, the focus on these traditional areas has masked the continuous role of religion in shaping social policies. This raises an unresolved question for future studies: Does religion "own" or at least have a particular interest in certain policy areas? And relatedly, to what extent does this interest vary across religions?

Finally, the results of the current study should be assessed in light of its limitations. For one, although the Israeli funeral services case illustrates how these three mechanisms—political institutional and ideational—are intertwined, more systematic and cooperative examination is needed to unfold such complex causal relations.

Second, although domain-specific analysis has its merits, it still leaves unexplored some questions regarding the influence of Judaism in other welfare areas. Can it be, for example, that although in the area of burial services state representatives have agreed to a compromise with their religious coalition partners, in others, less sensitive from a Jewish point of view no such compromise has been sought? Similarly, are there areas where religious parties and their constituencies have much greater interest?

To what extent has Judaism played a role in these other programs and what are the conditions under which Judaism does make a difference? Taking juvenile delinquency services as an example, part of their resilience in this neo-liberal period lies in Israeli familism, which is in turn grounded largely in religious values (Ajzenstadt and Khoury-Kassabri 2013; Weiss-Dagan and Cnaan 2020).

Third, this study focuses on Jewish burial services. Formally, paying for burial expenses in Israel is available to every citizen on an equal basis. However, some crucial administrative differences in meeting these expenses exist, as for non-Jewish citizens, for example, the NII payment might be paid under certain circumstances directly to the family (Non Jewish deceased 2020). Moreover, as in many other welfare policies (Rosenhek 2004), discrimination between Jewish and Palestinian Israelis is evident in land allocation for burial purposes, for example. Understanding these discriminatory practices, as well the unique nature of the Muslim and Christian burial industries requires further research. Moreover, from a broader perspective, future research could benefit much from exploring the role of these non-Jewish religions on shaping the Israeli welfare system (for a promising development in this direction, see Eseed 2018).

Fourth, this paper has limited itself to the Israeli context. Although some reference have been made to the British context, with its Beveridge model, more systematic comparative analysis is required if we are to fully grasp the unique influence of Judaism and the ways it is similar or different from the role of other religions in shaping the modern welfare state. A good starting point would be to look more closely at both the ambition of Jewish religious parties to transform Israeli society along theocratic lines, as well as the way the abovementioned conditions—history, timing, and content—are played out in other cases.

Finally, in order to avoid over-complexity, this paper has treated Judaism as a uniform entity. To better understand the full, and sometimes contradictory, role of Judaism, its diversity should be taken into consideration. This could benefit from paying attention to the fact that the differences among the various Jewish currents are related to class and cultural characteristics (Sarfati 2013). Another promising benefit could be found in exploring the recent move of the Zionist-religious movement toward neo-liberal ideology and the supposedly future impact of this ideological shift on the Israeli welfare state.

NOTES

1. The analysis focuses on Jewish services, which dominate the Israeli burial market. The burial services of all religions are covered similarly by the NII, with some discrepancies in support that require further study.

2. Sarah' burial story is the first in the Bible. Wife of Abraham the Patriarch and the first of the four Jewish Matriarchs, she was buried in Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, as were her descendants.

3. Although the Jewish tradition consists of various tax systems with diverse obligations, when viewed together they share common progressive themes, including solicitude for the poor and some sort of redistribution of wealth for ensuring it (Chodorow 2007).

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