Bounding an Elusive Concept: Response to 'Jewish Sectarianism' and the State of Israel
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Given the comparatively limited attention paid to Jewish contention the paper is a welcome addition to the literature. It offers a wide-ranging account of the concept of sectarianism, going on to set out a brief history of Jewish sectarianism before exploring the relevance of the sectarian concept for interpreting contemporary intra-Jewish contention through a series of case studies. Situating discussion within the framework of sectarianism the paper promises insights into the dynamics of inter and intra-group conflict, and in turn, aims to further elucidate the concept of sectarianism through examination of the Jewish case.

The paper is particularly welcome as sectarianism has not commonly been applied to contemporary Jewish contention. Indeed, significant challenges face the effort to apply the idea of sectarianism to Judaism, many of which extend into wider debates about the utility of the sectarian concept. Notably, the extent to which it is appropriate to categorise particular Jewish groups as 'sects' and the difficulty in identifying 'ideal types' that accurately reflect particular groupings; the way the different roles of political power and religious ideology can be overlooked by imputing sectarianism; the pejorative nature of the sect and sectarian concepts; and the difficulty in framing and applying often weakly defined ideas of sectarianism (Stern, 2011). By addressing the conceptualization of sectarianism, situating it historically, and looking at recent examples of conflict, the paper goes some way to acknowledging these concerns, and affords a valuable opportunity to revisit the phenomenon of intra-Jewish claim making. If anything, the paper could go further than it does in drawing out the implications of its exploration of Jewish sectarianism.

In assessing the extent to which the paper achieves its ambition of, first, informing an assessment of intra-Jewish contention, and second, deepening understanding of the concept of sectarianism through an examination of the Jewish case, Baumgarten's (2011) criteria remain useful. In the context of a historical assessment of sectarianism and Judaism, Baumgarten argued the success of a study can be interpreted by the extent to which it made visible previously unexplored features of a particular phenomenon; deepened understanding of the concept of sectarianism through an empirical assessment, and in turn, enhanced understanding of the substance of Jewish contention by applying the idea of sectarianism; and finally, how information that does not fit the theory is handled. In general, the paper is more successful against the first criterion, and goes some way to address the second, but is less able to address the final question.

One of the challenges the paper faces in fulfilling Baumgarten's criteria is the breadth of its account of sectarianism. Drawing together a range of features including ideological division, conflict, legitimacy and truth claims, authenticity, power, obedience, culture, identity, spatial-communal and historical-temporal dimensions, captures a wide array of practices and relations. With this breadth comes the challenge of identifying and testing the inner and outer boundaries of the concept. Inevitably, defining the limits of sectarianism is inherently contentious. As with debates on the concept of 'terrorism', determining which groups should and should not be framed by the ideas and practices of sectarianism is shaped by the position of the actor, and often resisted by the group subject to that process.

Various designations such as fundamentalist, extremist and cult are used in the paper and reflect the tensions over the scope of the concept of sectarianism. Although these labels are not antithetical to the notion of sectarianism, their use illustrates the deeply contentious nature of the concept. For example, perhaps the most extreme manifestation of Jewish militancy, Kach, and its leader, Meir Kahane were routinely denounced as outsiders and as being antithetical to Judaism by many in Israel (Sprinzak, 1985a; 1985b). The ideas Kahane and his followers promoted were implicated in some of

the worst violence perpetrated by Jews in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, including the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, carried out by a man apparently sympathetic to Kahane's ideas (Cohen-Almagor, 1997). Whether this counts as an act informed by sectarianism or whether it is more properly understood as terrorism or extremism is shaped by the position of the observer; a clearer recognition of the subjective nature of the category would have enabled a more focused assessment of its utility in the Jewish context.

Drawing a tighter boundary around the sectarian concept would help make the constraints that influence the extent of violence likely to emerge from particular groupings more visible. The paper describes a number of different types and targets of violent contention but could go further in applying the notion of sectarianism to the question of where the limits of the violence might lie. Ravitzky's (1990) assessment of the two main historical currents in the radical right - messianic redemptionism (e. g. Gush Emunim), and ultra-orthodox religious radicalism (the Haredim) - convincingly proposes that they incorporate within them a number of radicalising and moderating forces which help explain the types of contention they engage in. Because the ultra-orthodox are primarily opposed to secular Zionists who they believe are both impacting on their capacity to practice their beliefs, and are also prolonging the redemption, makes secular and reform Jews primary targets. However, as the Haredim are still technically in exile, protest is limited as they are required to persevere under adversity, and not rise up against their rulers. Hence, there is a moderating force on the extent to which they will confront their primary antagonist, whilst bounding the type of target they are likely to attack. Ehud Sprinzak (1999) made a related point, to some extent acknowledged in the paper, that ultra-Orthodox contention is largely in response to events that impact their immediate surroundings. As such, it is those living in the local area in the midst of these communities that are likely to bear the brunt of their violence. These arguments draw attention to the importance of acknowledging those features of religious and socio-cultural traditions that restrain violence. With a definition of sectarianism as broad as that proposed in the paper, it is important to keep such constraints in mind to avoid over-stating the potential for violence.

The paper is more successful in acknowledging the crucial role of those wider structures that have shaped how intra-Jewish contention has evolved, most notably, the state and the socio-historical currents that led to its creation. The issue of Jewish sectarianism is informed by the historical dispersion of the Jewish people and the question that raised of how to retain a commitment to Judaism while interacting with those from other cultural and religious traditions. Similarly, the Zionist project confronted religious and political actors with the question of how to reconcile the role of the divine in the return of the Jewish people to Israel and its relationship to the coming of the messiah (Shindler, 2013). The paper's reflections on the historical foundations of contemporary contention are all the more valuable for acknowledging these issues.

As the author points out, the state is the fulcrum around which much of the story of contemporary Jewish sectarianism pivots. It is at once a site of contention, an actor in the conflict, and importantly, is the target of some of the claim making. That the state itself is considered illegitimate in some quarters of Jewish thought adds an extra dimension to the relevance of the sectarian concept. It also helps to shed light on the battles over the shape of Israel to have featured in the political discourse since the country's formation. Indeed, the seeds of contemporary contention were sown in the agreement Ben-Gurion reached with the ultra-Orthodox leadership in the 1940s to ensure particular tenets of Judaism were enshrined in the founding principles of the State of Israel, for example, ensuring their education system was separate from that of mainstream schooling (Pedahzur, 2012). As the paper describes, what flowed from this was an insular community increasingly shut off from the normal functions of wider society.

Yet, the isolation of the ultra-Orthodox communities does not extend to the political sphere where they have exerted considerable influence over Israeli politics. Because of the way the political system is structured, ultra-Orthodox leaders have been able to assert their power in the Knesset to shape policy in line with their ideological agenda (Elizur & Malkin, 2013). Along with the internal rivalries between different Haredi rabbis described in the paper's account of one family's 'flight from the ultra-Orthodox fold' this illustrates that the distinction between political power and religious ideology is more complex than the paper perhaps reflects. Although cautious of rejecting the instrumentalisation of religious ideas in the service of political influence, the paper ascribes less weight to power and its distribution than might be necessary to develop a fuller account of the dynamics of intra-Jewish contention.

The paper makes a valuable contribution by opening up the question of how sectarianism matters in the Jewish context. This is an important issue, relevant to some of the foundational questions that have faced the State of Israel since its inception: who is Jewish, what does sustaining a Jewish state mean, what are the obligations of the different identity groups that make up Israeli society, and what are the divine implications of the answers to those questions? The paper does a good job of drawing out the relevance of sectarianism for these debates and paves the way for further work to interrogate intra-Jewish contention through this lens.

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