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Israel's Exceptional Fertility Rate: Demography as a National Security Issue and the Role of Women in a Jewish State

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Introduction

The aim of this final work is analyzing the dynamics behind Israel's exceptional fertility by providing a study of factors contributing to such a high rate. In particular, this thesis aims at illustrating the Israel demographic by examining various dynamics that cross several elements. The study of several factors, from cultural to demographic and political ones, and their intersection will shed light on Israel's complex and multifaced nature of fertility dynamics in Israel.

Indeed, Israel's high fertility rate is a demographic phenomenon that has attracted significant attention recently. This is because of the widespread decline in fertility rates across the globe in recent years, with more than half of the world's population now having fertility rates below replacement level; this trend is particularly affecting the majority of developed countries that have fertility rates that are not just below the replacement level but far lower, resulting in a dramatic and irreversible demographic shift toward population decline (Testa et al., 2006). Many scholars and researchers have been studying the reasons and possible policies for this drastic demographic change. Despite this seemingly unstoppable demographic transition, Israel remains untouched. Although grouped in the developed countries, Israel seems to be immune from all these demographic shifts, contrary to its western fellows, challenging its middle eastern neighbors as well. Compared to other developed countries, especially western countries, Israel has a striking level of fertility, with a total fertility rate (TFR) that has consistently remained above the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman (OECD, 2022). This is particularly remarkable given the small size of the country and its relatively high level of economic and social development. Consequently, the author wish is to provide a comprehensive examination of the factors that have contributed to Israel's high fertility rates. The research will explore the demographic, economic, social, cultural, religious, and political factors that have influenced fertility patterns in Israel and will also consider the ways in which these factors have interacted with one another to produce the current demographic landscape.

The research is structured into two parts; the first part, called "Part I Israel and Demography,**"** includes the first chapter, and the second part, "Part II Exploring

the Dynamics and Factors of High Fertility Rates," contains the remaining two chapters.

As said previously, this thesis aims to explore the reasons for the significant birth rates compared to the Western world. One potential explanation for this discrepancy may be attributed to the prominent role of the Jewish religion in Israel. However, as the first chapter will show, more than this reasoning alone is needed to fully account for the variation in fertility rates, as Jewish people worldwide are not consistently reproducing at rates comparable to or closely resembling those in Israel, even the secular Israeli people. The first chapter consists of an introductive part that will provide a comparative analysis of the different demographic compositions among various Jewish communities across countries. Firstly, there will be a brief overview of the fertility patterns of Jewish in Western countries, such as European countries, especially the United Kingdom and the United States, characterized by the largest Jewish community in this part of the world. This will be followed by an examination of the demographic situation in Israel, including a discussion of the country's total fertility rate, with the relative demographic factors and fertility patterns across various ethnic and religious groups. The comparative fertility analysis is, consequently, useful in understanding if religion, particularly Judaism, can be the (sole) answer and the driving fertility variable for high fertility rates in Israel.

The remaining part will then explore the various factors contributing to Israel's high fertility rate. The second chapter, particularly, analyzes demography as a national security issue in the politics and culture of Israel, leading to the crucial importance of fertility in the public and private domains. Demography is widely acknowledged as a critical aspect of national security, particularly in the case of Israel, a Jewish democracy. The demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in Israel has important implications for the country's identity as a Jewish democracy and its relations with neighboring Arab countries. This issue is of paramount importance for Israel's national security, as a demographic shift towards a majority Arab population could threaten the country's ability to maintain its Jewish character, being Israel's *raison d'etre* (Stypinska, 2007). Therefore, the examination of the Arab fertility patterns, especially Muslims, characterized by high levels of fertility, and the demographic trend of Arab Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza strip and West bank is crucial for understanding the overall security

situation. Indeed, the National and Ethnic ideologic features of Jewish democracy as a state that is both democratic and Jewish are essential to comprehend, then, how demographic variables, especially migration and fertility patterns, have played a role in Israel's nation-building project since its establishment. Furthermore, the thesis will delve into the intertwined relationship between religion and the state, affecting public life, individuals' private sphere, even those who consider themselves secular, and how religion has been used to construct the political discourse and the Israeli (Jewish) identity.

The last chapter includes a comprehensive analysis of the role of women in Israel, especially Israeli Jewish ones. Studying their status is essential in comprehending the fertility patterns and their implications on the life of Jewish women. This last part aims to explore the factors that have contributed to Israel's high fertility rate, focusing primarily on the role of women regarded as individuals with reproductive duties. It will first explore how political and religious discourses have constructed motherhood as a fundamental value for both the existence of Israel as a Jewish state and women's identities since the formation of Israel; this led to pressure on women's aspirations around the family formation and shaping their reproductive choices (Berkovitch, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Bloomfield, 2009). Then, the chapter analyzes the role of religious institutions in promoting traditional gender roles. Indeed, religious institutions play a significant role in shaping society, and this is particularly evident in the Orthodox Jewish community's influence on the construction of motherhood and reproductive decision-making. Religious institutions hold considerable power and influence in matters related to reproductive health and family planning in Israel (Goldscheider, 1996; Tal, 2016; Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). This can present obstacles for women seeking access to reproductive health services and can constrain their autonomy and agency in making reproductive decisions. This chapter will also explore the conservative Israeli welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Stier et al., 2001), particularly pronatalism (focusing on the pro-natal policies) and familism, and how much conservative ideologies intersect with the overall women's agency and issues of reproductive rights and gender equality for women in Israel. Consequently, the author analyzes how conservative welfare with public policies and societal pressure for motherhood affect reproductive choices for Israeli women. The last part of the chapter, after providing an excursus on the public policies on motherhood and their

possible impact on fertility and women's employment rates, analyzes women's education levels and employment patterns in detail. This study will delve into the dynamics of employment, education, work-family balance, and household behaviors to understand the cultural and systemic factors contributing to the country's high fertility rates and their impact on women's agency and opportunities. Although Israel is characterized by high levels of women's education and employment, also among mothers (Okun, 2011; Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Bowers, 2020), which could imply a society where women can be professionally realized, it results in a persistent traditional gender roles-based culture. Also, the job sector's structure will be analyzed, displaying a wide gender pay gap and occupational and educational gender segregation. The public sector will result in being a significant player in providing the right environment for women to take care of their mother's duties and work.

Conclusively, the conclusion with the final considerations aims at resuming the fundamental concepts and the findings of the thesis, summing up the possible explanations behind Israel's exceptional fertility rate.

Therefore, the study of Israel's fertility rate offers a unique opportunity to examine the interplay between demographic, social, political, and cultural factors and how they shape reproductive choices and behaviors. Exploring how gender norms and stereotypes, as well as public policies, have shaped women's reproductive decisions and behaviors in Israel could also reveal insights into the role of women and their agency in reproductive choices. Additionally, the impact of the "demographic threat" on fertility in Israel can also offer a fascinating case to study how religious beliefs, practices, and both state and religious institutions shape fertility patterns and how they influence society. Israel's high fertility rate is a phenomenon that offers a rich case study for understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of fertility dynamics, as well as their implications in women's lives from a demographic and social perspective.

Part I Israel and Fertility

1 Comparison: Israel Fertility and Jewish Fertility in the West World

Over the last three decades, the fertility rate has declined in almost all countries, and it is assessed that already more than half of the world's population has below-replacement level fertility (Testa et al., 2006). Many countries have fertility rates not just under replacement fertility but far below that level. This represents a dramatic demographic regime that is irreversible, determining the sharp decline of the population. Fertility is, together with mortality and migration, an element of population growth that reflects both causes and effects of economic and social developments (OECD, 2022). For this reason, it is becoming a salient topic, especially in the Western and developed world. This is because this part of the world is affected by a demographic phenomenon, the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), with very low birth and mortality rates under the replacement level. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, assuming no net migration and unchanged mortality, a fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman ensures a broadly stable population. Instead, the average fertility rate in the developed world is actually meager, reaching 1.50 total fertility rate (TFR) in the EU in 2020, ranging from 1.13 in Malta to 1.83 in France (Eurostat, 2020), consequently falling below the replacement level, beneath which population numbers start decreasing. Israel seems to be immune from the trend affecting the West World; indeed, its fertility rate is incomparable to the rest of the developed world, reaching 3.04 TFR in 2020.

For this reason, Israel's fertility is a matter of substantial interest to scholars and demographers principally because of Israel's resistance to contemporary trends in fertility, experienced mainly in the West World, besides being a modern and affluent democracy (Anson & Ajayi, 2018). It is so striking that Israel's fertility rate is challenging those of its neighbors in the Middle East (besides their lower standard of living and socio-economic profiles); it is much higher than those found in some regions nearby (Della Pergola, 2009). Indeed, while global fertility rates are experiencing a downward trend, Israel is not affected by the worldwide trend of its fellow democracies, which are experiencing the consequences of SDT, low mortality, and low fertility. Taking into account a theoretical perspective of the STD, which presumes "the rise of individual autonomy values in postindustrial

economies is accompanied by the postponement of family formation and childbearing", all these elements are contributing to a fertility transition characterized by a general postponement of childbearing and consequently a decrease in fertility (Bystrov, 2012, p. 263; Anson & Ajayi, 2018, p. 154). So, what are the reasons for explaining the considerable difference in birth rates between the West World and Israel? Probably, the reason would lie in the prominent role of the Jewish religion in Israel. However, according to such reasoning, Jewish people worldwide should be expected to have a fertility rate that reaches the average of Israel or at least immediately beneath. Yet, as it will be analyzed in this chapter, the fertility of Jews in the West World is surprisingly and significantly lower than Israel's, even below the replacement level.

Consequently, I will briefly discuss the fertility of the Jewish world to clarify and ascertain the gap between Israel's fertility and Jewish fertility in the West World. Then, I will examine the fertility composition of the population in Israel due to its fundamental importance in understanding how the birth rate is distributed among the different groups. Indeed, demography plays a decisive role in understanding Israeli society and its complexity (Goldscheider, 1996). All those will be fundamental to comprehending how religion alone cannot be the only fertility-driven element, but probably the relation between nation and religion in Israel has a particular value. However, there are other factors, not only economic but also social and cultural ones, having a substantial significance in the birth rates as well as the synergy between legal, organizational, and socioeconomic infrastructures within the institutional system and social psychology (Della Pergola, 2003a). They will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

1.1 Jewish Fertility

1.1.1 Data and Variables

In this paper, data are collected by the *Pew Research Center*, a nonpartisan fact tank that studies relevant issues, attitudes, and trends by conducting public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis, and other data-driven social science research. Especially for this paragraph, I consider two studies made by this fact tank. The first one is "*The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*", a report conducted in 2015 that analyzes religious change

and its impact on societies worldwide. The demographic projections are based on the up-to-date size and geographic distribution of the world's major religions, such as age differences, fertility and mortality levels, international migration, and patterns in conversion. The two primary sources are censuses, large-scale demographic surveys, and general population surveys covering almost all global populations. Concerning fertility data, they were collected from censuses and surveys, and fertility rates were assessed via direct and indirect measures; some censuses and surveys directly calculate recent births or the number of children a woman has ever born, while in other cases, fertility data were collected indirectly, for instance, by using data on the age of a mother's children to make an estimate of her past birth patterns (Pew Research Center, 2015). All these sources about fertility were used to evaluate age-specific and Total Fertility Rates for religious groups in each country (Pew Research Center, 2015).

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is a standard demographic indicator used internationally to estimate "the total number of children an average woman would have in her lifetime if fertility patterns did not change" (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 25). The TFR is the most commonly used fertility measure for two main reasons: it is independent of the change or difference in the age-sex structure of the population, and it provides an easily comprehensible measure of hypothetical completed fertility. Regarding the reports used to analyze the situation in Europe, they have been produced by many researchers collaborating with the *Institute for Jewish Policy Research* (JPR), which is a London-based research organization, consultancy, and think-tank aimed at analyzing the Jewish communities in the United Kingdom and across Europe by conducting research and the Board of Deputies of British Jews, a spokesman organization for Jewish interests. Data were collected through different surveys. The report named "*Jews in Europe at the turn of the Millennium Population trends and estimates*" presents a comprehensive overview of several aspects of the demography of Jews in Europe; consequently, many different databases are used from public and private sources such as national population censuses, Jewish community registers, vital statistics from national and Jewish sources, Jewish population surveys in many European countries, data collected through the 2018 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey of antisemitism. While that named "*Vital statistics of the UK Jewish population: births and deaths"* is focused on birth and death statistics in the Jewish

population in the UK, including data up to and including 2016. However, since there are no official vital statistics on Jewish births or deaths because UK authorities do not record an individual's religion, the Jewish community must collect these data through different organizations officially recognized by UK authorities.

The Third report is "*Jewish Americans in 2020*" by *Pew Research Center* in 2021. For this report, 4,718 American adults who identify as Jewish were surveyed, including 3,836 Jews by religion and 882 Jews of no religion. The survey was administered online and by mail from Nov. 19, 2019, to June 3, 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2021). This report focuses on three types of people: those who said their present religion is Jewish (Jews by religion), those who said they currently have no religion (they identify religiously as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular) but at the same time, they consider themselves Jewish aside from religion and have at least one Jewish parent or were raised Jewish (Jews of no religion) (Pew Research Center, 2021). Together, these two groups constitute the net Jewish population, also known as Jewish Americans.

1.1.2 Jewish Fertility in the West World

Before comparing the developed countries and Israel, studying which variables affect fertility is fundamental to understanding the whole situation.

Demographers study what variables influence fertility patterns to comprehend better why the birth rate can vary. As said by the *Pew Research Center* (2015), fertility patterns may vary between countries for a multitude of causes, such as cultural norms, the degree of welfare, in particular government policies, that affect childbearing, childcare availability, the level of economic development, access to the labor market (especially women's participation), and educational opportunities. Fertility is also influenced by social status and income levels. Notably, government policies can substantially impact the overall fertility rates; for instance, pro-natalist policies promoting having children are often adopted when the population starts declining or counteracting fertility rates dropping below the replacement level (Moran, 2020). Naturally, birth rates also depend on biological aspects, like the parent's age, the timing, the physical health of both parents, and

sexual behaviors. Other factors affecting the fertility rate are the number of children already born and the infant mortality rate. Indeed, in most cases, as the mortality rate decreases, the fertility rate also falls. Thus, considering an overall perspective, fertility rates are affected by the prevailing conditions in a society. Not only socioeconomic conditions such as education, employment, housing conditions, and work-life balance but normative pressure of relatives and friends as well as personal attitudes towards childbearing (Testa et al., 2011). The child's value, the parents' assessment of having children, is another element affecting fertility intentions and birth rates (Azmoude et al., 2017). Positive values include "emotional and economic interests, identity acquisition, achievement of perfection, and survival of family"; instead, negative values embrace "emotional, physical, economic and family costs, restrictions, and lost chances" (Azmoude et al., 2017, p. 124).

Therefore, there are different explanations for the low fertility trend; on the one hand, there is the socio-economic perspective which considers the positive and negative opportunity costs of childbearing; when women increase their economic independence by improving their education and higher labor force participation, marriage, based on the traditional gender division of workload in the family, loses its gains by increasing the relative costs of having children (Testa, 2012). This is because it is assumed that women sacrifice their progress in their career leads to care for children or that they reduce their work hours. The other theory focuses on gender systems and gender inequality in the different spheres of society, from work to the family; very low fertility might be the consequence of a hiatus between high levels of gender equity in individual-oriented institutions (women have the same opportunities as men in education and labor market) and persistent gender inequity in family-oriented social institutions (women have the heaviest workload at home) (Testa, 2012). Another approach exemplifies fertility postponement as a rational response to economic insecurity and increasing childbearing expenses, characterizing the modern and current society (Testa, 2012). All these factors affect fertility, and I analyze them in the following chapters by considering the Israeli context. However, a prominent factor characterizing the Israeli context should be considered: the Jewish Religion. Could religion be considered the sole fertility-driven variable, the element influencing Israel's fertility?

If the Jewish religion is a solid fertility-driven factor, its effects should also be known in other regions. However, the situation is totally different when we compare

Jews in Israel to their counterparts elsewhere. It is true the fact that religion, per se, is well known to be an influencing fertility factor. For many years scholars and demographers have studied how fertility is affected by religious factors, especially in the western world. It is sufficient to consider the difference between secular women's fertility and religious women's fertility, such as Muslims or Mormons. Indeed, the most prominent religious traditions attach greater importance to family life and childbearing, considered human solid life values.

Nevertheless, the situation drastically changes regarding Jews; there is a real gap between fertility in Israel and fertility in the Jewish community in every other developed country. In those parts, Jewish fertility, which is considerably low, reaches the national average level, even in some cases below the replacement level. Although they share the same history and fate, Jewish fertility changes drastically, for instance, among Jews in Europe, where welfare policies are more generous than in Israel (מרכז טאוב - Taub Center Staff, 2019). Indeed, since the 1970s, 8.5 percent of the Jewish population has disappeared in Western Europe. During the period from 1970 to 2003, Jews diminished by nearly 80% in the European region of the Former Soviet Union (FSU), by 91% in the Asian one of the FSU and North Africa, 56% in the rest of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, 36% in Southern Africa, and 22% in Latin America, and North America by 0.5% (Della Pergola, 2004). By comparison, the Jewish population is increased by approximately 53% in Oceania and over 97% in Israel (Della Pergola, 2004).

A study named *the Future of World Religions* (2015) by the Pew Research Center affirmed the decline of the Jewish population in the western world. Table 1

TABLE 1. World Jewish Population by Religion, 2010 and 2050

	YEAR	REGION'S TOTAL POPULATION	REGION'S JEWISH POPULATION	% JEWS IN REGION
North America	2010	344,530,000	6,040,000	1.8%
	2050	435,420,000	5,920,000	1.4
Middle East-North Africa	2010	341,020,000	5,630,000	1.6
	2050	588,960,000	8,200,000	1.4
Europe	2010	742,550,000	1,420,000	0.2
	2050	696,330,000	1,200,000	0.2
Latin America-Caribbean	2010	590,080,000	470,000	< 0.1
	2050	748,620,000	460,000	< 0.1
Asia-Pacific	2010	4,054,940,000	200,000	< 0.1
	2050	4,937,900,000	240,000	< 0.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	2010	822,730,000	100,000	< 0.1
	2050	1,899,960,000	70,000	< 0.1

Source: **The Future of World Religions: Population Growth**

shows the shrinkage in size, which characterizes different parts of the world. In North America, the Jewish population is expected to decline, from 6 million in 2010 to 5.9 million in 2050, and as a share of the region's population, from 1.8% in 2010 to 1.4% in 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Moreover, it is interesting to stress that the total population in this region is presumed to grow (26%), while the Jewish population in North America is expected to shrink in size (minus 2% growth) (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, North America (especially United States) represents the second place where there are more Jews after Israel (Della Pergola, 2004).

In Europe, the Jewish population decline is projected to be more rapid (minus 15% growth between 2010 and 2050) than for Europe's general population (minus 6%) (Pew Research Center, 2015). Indeed, the Jewish population is expected to drastically drop, from 1.4 million in 2010 to 1.2 million in 2050, with a total fertility rate (Table 2) below the replacement level (1.8), even though the Jewish population in the region is expected to remain stable as a share of the region's population (Pew Research Center, 2015).

TABLE 2. Total Fertility Rates of Religious Groups in Europe, 2010-2015

Muslims	2.1
Jews	1.8
Christians	1.6
Hindus	1.5
Unaffiliated	1.4
Region	**1.6**

Source: **The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050**. Only groups for which there are sufficient data are shown
Pew Research Center

Although the centrality of fertility patterns for population growth and the "uncertainty concerning the most recent levels of European Jewish fertility", it is crucial to claim that a comprehensive analysis of the most recent levels of Jewish

fertility in Europe has not been produced yet (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2019, p.12).

1.1.2.1 Jewish Fertility in Europe

The Jewish diaspora, especially in Europe, is characterized by low fertility and low natural growth, a condition very similar to inhabitants in this region. This is the result of the demographic transition from high fertility and high mortality to low fertility and low mortality (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2019). Israel and the Jewish Diaspora highly differ in the demographic transition; the former led to very high longevity, among the highest in the world, without lowering fertility (around three children per woman); the Jewish Diaspora, especially in Europe, struggles to reproduce itself and is characterized by low fertility which results in a considerable proportion of elderly people tending toward higher death rates than births rates (Della Pergola, 2003b; Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2019; Della Pergola, 2020b). This low annual growth is also caused by emigration (especially in France due to the continuing sense of uneasiness and fear due to the rising of antisemitism) affecting the overall size of the European Jewish community and assimilation through intermarriage or independently of it, whose children were more frequently than not raised in a non-Jewish setting (Della Pergola, 2003b; Della Pergola, 2020a; Della Pergola, 2020b). In particular, the frequency of marriage constitutes a relevant indicator "of the likelihood that a new generation will be born to replace the present one" (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020, p. 48). Belgium shows the lowest percentage of Jewish men and women still unmarried at age 30–39, only 14% and 8%, respectively (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). This is likely due to the early marriages, which, in turn, generally characterize the most religious sectors, the Haredi population, which represents an important share of the Jewish community in Belgium (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). Conversely, Italy displays higher percentages of never-married women and men, standing at 46% and 56%, respectively (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). This reflects the overall postponement and decline in marriage frequency among the general Italian population (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). Such a phenomenon can underline the high level of assimilation in a country such as Italy, where Jews tend to replicate the population's demographic behavior. However, earlier and numerous marriages in states like Belgium, or more frequent cohabitation as in Sweden, suggest a greater

possibility of Jewish demographic continuity than "late or non-marriage in

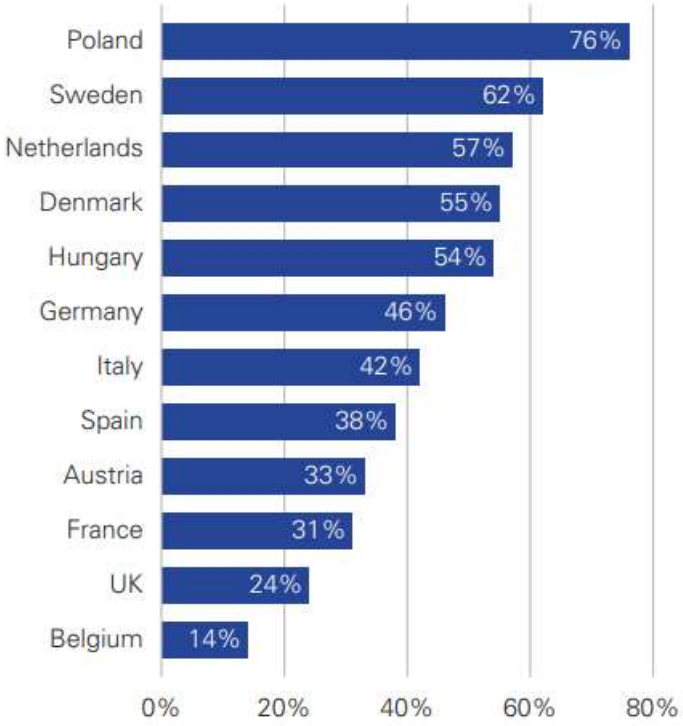
TABLE 3. Percentage of Jews never married or are not in a registered partnership by age and sex in 12 EU countries, 2018

Age and sex	Belgium	Sweden	Hungary	Denmark	Spain	Germany	Austria	Netherlands	Poland	France	UK	Italy
Women												
16–29	42.7	66.3	96.3	68.5	87.9	80.8	73.6	87.3	69.7	79.5	83.2	94.1
30–39	8.0	18.1	24.3	25.6	27.4	27.6	30.8	31.7	33.3	34.0	34.3	46.2
40–49	6.5	4.8	23.6	2.9	5.9	10.7	7.1	20.6	21.2	12.1	16.9	22.2
50–59	11.1	12.1	16.7	7.3	21.6	12.6	10.3	18.0	11.1	17.6	15.6	14.3
60–69	4.5	3.6	7.8	6.8	11.1	6.4	9.3	8.3	3.8	16.8	13.4	5.7
70 +	1.7	5.3	11.8	7.0	0.0	12.2	12.5	4.2	13.3	8.6	5.3	9.2
Men												
16–29	48.5	60.0	100.0	81.7	77.8	89.5	87.5	94.1	73.1	82.6	68.7	90.3
30–39	14.1	24.3	36.1	28.6	39.6	41.1	30.2	25.2	27.8	24.6	24.7	55.8
40–49	3.6	5.9	10.9	8.5	17.2	9.6	11.1	25.0	11.5	8.5	13.5	18.2
50–59	12.2	6.6	4.0	7.0	7.0	16.0	14.6	9.8	0.0	8.7	11.2	14.5
60–69	7.7	2.5	1.8	3.3	1.9	8.0	4.8	13.9	0.0	6.1	6.7	7.9
70 +	2.6	2.8	0.0	0.0	12.5	11.4	3.6	5.8	0.0	1.3	4.1	1.7

Note: Countries are ranked from left to right according to the percentage of Jewish women who had never married at age 30–39, rising from lowest to highest. The focus on this age group in the female population has much to do with the fact that this is the most common age range for women to have children in contemporary societies.
Source: **2018 FRA Survey**, weighted data. Report **Jews in Europe at the turn of the Millennium Population trends and estimates** led by Institute for Jewish Policy Research

countries like Germany or Italy" (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020, p. 49). An indirect measure of the Jewish demographic fertility can be the distribution of household size, which is affected by the number of children who are residents in those households (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). Here again, Belgium displays high percentages, with 40% of households with four members or more, followed by Spain, the UK, and Italy, with 30–40% of the same households (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). Then, Austria, Germany, France, and Hungary followed with 20–30% (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). However, considering the average household sizes, the data indirectly shows low fertility levels due to the low number of children per household (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). The averages are Belgium 3.32; Spain 3.03; UK 2.96; Italy 2.86; Austria 2.76; France 2.67; Germany 2.62; Hungary 2.61; Denmark 2.41; Sweden 2.38; Netherlands 2.32; Poland 2.32 (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020).

TABLE 4. Percentage married to non-Jewish spouse in 12 EU countries, 2018



Note: The data refer to religion at the time of survey, not at the time of birth. Any possible effect of intervening conversions is therefore not represented in the following description
Source: FRA 2018 Survey, weighted data. Report **Jews in Europe at the turn of the Millennium Population trends and estimates** led by Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

Another indicator to analyze is the intermarriage rate which drastically shapes the demographic development; indeed, it has been considered a factor of erosion in the Jewish population size. The main reason was the "non-attribution of Jewish identity to large shares of the children born to intermarried couples, who received the religious and/or ethnic identity of the non-Jewish parent" (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020, p.51).

Besides impacting the future identity of offspring, intermarriage affects the nature and modality of cultural interactions and participation with and within the Jewish community (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). From table 4, there is a great difference between Eastern European countries and Northern European countries, displaying shares of intermarriage over 50% (the highest being Poland with 76%), followed by Germany, Italy, and Spain with levels around 35–45%, Austria and France just above 30%, the UK at 24%, and Belgium with the lowest frequency of 14% (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). Nevertheless, it is possible to detect the decline in intermarriage rates, and this can be explained by the actual mechanism of disassimilation and desecularization which is happening in several Jewish populations of European countries, especially those welcoming the vast share of strict ultra-orthodox, including the Haredi population which is characterized by higher levels of fertility than the less religious Jews (Della Pergola & Staetsky,

2020). To sum up, a significant proportion of Jews of childbearing age are not married, while 44%- 72% of Jewish households have just one to two people in them, "with the smallest household sizes observed in Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and the Netherlands, and the largest in Belgium, Spain, and the UK" (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020, p.66). The former group of states is also characterized by high levels of intermarriage, whereas the latter has far low intermarriage levels (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020). These findings can suggest that the overall Jews population in Europe has low fertility, except for those countries welcoming large populations of strictly Orthodox Jews who show higher "internal cohesion and relatively homogeneous social networks and frequent inmarriages" (Della Pergola & Staetsky, 2020, p.67). However, what is striking in analyzing the demography of Jews in Europe is the rapid growth of the Haredi (Ultra-orthodox) population, the most religious and conservative section of Judaism. Data from the United Kingdom and Belgium underline this puzzling growth, suggesting that they have had high fertility levels since it is not occurring any Haredi migration towards these countries (Boyd, 2022). Between 2010 and 2016 in the U.K, synagogue membership "declined by 7.5% for the Central Orthodox, 4.1% for the Reform, 9.1% for the Liberal, and 21.4% for the Sephardi"; instead, membership rose "by 15.5% for the *Masorti*, and by 18.4% for the Strictly Orthodox" (Della Pergola, 2020a, p.48). In 2018, a report named *Vital statistics of the UK Jewish population: births and deaths*, led by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), underscored the demographic turn of the Jewish community in the UK; in the past decades, the Jewish community was characterized by demographic decline, where Jewish deaths constantly exceeded Jewish births (Casale Mashiah, 2018). However, since 2006 births have exceeded deaths, which implies a potential Jewish demographic growth (Casale Mashiah, 2018). From 1979 to 2015, Jewish births represented, on average, 0.5% of all overall births in England and Wales (Casale Mashiah, 2018). However, between 2005 and 2015, total births in England and Wales increased by 8.1%, whereas Jewish births rose by 25.4%. The number of births from 1979 to 2015 forms a shallow U-shaped trend over time, principally declining between 1979 and 2003 and increasing between 2003 and 2015 (Casale Mashiah, 2018). Between 2007 and 2015, the estimated number of Strictly Orthodox births per year increased by 35%, while the estimated number of 'Mainstream' (non-Strictly Orthodox) births per year rose by 2.4% (Casale Mashiah, 2018). However, in 2015 51% of all

Jewish births represented Strictly Orthodox births (Casale Mashiah, 2018). Considering the TFR (see Table 5) of the Jewish population as a whole (2.60) is higher than the fertility of the total population of England and Wales (1.93) and over the replacement level (2.10) (Casale Mashiah, 2018). However, these data are influenced by the high fertility levels of Strictly Orthodox Jews, which is estimated to reach six to seven children per woman; in contrast to the mainstream Jewish population's fertility is much lower, standing at 1.98, not reaching the replacement level (Casale Mashiah, 2018).

Consequently, the high fertility levels in the Haredi population are the main responsible for the positive natural growth of the Jewish population in the UK since 2006, explaining the sharp increase in Jewish births between 2005 and 2015 (Casale Mashiah, 2018). In the last decades, death rates have also significantly decreased due "to economic developments, improving living standards, public health measures, sanitary reforms and advancements in medicine" (Casale Mashiah, 2018, p.18). The British Jewish community is older than the general population, with a mortality rate at the lowest point historically (Casale Mashiah, 2018). At the same time, compositional change because of the increase in the share of the Strictly

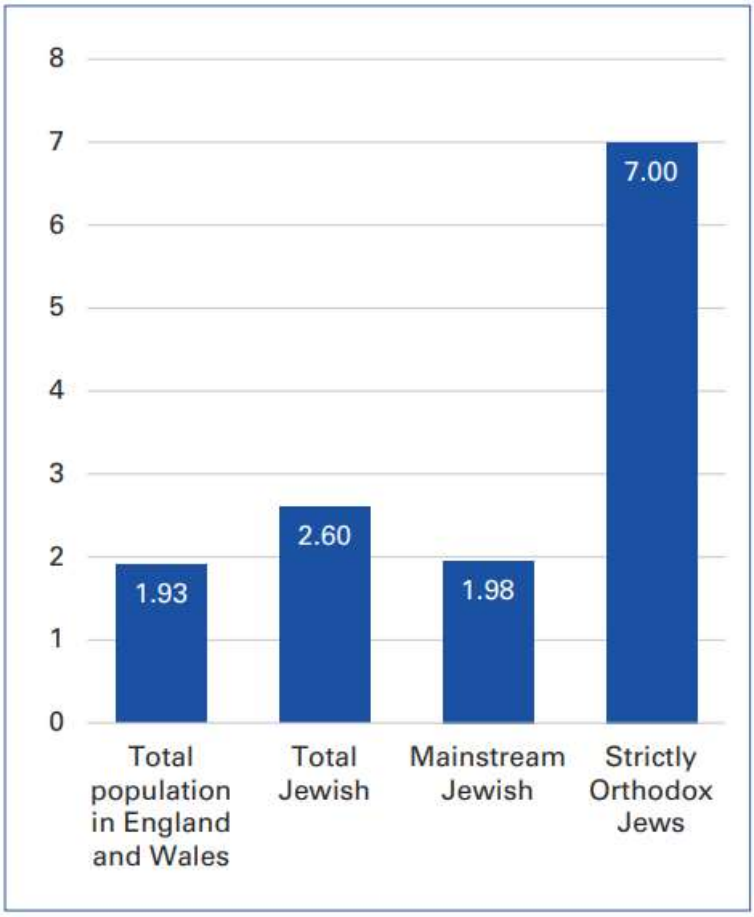
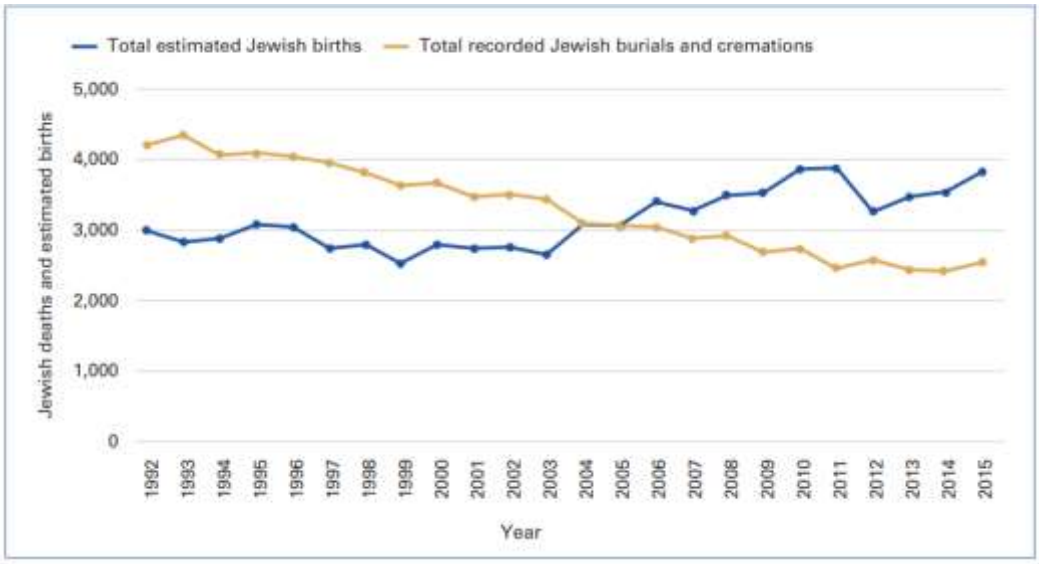


TABLE 5. Estimated TFR in England and Wales in 2011

Source: **Vital statistics of the UK Jewish population: births and deaths** led by Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), published in 2018.

Orthodox in the total Jewish population due to their high fertility entail a rise in overall births (Casale Mashiah, 2018). To sum up, Jewish fertility in Europe, especially in Belgium and UK, is mainly shaped by the degree of religiosity. The secular or least religious Jewish people have much lower fertility levels (even below

TABLE 6. Jewish deaths and estimated births, 1992-2015



Source: **Vital statistics of the UK Jewish population: births and deaths** led by Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), published in 2018.

the replacement level) than most religious Jewish people (Haredi or Ultra-orthodox), suggesting the spread of a more halachic, observant, and separatist type of Judaism at the heart of Jewish life, particularly in UK and Belgium, where Haredi percentages within the Jewish community were around 26% and 35% respectively in 2020 compared to 3% in France and Israel 13% (Boyd, 2022).

1.1.2.2 Jewish Fertility in the USA

Notably, it is crucial to spend some time analyzing in detail the fertility and the demography profile of Jewish Americans because of many studies on the demography of the Jewish American population, which is the second largest Jewish community after the Israeli one. I examine three variables that directly and indirectly influence explaining the fertility rate: (1) fertility levels, (2) the intermarriage rates (also how children are raised, religiously or not), and (3)

TABLE 7. Fertility levels

	Average number of children born per adult	Average age when had first child
NET Jewish	1.5	28.1
Jews by religion	1.7	28.1
Jews of no religion	1.0	28.1
Orthodox	3.3	23.6
NET Non-Orthodox	1.4	28.6
Conservative	1.8	28.7
Reform	1.4	29.1
No particular branch	1.1	28.2
Men	1.4	29.6
Women	1.7	26.7
Married	2.0	28.8
Spouse Jewish	2.3	28.3
Spouse not Jewish	1.5	29.7
Not married	0.9	25.9
High school or less	2.0	N/A
Some college	1.5	26.1
College graduate	1.3	30.2
Postgraduate degree	1.6	30.6
Household income <$50K	1.7	N/A
$50K-$99,999	1.4	27.1
$100K-$199,999	1.5	29.5
$200K or more	1.7	30.8

Note: Due to sample size limitations, results are shown for all adults, rather than just those who have completed their prime childbearing years. Number of children born and age when had first child are recalculated to exclude nonresponse. "N/A" indicated insufficient sample size.
Source: Jewish Americans in 2020, Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults by **Pew Research Center**

educational attainments level. Recent studies have found how low the fertility rate of American Jews is, even below the national average and the replacement level. Even though, according to all three major movements of American Judaism (Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox), raising children is a Jewish value, the fertility rate remains tragically low; a study, underlined by Shain (2019), using data from the General Social Surveys of 2000–2006 determined that the TFR for Jews was estimated at 1.4 (Shain, 2019). It was somewhat lower than the replacement level and lower than the TFRs of all other major religious and ethnic groups, such as liberal, White Protestants (1.8), and non-Hispanic Catholics (2.1) (Shain, 2019). Another paper based on data from General Social Surveys also showed that Jewish women had the first child at the highest age of all major religious groups at 25.9 years (Shain, 2019). In the 2020 survey led by the *Pew Research Center* ("*Jewish Americans in 2020")*, Jewish adults ages 40 to 59 stated to have an average of 1.9 children, the same slightly below the average of the general American population, which is 2.3 children per adult considering the same

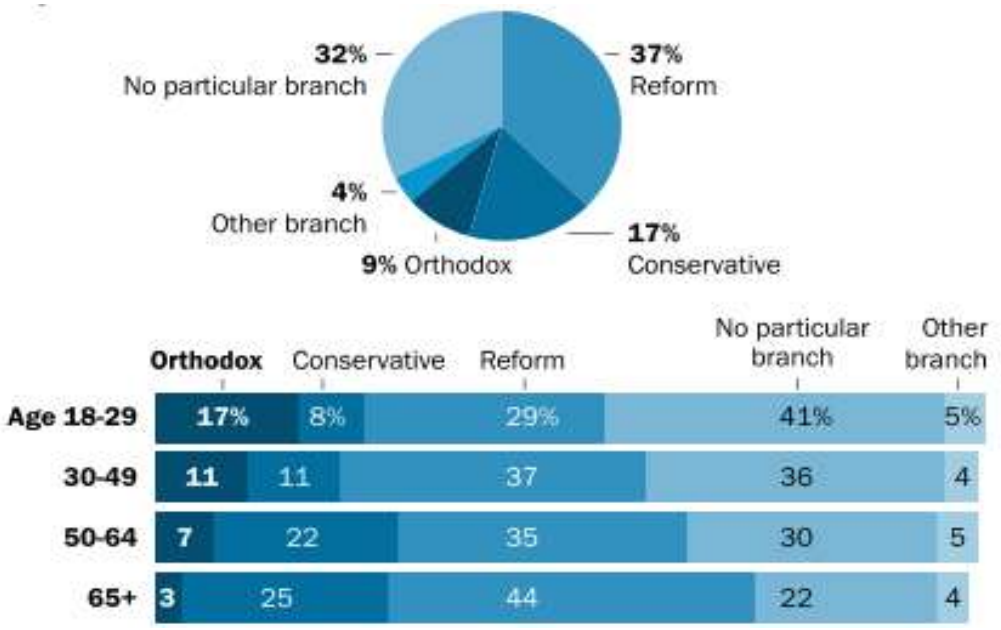
TABLE 8. Percentage of Women who have had from 0 to 3+ children

	NET Jewish				U.S. adults			
	0	1	2	3+	0	1	2	3+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Ages 18-39	54	12	18	16=100	44	21	16	18=10
40-59	20	19	33	28	10	12	37	41
60+	15	12	43	30	12	13	33	42

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Percentage recalculated to exclude nonresponse.
Source: Jewish Americans in 2020, Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. Jews.
Data on U.S adults overall from 2018 General Social Survey.
Pew Research Center

age cohort. Moreover, in other reports based on data from adults of all ages, it has been found that, on average, the degree of how religious a person is has a substantial impact. In fact, by table 7, it can be seen that Jews by religion (1.7) have more offspring than Jews of no religion (1.0) and Jews with Jewish spouses have more children (2.3) than religiously intermarried Jews (1.5) (Pew Research Center, 2021). Furthermore, there is a vast fertility difference between Orthodox Jews and the rest of the Jews. Orthodox Jews adults have an average of 3.3 children, at least twice as high as among non-Orthodox Jews (1.4). Also, the average age when giving birth to the first child is different; Orthodox Jews are five years younger (23.6), while non-Orthodox Jews are much older (28.6) (Pew Research Center, 2021). Another aspect to consider when discussing fertility differences between Jews and the general public is the outstanding share of Jewish women who have never had children (see table 8) (Pew Research Center, 2021). Indeed, among women 40 to 59 age cohort, Jews are twice as likely to have no children (20%) compared to American women (10%). Even though Orthodox fertility is very high

TABLE 9. Percentage of U.S. Jews of different Jewish branches



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. Figures include both Jews by religion and Jews of no religion. Virtually all orthodox Jews (99%) and Conservative Jews (99%) in the survey are Jews by religion, as are 88% of Reform Jews. Most Jews who are unaffiliated with a branch are Jews of no religion (65%).
Source: Jewish Americans in 2020, Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults by **Pew Research Center**

compared to Jewish fertility overall, the net Jewish fertility remains below the replacement level. This is because, in the group of youngest American Jews, there is a moderately large group of people who consider themselves traditionally observant, Orthodox Jews and an even larger share of people (the majority) who regards themselves as Jewish for cultural, ethnic, or family reasons but do not identify with Judaism, as a religion, at all (Pew Research Center, 2021). Thus, two sharply opposing expressions of Jewishness appear to be more relevant, one including religion deeply in every aspect of life and the other involving little or no religion (Pew Research Center, 2021). Compared with older Jews, the youngest Jewish adults count larger shares of Orthodox and people with no religious (Jewish) identity. Consequently, we can see a drastic difference in fertility between Orthodox (3.3) and those who belong to no particular branch (1.1) (see Table 9) (Pew Research Center, 2021). An element to consider for explaining the fertility decline is intermarriage which determines how crucial Jewish religion is considered, the decline of religious traditionalism, and consequently, how the offspring are religiously educated. By table 10, 58% of all married Jews affirm having a Jewish spouse, while 42% are married to a non-Jewish person. Jews of no religion are much more likely than Jews by religion to be married to someone who is not Jewish. Indeed, if we compare Jews by religion and ones of no religion, among the first category who are married, 68% have a Jewish spouse (Pew Research Center, 2021). Regarding Jews of no religion, 21% who are married report having a Jewish spouse, while 79% say they are married to a non-Jew. Intermarriage rates are increased in the past decades; for instance, among American Jews who got married in the range 1990-1999 and are still married, 37% are married to someone who is not Jewish

TABLE 10. Percentage of U.S. Jews married to Jews/not Jews

	Spouse is Jewish	Spouse is not Jewish
	%	%
NET Married Jews	58	42=100
Jews by religion	68	32
Jews of no religion	21	79
Among respondents who got married in ...		
2010-2020	39	61
2000-2009	55	45
1990-1999	63	37
1980-1989	58	42
Before 1980	82	18

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Those who did not specify the religion or Jewish identity of their spouse are included in the "Spouse is not Jewish" category.
Source: Jewish Americans in 2020, Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults by **Pew Research Center**

(Pew Research Center, 2021). Instead, among Jewish adults having current and intact marriages that started in 2010 or later, 61% are married to a non-Jew (Pew Research Center, 2021). Another element to analyze is how children of marriage and intermarriage are religiously educated. By table 11, Jews of religion tend to care more about raising their children as Jewish.

TABLE 11. Percentage of all respondents whose children are being raised as…

	Jewish by religion	Jewish but not by religion	Partly Jewish by religion	Some mix	Not Jewish
	%	%	%	%	%
NET Jewish	60	13	6	1	19=100
Married	65	14	6	1	14
Spouse Jewish	93	3	1	1	1
Spouse not Jewish	28	29	12	<1	30

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. "Some mix" includes those who are currently raising more than one child, and who are raising some children differently than others.
Source: Jewish Americans in 2020, Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults by **Pew Research Center**

60% are raising their children as Jewish, 13% say they are raising at least one child Jewish but not by religion, and 6% report raising their children as partly Jewish and partly in another religion. Instead, 19% are not raising their children as Jewish at all. According to the survey, eight-in-ten Jews by religion are raising their children Jewish by religion, 7% say that they are raising their children partly Jewish by religion and partly another religion, and 5% report raising them Jewish but not by religion (Pew Research Center, 2021). Two-thirds of married Jews are raising those children as Jewish by religion (65%). However, when both parents are Jewish spouses, 93% report raising their children Jewish by religion; by comparison, 28% of Jews married to someone who is not Jewish are raising their children Jewish by religion (Pew Research Center, 2021). Instead, regarding raising children Jewish but not by religion, the intermarried Jews reach 29%, while 12% are raising children in a context of multiple religions, and 30% are not raising their children as Jewish.

Last but not least, a factor in analyzing to have a better picture of American Jewish fertility is the education level of Jews. The common assumption is the negative relationship between educational attainment and fertility; fertility levels fall with women's education levels. The situation of American Jews does not refute this assumption. Indeed, overall American Jewish adults are a relatively well-educated group.

TABLE 12. Percentage of U.S. Jews who completed…

	High school or less	Some college	College degree	Postgraduate degree
	%	%	%	%
NET Jewish	20	22	30	28=100
Jews by religion	19	21	30	30
Jews of no religion	21	27	30	22
Orthodox	43	20	17	20
Conservative	18	27	25	30
Reform	16	20	33	30
No particular branch	20	23	32	24
Men	19	23	31	27
Women	21	22	28	29
Ages 18-29	36	26	29	9
30-49	13	19	36	32
50-64	9	20	34	36
65+	23	26	21	30
Married	15	17	32	36
Not married	27	30	27	16
Household income <$50K	43	31	17	9
$50K-$99,999	19	28	32	21
$100K-$199,999	10	16	37	37
$200K or more	10	15	30	44
U.S. adults	40	31	18	11
Christian	38	32	17	13
Protestant	37	34	16	13
White evangelical	38	34	17	11
White, not evangelical	33	32	19	16
Black Protestant	41	36	14	10
Catholic	41	28	17	14
Unaffiliated	35	32	19	14

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Percentage recalculated to exclude nonresponse.
Source: Jewish Americans in 2020, Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults, and Aug. 3-16, 2020, among non-Jewish religious groups. Data for U.S. adults overall from American Community Survey 2014-2018.
Pew Research Center

30% are college graduates, including 28% who have completed a postgraduate degree (Pew Research Center, 2021). By comparison, nearly 18% of American adults have completed a college degree, and 11% have a postgraduate degree (Pew Research Center, 2021). Overall American Jews, with no distinction between ones by religion and ones of no religion, have far higher levels of education than the general public. Thus, the demographic profile of Jewish Americans is characteristic in several ways; the Jewish population is older than the general public, is a comparatively well-educated group, and the Jewish adults aged 40 to 59 have slightly fewer offspring, on average, in contrast with the American population. However, when considering the degree of how religious a person is, there are considerable differences in fertility, with Orthodox Jews having much higher fertility rates and living in larger households than non-Orthodox Jews (Pew Research Center, 2021). Several Jewish young adults feel "demographically disenfranchised" in typical Jewish institutions characterized by families, and the joint initiatives organized by those institutions aimed at involving single young adults have met with limited success (Shain, 2019). Those institutions generally incentives people to marry and have children representing a source of religiosity in everyday life. Not only for the Jewish religion, in general, but marriage and families are also positively associated with religious engagement in the United States; consequently, since (in this case)

the United States is experiencing an increase in the age at which young adults are married and become a parent, it leads to a considerable decline in religious service engagement among the current generation (Shain, 2019). Indeed, delayed childbearing and low fertility in the Jewish community probably entail lower synagogue attendance levels among young adults (Shain, 2019). Thus, low religious attendance and involvement with religious institutions lead to a decline in religious traditionalism, especially in considering themselves as religious people, not pursuing religious norms. Naturally, socioeconomic status represents an influencing fertility variable. Being more educated is (on average) associated with a higher age at first birth, higher rates of childlessness, and consequently, lower fertility rates. The reasons behind these differences are complex; many scholars explained that income insecurity, income inequality, and the gender wage gap provide women (who can afford it) strong incentives to delay marriage and childbearing and pursue educational and professional advancement (Shain, 2019).

TABLE 13. how religious American Jews are

	Jewish adults	All U.S. adults
	%	%
Religion is very important to them	21	41
Somewhat important	26	25
Not too/not at all important	53	34
They attend religious services ...		
Weekly	12	27
Once or twice a month	8	8
A few times a year	27	15
Seldom/never	52	50
They believe in God of the Bible	26	56
Believe in other higher power/ spiritual force	50	33
Do not believe in any higher power/ spiritual force	22	10

Note: Jewish Adults include both Jews by religion and Jews of no religion
Source: Jewish Americans in 2020, Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults and Jan.21-Feb. 3,2020 (belief in God) and Aug.3-16,2020 (importance of religion and attendance), among U.S. adults
Pew Research Center

Besides socioeconomic status, which affects fertility levels, religiosity is generally associated with lower rates of childlessness and nonmarital births but higher fertility overall (Shain, 2019). The association between these two variables (religiosity and fertility) depends on the religious norms about fertility and how religious communities convey and support these norms. American Jews, as a group, are less religious than other Americans; indeed, Jews are much more likely than other Americans to define their attitude as basically secular (Shain, 2019). For instance, by table 13, 21% of Jews report religion as a significant value in their lives

versus 41% of the general public. 12% of Jewish Americans affirm they attend religious services weekly or more often, compared with 27% of American adults. However, only a minority of Jews, Orthodox Jews, have regular engagement with religious communities and pursue religious norms surrounding fertility; they are characterized by strong self-defense, transmission mechanisms, higher levels of religiosity, and higher overall fertility levels. Therefore, American Jews who are not Orthodox experience the same trend as America's upper middle class, dominated by delayed childbearing and low lifetime fertility (Shain, 2019). Instead, the Orthodox minority, associated with high fertility regardless of educational attainment (even though they are less educated than non-Orthodox but more than the general American population), suggests how religious norms around fertility can coexist with educational attainment (Shain, 2019). Unfortunately, there is no research on the respect of gender egalitarianism in that minority while maintaining fertility and educational attainments (Shain, 2019).

To sum up, there are many factors to be considered as consequences of lower fertility, such as a high level of educational attainments, the decline in religious traditionalism, and an increase in intermarriage, both of which affect Jewish fertility. Another element is religious affiliation and religious practices, which may affect fertility outcomes. As said before, it is likely that the low engagement with religious institutions, representing a religiosity source, relatively influences a person's identity by weakening their Jewish identity.

Compared to Israel, as we see in the following paragraph, in other regions, there is a striking difference in fertility between non-Orthodox and Orthodox Jews. Consequently, comparing the Jewish population to other religious groups is impossible. This is because while other minorities, such as Catholics, have higher fertility when they are not in the majority, it cannot be associated with the Jewish population (Ehrenfreund, 2021). It could think that non-Orthodox Jews possess the exact characteristics of a low fertility population, having high levels of education and thus having low fertility. This explains only partially the condition of Jews. Indeed, the assimilation process significantly impacted the Jewish population (Ehrenfreund, 2021). Jews are very integrated into society; they accept the norms accepted by the majority ruling the socio-economic institution by adapting themselves; they do not frequently attend religious practices and have relationships not strictly with Jewish people (friendship or marriage), which affects how children

are educated and how their identity is shaped (Ehrenfreund, 2021). Thus, the context and structure of Israel have fostered a high fertility rate; it is not the religion per se since secular Israeli citizens have a very high fertility above replacement level. It is the relationship between socio-economic institutions and the Jewish religion, how much religion is an integral part of people's lives (even in secular ones') and affects society's norms the crucial aspect to study. Hence, the religious factor has a relative impact if the overall Jewish community is considered. However, the situation in Israel is unique since the Jewish community in other regions has low fertility. Thus, what are the factors affecting the fertility rate in Israel? Israel's fertility is considered a unique phenomenon, influenced by different socioeconomic and cultural variables, which will be explained in the following chapters. The striking case of Israel cannot be explained only by the Jewish religion per se. However, the existence of a binding relationship between the Jewish religion and the State will be explained, clarifying if it could represent a sort of fertility-driving factor in the country.

1.2 High fertility in Israel

1.2.1 Data and Variables

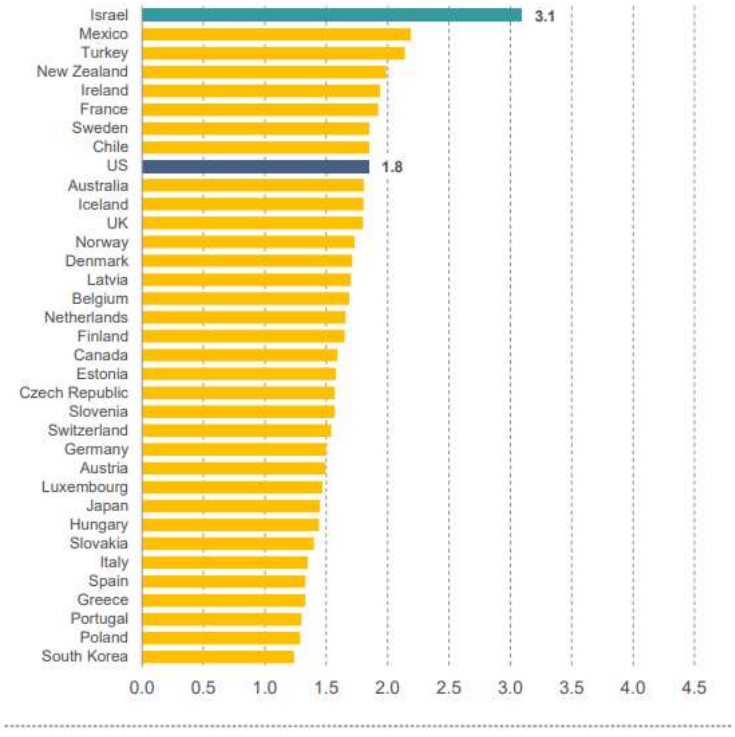
Firstly, in this paragraph, the OECD countries' data are used and are collected from different sources, such as the World Bank database or World Values Survey. Generally, the OECD term contains all the most developed countries, including European and North American and non-European countries like Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Mexico, and Chile. The primary measure of fertility, the same as in the previous paragraph, is the Total Fertility Rate (TFR). In the paragraph about Middle Eastern countries, besides the TFR variable, I also use the variable Crude Death Rate, which describes the number of deaths occurring during the year per 1,000 population estimated at midyear (*Glossary | DataBank*, n.d.). Throughout this paragraph, besides OECD data, I used data from the Statistical Abstract of Israel published annually by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS) and also taken from different studies like the ones made by *Taub Center Staff* or Evgenia Bystrov; these data are collected from ICBS like the Statistical Abstract of Israel and Israel

Social Survey (ISS). Instead, in the sections on childlessness and education, I use data from *Taub Center Staff*, where national surveys are used, not only the ISS but also the European Values Survey (EVS) produced by Tilburg University and partners. However, in those sections (childlessness and education), the number of children ever born by a given age instead of TFR is taken into consideration.

1.2.2 Demographic Composition of Israel's Population

Israel is ranked by the United Nations Human Development Index as among the "very high human development countries" by considering income, education, and health (United Nations 2011). It is also characterized by an exceptional fertility level with a TFR of 3.1 per woman. Israel has the highest fertility rate in the OECD, overtaking the highest fertility countries like Mexico and Turkey (see table 1.1). To compare Israel's fertility to Western countries, fertility was as high as Israel's one (3.1) in the United States at the end of the baby boom in the mid-1960s, in Italy in 1931, in Germany in 1914, in the UK in 1908, and France in 1889 (מרכז טאוב - Taub Center Staff, 2019).

TABLE 1.1
TFR in 2015, OECD Countries



Source: **Taub Center.** Data OECD Countries.

Indeed, as explained in the previous paragraph, Jews in western countries consistently have lower fertility than Israel compared to their neighbors in Europe and North America. This has shown how the specifically Jewish injunction to high fertility is not a cause of high fertility, but probably (as will see in the following sections) several factors influence the fertility patterns in Israel, besides the Jewish religion. Israel's relative economic well-being is likely to provide the means for the Israeli population to afford more children, and national policies encourage them through public incentives and constraints (Della Pergola, 2003a). I will analyze Israel's demographic composition in the following sectors, focusing on fertility levels.

Demographic Composition

In 2021 the Israeli population increased by about 2%; concerning the religious-ethnic group in Israel, the Jewish population currently is 6.982.600 (around 70%), and 1,997,800 (around 20%) are Arabs (see Table 1.2). The Jewish population includes legally all persons defined as "Jewish" by the Interior Ministry's Population Registry, which in turn follows the definitions of the Israeli Central Rabbinate (Della Pergola, 2016). According to the current version of Israeli civil

TABLE 1.2 Population, by Population Group

Thousands **אלפים**

	Average population אוכלוסייה ממוצעת				Population at end of year אוכלוסייה בסוף השנה				
	אחרים Others	ערבים Arabs	יהודים Jews	סך כולל Grand total	אחרים Others	ערבים Arabs	יהודים Jews	סך כולל Grand total	
1995(3)	(1). .	(1)1,049.8	4,495.1	5,544.9	(1). .	(1)1,122.0	4,549.5	5,619.0	(3)1995
1995(4)	. .	. .	. .	. .	85.1	1,004.9	4,522.3	5,612.3	(4)1995
1996	94.6	1,021.3	4,569.2	5,685.1	104.1	1,037.7	4,616.1	5,757.9	1996
1997	116.6	1,053.5	4,658.8	5,828.9	129.0	1,069.4	4,701.6	5,900.0	1997
1998	139.9	1,087.4	4,743.4	5,970.7	150.9	1,105.4	4,785.1	6,041.4	1998
1999	171.6	1,124.7	4,829.0	6,125.3	192.4	1,143.9	4,872.8	6,209.1	1999
2000(5)	208.8	1,166.3	4,914.1	6,289.2	225.2	1,188.7	4,955.4	6,369.3	(5)2000
2001	240.8	1,208.1	4,990.2	6,439.0	256.3	1,227.5	5,025.0	6,508.8	2001
2002	264.6	1,245.7	5,059.6	6,570.0	273.0	1,263.9	5,094.2	6,631.1	2002
2003	277.2	1,282.8	5,129.8	6,689.7	281.3	1,301.6	5,165.4	6,748.4	2003
2004	286.5	1,320.9	5,201.5	6,809.0	291.7	1,340.2	5,237.6	6,869.5	2004
2005	295.8	1,358.7	5,275.7	6,930.1	299.9	1,377.1	5,313.8	6,990.7	2005
2006	304.9	1,395.2	5,353.6	7,053.7	309.9	1,413.3	5,393.4	7,116.7	2006
2007	312.7	1,431.7	5,435.8	7,180.1	315.4	1,450.0	5,478.2	7,243.6	2007
2008(3)	316.3	1,468.8	5,523.7	7,308.8	317.1	1,487.6	5,569.2	7,374.0	(3)2008
2008(4)	. .	. .	. .	. .	310.3	1,499.9	5,608.9	7,419.1	(4)2008
2009	312.3	1,517.8	5,655.4	7,485.6	314.3	1,535.8	5,701.9	7,552.0	2009
2010	316.9	1,554.4	5,752.2	7,623.6	319.5	1,573.1	5,802.4	7,695.1	2010
2011	324.0	1,591.4	5,850.4	7,765.8	328.5	1,609.8	5,898.4	7,836.6	2011
2012	333.1	1,628.5	5,949.0	7,910.5	337.8	1,647.2	5,999.6	7,984.5	2012
2013	342.3	1,665.2	6,052.0	8,059.5	346.8	1,683.2	6,104.5	8,134.5	2013
2014	352.1	1,701.7	6,161.8	8,215.7	357.5	1,720.3	6,219.2	8,296.9	2014
2015	364.3	1,739.0	6,276.8	8,380.1	371.1	1,757.8	6,334.5	8,463.4	2015
2016	378.2	1,777.5	6,390.3	8,546.0	385.2	1,797.3	6,446.1	8,628.6	2016
2017	395.2	1,817.7	6,500.3	8,713.3	405.3	1,838.2	6,554.5	8,797.9	2017
2018	415.0	1,858.3	6,609.4	8,882.8	424.8	1,878.4	6,664.4	8,967.6	2018
2019	436.5	1,898.7	6,718.8	9,054.0	448.3	1,919.0	6,773.2	9,140.5	2019
2020	453.4	1,938.2	6,823.5	9,215.1	458.6	1,957.3	6,873.9	9,289.8	2020
2021	465.6	1,977.5	6,928.3	9,371.4	472.5	1,997.8	6,982.6	9,453.0	2021

Data based on: **CBS. Population Census: Population and Immigration Authority, Population Register**.
1. Until 1995. Before the publication of the Census results, "Arabs" also included "others
2. Date of population registration
3. Based on the previous Census
4. Based on the Census of that year
5. As of 2000, the total population and the Arab population also include Lebanese who were not classified by religion in the Population Register 11.5 thousand at the end of 20211
Also see: CBS website Population.

law, a Jew is defined as an individual who had a biological Jewish mother, or converted to Judaism and does not practice any other religion (Della Pergola, 2016).

Those identified as "others" are people who are not officially recognized as Jews but who are part of mixed immigrant families, mainly from the former Soviet Union, or born in Israel to parents from such backgrounds, who regarded themselves as Jewish but do not satisfy the Orthodox Jewish definition of "Jewish" which the government uses for civil procedures; they constitute just over 5% of the Israeli population (Della Pergola, 2016). Regarding population by religion, in 2021 was slightly over 18% Muslim (1.708.900), around 2% Christian (183.000), and around 1.6% Druze (ICBS, 2022). Christians represent 7% of the Israeli Arab community; most Christians (77%) are Arabs (Jewish Virtual Library, 2022). Out

of the 15.2 million Jewish people in the world, 47% reside in Israel (Jewish Virtual Library, 2022).

In the Jewish community, there are evident differences, especially in terms of practices and level of observance; four categories can be considered: *Hiloni* (secular), traditional/religious, *Masorti* (traditional/ not so religious), *Dati* (religious or modern Orthodox), and *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox). According to Pew Research Center (2016), 49% identify as *Hiloni*, 29% identify as *Masorti*, 13% identify as *Dati*, and 9% identify as *Haredi*. However, in the last years, the more religious section of the Israeli population is increased; in 2021, Haredi reached 10,5% instead of Hiloni, which decreased (to 45.3%) (ICBS, 2022). The four Jewish groups, however, may be thought of as a spectrum of religious observance, with the secular on the one hand and the Orthodox on the other; on the secular side, you have *Hiloni* and *Masorti*, while on the Orthodox side, you have the *Haredi* and the *Dati* (Scroope, 2020). The last two sectors adhere strictly to Jewish law (Halakhah) and Jewish customs (Scroope, 2020). On the secular side instead, the *Masorti* traditional are more inclined to be involved in secular society while preserving a level of Jewish observance; instead, the *Hiloni* typically do not observe Jewish laws and customs but are likely to attend a synagogue and join major religious events (Scroope, 2020).

Regarding the average age of the Israeli population, it is relatively shallow (29.5 in 2011) compared to the populations of other Western countries, even though it is getting older (27.6 in 2000). In 2021, 28% of the population was aged 0-14, while only 12% were older than 65 years, while the OECD average is 18.5% (0-14) and 15% (65+) age (Jewish Virtual Library, 2022).

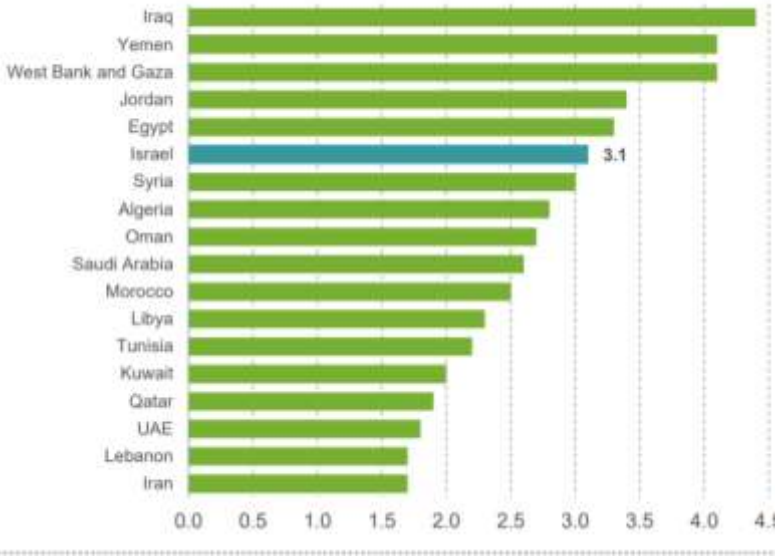
1.2.3 Fertility in Israel

As seen in table 1.1, Israel's TFR in 2015 was 3.1, which is pretty high, and well above the population "replacement level" of 2.1. The overall fertility rate in Israel in 2020 was 3.1 children per woman compared to the TFR of OECD countries in 2017 (1.65) (Jewish Virtual Library, 2022). Consequently, fertility levels in Israel exceed the fertility rate in all other developed countries (OECD countries), while in these parts, there have been widespread and detectable reductions in fertility rate over the last 150 years, so-called the "Second Demographic Transition" pulling fertility levels below 2 (TFR) since about the 1970s (Weinreb et al., 2018). Israel seems not to be affected by this trend.

Israel and Middle Eastern countries

Israel's fertility levels are even closest to its neighbors (see table 1.3), regardless of several differences in socioeconomic aspects (Weinreb et al., 2018).

TABLE 1.3. TFR in 2015, Middle East Countries



Source: **Taub Center.**
Data: **US Census International Programs**

Middle Eastern societies can be regarded as family-oriented, where marriage and childbearing are highly valued (Inhorn et al., 2017). Despite that, during the twentieth century, like other developing countries, Middle Eastern populations have experienced the major demographic stages, where TFR has

decreased over the past 40 years, diminishing the number of children desired within a family (Winckler, 2002; Kartin & Schnell, 2007; Inhorn et al., 2017). Until the 1940s, these societies had experienced the first stage, characterized by high rates of both fertility and mortality, while during the 1950s, the second stage started with a rise in natural population growth resulting from a steady decline in the crude death rate due to the increase in life expectancy and reductions in infant and child mortality rates (Winckler, 2002). In the 1960s, the average TFR among Middle Eastern countries was 7.0; by the mid-1980s, it was 5.0 (remaining very high) while the crude death rate was less than 10 per 1,000 in many most Middle Eastern countries, except for Yemen and Sudan (Winckler, 2002; Kartin & Schnell, 2007). However, during the end of the 1980s and the 1990s, the third stage started throughout almost all Arab countries, characterized by a steady decline in fertility rates, entailing an overall reduction in the natural increase rates (Winckler, 2002). In the vast majority of countries in the region, except for a few (Yemen, Iraq, and Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza strip), fertility rates have significantly declined during the past decades, reaching 3.3 in the year 2002 (Winckler, 2002; Kartin & Schnell, 2007). It is not the work's intent to analyze in detail the reasons behind the decline in fertility rates among Middle Eastern countries. However, it is possible to provide some contexts to explain briefly the fertility transition that occurred over the past decades in the region. The transition from a high level of fertility and mortality to lower natural population growth due to both lower fertility and mortality rates is the outcome of "modernization" (Winckler, 2002). In one of their studies, Winckler (2002) identifies two other significant factors in shaping the sharp fertility decline in Middle Eastern countries since the mid-1980s: family planning policies (official and unofficial) and changing economic policy and higher levels in women's education.

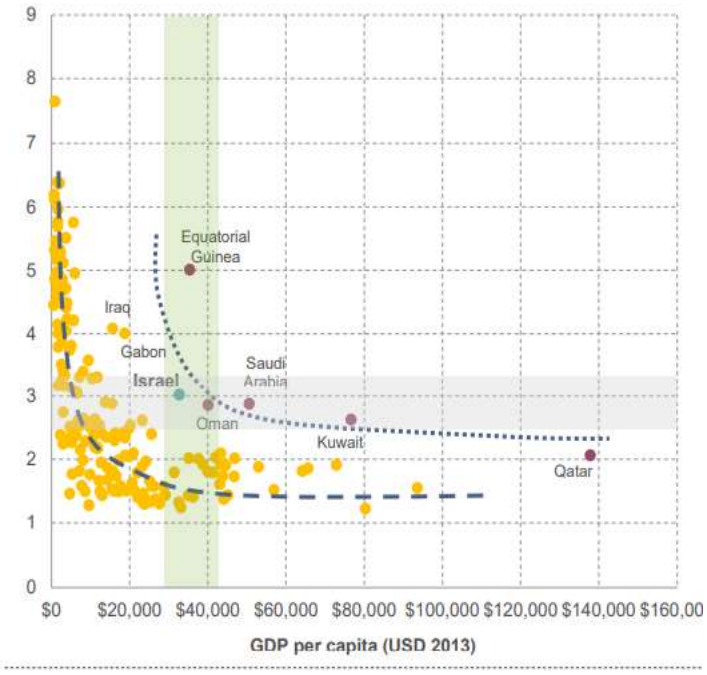
The implementation of family planning policies was aimed at holding the sharp rise in fertility. The changing economic policy included reductions in the state's subsidies "for basic foodstuffs, healthcare, and education", which increased the economic hardship of childbearing (Winckler, 2002, p.49). Those two elements were accompanied by lowered infant and child mortality rates, significant improvements in women's educational levels, which raised women's labor force participation rates, and a high level of urbanization (Winckler, 2002). All those

factors together led to a sharp reduction in fertility levels throughout almost all regions.

Consequently, as seen in table 1.3, this trend includes the vast majority of Middle Eastern societies (having a TFR below Israel's one), and only a minority, such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the Palestinian Authority (PA), has a TFR very high over 3.5 children per women (Kartin & Schnell, 2007; Weinreb et al., 2018). For example, in Iran, the average annual population growth rate has dropped to 1.2%, far below the replacement level; on the contrary, Israel continues to have one of the highest TFR in the region, with the majority of sectors of the Israeli society such as Palestinians and Jews, both secular and orthodox, keeping TFR far above replacement level (more than two children per family) (Inhorn et al., 2017).

Israel's Fertility

TABLE 1.4. The relationship between TFR and GDP per capita in 2013



Source: **Taub Center.**
Data: World Development Indicators 2014

To understand how unusually high Israel's fertility is, it can be taken into account the relationship between TFR and GDP per capita (Weinreb et al., 2018). Table 1.4 shows the negative relationship between these variables, using 2013 data from 177 countries (Weinreb et al., 2018). It displays the negative association for most countries, falling to the main fitted (dashed) line. Israel, in contrast, falls on the other dotted line with seven other countries, which are the major oil-producer (except for Israel). Table 1.4 shows shaded areas, which is

helpful in comparing Israel to countries with similar fertility or GDP levels, confirming Israel's particularity. Indeed, the countries with a similar GDP per capita had a different TFR lower than that of Israel: South Korea (1.24) and New Zealand (2.02) (Weinreb et al., 2018). Instead, countries with a similar TFR have GDP per capita ranging from $1,684 (Haiti) to $13,741 (Algeria), lower by five times than Israel's GDP per capita (Weinreb et al., 2018).

Religion and religiosity

Israeli fertility hides considerable heterogeneity across different subpopulations, especially among different ethnoreligious groups and levels of religiosity. The major ethnoreligious groups in Israel are Jews, Christians, Druze, and Muslims. The fertility of Israeli Jewish women after 2019 exceeded that of Arab women for the first time; for example, 184,000 babies were born in 2021, 74% were born to Jewish

TABLE 1.5. Fertility rates, by age and religion

Specific rates, unless otherwise stated — **ן, אלא אם כן צוין אחרת**

Woman's age	2021	2020	2015-2019	2010-2014	2005-2009	2000-2004	1995-1999	1990-1994	1985-1989	1980-1984	1975-1979	1970-1974	1965-1969	1960-1964
	TOTAL POPULATION(2)													**כל האוכלוסייה(2)**
GENERAL FERTILITY RATE	**85.5**	**83.0**	**89.6**	**90.9**	**87.9**	**87.0**	**85.4**	**86.7**	**95.8**	**102.6**	**112.5**	**115.3**	**109.2**	**111.4**
15-19	6.6	7.0	8.7	11.5	14.0	16.1	17.7	19.4	22.0	31.3	40.5	40.3	37.3	46.6
20-24	91.5	93.8	103.6	107.7	106.3	114.0	120.2	131.7	153.6	174.7	194.8	203.5	208.6	229.5
25-29	170.3	166.4	176.9	174.8	171.5	179.5	189.7	193.0	201.7	194.3	204.9	226.9	239.0	230.3
30-34	184.4	174.0	182.9	177.2	167.1	161.5	156.7	147.3	144.8	137.5	150.3	170.4	168.1	154.0
35-39	112.8	105.9	109.5	105.3	96.0	88.5	81.7	75.8	73.7	71.8	80.8	91.8	84.9	77.5
40-44	30.9	29.7	31.2	28.2	24.4	21.8	19.4	17.6	17.0	15.8	19.6	24.3	23.3	26.3
45-49	3.1	3.4	3.6	3.1	2.5	1.8	1.5	1.7	1.4	1.4	2.4	3.7	5.6	5.9
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE	**3.00**	**2.90**	**3.08**	**3.04**	**2.91**	**2.92**	**2.93**	**2.93**	**3.07**	**3.13**	**3.47**	**3.80**	**3.83**	**3.85**
	THEREOF:													**מזה:**
	JEWS													**יהודיות**
GENERAL FERTILITY RATE	**88.8**	**85.7**	**92.0**	**91.5**	**84.2**	**77.2**	**73.4**	**75.3**	**86.3**	**92.3**	**98.7**	**99.5**	**94.5**	**96.6**
15-19	3.5	3.5	4.0	5.2	6.0	6.8	8.1	10.6	14.0	22.8	31.2	29.3	31.3	38.8
20-24	82.9	82.4	87.9	88.1	82.6	84.0	89.1	104.8	132.3	156.3	175.0	184.5	192.2	209.1
25-29	169.2	165.5	174.4	169.3	163.5	167.6	176.4	180.0	191.5	181.5	187.5	205.7	217.1	210.0
30-34	203.2	190.7	198.7	190.1	176.4	162.7	152.2	140.0	137.6	127.0	129.0	146.3	144.6	133.9
35-39	126.8	118.7	122.8	117.1	103.7	88.9	78.8	71.0	68.5	60.8	62.8	73.3	67.5	63.3
40-44	35.8	34.3	35.8	31.9	26.2	21.6	18.0	15.8	13.5	10.5	12.6	16.0	16.0	19.3
45-49	3.8	4.1	4.4	3.7	2.8	1.8	1.5	1.4	0.9	0.6	1.0	1.7	3.3	3.7
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE	**3.13**	**3.00**	**3.14**	**3.03**	**2.81**	**2.67**	**2.62**	**2.62**	**2.79**	**2.80**	**3.00**	**3.28**	**3.36**	**3.39**
	MOSLEMS													**מוסלמיות**
GENERAL FERTILITY RATE	**91.7**	**90.5**	**97.9**	**104.9**	**121.8**	**149.8**	**156.3**	**153.4**	**151.6**	**173.3**	**221.4**	**257.1**	**283.8**	**277.9**
15-19	16.6	17.7	22.8	31.2	43.1	56.0	58.8	56.6	53.9	67.5	91.8	118.5	113.8	118.9
20-24	132.5	141.9	167.1	191.3	221.3	253.2	254.8	244.5	236.9	270.4	334.0	379.3	383.9	388.6
25-29	197.3	192.9	209.5	220.2	231.1	261.5	265.7	259.1	260.5	292.3	368.1	409.9	431.3	440.7
30-34	152.1	146.9	152.2	155.7	166.0	196.7	199.8	203.1	204.8	244.9	320.5	359.2	406.9	389.1
35-39	82.7	77.6	79.5	80.2	91.0	112.7	116.9	124.1	130.4	162.8	225.8	269.2	297.8	304.2
40-44	20.0	18.8	20.9	20.7	24.4	31.5	35.8	41.2	47.4	60.7	90.0	121.7	154.9	147.2
45-49	1.1	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.8	2.3	3.0	4.5	5.8	8.8	20.6	37.1	55.8	58.1
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE	**3.01**	**2.99**	**3.27**	**3.50**	**3.89**	**4.57**	**4.67**	**4.67**	**4.70**	**5.54**	**7.25**	**8.47**	**9.22**	**9.23**

Specific rates, unless otherwise stated — **אלא אם כן צוין אחרת**

Woman's age	2021	2020	2015-2019	2010-2014	2005-2009	2000-2004	1995-1999(3)	1990-1994	1985-1989	1980-1984	1975-1979	1970-1974	1965-1969	1960-1964
	CHRISTIANS													**נוצריות**
GENERAL FERTILITY RATE	**51.6**	**53.5**	**57.3**	**62.3**	**63.0**	**71.8**	**79.5**	**69.4**	**80.7**	**77.6**	**96.5**	**117.6**	**133.0**	**150.5**
15-19	(1.7)	(2.0)	2.0	3.7	5.8	10.7	15.3	15.9	18.0	20.3	30.3	40.0	45.5	46.5
20-24	27.4	36.4	45.6	67.7	87.3	115.5	140.6	134.0	154.4	151.7	189.5	204.9	224.7	241.9
25-29	121.4	129.3	144.7	165.9	162.2	168.5	177.1	149.8	168.1	157.7	188.1	219.7	255.5	273.5
30-34	127.4	128.4	130.0	126.9	110.7	113.5	115.8	88.8	104.4	97.8	130.9	160.5	191.6	210.4
35-39	62.5	58.2	61.3	58.2	49.5	50.0	50.2	38.1	45.3	44.5	69.0	82.0	100.2	121.1
40-44	13.3	13.3	13.5	11.6	10.4	9.8	11.4	7.3	7.6	9.4	15.8	21.6	29.6	38.9
45-49	(1.1)	(2.2)	1.7	1.8	(1.6)	1.3	1.4	1.6	0.6	0.4	1.3	1.7	4.4	4.5
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE	**1.77**	**1.85**	**1.99**	**2.18**	**2.14**	**2.35**	**2.56**	**2.18**	**2.49**	**2.41**	**3.12**	**3.65**	**4.26**	**4.68**
	DRUZE													**דרוזיות**
GENERAL FERTILITY RATE	**59.2**	**57.1**	**63.1**	**68.9**	**80.3**	**94.6**	**106.5**	**122.1**	**134.7**	**168.5**	**204.7**	**214.0**	**219.4**	**233.8**
15-19	(2.7)	(2.8)	4.1	9.3	13.0	20.9	24.3	30.0	38.0	59.1	63.7	65.6	67.9	86.7
20-24	48.9	56.5	77.4	107.3	136.8	164.3	174.8	199.1	224.1	271.7	314.7	335.1	327.7	360.1
25-29	151.9	141.9	157.5	166.4	165.4	174.7	199.3	219.6	236.3	289.2	371.0	371.5	377.7	375.3
30-34	124.5	113.8	119.0	113.0	118.9	132.3	146.3	175.5	186.4	231.5	311.0	335.0	333.0	323.2
35-39	55.8	62.6	57.3	52.5	59.5	67.6	80.0	99.4	114.6	163.7	230.4	245.6	224.6	231.3
40-44	15.0	10.1	11.0	11.3	12.9	13.5	22.3	26.7	35.1	56.9	85.0	77.0	104.9	100.2
45-49	..	..	1.0	(0.6)	1.0	0.7	1.3	2.7	3.3	8.4	10.6	20.0	24.6	21.4
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE	**2.00**	**1.94**	**2.14**	**2.30**	**2.54**	**2.87**	**3.24**	**3.77**	**4.19**	**5.40**	**6.93**	**7.25**	**7.30**	**7.49**
	NOT CLASSIFIED BY RELIGION													**ללא סיווג דת**
GENERAL FERTILITY RATE	**39.7**	**38.9**	**46.9**	**51.1**	**47.4**	**49.4**	**56.5**							
15-19	2.4	3.2	4.4	6.3	10.5	15.4	26.7							
20-24	26.9	30.9	36.3	46.1	53.0	73.7	99.0							
25-29	77.3	76.6	95.1	104.4	100.0	98.9	104.7							
30-34	97.2	86.2	102.1	103.6	87.5	75.2	76.7							
35-39	58.0	55.3	60.6	58.5	44.0	37.0	35.9							
40-44	14.7	17.0	16.9	15.0	11.1	8.5	8.6							
45-49	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.6	(0.7)	0.5	0.3							
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE	**1.39**	**1.35**	**1.59**	**1.68**	**1.53**	**1.55**	**1.76**							

Data based on**: Population and Immigration Authority, Population Register**.
Blank space = data not known or irrelevant as a result of the table's structure.
() =rates, percentages, averages, etc. based on 5-19 cases.
.. = rates, percentages, averages, etc, based on fewer than 5 cases.
1. Data for five-year periods are arithmetic means.
2. As of 2000, includes the population of Lebanese women who are not classified by religion in the Population Register.
3. Data on women not classified by religion are presented for the years 1996-1999.
Also see: CBS website Population

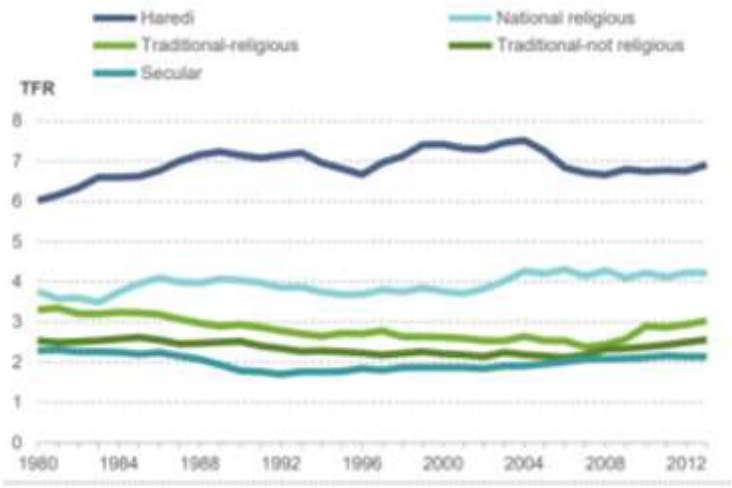
mothers, 23% to Arab mothers, and 3% to mothers of others (Jewish Virtual Library, 2022).

Fertility levels across several sectors have changed over the decades. Table 1.5 shows how fertility levels have changed, except for Jews, where the TFR remained stable around the average, rising above the average in 2015 and reaching 3.13 in 2021. The TFR of Christians fell in the 1970s to a current TFR of 1.77, Druze TFR dropped from 7.25 to 2.0 children between 1970 and 2021, and Muslim fertility also dropped drastically from 9.22 in 1965 to 3.01 around 2021.

These statistics stress a crucial aspect when discussing Israel's unusual fertility profile. Since 2005, national fertility levels have increased due to the high fertility of Israeli Jews, since Muslim and Druze fertilities have dropped, and Christian fertility as well. Then there is a sector of Israeli subpopulations with TFR at the same level as the standard global pattern (not classified by religion), which has had a TFR below two since the late 1990s. This is important, however, because Israel's exceptional fertility is a product of the Jewish population.

By religiosity

TABLE 1.6. TFR by level of religiosity in Jewish population



Source: **Taub Center.**
Data: **Hlethel 2015**

After discovering that the Jewish community is the main responsible for the high fertility in Israel, it is crucial to understand which branch in the Jewish community is the leading group for the high fertility by analyzing the TFR by the level of religiosity in the Jewish community. It is essential to underline that Israel is characterized by no separation of religion and state, consequently, even self-defined secular people may be influenced by the religious environment (Okun, 2017). However, it will be analyzed in the following chapter. Table 1.6, which draws on graphs TFR by religiosity between 1980 and 2013 for Israeli Jews, shows many differences in fertility by religiosity, taking into consideration *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox), traditional-religious, national religious, traditional-not religious, and secular groups. (Weinreb et al., 2018). TFR among *Haredi* has fluctuated by around seven since the 1980s and among the secular and the traditional who identify as not religious, around 2.5 (Weinreb et al., 2018). Going into detail, even though *Haredi* fertility remained significantly high across the 1980s, from 2007 to 2013, fertility for *Haredi* lowered compared to the mid-1990s. Instead, in the non-Haredi population, there has been

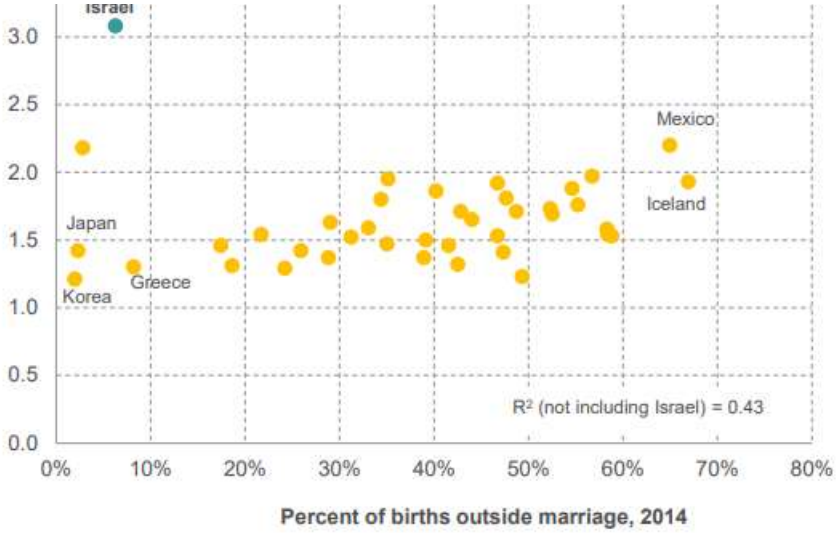
an increase in fertility. This is striking because (even though the difference in fertility between Haredi and non-Haredi Jewish communities), even among Jewish women who identify themselves as secular and traditional but not religious, the TFR consistently exceeds 2.2, being higher than the average TFR in all other OECD countries (Okun, 2016; Weinreb et al., 2018).

Other Factors associated with fertility

In this section, a comparison between Israel and the other OECD countries on some core Second Demographic Transition (SDT) dimensions will be made, considering four variables that are associated with STD influencing fertility levels: non-marital fertility, age at first birth, childlessness, and education levels. The idea behind the reduction in fertility rate since the 1960s is the long-term types of cultural change that influence marital patterns such as delayed marriage, cohabitation, and increasing celibacy, and fertility behavior such as decoupling sex from reproduction (and reproduction from marriage), postponing childbearing and childlessness (Okun, 2016; Weinreb et al., 2018).

Non-marital fertility

TABE 1.7. The relationship between TFR and the share of births outside of marriage in 2014



Note: 2014 or nearest data with available data
Source: **Taub Center.**
Data: **OECD Database.**

As shown in Table 1.7, across the OECD and other developed countries, there is a positive relationship between TFR and non-marital fertility (Weinreb et al., 2018). This kind of fertility currently characterizes a significant share of births in many countries, particularly northern European countries and Mexico, where people are not "forced" to marry to have babies. This also has many significant impacts on welfare policy because of the long-recognized concentration of child poverty in single-parent families (Weinreb et al., 2018). However, Israel is instead the

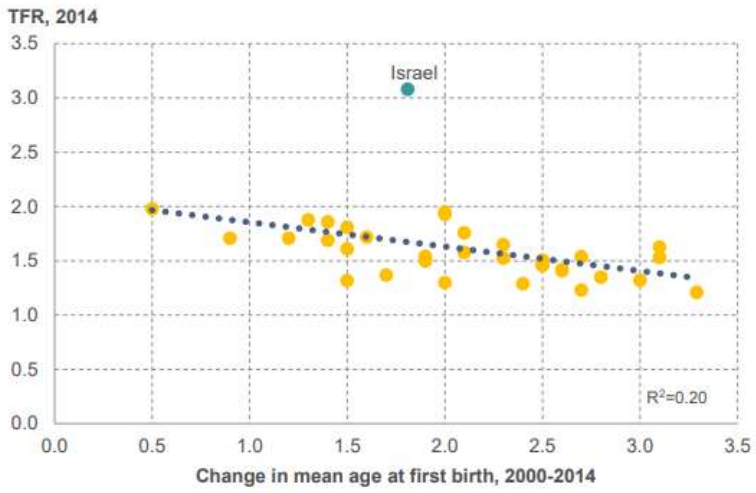
opposite, having high marital fertility and one of the lowest rates of non-marital fertility and, more generally, a low rate of non-marital cohabitation (less than 10%, compared to about 40% on average in the OECD) (Weinreb et al., 2018). Only Japan, South Korea, and Turkey score lower among all OECD countries but with far lower fertility rates (Weinreb et al., 2018). Still, non-marital fertility does not give any answer for the high fertility rate in Israel.

Nonetheless, birth rates outside the marriage in Israel are rising above age 30 (even though it is relatively high among women aged up to 19) (ICBS, 2022). Among fertility of women aged 25-29, the percentage of births of never-married women rose from about 1.9% in 2000 to about 4% in 2020 (ICBS, 2022). Across all never-married women aged 40+, it increased from 7% to over 18% of all births (ICBS, 2022). Furthermore, it can be assumed that non-marital fertility is disproportionately concentrated in Israel's non-religious Jewish community since non-marital fertility is strongly inadmissible and highly rare among Arab Israel and the most religious Jewish (Haredi) populations; indeed, from data from ICBS, it is possible to see how low the percentage of people never married (in 2020) in the Ultra-Orthodox section (around 4%), and religious section (around 10%) is, consequently, confirming the unlikely possibility of non-marital fertility in those populations compared to other sections (secular just over 51% and both traditional-religious or traditional not so religious around 25%) (2022). This could also be confirmed by the fact that one of the higher percentages of births to never-married women is that of women aged up to 19 likely not belong to the most religious sectors (about 20%), compared to 20-21 aged just over 3%, 25-29 around 4%, 30-30-39 between 8% and 10% (ICBS, 2022). Finally, the striking feature of Israel is that non-marital fertility is growing, at least above age 30, testifying standard SDT trends, but it is rising together with marital fertility, entailing a high fertility rate which is not happening in other developed countries (ICBS; 2022).

Age at first birth

Across all the OECD and developed countries, age at first birth has continued to rise in OECD countries because of improved and facilitated access to effective contraception and rising levels of women's education and employment.

TABLE 1.8. Relationship between the change in age at first birth and TFR

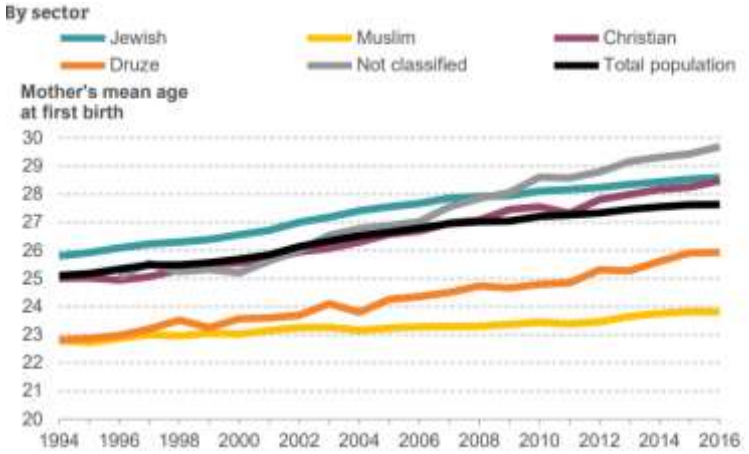


Source: **Taub Center.**
Data: **OECD Database.**

Table 1.8 confirms the existence of a negative correlation between the rise of age at first birth and fertility levels. TFR is 1.4 in the 10 OECD countries that experienced at least a 2.5-year rise in age at first birth between 2000 to 2014 period (Weinreb et al., 2018).

Instead, the TFR is 1.7 in the nine countries where the increase was 0.5 to 1.5 years in the same period (Weinreb et al., 2018). In Israel, in 2016, the average age for Israeli women to be married was 26.1, and the average age for an Israeli woman to give birth to her first child was 28.3; indeed, teen moms are uncommon in Israel,

TABLE 1.9. Mother's average age at first birth



Source: **Taub Center.**
Data: **ICBS,** ***Statistical Abstract of Israel.***

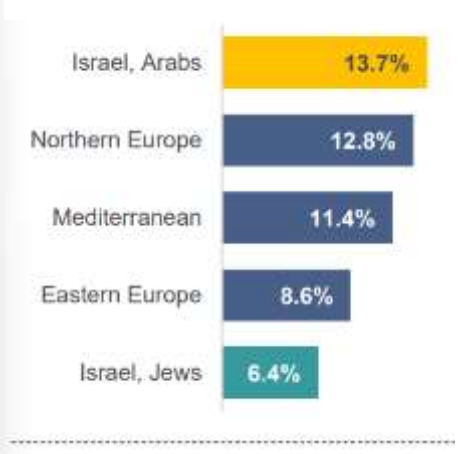
births of women, aged 19 and under, accounting for 0.5% of national births during the same year (Jewish Virtual Library, 2022). Table 1.9 shows the change in age at first birth, across the 1994 and 2016 periods, in the different population groups in Israel. While in 1994, the majority of births occurred at ages 23-27, by 2010, Jewish women of various ethnic origins had completed the shift over the 30s, even though for Muslims, primary childbearing ages remained 15-24. It rose by about three years for Christians and Druze and one year for Muslims, with an overall reduction in TFR in these groups (Weinreb et al., 2018)

Across all Jews, age at first birth rose by about 2.8 years in the same period, even as non-Haredi Jewish TFR increased by about 0.2. The trend among Israeli Jews is a setback of the traditional correlation between age at first birth and fertility because it entails the rise in fertility at older ages which has outweighed decreases in fertility at younger ages. Consequently, postponed childbearing is not a fertility limitation for Israeli Jews because they have children even at older ages, compensating for reductions at lower ages, which can represent a complication for having babies in other countries. The age at first birth is also interesting to be analyzed in relation to the level of religious observance in the Jewish community. From the Social Survey 2009 data of Israel, only 2% of secular women had their first child before 25 years; 76% of them decided to delay the first birth in the age group 25-29, and 38% still did not have a child at 30-34 (Bystrov, 2012). This decision to postpone having children at late childbearing ages is comparable to the pattern in most European countries. However, the age at first birth among the different sectors in the Jewish community was different: 28% of the religious and 32% of the Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) gave birth before the age of 24 (Bystrov, 2012). Therefore, when speaking about fertility transition in Israel and STD (delaying childbearing), only secular Jewish women should be considered; indeed their decision to postpone childbearing until late ages until their thirties and further is comparable to the pattern in most European countries (Bystrov, 2012). However, even though they have the same childbearing postponing behavior as European women, the consequences are different because the fertility of secular Jewish women, unlike OECD women, remains above replacement level (over 2), not showing any signs of low-lowest fertility trends. As we can see also in the level of childlessness, they manage to compensate for postponing childbearing by recuperating births at late childbearing ages.

Childlessness

The share of childless women in Israel is comparatively low (Weinreb et al., 2018). It is more prevalent among Israeli Arabs women aged 45-59 (13.7%) than among Israeli Jews of the same age (6.4%), suggesting how necessary marriage remains for childbirth primarily for Arabs (Weinreb et al., 2018). Indeed, ultimate childlessness is relatively low across all Jewish women, regardless of the level of their religiosity (Bystrov, 2012). For instance, Social Survey 2009 showed that among women born before 1959 who had just completed their childbearing period, the highest ultimate childlessness was 7% for secular women and the lowest 2% for Ultra-Orthodox women (Bystrov, 2012). These percentages are very low compared to the average in Europe.

TABLE 1.10. Share of childless women ages 45-59, 2007-2012, by Sector of Israel and location



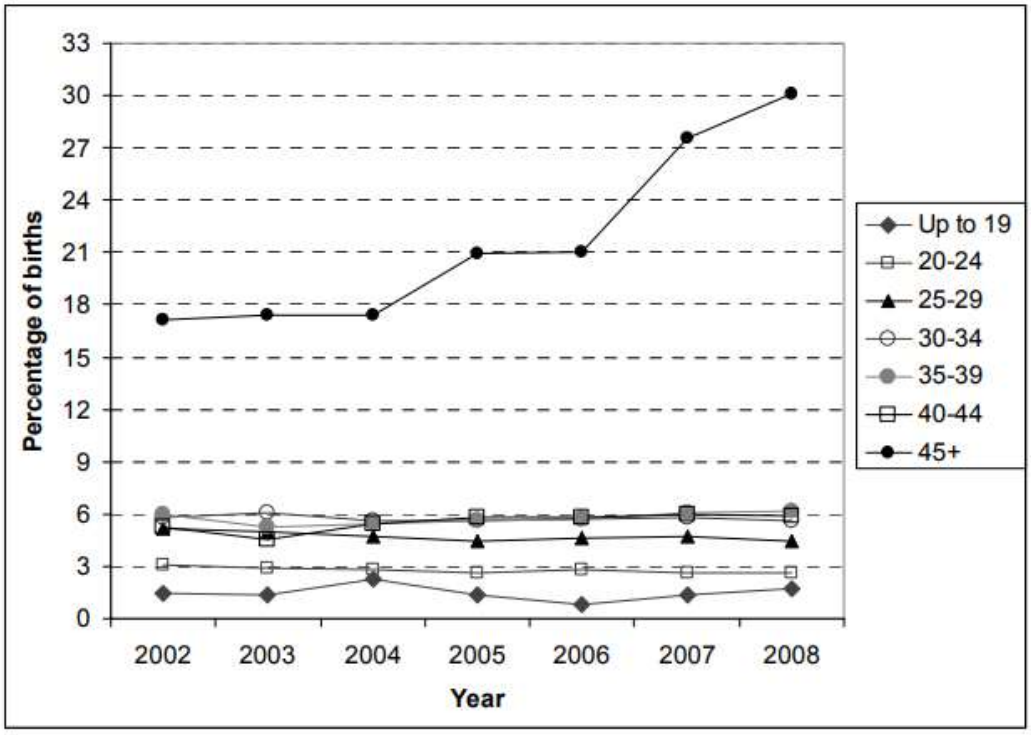
Source: **Taub Center.**
Data: **European Values Study (EVS) 2008-2009;**
ICBS, Social Survey 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012

Therefore, even less religious Jewish women in these cohorts, characterized by more liberal attitudes combined with non-marital fertility, preferred having a child, regardless of marriage, which outweighed the unacceptability of non-marital fertility. This can be understood better when traditional Jewish familism, in particular the value of the child, is explained in the following chapters. As confirmed previously, even if they decide to delay childbearing as OECD women, they do not end in ultimate childlessness, but they manage to recuperate it from having children at older ages. Thus, this shows extremely low levels of eventual childlessness because of the almost complete compensation for all the delayed births (Bystrov, 2012).

More newborns at later childbearing

It is also striking to see the consequences of late childbearing because this phenomenon drastically affects fertility levels, thus the number of children per household. Indeed, as effects of postponement of childbearing until very late ages, three primary outcomes can be observed: firstly, the percentage of multiple births rises intensely after the age of 45 due to assisted reproduction; secondly, extremely low levels of eventual childlessness because of the almost complete compensation for all the delayed births; and, thirdly, non-marital fertility at those ages increases (Bystrov, 2012). The last two outcomes have already been analyzed; the first one instead is fascinating because it has a direct impact on the number of children, consequently, on the fertility level of older women (having multiple newborns in a single birth); this also radically influences the mother profile in society because being a mother is not anymore a prerogative of young women (Bystrov, 2012).
Since most women have difficulty beginning childbearing at old ages, they resort to assisted reproduction which entails a high probability of giving birth to several

TABLE 1.11. The proportion of multiple births among Jewish women in Israel in 2002-08

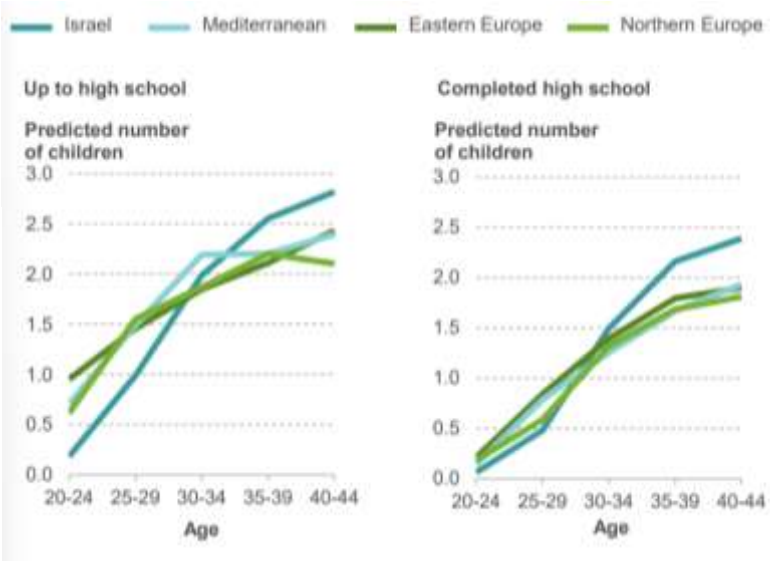


Source: **Bystrov, E. (2012).**
Data: **ICBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel**

newborns compared to childbearing at younger ages without medical intervention (Bystrov, 2012). For example, table 1.11 shows that in 2008 approximately 30% of births to women over 45 involved more than one newborn in contrast to women of other age-cohort where the percentage drops to around 6% (Bystrov, 2012). In the future, this proportion could rise even more since an increasing number of women decide to postpone their childbearing at later ages.

Education

Education, especially for women, is regarded as one of the most crucial determinants of fertility. Educated women generally have lower fertility than less educated ones, creating a negative association between women's fertility and education (Weinreb et al., 2018). Educated women have primarily continued to have lower fertility than their less educated peers because they have postponed



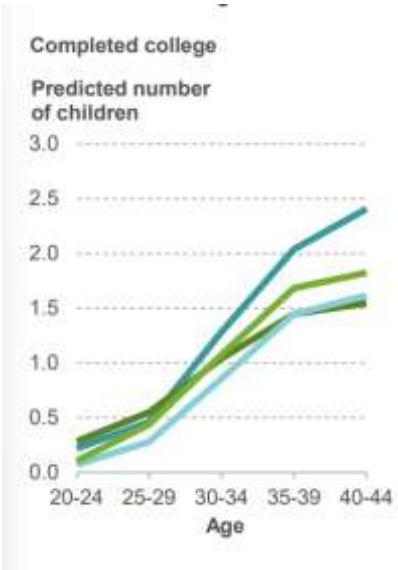


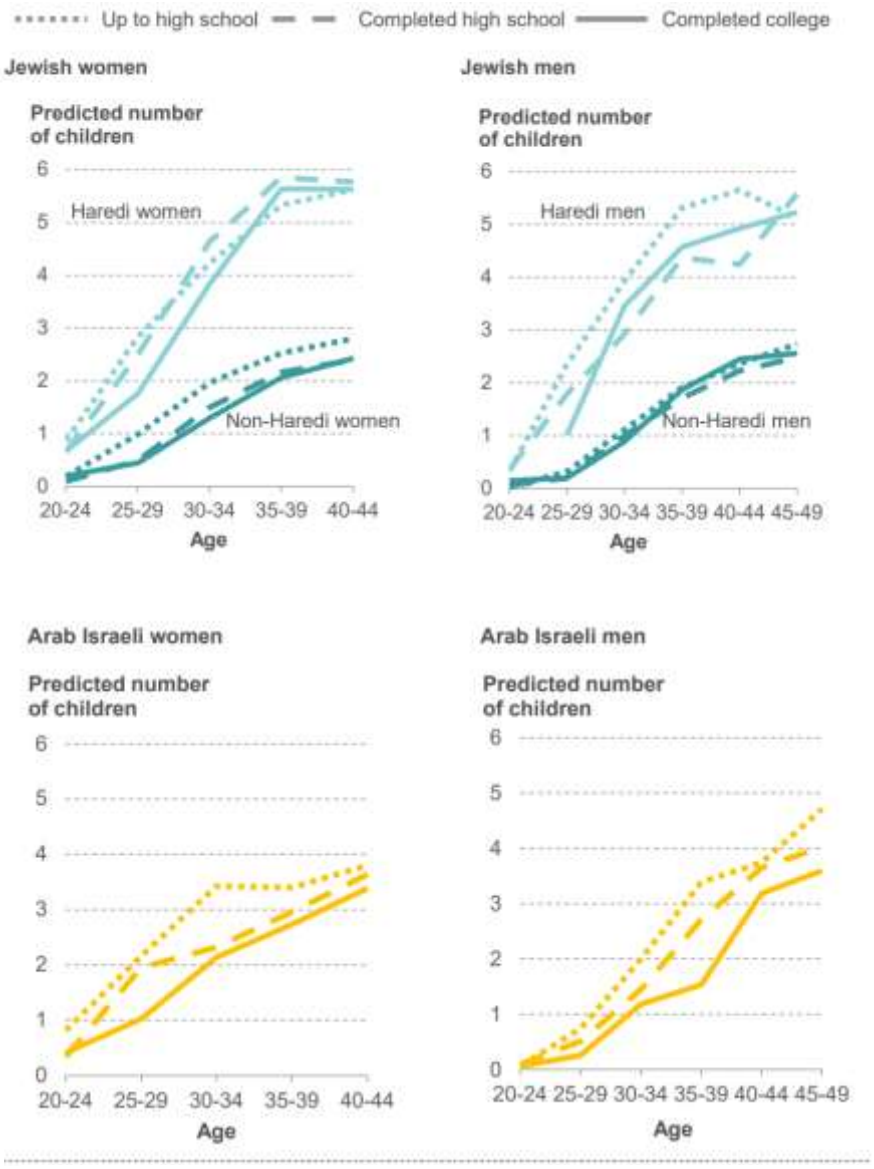
Table 1.12. Predicted number of children by education level, age and residential region among women, Israel (2008-2012) and Europe (2009)

Source: **Taub Center**.
Data: **European Values Study (EVS) 2008-2009; ICBS, Social Survey 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012**

childbearing to continue their education and have a career, and also due to the gender inequality in the household chores. This has also entailed reducing fertility because of the risk of undesirable health consequences associated with late childbearing and investing more in smaller family composition (Weinreb et al., 2018). Before going into detail in explaining the fertility in Israel by different educational attainments and groups, we can make a comparison between Europe and Israel. Israel represents a particular case compared to the other developed countries, characterized by a rise in women's education attainments and higher fertility compared to Europe. From table 1.12, two significant findings can be underlined; the first one is that cumulative fertility in Israel is not higher at every age within every educational level (Weinreb et al., 2018). Indeed, across the least educated women, Israelis (not considering Haredi and Arab Israelis) actually have higher fertility in their late 30s than their European peers but lower fertility in their 20s. It is much similar for those who have completed high school; indeed, within this category, Israeli women seem to begin childbearing also later than their European counterparts but then quickly accelerate to higher levels overtaking European women (Weinreb et al., 2018). Only among Israeli women who have completed college, fertility during women's 20s is not the lowest. A second important finding is that Israeli fertility is higher at higher age at birth than the overall European fertility across education levels. Moreover, the difference in fertility in Israel across the various educational levels is shallower than in Europe.

By age 40-44, cumulative fertility rates in Europe are significantly higher among the least educated than among the most educated; indeed, women belonging to this age cohort without secondary school degrees have 0.4 children more than women who completed high school and 0.6 children more than women who have completed college (Weinreb et al., 2018). While among Israeli women of the same age cohort, the difference in fertility is smaller; indeed, women's fertility with the lowest education is 2.8, while those with complete high school and those with a first degree have only 0.3 fewer children. This underlines something different in Israeli fertility compared to other developed countries. That is, most of the difference in fertility between Israel and European counterparts stems from relatively educated families, being a significant and increasing portion in Israel, having more children, with at least a couple of older siblings (consequently, older and more-educated

TABLE 1.13. Predicted number of children by age, gender, and religiosity, 2008-2012



Source: **Taub Center.**
Data: **European Values Study (EVS) 2008-2009; ICBS, Social Survey 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012**

parents have more children compared to developed countries) (Weinreb et al., 2018). Indeed, the difference in fertility between the most educated Israelis and their European peers is greater than between the least educated Israelis and their European counterparts. Table 1.13 shows the marginal effects of education on the foreseen number of children by five-year age group in Israel, for women up to ages 40-44 and men up to ages 45-49, belonged to different sectors, with household income set to its mean (for Jews, there is the distinction between Haredim and non-Haredim) (Weinreb et al., 2018). Overall, to the majority of groups in Israel is valid

the negative correlation between education and fertility; indeed, as education rises, fertility declines. However, some differences among the different groups can be traced (Weinreb et al., 2018). Among both Arab Israeli women and men, the pattern shown in the previous table matches the standard relationship. At every age cohort, Arabs (both men and women) with the lowest education attainments have the most children, and at most ages, persons having college degrees have fewer children than high school graduates (Weinreb et al., 2018). Among Jews, the situation partially matches the standard correlation between fertility and education. For non-Haredi Jewish men, the number of children among those who have completed college and those with lower levels of education is the same, while for both Haredi men and women with the highest degree have their first child at a pretty late age, but by their late thirties, their fertility levels reach appears to converge to those with lower levels of education (Weinreb et al., 2018). Only among non-Haredi women, the least educated have higher fertility rates than those who completed high school or have a degree, with the fertility pattern being alike for the latter two groups (Weinreb et al., 2018).

To sum up

As demonstrated previously, Israel's fertility is outstanding because it is much higher than in other OECD countries. Indeed, even though signs of STD are evident in Israel (especially in the more secular and less religious Jewish community sections), such as delayed marriage, later childbearing, and increasing celibacy, fertility remains incredibly high, even above replacement level. Furthermore, Israel is one of the only countries where fertility is increased in the last two decades. It is true that the Haredim, who constitute around 13% of the Jewish population, have a fertility rate of around 7, rising the overall fertility average. Nevertheless, even without the Haredim and the most religious ones, considering solely the secular Jewish population, the average fertility rate is still very high, above 2 (Weinreb et al., 2018). Another striking feature is that the percentage of women without giving birth into their 40s is significantly lower in Israel than in Western countries; Israel is indeed characterized, unlike developed countries, by postponing childbearing, which is compensated by higher fertility at later ages (30s into early 40s) and higher fertility among more educated groups (Weinreb et al., 2018). Instead, among Israeli

Muslims, Christians, and Druze, there have been sharp decreases in fertility since the mid-1990s, associated with rises in age at first birth, which is in line with global patterns (Weinreb et al., 2018). Thus, what factors influence the high fertility in the Jewish community in Israel? Religion may be the most serious manifestation of the difference between Israel and Jewish communities outside Israel since there is no separation of religion and state in Israel (Okun, 2017; Goldscheider, 1996). The Jewish religion has been highly politicized, and religious institutions (especially one segment of Judaism, the Orthodox) have particular powers (Okun, 2017; Goldscheider, 1996). Those elements will be explained in detail in the following chapters.

Part II Exploring the Dynamics and Factors of High Fertility Rates

2 Demography as a National-Security Issue: Nation-Building Project

As we could previously see, the fertility rate in Israel, especially within the Jewish community, is strikingly high, characterized by a secular population sector having fertility above replacement level, unlike the secular population in other developed countries. Particularly this secular pole is experiencing the same SDT trend (like marital transition and late childbearing) even though the fertility rate remains really high (Bystrov, 2012). It is essential to underline the environment where Israeli citizens reside. Lazerwitz and Tabory (2002) express the possibility that this high fertility may be influenced by traditional (family) norms preserved by the religious environment in Israel, which enhances the religiosity of most secular Jews and even the non-Jews living there. Israel experiences an extensive overlap between civil and religious authorities; religious institutions and religion-based political parties directly and indirectly influence public life, such as marriage, divorce, education, and social welfare systems (Okun, 2016). Orthodox institutions indeed regulate personal matters, such as marriage and divorce, affecting some features of the STD and social dynamics (Bystrov 2012).

In one of their studies, Okun (2016) stated that the combination of many factors could be responsible for the high fertility like the continuing importance of familiarism and of marriage as a social institution, the importance of raising children as a strong societal value, the role of Jewish nationalism and collective behavior in a religious society and a nationalist discourse that defines women as the biological reproducers of the nation. However, it is crucial to consider Israel's particular and unique condition when analyzing fertility. Israel is a western-oriented country positioned in the Middle East characterized by ethnonational conflict. The "demographic struggle" is a persistent variable in the life of Israeli Jews, in fact, they are deeply committed to maintaining, regardless of the effort, the numerical majority of the Jews in Israel (Stypinska, 2007; Leuprecht, 2011). Such demographic competition and existential threat may foster pro-natalist sentiment and policy, influencing higher fertility rates among both groups, even the most secular ones. Demography has played a decisive role in shaping the power balance

within Israeli society; indeed, demographic variables, such as migration and fertility rate, determine the size and structure of the Israeli population. In this chapter, I analyze fertility considering the overall context of Israel. Firstly, demography is regarded as a national security issue, and this can be understood after a brief analysis of Jewish democracy, its National and Ethnic ideology, and its *raison d'etre* being a state both democratic and Jewish. The Jewish numerical dominance has been fundamental to guarantee the Jewish population's social, political, and economic authority and to maintain the Jewish-Zionist character (Stypinska, 2007). It is a security matter. Then I examine the role of religion in the state, particularly how it affects the state institution and public life. Comprehending the Arab threat is crucial as well since the increase of the Arab population would be a threat to the Israeli (Jewish) majority. Analyzing the demographic trend, firstly of the Arab Israelis and then Palestinians in the Gaza strip and West bank, is essential to understand the overall situation. Finally, I briefly analyze the population policies (immigration and fertility ones) as nation-building attempts focusing on the many waves of immigration and several policies. Fertility policies (pro-natalist policies) will be explored in depth in the last chapter concentrating on women's role.

2.1 Jewish democracy: Ethnic-national Ideology

The Jewish character of the state is the core principle of the Israeli *raison d'etre*. The majority of the Jewish population component is the critical factor that enables Israel to control its political, economic, and territorial power and maintain some form of Jewish identity. Smooha, an Israel scholar, has elaborated a term to describe the particular condition of Israel: ethnic democracy. Here, I have to make a premise. The intent of this study is not to verify the consistency of Jewish democracy with democracy as usually defined. This is not the place to discuss the legitimacy or non-legitimacy of the state of Israel and the fair or unfair condition of the Arab minority. The intent is to briefly explain the particularity of this democracy and the importance of the Jewish ethnic feature in the country and understand how the fertility rate is such a crucial factor to consider in this particular context.

According to Smooha (1990), Israel is a perfect "ethnic democracy" model, a highly centralized state dominated strongly by a Jewish majority. Smooha (2002)

explained the conditions necessary for a democracy to emerge as an ethnic one. The primary condition is the pre-existence of ethnic nationalism and the ethnic nation; this nationalism would shape the new state (Smooha, 2002). Another condition is the majority's continued sense of a threat, real or perceived, that entails the mobilization of the ethnic majority to preserve the ethnic nation (Smooha, 2002). Ethnic democracy is characterized by: (a) full democratic rights extended to the state's citizens; (b) limited collective rights granted to ethnic minorities; and (c) state institutions remaining firmly in the control of the dominant ethnic group (Yiftachel, 1992). Ethnic democracy is driven by an ideology or ethnic nationalism which asserts that a particular population shares a common descent (blood ties), a common language and a common culture as an ethnic nation (Smooha, 2002). The Jewish democracy has been built on Zionism, the Jewish (ethnic) nationalism.

Consequently, Zionism is the state ideology, and its primary intent is to make Israel Jewish in "demography, language, culture, institutions, identity and symbols" and to defend Jewish people and their interests all over the world (Smooha, 2002, p.485). Therefore, the central value of Israel since its formation in 1948 has been establishing a Jewish state. Consequently, such a state was founded as an ethnonational ideology (King, 2002).

The Jewish ethnic relevance of Israel's state is expressed in formal legislation and the practical conduct of the state, for example, the allocation of more resources to the Jewish population (Shapira, 2018). Israel is an ethnic state with a political system that has to preserve the majority of the Jews. When talking about the Jewishness of the state, the Israeli Supreme Court tried to give an answer. With a "Jewish state" the court meant at least three features: (a) "maintenance of a Jewish majority, (2) the right of Jews to immigrate, and (3) ties with Jewish communities outside Israel" (Dowty, 1999, p.10). Ethnic exclusivity is expressed in Israel's Basic Laws, which correspond to the constitution (law) in the absence of a written one (Rouhana, 1998). The Knesset Basic Law (1985), item 7a, provides "a list of candidates shall not participate in the elections for the Knesset if its aims or actions expressly or impliedly, point to ... denial of the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people" which clarify the nature of Israel as the state of the Jewish people (Rouhana, 1998, p.280). The Jewishness of the state was later secured by two other Basic Laws, the first one was "Human Dignity and Freedom," and the other one was "Freedom of Occupation" (Rouhana, 1998). Both laws,

enacted in 1992 and amended in 1994, reaffirmed Israel's nature and basic principle as a "Jewish and democratic state" (Rouhana, 1998). Israel's Citizenship Law or Law of Nationality (1952) has always been highly ethnic in character; jus sanguinis (right of blood) is the primary mechanism for acquiring citizenship, and citizenship status is automatically granted to children of Israeli citizens (Shapira, 2018). In addition, the Law of Return (1950) and its amendments claim that all Jews and many of their relatives are the right to immigrate to Israel; moreover, they are named as olim (ascendants) and, according to the Law of Nationality can immediately receive Israeli citizenship status (Della Pergola, 2004; Shapira, 2018). While the Law of Return provides unconditionally to all eligible Jews and members of their families, with the exception of whoever "(i) acts against the Jewish nation; (ii) is liable to threaten the public health or security of the state; or (iii) has a criminal past which is liable to endanger the public's peace)", the Law of Nationality is subjected "to certain conditions and restrictions, as in most other countries of the world" (Della Pergola, 2004, p.7-8).

The Law of Return classifies who is regarded as Jew. According to this law (Amendment No. 2, 1970), a Jew is one who was born to a Jewish mother or converted to the Jewish religion and is not a member of another religion (De Grazia, 2013). The right of return is also guaranteed to a non-Jew who is a child and grandchild of a Jew, spouse of a Jew, spouse of a child, and grandchild of a Jew, except for those who have converted to another religion; consequently, even the relatives are entitled to obtain Israeli citizenship automatically (facilitating the immigration process) (Stypinska, 2007; De Grazia, 2013).

The Law of Nationality, besides providing an automatic acquisition of Israeli citizenship for Jews, identifies three other ways to grant citizenship: residency, birth to an Israeli parent, and naturalization, giving possibilities to all possible applicants (Della Pergola, 2004; De Grazia, 2013). The referring doctrine underlines the difference between the concept of "statehood" and "nationhood" to demarcate the different bonds between Arabs and Jews with the Israeli state (De Grazia, 2013). It emphasizes that Israeli citizenship, granted to Arab minorities, cannot be associated with Israel's national identity (De Grazia, 2013). Arab citizens, however, are not totally excluded from the political or democratic process in Israel. Israel's Declaration of Independence formally entitles Israeli Arabs to the legal and political rights given to Jews as well (Yiftachel, 1992). Yet, the policy

and practice of ethnic exclusivity embodied in the constitutional structure are regarded as the embodiment of the state's ideology. This preference for one ethnic group over the other is expressed by many laws and regulations covering a broad range of state services (Rouhana, 1998). The ethnic exclusivity of the state (its Jewish nature, character, and identity) has strong support among the Jewish public; this can be proved by considering surveys relating this exclusivity of Jews over Arabs (Rouhana, 1998). But also, the dominant Jewish ethnic character is acknowledged and welcomed among all significant political actors, not just far-right politicians (Shapira, 2018).

Israel has used different measures to vitalize Jewish identity and create a sense of community in the Jewish sector. One vital mechanism is religion's central role, which has been highly instrumentalized and politicized (it will be seen especially in the following paragraph). Hebrew is Israel's official and primary language and being a solid base of Israeli Jewish culture and education (Smooha, 2002). The Jewish religion is very present in public life. The state's symbolic system is strictly Jewish, like "Israel's titular name, calendar, days and sites of commemoration, heroes, flag, emblem, national anthem, names of places, ceremonies" (Smooha, 2002, p.486). Israel has built a uniform narrative considering a version of Judaism common to many Jewish groups. The common Judaism of Israel has been a refinement of Jewish history and values in which all or most Jews may recognize themselves. Therefore, Zionism's vision lay in the combination of ethics and nationalism; when Judaism became more relevant, ethnic origin started being important since Judaism attached great importance to ethnic origin because of its own ethnic community's social history (Gertz, 2018; Feldman, 2015). Ethnic origin becomes a fundamental unifying factor (Feldman, 2015).

Besides the ethnic feature of Israel's ideology, this ideology is based on the perception of the threat perceived by Israeli Jews. Smooha (2002) listed two major threats to the Jewish population. The first threat is Israel's physical and political survival in the region due to the precarious condition of Israel in the Middle East, where many states do not recognize it as a legitimate state (Smooha, 2002). The second threat is the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel; they are regarded as a security and demographic issue (Smooha, 2002). In all this context, demographic factors, particularly fertility, are seen as crucial factors in this demographic struggle against the enemy to secure Israel's existence. The creation of a Jewish state in a

region inhabited predominantly by non-Jewish people required policies and strategies to maximize and increase the numerical strength of one group while minimizing that of the other; this meant preserving a Jewish majority considered an indispensable precondition for the existence of Israel as a democratic and Jewish state (Toft, 2011; Steinfeld, 2011). Bachi's studies and work must be considered to understand the importance of demography as a national-security issue. Roberto Bachi was an Italian demographer and professor of demography who immigrated to Israel in 1939 and worked at the national Jewish institutions of the Yishuv (Leibler, 2014). After establishing the Israel state, controlling the demographic trends and strengthening Israel's nation-building project was fundamental. Although it will be explained in detail in the last paragraph of this chapter, it is crucial to state that the Jewish state was not built on a natural phenomenon like natural population growth. Still, specific population policies, especially immigration policies, have been adopted to construct a Jewish State and counteract the Arab population. Bachi's demographic work embodied three issues relating to the future of the Jewish nation-state: "(1) identifying a general decrease in Jewish reproduction within Mandatory Palestine, (2) predictions of the continuing demographic imbalance between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, and (3) classifying 'Mizrahim' as the Jewish group with the highest reproduction rates" (Leibler, 2014, p.272).

Due to the low fertility rate, the State of Israel developed policies to encourage Jewish reproduction based on the concern that Israel was in a demographic struggle with the Palestinian population due to the increase of their birthrate and the decreasing birthrate of the Jewish people (Leibler, 2014). Naturally, these trends were regarded as threats to the national-building project, jeopardizing the Jewish majority. Bachi started running a campaign for increasing Jewish fertility as one of the points of Zionism's political agenda and of national importance being a concern of every Israel Jew (Leibler, 2014). The existence of Israel depended on the size of the Jewish population in the country, and the fertility rate was fundamental in order to be successful. High immigration fertility was no longer considered enough, but only a growth in the reproductive capacity of the Jews could strengthen the nation in pursuing its goals (Leibler, 2014).

Moreover, the demographic imbalance between Palestinians and Jews was urgent because of higher reproduction rates and low mortality rates. Indeed, Bachi,

in one of its works, investigated the population groups in Palestine according to their fertility and mortality rates (Leibler, 2014). Political demography became the scientific basis for planning the new state and establishing official social policy toward the population, keeping the Palestinians a minority (Leibler, 2014).

Israel is regarded as an ethnic state where ethnicity, religion, and peoplehood are intertwined; indeed, a member of the Jewish community cannot be considered a member of a non-Judaic religion (Smooha, 2002). However, since Israel exists only if democratic and Jewish, it is important to understand what Jewish means as the distinction between members and non-members (Toft, 2011; Goldscheider, 1996). Israel's Parliament, the Knesset, decided the definition of the Israeli state on "religious" grounds. Moreover, the Law of Return in the state of Israel is entitled to define who is to be considered Jewish since this law enables every Jew to immigrate to Israel and become a state citizen (Goldscheider, 1996). The state lawfully grants citizenship rights to all those who are regarded as Jewish, by religious and legal (halachic) criteria, because of birth to a Jewish mother or conversion to Judaism by a recognized Orthodox rabbi (Goldscheider, 1996). Indeed, the Zionist project exploited the content of the Jewish religion to develop a strong ideology of integration (Lewin-Epstein, & Cohen, 2008). The intent of Zionism was to secure for Jews a place of refuge from persecution, to have a nation where they were the majority, to offer the Jews of the world a choice between remaining in the Diaspora understood as an exile, and a fully independent existence; to achieve, finally, the normality of peace, security, and integration in the Middle East (Gomel, 2016). Indeed, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Jewish population was persecuted and discriminated against. So, the birth of the State of Israel was seen as the solution to antisemitism, which had haunted the Jews throughout history (Hermann, 2013). It was important, consequently, to construct a political-national identity. Zionism's nation-building has been a project aimed at establishing a national-territorial identity based on reconstructing Jewish ethnic identity, thus excluding Arabs (Yiftachel, 1996). The term Jewish was important because it gave a sense of unity. Jewish history and values were a relevant part of the country's collective identity and have imprinted the public sphere until nowadays. As we can see, Jewish values and symbols have been used in Israeli society to create a uniform narrative because (as can see in the following paragraphs) there was the necessity to amalgamate all people under the same narrative, the famous "melting pot"

(Goldscheider, 1996; Fischer, 2012; Lewin-Epstein & Cohen, 2018). This is especially due to many waves of immigration which brought different persons with their own life of stile and set of beliefs and traditions. However, in the beginning, Zionism was a predominantly secular movement that emphasized people's right to self-determination as a universal principle that applied to the Jewish people (Abulof, 2014). The intent to create a Jewish state was based on the idea of the right to self-identity as a people, a collective, not a mere group of individuals, and the right to have an independent state (Abulof, 2014). Even though it was complicated to deny the existence of Judaism's connection with the Jewish people, Zionists continued to reshape the society's culture, considering a modern, secular nationalism centered on the state (Don-Yehiya, 2018). The State of Israel was used as the source of allegiance and commitment as the main unifying feature for the Jewish community (Don-Yehiya, 2018). During the first decades, the state enforced a Zionist ideology while erasing any religious expression, without leaving room for any other cultures, even though many Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries were religious (Feldman, 2015). After the first decades of independence, Zionism (especially Socialist Zionism and Mamlachtiyut) was starting to lose the appeal, especially facing the high amount of immigration and the necessity to assimilate them. It is important to underline that Zionism was never a uniform movement; there were various Zionisms, such as Labor, Revisionist, and Religious Zionism (Steinfeld, 2011). It was followed by an increasing Zionism shift to consider Judaism a source of political legitimation (Abulof, 2014). This new civic religion was characterized by a stronger attachment to Jewish religious tradition (Don-Yehiya, 2018). Zionists started using Judaism to justify the existence of the Jewish state; for instance, most of its rituals and symbols have been reinterpreted in a nationalist spirit without removing their religious content. The intent of Israel was to establish a democratic state as well as to preserve Jewish identity. However, the traditional myths and symbols used have always been Jewish. Secular Zionists were committed to constructing Israeli national identity based on Zionism, democratic and socialist values (Acosta, 2014). Indeed, Israeli national identity has core sources: Zionism, democracy, and Judaism. Judaism was increasingly used after the first years of Israel. The national identity of the Israeli population was built on three features: (1) belief in a religious/legal connection to the historic land of the Jewish people, (2) commitment to Western/democratic values, and (3) loyalty to Jewish

nationalism and the historical narrative of Zionism (Acosta, 2014). The Jewish people as an ethnic-national entity is the combination of religion and nationhood, without any distinction between religion and nationality, religion and ethnicity (Smooha, 1997). It is sufficient to think that an individual being a member of the Jewish community cannot simultaneously belong to any other religious community other than the Jewish one (Smooha, 1997). Citizenship and national identity are thus clearly distinct in Israel (Yakobson, 2010). In a country with an ethnic majority, having a national identity distinct from that of the minority is true by definition. Indeed, the ethnic identity of Arab Israelis can never be fully Israeli as long as being Israeli has a clear and distinct "Jewish cultural component, Jewish historical constructions, and dominant Jewish symbols" (Goldscheider, 1996, p.352-353). Religion indeed became the distinct traditional culture of the Jews; if Israel's national identity is considered, many Israeli Jews tend to consider the terms "Israeli" and "Jewish" as practically synonymous (Yakobson, 2010). In such a situation, the bond between religion and peoplehood is naturally strong and has not been removed by modernization and secularization (Yakobson, 2010).

2.1.1 The role of religion in Israel

As previously said, the Jewish religion is an essential aspect of Israel's culture and identity; Judaism, nationality, culture, and religion are indissolubly intertwined. Religion has been used as a source of Jewish identity. Judaism has been used to realize a meaning and symbolic system for the individual Jew and the community (Liebman, 1983). Judaism indeed aided in defining the nation's boundaries through the use of myths, symbols, and central elements used to represent Israel (Tzidkiyahu, 2021). Since the decline of socialist Zionism with its attempt at total secularization, Israeli Jews have been increasingly exposed to religious symbols, which served as a basis for integration, legitimation, and mobilization (Liebman, 1983). The new civil religion used traditional Judaism as a component of Jewish identity and Jewish history, but it did not require some detailed religious practices (Liebman, 1983).

The importance of the Jewish religion is mainly manifested in the country's policies and laws which are religiously influenced. Jewish religion, principally the Orthodox Jewish religion, has an essential role in the country's public life; this may be found in several areas, such as Jewish holidays, family law, social welfare

systems, and the educational system (Herzog, 2010). Many regulations define the concept of the Jewish state by recognizing and allowing Jewish organizations to collaborate with state institutions (De Grazia, 2013). Such religious interference and the state's establishment of religion can be found in various areas (Shetreet, 1999). In the field of education, there is an established state religious education system that represents an expression of the state establishment of religion (Shetreet, 1999). The Rabbinate and the religious courts are authorities (government agencies) established by the state's laws as well (Shetreet, 1999). Such a definition illustrates Israel's strong bond between the state and religious bodies (Shetreet, 1999).

Israel finances religious services and religious schools and, within Judaism, recognizes only Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox affiliations; indeed, the state has constantly rejected giving the formal status (the one that Orthodox Rabbinate holds) to Conservative and Reform Rabbinates (Shetreet, 1999; Okun, 2011). An aspect manifesting the strong involvement between religious and civil spheres is the participation of certain political parties in the Parliament (Knesset) in determining specific national policy. Despite the fact that it is a secular organ, state laws frequently reproduce contents of religious precepts due to the presence of religious and political parties (De Grazia, 2013). There have been several proposals for separating state and religion in Israel, but the Knesset has continuously declined these challenges (Shetreet, 1999). Besides many laws which define who is Jew also following religious prescription, this religious implication can be noticed by the several laws regulating religiously based prohibitions. There is the ban on importing non-kosher meat or the ban on raising pigs to be linked, albeit indirectly, with the religious ban on eating their meat which restricts the market economy; the prohibitions imposed on the movement of public transportation on Sabbath days and holidays that restrict freedom of movement (De Grazia, 2013). Shabbat is a pivotal moment in Jewish tradition, and it is the day of rest on which work and productive activities cannot be carried out. The difficulty of separating Jewish culture's religious and national elements is illustrated by these restrictions, which are often respected even by those who observe neither the Jewish diet nor the suspension of activities (De Grazia, 2013). This is because the Jewish religion has been fused with the Israel national culture and symbols. Many Israelis attach these religious practices to common national feelings. Sharing Jewish traditions is understood in a secular, ethnonational sense and not as a religious affiliation (De

Grazia, 2013). This may be manifested in the education system, which is highly influenced by religion. Education systems of religious movements in Israel are inclined to be advantaged over the regular education system, as they provide lower or no-cost education (Shetreet, 1999). The result is that such systems transmit to the student and his family a Haredi Ultra-Orthodox way of life totally different from the secular way of life (Shetreet, 1999). The special focus on education in accordance with Jewish principles is expressly recognized in Article 2 of the State Education Law 1953, in which the state's goal is to provide a system of education based on the values of the Jewish tradition (De Grazia, 2013). Elements of Jewish tradition are seen as cultural elements belonging to the Jewish people's common tradition of the Jewish people, not as religious influences in the state sphere (De Grazia, 2013). The religious element is part of the Israeli (Jewish) culture connected to their ethnic, linguistic, and socio-political features (De Grazia, 2013). The term "Jewish" would therefore describe a national identity where the religious one is included. Another matter where religion has a central role is marriage. The recognition of the exclusive jurisdiction of religious courts in marriage and divorce matters (involved with other important aspects of life such as custody of children and burial rites) is particular because the jurisdiction of rabbinical courts (orthodox Judaism) has been extended to all Israeli Jews, regardless of personal religious choice (Okun, 2011; De Grazia, 2013). There is an imposition of the Orthodox religious interpretation carried out by the religious judges without any possibility of alternative choices. Therefore, in matters concerning marriage and divorce, Jewish law becomes the state's rule (De Grazia, 2013). There is no civil alternative to marriage. The exclusive jurisdiction of religious law determines the binding nature of the various prohibitions imposed by religious law, such as the obligation to celebrate marriage according to the Orthodox rite, the prohibition of mixed marriages (between Jews and no-Jews), or the prohibition of a kohen (priest) to marry a divorced or converted woman (De Grazia, 2013). Such legislation may be considered instrumental in securing the Jewish character of the state. The 1953 Israeli Law on the Jurisdiction of Rabbinical Courts states, that Marriages and divorces of Jews, in Israel, citizens or residents of the State, shall be the exclusive jurisdiction of the Rabbinical Courts. Marriages and divorces of Jews shall be conducted in accordance with Torah law (De Grazia, 2013). Thus, Jewish law is entirely incorporated into state law, determining an exclusive jurisdiction of the

religious courts in specified matters like marriage and divorce; this underlines a high religious interference in state affairs (De Grazia, 2013). Therefore, many people living in Israel are unlikely to be completely secularized even though they define themselves as secular. According to Lazerwitz and Tabory (2002), people in a religious society are affected by its social and religious nature, leading them to be more religiously observants "than members of the same religious group who live in secular societies" (p.22). Indeed, according to the research "*Israel's religiously divided society*" led by Pew Research Center in 2016, Israeli Jews are more religiously observant than Jews in the United States; for example, Jews in Israel participate more in specific Jewish practices than do American Jews; 56% of Israeli Jews report "someone in their home always or usually lights Sabbath candles on Friday night," as opposed to 23% of American Jew (Pew Research Center, 2016, p.50). 30% of Israeli Jews say religion is significant in their lives compared to 26% of American Jews (Pew Research Center, 2016). This is not only because of the higher number of Israeli Jews who are Orthodox (which are more religious than American Orthodox Jews), but even among the non-Orthodox. Especially secular Israeli Jews (*Hiloni*) follow more Jewish beliefs and practices, such as the rates of keeping kosher at home or attending a Passover Seder (festive meals with special foods that involve the retelling of the story of ancient Jews' exodus from slavery in Egypt); for instance, 87% of *Hiloni* report the attendance a Seder last Passover, higher than the share of all American Jews (70%) (Pew Research Center, 2016). This does not mean that the Israeli secular Jews are more religious than American Jewish ones, but it underlines how some religious beliefs and practices are more ingrained due to the fact of being part of national culture. Indeed, Jewish observance is more deep-rooted in daily life in Israel than in the USA. For example, kosher food is more commonly available in Israel, and major Jewish holidays are usually Israeli national holidays (Pew Research Center, 2016). Israeli society is not immune to the impact of its dominant religion, Orthodox Judaism (Lazerwitz & Tabory, 2002).

Although almost half of Israeli Jews are seculars, Israel society is highly characterized by people who regard themselves as not secular; by the Social Survey of Israel Central Bureau, in 2021, self-defined secular Jews were about 46 compared to the rest of the Israeli Jewish (54.7) recognized themselves as either Traditional (33.1), Religious (10,7) or Ultra-Orthodox (10.5). However, Israel as a

state is infused with religious symbols and values used to construct an Israeli identity. Indeed, the terms Jewish and Israeli have usually been interchangeable. 93% of Jews say they are proud of their Jewish identity, and 88% report a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people, with no significant differences in percentage between the most and the least religious people (Pew Research Center, 2016). However, how Jewish identity is understandable differs among Jews in Israel. A majority of *Haredi* (Ultra-orthodox) (70%) reported that being Jewish is mostly about religion instead of *Hiloni* (secular), 83% said being Jewish is mainly a matter of ancestry or culture, while just 4% is primarily about religion (Pew Research Center, 2016); the survey asked Israeli Jews what elements may be essential to their Jewish identity; most Israeli Jews said "remembering the Holocaust is essential to what being Jewish means to them, personally" (p.62). 53% of Israeli Jews report that providing a "Jewish education to children or sharing Jewish traditions with children" is indispensable to their Jewish identity (Pew Research Center, 2016, p.72).

Considering many religious beliefs and practices, wide variation in religious observance among the Jewish community is present. *Hiloni* tends to be less religious, they don't pray daily 79% never pray, instead of *Haredi*, which prays at least once a day (76%), as do most *Dati* (58%) (Pew Research Center, 2016). This suggests how secular Jews' understanding of their Jewish identity as primarily about ancestry or culture reflects their beliefs and practices (Pew Research Center, 2016). Only a few *Hiloni* reported attending synagogue weekly or praying daily, but many (40%) also stated that they did not believe in God (Pew Research Center, 2016). Yet, although many secular Jews showed low levels of religious attendance, many experienced many aspects of Judaism, whether for cultural or religious reasons (Pew Research Center, 2016). For instance, 87% of them reported that they attended a Seder last Passover, even though the majority of them attended a not traditional Seder (46%), about half (53%) said they at least sometimes lighted candles before the start of the Sabbath and about one-third of *Hiloni* said they kept kosher in their home (Pew Research Center, 2016). Therefore, only 3% of *Hiloni* reported they followed all or most of the traditions, while 47% followed some Jewish traditions and 50% did not (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Meanwhile, the rest of the Jewish community, especially *Haredi* and *Dati*, observed all or most Jewish religious traditions (Pew Research Center, 2016). By

the report, it is underlined that secular people reported at least occasionally observance of religious commandments, attending synagogue for main holidays, and considering religious ceremonies as very significant in their lives; this may suggest that even most secular Israeli Jews are not entirely secularized, although they regard themselves as not religious at all. This is because the public life of the vast majority of Israelis regardless of how they consider themselves (religious or not religious) contains religious overtones. That also relates to national identity. Every Israeli Jew celebrates some aspects and practices of Judaism, even though they do not regard those activities as religious (Liebman, 1983).

2.2 The Arab Threat

As mentioned previously, the Israeli majority would be threatened if the Arab population continued to grow. The Jewish numerical dominance was necessary to secure the "social, political and economic dominance of the Jewish majority" in the country; indeed, the loss of the Jewish majority in Israel would mean losing the fundamental element to make Israel have a Jewish-Zionist character (Stypinska, 2007, p.105; Toft, 2011). Israel is willing to remain a Jewish state in the face of a fertility rate lower among the Jewish population than Palestinians' birth rates - both in Israel and the occupied territories- and declining Jewish immigration (Tal, 2016). Moreover, preserving the Jewish majority has been regarded as a "security" matter, being of primary significance in Israel because of its particular position in the Middle East (Stypinska, 2007). In fact, public opinion and the Jewish authorities perceive the Arab population growth as a "demographic threat" and a fundamental social problem since its growth seems relatively high (Yonah, 2004; Toft, 2011; Leuprecht, 2011; Okun, 2016).

For this reason, Israeli institutions have always used pervasive control mechanisms toward the Israeli Arabs (Yiftachel, 1992). The willingness to secure Jewish dominance in historical Palestine has shaped both the domestic and foreign policies of Israel (Tal, 2016). All of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians on both sides are thought from the perspective of demography linked to the 'Jewishness' of the state (Tal, 2016). The ratio to ensure the Jewish demography majority and Arab minority have been of central political importance to the Israeli authorities (Tal,

2016; Stypinska, 2007). Many Israeli scholars have called for the authorities to adopt a "more proactive policy of Arab population 'containment', to encourage a decline in the birth rate" among the Israeli Arabs and encourage Jewish immigration (Zureik, 2003, p.621). In this paragraph, I analyze the demographic trends of both side sides (Arabs living within Israel and Palestinians dwelling in the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank) to examine the demographic struggle between the Jews and the rest.

Arabs in Israel

Arab community in Israel is characterized by a high level of heterogeneity (Friedlander, 2009). They are mainly Muslims, Druzes, and Christians (Winckler, 2002). Among the Arabs, the largest group is the Muslim one, and according to the data from ICBS, at the end of 2020, they were estimated at 1.669 million (18% of all residents) with an annual growth rate in 2021 of 2.2% (ICBS, 2020, 2022).
The second largest group consists of Christians, who constitute 7.0% of the total Arab population of Israel with annual growth of 0.8% in 2020 against a 3.2% yearly increase of Non-Arab Christians; at the end of 2021, Arab Christians were estimated at around 140.000 (about 1.50% of Israel's population), 76.7% of the Christians in Israel (approximately 182.000 Christians resided in Israel, 1.9% of the total population) (ICBS, 2020, 2022). The Arab Christian group grew by 0.8% in 2020, primarily as a result of a natural increase, in contrast to the non-Arab Christian population rose by 3.2%, mainly as a result of international migration (ICBS, 2020, 2022). The last group is comprised of the Druzes, and at the end of 2021, the Druze population in Israel was approximately 149,000, and they comprise about 1.6% of Israel's population and 7.5% of Israel's Arab people; the growth rate of the Druze population has decreased gradually over the past decade: 1.7% in 2010, 1.4% in 2015, and 1.2% in 2020 (ICBS, 2020, 2022). Though this rate is lower than that of the Muslim population (2.2%) and the Jewish population (1.5%), it is higher than the Arab Christians' annual growth (0.8%). (ICBS, 2020, 2022). In the past two decades, there has been a downward trend in the annual growth rate of Muslims, from 3.8% to 2.0% in 2020 but with a slight rise in 2021 (2.2%). Despite this decline, the growth rate of the Muslim population is the highest in Israel; in 2020, the growth rate of the Jewish population was 1.6%, that of the Arab Christians was

0.8 %, and that of the Druze population was 1.2% (ICBS, 2020; ICBS, 2022). Consequently, over the years, the Arab population slowly declined in subsequent years; the growth rate of Israel's total Arab population slowly declined, and in 2013, it was 2.11%, rising to 2.19% in 2014 (2.21% and 2.23%, respectively, among Muslims; lower among Christians), compared with 1.85% for the Jewish population including immigration, and 1.55% excluding it (Della Pergola, 2016).

Regarding assimilation, the Christian population and Druzes are more integrated into Jewish Israeli society (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Friedlander, 2009). The former experiences higher socioeconomic status than Muslims and Druze in various respects, such as educational attainments, occupational status, and income; Christian Arabs are highly urbanized, while most Muslims and Druzes dwell in overgrown towns (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007, Friedlander, 2009). Christian Arabs are highly educated, and both Druze and Christians are more means for social mobility (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007). However, although all these Arab groups experience discrimination, Muslims are more marginalized within Israeli society (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Smooha, 1990). In fertility terms, the Christian Palestinians in Israel have usually had much fewer children than Muslims because of principally "greater urbanization and higher female educational levels" (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007, p.74). As seen in the first chapter, the fertility level of Christian Arabs is lower than that of Jews (the former had a TFR of 1.85 and the latter around 3 in 2020) (ICBS, 2021). The TFR of Druze women in 2020 was instead of 1.94 children declining since the mid-1960s (ICBS, 2022). Both fertility of Christians and Druzes fell below the replacement rate (2.1 children per woman, the rate needed to maintain a population size), and the Druzes one was almost as low as that of Christian women (1.85) (ICBS, 2021).

The TFR for Muslim women was higher than the rates for women until 2019. Indeed, the fertility rate started falling below three children (2.99 in 2020), lower than that of Jewish women (3.00), and in 2021, Muslim fertility was 3.01 vis-vis fertility of Jews 3.13 (ICBS, 2020, 2022). Since 2001, the TFR in the Muslim population has been declining, reaching 3.16 in 2019 (compared to 3.20 in 2018) (ICBS, 2020). However, it keeps being much higher than the rate of Druze women (1.94) and that of Christian Arab women (1.85) (ICBS, 2020). Compared to the TFR of Muslim women in communities in other Muslim countries in the Middle East, the TFR of those in Israel is higher than the rate elsewhere, such as Jordan

(2.70), Tunisia (2.11), Saudi Arabia (1.90) and Iran (1.80), similar to the total fertility rate in Egypt (3.00), and is lower than TFR in countries such as Algeria (3.10) and the Palestinian Authority (3.80) (ICBS, 2020).

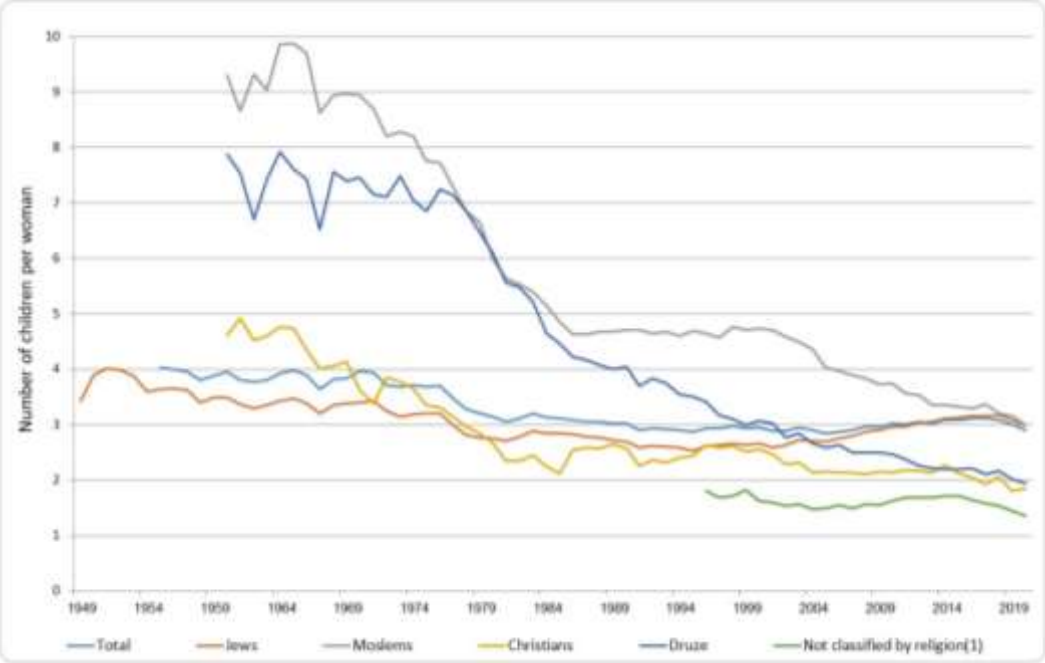
In demographic terms, the attention on the Arab Israeli community is due to the differential growth rates of this population and the Jewish one since the demographic growth of the Jewish Israeli population (from the formation of Israel) has been the consequence of immigration, combined with the indirect effects of the high fertility of the immigrants particularly from the Muslim countries (Goldscheider, 1996). Instead, the Arab population's growth has been characterized by a natural increase as a result of their higher rates of fertility than mortality (Goldscheider, 1996; Della Pergola, 2016). Mortality and fertility represented the critical demographic changes affecting the growth of the Arab population living in Israel; in particular, the mortality rate reflects essential changes in Arabs' life (Goldscheider, 1996; Della Pergola, 2016).

Since the formation of Israel, the Arab population has been through enormous demographic changes, mainly because of infant and child mortality changes and life expectancy (Winckler, 2002). The changes in Arab fertility patterns indeed have been characterized by continuing declines and low levels of mortality even before the establishment of the state and the decline in fertility; infant mortality fell from 60 deaths per 1,000 births at the end of the 1950s to 41 deaths per 1,000 births in 1975 and 15 per 1,000 in 1989 (Goldscheider, 1996; Della Pergola, 2003c; Della Pergola, 2016). The decline in mortality and the low rates of infant deaths have impacted the goal of reducing family size and, subsequently, fertility levels. Despite the fact that the mortality and infant mortality rates (IMR) among Arab Israelis have drastically declined over the years, it is still much higher than that in the Jewish community. In 2000, the IMR was 5.4 per 1000 live births (Jews 3.9; Moslems 9.2; Christians 3.6; Druze 6.39) (Amitai et al,. 2005). Between 1970 and 2000, the overall IMR declined drastically (decreased by 78% among Moslems, 82% among Druze, and 88% among Christians, as compared to 79% in the Jewish population) (Tarabeia et al., 2004; Amitai et al,. 2005). In 2021 the IMF of Muslims decreased, reaching 5.4, with a substantial difference between those living in urban localities and rural villages (4.9 and 9.2, respectively) (ICBS, 2022). This represents the differential access of Arabs to the more general healthcare facilities in Jewish areas and the disparity in the distribution of health and related

services to more isolated Arab communities in Israel (Goldscheider, 1996). The Arab-Jewish mortality gap reflects a social inequality within Israeli society (Goldscheider, 1996).

Thus, Christian populations, experiencing a higher stage of socioeconomic modernization since the 1930s, have undergone significant fertility declines from a TFR of 7.5 to 3.6 in the early 1970s and to below 2 in 2022 toward replacement

TABLE 2.1 TFR by Mother's religion, 1949-2020



Note: (1) Non-Arab Christians and persons not classified by religion in the Population Register.
Source: The Druze Population of Israel On the Occasion of the Nabi Shu'ayb Festival 2022, Report by **Israel Central Bureau of Statistics**

level (Friedlander, 2009; ICBS, 2021). Instead, the Druze population was situated between the Christian and the Muslim Arab population communities in their total fertility rate (Friedlander, 2009). This fell to 7.2 in the early 1970s and 3.0 in the late 1990s, but it is currently 1.94, below the replacement rate (2.1 children per woman needed for preserving the population size), almost as low as that of Christian women (Friedlander, 2009; ICBS, 2022). The most interesting fertility patterns among the three Arab religious groups are those of the Muslim community, which underwent enormous demographic changes in reproductive behavior (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Friedlander, 2009). Its TFR was about 7.5-8.0 during the 1940s and reached a maximum of 9.3 in the 1960s (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Friedlander, 2009). It followed by a dramatic decrease afterward, reaching a rate of 4.6 in the mid-1980s and remaining at that level throughout the beginning of the

2000s (Della Pergola, 2003c; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Friedlander, 2009; ICBS, 2020). Table 1.2 shows the average number of persons per family by the degree of religiosity; it underlines that Muslim families are larger on average regardless of

TABLE 2.2 Average Persons per family, by religion, and Religious Lifestyle, 2020

Religion	Religious Lifestyle	Average Number of Persons per Family
Moslem family	Non-religious	4.41
	Traditional	4.66
	Religious/very religious	4.40
Jewish family	Non-religious	3.18
	Traditional	3.37
	Ultra-Orthodox	5.45

Source: The Moslem Population in Israel: Data on the Occasion of Eid al-Adha (The Feast of the Sacrifice) in July 15, 2020. Report by **Israel Central Bureau of Statistics**

the degree of religiosity than Jewish families, and the largest families are those who lead a traditionally religious lifestyle (ICBS, 2020). However, Jewish families differ significantly from Muslim ones when considering the most religious people; indeed, they vary according to their religious lifestyle (ICBS, 2020). Ultra-orthodox have much more children than very religious Muslim families.

The fertility transition was slower among the Muslim people in Israel and later than among Christian-Arab Israelis (Friedlander et al., 1979; Goldscheider, 1996; Della Pergola, 2003c). Indeed, the fertility behavior change was slow at the beginning; Muslim women who married before 1935 had 8.1 children, the cohort who married in 1940 had 9.1 children, and those that married in the mid-1940s had 9.4 children (Goldscheider, 1996). Muslim women among those married in the 1970s began to decrease an ideal family size to 5 children; instead, fertility behavior in Christian women was faster; those who were married before 1955 had an ideal family size of about six children, but "the cohorts married in the post-1967 period had an average ideal family size of 4 children" (Goldscheider, 1996, p.313-314). Most Muslim women began to control family size after long marriages by using contraception to stop childbearing and reduce fertility (Goldscheider, 1996). Indeed since 1975, this decline in fertility has occurred even among Muslim women less

educated, and at shorter marriages, including all socioeconomic sectors of the Arab population (Goldscheider, 1996). There has also been a slight increase in the average age Muslim women marry, from 19.7 years in the 1960s to 20.6 in the late 1970s and the mid-1980s; indeed, from 1964 to 1968, 34 percent of women who married were less than age 18, instead of 18 percent from 1979 to 1983 (Goldscheider, 1996). It is suggested that the decline in early marriages could be accountable for one-third of the decrease in the fertility level of Muslim women in the period from 1972 to 1983 (Goldscheider, 1996). However, in the 1990s, the average age of marriage increased to 20-24, remaining at that level throughout the 2000s. The percentage of Muslim married women aged 20-24 in 2020 is 41.8% (higher than Jewish married women at this age 20.9%).

The fertility pattern of the Israeli Arabs has been divided into three stages by Winckler, the first one during the first period of the state between the 1940s to 1960s, the second one from the 1960s to 1980, and the third one from the 1980s. The first one, from the 1940s to the 1960s, has been characterized by the high level of fertility rise among both Muslims and the Druze population (during the 1950s and 1960s it is recorded the highest fertility levels among Muslims and Druzes), while the trend of declining fertility among the Christians (Winckler, 2002). Winckler found four reasons for this increase in fertility levels during this period (from the 1950s to 1960s):

1. The improved standard of living, and increased life expectancy due to a rise in the probability of pregnancy and extension of the reproductive period, caused immediate higher fertility rates.
2. During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the primary source of living for the Israeli Arabs remained agriculture, and this sector needed a large number of children to meet labor demands.
3. Israeli pro-natalist policy, reducing the economic burden of maintaining a large family.
4. The low education level of women is associated with higher fertility rates; during the late 1950s and the 1960s, the majority of Israeli Arab women, particularly in the villages, married and in their reproductive years, remained illiterate.

In the early 1970s, the second stage started, characterized by a relative fertility decline among both the Druze and Muslim populations, with a sharper drop of the

former (Winckler, 2002). The reasons are the prolonged reduction of mortality rates and the increase in life expectancy because of the extension and intensification of organized public health services which are universally accessible and weel-articulated (Winckler, 2002; Goldscheider, 1996; Della Pergola, 2003c); the Establishment of the Israeli Social Security System combined with a pension system eliminated the necessity of giving birth to a large number of children to guarantee the parents' financial security in old age (Winckler, 2002). The transition from agriculture to industry and services led to a condition where children no longer had economic advantages because of the decreasing importance of the agriculture sector, and they became a financial burden, in line with the rising standard of living (Winckler, 2002). Since the 1960s, the occupations of the Israeli Arabs have rapidly changed, and "by 1972, only 28.0 percent of the Israeli Arabs still found their livelihood in agriculture. This percentage further declined to as low as 5.5 per cent by 2000" (Winckler, 2002, p.45).

The last factor is the sharp improvement in women's educational attainments; education is indeed an influencing factor on fertility since education is central in explaining fertility decline (Winckler, 2002; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Goldscheider, 1996). According to the 1983 census results, while the total fertility rate among Muslim women without any formal education was estimated at 7.0 births per woman, the fertility sharply declined to 3.4 among those with 13 years of education and more (Winckler, 2002). There has been a continuing increase in the educational attainment of those Muslim women who benefited from the Compulsory Education Law; however, only for those who reached their childbearing period in the 1970s (Goldscheider, 1996; Winckler, 2002). The percentage of the overall Israeli Arab population (both males and females) not attending school was almost 50% in 1961; it fell to less than 7% in 1998 (Winckler, 2002). Among the Israeli Arab women in the age group 18-24, around 70% had more than ten years of schooling by 1998, in contrast to the only 14 % for those aged 65 and over (Winckler, 2002).

Particularly among the Muslim population, 31% of Muslim women who married between 1974 and 1978 and 45% of those who married from 1979 to 1983 had nine or more years of education, compared to 8% of Muslim women who married between 1964 and 1968 and in 1995, 86% of Muslim women aged 15-17 had nine or more years of education, compared with only 39% for Muslim women

aged 35-44 and 16% for women aged 55 and over; it suggests that fertility levels declined as a result of the sharp improvement in the educational levels of the Arab women (ICBS, 1997; Goldscheider, 1996; Winckler, 2002; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007). However, despite these improvements in female education levels between the 1980s and 2000s, fertility decline stagnated, ranging from 4.60 to 4.76, starting to decline again after 2004 (ICBS, 2008; Okun, & Friedlander, 2005; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Goldscheider, 1996). It is crucial also to consider the relationship between the women's educational attainments and their age at marriage. This relationship has been U-shaped among Muslim women (Goldscheider, 1996). Both the least educated and the most educated usually marry at an older age, in part because "of the arranged marriage system wherein women with low education" are fewer desirable spouses and women more educated are more likely to delay marriage (at least) until after the end of their studies, and some work experience (Goldscheider, 1996, p.316-317). The mid-1980s marked the third stage, characterized by an increasing dichotomy in fertility patterns; among the Muslim population, the fertility level remained steady, and for the Christians and the Druze population, fertility kept declining (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003c).

One of the interpretations of these findings is that there may be a critical value of mass schooling that is necessary in order to profoundly affect the mindset and values of a community towards childbearing, particularly within societies where pro-natalism is deeply rooted as Israel (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007). Moreover, when analyzing Muslim communities, it is crucial to consider their particularity of them. Communities indeed have a crucial role in Muslim society in Israel because of the centrality of the Hamula, "an extended kinship network that controls a wide range of social and political activities in Arab society" and its corresponding influence on Muslim families (Goldscheider, 1996; Khawaja, 2000; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007, p.78). In the 1980s and 1990s, significant improvements were made in the female schooling level; the drastic drop in fertility after the 2000s suggested a critical level of female schooling in order to change the attitudes profoundly toward childbirth was reached (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007). Therefore, besides education's effect on the individual choice of childbearing of individual women, there was the spread of "ideas gained during schooling, the increase in female autonomy, and the lower fertility of educated women influenced the whole locality", which weakened the control exercised by Hamula over Muslim

family (Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007, p.86). However, as said before, the declining Muslim fertility, especially among the younger generation, is a consequence of the use of contraception by controlling births within marriage (Goldscheider, 1996). Changes in marriage and the control of fertility within marriage are related to the significant demographic and socioeconomic transitions that have occurred in the Moslem-Israeli population since the 1970s and 1980s (Goldscheider, 1996).

Naturally, the change in Arab fertility has been influenced by Israel's economic well-being, which provides pro-natalist policies encouraging and fostering the high fertility rates among large segments of the Muslim population in Israel (Goldscheider, 1996; Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003c). Strong pronatalist attitudes are also rooted in religious and cultural traditions shared by most Jews and even Muslims, influencing fertility trends (Della Pergola, 2003c).
Since the tax reform of 1975, children's allowances have increased rapidly. In 2000, Israel decided to increase the children's funding for the fifth child. By those provisions, Israeli Arabs benefited more than Israeli Jews (almost 40% of children's allowances went to them, even though they constituted about 20% of Israel's population) (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003c).

Israel has enlarged these pro-natalist policies to a great extent during the 1990s and even more in the 2000s, having a considerable impact on the lowest strata of society, enabling them to increase or maintain their high fertility rates (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003c). For these strata of society, a large number of offspring only ensure an improvement in their economic condition since the children's allowances are higher from the fourth child and above, and these allowances of the children beyond the fourth were needed to "subsidize the earlier ones among the poorer classes" (Winckler, 2002, p.52). Indeed, an analysis of the fertility patterns in Israel clearly suggests that only three groups have increased their fertility rates during the past decades: the ultra-Orthodox Jews, the Muslim population of East Jerusalem and the Southern District (especially the Bedouin in the Negev) (Winckler, 2002). According to the 1995 census results, the poorest socioeconomic condition in Israel was in Rahat, followed by Kfar Manda (the two Muslim villages with the highest fertility rates); instead, among the Jews, the Orthodox city, Bene Barek, is the poorest large city in Israel with the highest level of fertility (Winckler, 2002). Those findings underline the high correlation between socioeconomic conditions and fertility levels, which suggests that fertility patterns may also be an

outcome of socioeconomic conditions and fertility policies (Goldscheider, 1996; Winckler, 2002).

Consequently, all the state's policies as "the opportunity to increase the educational level of the population; the provision of social security organized at the national level has increased the expectations for higher levels of living; [..] subsidies and tax benefits; welfare payments through the national insurance system" may have ensured a decrease in fertility but preventing a more drastic fertility fall (Goldscheider, 1996, p. 315-317). However, all these policies improving living standards and attitudes have affected the values and attitudes towards childbearing (in combination with economic trends), opting for smaller families and eroding the control that the Hamula "exercised over women and the value of children and large family size" (Goldscheider, 1996, p. 315-317). Higher standards of living and increased education have disfavored the formation of large family sizes, decreasing fertility levels.

Palestinians in the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank

High birthrates among Palestinian Arabs in the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank have constituted a source of substantial anxiety for Israel's Jewish majority (Toft, 2011; Tal, 2016). In the past decades, the number of Jews increased due to mass migration and a relatively high natural increase; however, the Jewish growth was counteracted by the natural growth of the Arab population (both in Israel and in the Occupied Territories), which grew almost exclusively because of natural increase (Della Pergola, 2016). Palestinians' apparently irregular fertility patterns can only be explained by a particular combination of factors that limit the tendency to favor smaller family sizes typically of modern societies (Della Pergola, 2003c). Strong pronatalist attitudes are rooted in religious and cultural traditions shared by the majority of the population; this attitude is collocated in the competitive logic of political-military conflict, which has encouraged large families (Della Pergola, 2003c).

It is difficult to draw a complete analysis of data about the Palestinian population from the establishment of Israel to the present because no exhaustive population census was conducted in the past decades (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). Before the 1994 Oslo Accords, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS),

together with various organizations and foreign nongovernmental agencies, carried out some polls in the West Bank and Gaza (Kartin & Schnell, 2007; Della Pergola, 2016). After that, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) became responsible for that task, and in 1995-97, the PCBS conducted a census with the guidance of Norwegian experts and surveyed 1,600,100 people in the West Bank and 1,001,569 in Gaza for a total of 2,601,669 (excluding Israeli residents) (Kartin & Schnell, 2007; Della Pergola, 2016). From the data collected on the Palestinian population from 1968 – 2003, the Palestinian TFR in the West Bank and Gaza remained one of the highest fertility rates (Kartin & Schnell, 2007; Tal, 2016). The fertility patterns in Palestine in the last decades underline the rising importance of demography to security; indeed, the number of Palestinians inside the Occupied Territories increased from 900,000 in 1960 to around 5 million in 2017, at a growth rate of 2.5% (Abuamer, 2021). Population growth among Arabs in Gaza and West Bank outpaced the Israeli average by 50 percent, expecting to grow even more in the following decades (Leuprecht, 2011). This growth is due to the youthful population structure, indeed in 2022, the percentage of individuals aged (0-14) years constituted 38% of the Occupied Territories' population, of whom 36% in the West Bank and 41% in the Gaza Strip (Leuprecht, 2011; PCBS, 2022). Instead, in 2022 the percentage of the elderly population aged (65 years and above) reached 3%, of whom 4% were in the West Bank and 3% in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2022).

It was considered a threat to the Jewish population in Israel since the fertility of Jews was much lower than Palestinians. In 1985, for instance, Jewish women had on average 2.85 children, with a steady decline during the 1990s (even though the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community's fertility skewed the fertility pattern with 8.0 children per woman), compared to Palestinian Arabs' fertility with 6.3 children per women in the West Bank, and 6.8 in Gaza (Fargues, 2001; Toft, 2011).

In 1995 TFR was estimated at 5.4 in the West Bank and 7.4 in the Gaza area, the latter, in 1997, TFR was estimated at 5.6 in the West Bank and 6.9 in Gaza, and an estimate for 1997-99 fertility declined to 4.5 in the West Bank and 5.4 in Gaza (Della Pergola, 2003c). According to the latest data of PCBs, the TFR of Palestinians has, for over a decade, moderately declined to reach 3.8 births (3.8 births in the West Bank and 3.9 births in Gaza) during the period from 2017 to 2019, compared to 4.6 births during the period from 1999 to 2003 (PCBS, 2022). The process of fertility decline has been relatively different between West Bank and

Gaza. From 1968 to 1975, fertility increased, yet from 1975, there was a gradual and slow decrease ending in the 1980s. From the late 1980s, differences in fertility patterns began to be more evident between the two regions (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). In Gaza, fertility continued to increase until 1992, with its maximum at 8.1 children per woman; in contrast to West Bank, after a slight increase in the late 1970s, a process of moderation in fertility occurred, with a gradual decrease (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). Instead, in Gaza, from 1993, a slow, gradual but consistent fall in fertility levels occurred (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). However, the gradual decrease in the fertility levels was a result of these combined factors: changes in the political climate due to the Oslo agreement in 1994; improvement and changes in economic conditions; and the activities of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) towards the promotion of social attitudes (including family planning and use of contraception) among the Palestinians (Kartin & Schnell, 2007).

Although the decline in fertility, this decrease has been very consistent, especially in Gaza. In analyzing the Palestinian fertility behavior in the West Bank and Gaza, Kartin and Schnell (2007) considered two categories of factors in shaping fertility rates: direct (proximate) determinants and background factors. The first category consists of the biological and behavioral factors that directly affect fertility, such as marital patterns, contraceptive use, women's educational attainments, the proportion of women in the workforce, and infant mortality (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). This category plays a crucial role in shaping fertility behavior (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). The second categories are all the background factors influencing fertility patterns, such as social, economic, political, and other background variables (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). By considering those elements such as infant mortality, women's education, and so on, Palestine's situation would suggest the occurrence of fertility transition towards low fertility levels because of some trends such as relatively high levels of female education, low levels of infant mortality, and high levels of urbanization; despite favorable demographic and socio-economic changes, high fertility in the Palestinian territories is persistently high (Randall, 1996; Khawaja, 2000; Kartin & Schnell, 2007).

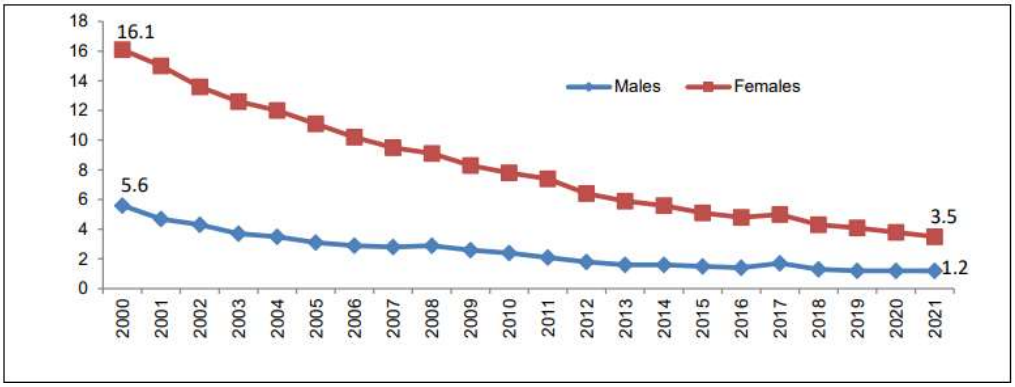
The increase in fertility from the 1967 war until the 1990s has also been due to the particular socio-economic condition of Palestinians. After the 1967 conflict, poor socio-economic and isolated conditions from the Arab environment characterized the lives of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza lived, where

incomes dropped by 40 percent in a single year (during the intifada) (Roy, 1995; Fargues, 2000). Despite Palestinians' precarious conditions, fertility rose significantly (Fargues, 2000). This increase has been partially attributed to the rise in very early marriages caused by lowering bride prices to facilitate marriages of their daughters during a period of great economic insecurity (World Bank, 1993; Khawaja, 2000; Fargues, 2000). Because of these early marriages, teenage fertility increased considerably in both Gaza (by 700%) and the West Bank (by 300%) from 1968 to 1991 (Khawaja, 2000).

A striking phenomenon is the high level of education (an important element in shaping fertility) of the Palestinian population and Palestinian women. The majority of people indeed recognize the importance of education; Palestinian children and adolescents have one of the highest rates of school attainment in the Arab world indeed, resulting over the years in an increase in the level of education rates among the youth (Fargues, 2000; Kartin & Schnell, 2007). In the 1970s, among the population aged 14 and over, only 16 percent had nine years of education or more in the West Bank and 25 percent in Gaza; instead, by 1987, the education rates had reached 38 percent and 49 percent, respectively (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). By 2000–2001 66,5% of the married women in the West Bank and Gaza and 55,5 percent of men had 12 years of education, and 11% of females and 21% of the males had graduated from university or college (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). However, despite the high level of education, the TFR decreased moderately, suggesting the minimal influence of education on fertility in Palestine, contrary to the common finding that the increase in the rate of education, specifically among women, caused a decline in the fertility rate (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). The TFR of women with elementary school education in the 1990s was 6.62, the TFR of women with a high school degree was 5.57, and the TFR of women with higher education was 4.62

(Kartin & Schnell, 2007). Considering the latest data from PCBS, Palestinians have experienced low levels of illiteracy. The Labor Force Survey 2021 data indicated that the illiteracy rate among people (15 years and above) was 2.3% (PCBS, 2022). The illiteracy in 2021 among males and females is 1.2% and 3.5%, respectively

Illiteracy Rates Among Palestinian Population (15 years and above in Palestine by Sex: 2000-2021

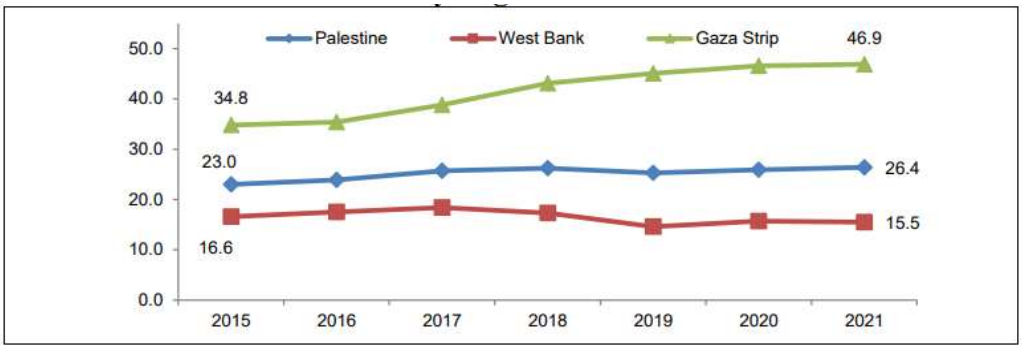


Source: **Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022**. Database of the Labor Force Survey 2000-2021. Ramallah-Palestine.

(PCBS, 2022). Data also showed that the percentage of individuals (aged 15 years and above) who have university degrees (bachelor's degree and above) was 17% (16% for men and 19% for women); in contrast, the individuals who didn't complete any stage of education reached 7% (6% for males and 9% for females) (PCBS, 2022). This high level of education can be associated with the context of the protracted state of belligerence where Palestinian children live, characterized by foreign aid from the international community. School indeed entails only modest, direct, or indirect costs for individual households (Fargues, 2000). The refugees' children have free access to education provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), established in 1950, which also provides all schools materials such as uniforms, books, stationery, meals, and transportation (Fargues, 2000). However, the slight effect of education on the fertility rate has been attributed to the nature of economic, socioeconomic, and cultural factors (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). One possible explanation for this education's minimal effect on fertility decrease is primarily the low women's participation in the wage-earning job market (Khawaja, 2000; Fargues, 2000; Kartin & Schnell, 2007). Palestinian

condition is characterized by higher educational levels and lower labor force participation (Courbage, 1995; Khawaja, 2000). Female labor force participation rates ranged from five to nine percent during the period 1968-1996; in 2001, this rate reached 13% in the West Bank and 8% in Gaza; (Khawaja, 2000; Kartin & Schnell, 2007). Considering the latest data from PCBS, the employment rate is relatively increased; however, more than one-fourth of the participants in the labor force were unemployed in 2021, reaching 26,4% (16% in the West Bank and 47% in Gaza) (PCBS, 2022). Since 2015 the unemployment rate is consistently increased in Gaza from 35,8 in 2015 to around 47 in 2021 (PCBS, 2022). The unemployment rate among women reached a high percentage (43%) compared to 22% among men (PCBS, 2022). Local employment opportunities in the West Bank and the Gaza

Unemployment rate among labor Force participants (15 years and above) in Palestine by region: 2015-2021



Source: **Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022**. Database of the Labor Force Survey 2021. Ramallah-Palestine.

Strip are extremely limited because of Egyptian and Jordanian mis-administration, the subsequent Israeli military occupation, the subsequent isolation, particularly of Gaza, and the influx of landless refugees (Owen, & Pamuk, 1999; Fargues, 2000). The tragic and adverse economic conditions in the West Bank and Gaza have restricted the possibility of Palestinian women entering the job market and escaping their low social positions (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). After graduation, women encounter unemployment instead of joining the job market, which may provide opportunities to leave the exclusive role of mother and wife (Fargues, 2000). These economic conditions where women live foster and strengthen the family's relevance and its patriarchal structure where they are only mothers and wives (Fargues, 2000; Kartin & Schnell, 2007). All these dynamics impede opportunities to improve their socioeconomic status and welfare as the common result of education and lessen incentives to reduce fertility typically of modern societies

(Kartin & Schnell, 2007). The human capital gained after years of education does not result in greater material resources earned in the labor market (Fargues, 2000). Those dire economic conditions are also responsible for the decrease in the marital age because of the lowering of the bride price, which is justified by reducing wedding budgets and hastening and facilitating marriage to lower the family's expenditure (Kartin & Schnell, 2007; Fargues, 2000). However, this precarious economic condition would lessen the motivation to have a large family because of the minimal job opportunities (Fargues, 2000). In light of the economic hardships faced by families, having many children may be constituted an economic burden, expecting to favor smaller families (Fargues, 2000). However, the economic hardships caused by large families are mitigated by the action of such organizations as UNRWA, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and Hamas, which ensure that childbearing expensive do not weigh directly on the individual family (Fargues, 2000).

Besides high education levels, IMR in Palestine is one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the Muslim world (Fargues, 2000; Kartin & Schnell, 2007). IMR has decreased from around 32 in 1991 to approximately 18 deaths per 1000 live births in 2016 (PCBS, 2016). Child mortality has also substantially reduced from the Under-five Mortality Rate of around 42 in 1991 to the rate of about 22 per 1000 live births in 2014 (PCBS, 2016). These low infant and child mortality levels are puzzling, considering the Palestinian population's dire and precarious economic condition (Giacaman, 1994; Fargues, 2000). As occurred for education, it is also an effect of the protracted state of belligerence characterized by foreign aid. Since the early 1950s, a substantial share of material resources flowing into Palestinian territories from both the international community (UNRWA) and the oil-rich Arab states and the Palestinian diaspora (through workers' remittances) was invested in constructing health centers, developing primary health care, and training medical and paramedical staff (Fargues, 2000). This entailed a drastic reduction in infant and child mortality, even in total isolation under Israeli occupation (Fargues, 2000).

The peculiarity of the Arab-Israli conflict has a responsibility in shaping demographic behavior due to also a strong political sense that all individuals of society have a role in the struggle contributing "to the collective goal of resistance to Israel" (Fargues, 2000, p.467). This is because improvements in health status became a means of resistance by developing parallel healthcare infrastructures

cooperating with banned organizations without waiting for official permissions from the Israeli military (Fargues, 2000).

The persistence of high fertility has also been attributed to the unique political situation (Arab-Israeli conflict) because fertility is likely to remain high as long as the demographic struggle, where Arabs would become the numerical majority in the territory under Israeli control, is a crucial issue in the conflict (Khawaja, 2000; Fargues, 2000). In such a unique context, childbearing is glorified as a powerful weapon against Israel's occupation; indeed, Yasser Ara-fat, an architect of the Intifada, urged the Palestinian women to give birth, claiming that their wombs were his best weapons, "a reference to God's promise in Genesis 18-21 that Sarah's dead womb would bring forth life" (Khawaja, 2000; Leuprecht, 2011, p.228; Steinfeld, 2011). In an interview in the 1980s, an activist, Umm Khalil, also underlined the importance of women's wombs in the struggle against Israel for survival, encouraging women to have more children since Israel was highly concerned with Palestine's birthrate (Fargues, 2000). The Palestinian Authority has endorsed undeclared pro-natal policies and has fostered a social norm urging that fertility is weaponized in the struggle against Israeli occupation; for example, media may have been used to spread pronatalist values (Fargues, 2000; Kartin & Schnell, 2007). Palestinians indeed used contraception but for spacing births, not for terminating fertility (Fargues, 2000). Although the presence of concrete direct determinants to foster fertility decline, such as one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the Muslim world and one of the highest levels of women's education, the decline in fertility in Palestinian society was delayed until the beginning of the 1990s, remained one of the last societies to experience the process of demographic transition (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). As seen, this transition has been impeded by political and economic factors, which play a crucial role in hampering the fertility decline in the West Bank and Gaza (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). The reduction in fertility can be seen from the second half of the 1990s; however, it is a prolonged process although the favorable conditions. Such as the high levels of fertility and unemployment despite the large share of the educated population in the West Bank and Gaza (specifically among women) reflecting women's low societal status (Kartin & Schnell, 2007). As explained by Easterline and Crimmins (1985), the process of modernization, which is evident through the spread of education and urbanization, would have encouraged a particular lifestyle valuing material well-

being, subsequently favoring small families as a part of the process of decreasing the economic burden of children's upkeep. However, this process of modernization has been hampered by the Palestinians' condition, especially the absence of economic stabilization, so a functioning economy that allows people to find jobs and strong and official governmental commitment to the decrease of fertility (Khawaja, 2000; Kartin & Schnell, 2007).

2.3 Population policies over the years

One of the statements of the Israeli first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, underscores the crucial importance of demographic factors in the national-building project and the demographic struggle with the Arab community: "Without high, constantly growing, Jewish immigration to Israel, without a significant increase in the rate of Jewish births in the country, we are condemned to become a minority" (Leuprecht, 2011, p.230). Since its establishment, the State of Israel has considered demography an essential factor for its existence. Migration and fertility were the two most relevant demographic measures to determine the Israeli population's size and structure. Among the most relevant demographic indicators, four can be distinguished: immigration, fertility rate, geographic distribution, and residential patterns of ethnic groups (Goldscheider, 2002; Stypinska, 2007).

All population policies, particularly fertility, immigration, and citizenship policies, somehow replicate government leaders' desire to manage their populations and to realize a national character or national identity (King, 2002).

Due to the significant Arab population growth by natural increase threatening Israel's existence as a Jewish state, Jewish leaders started to be concerned about preserving the Jewish majority in Israel (Portugese 1998; King, 2002). This was in the light of ensuring the Jewish majority vis-vis the Arab community since the latter posed a demographic danger (Steinfeld, 2011).

Therefore, since the relative size of the Jewish and Arab communities has been of central political importance to Israel, multifaced population policies focusing on fertility and immigration levels have been adopted (Stypinska, 2007; Steinfeld, 2011). Since its formation, Israel indeed has implemented several immigration policies denying the Palestinians' right to return while fostering Jewish

immigration also by granting automatic citizenship to Jews and fertility policies to encourage Jewish fertility (Steinfeld, 2011). To the Israeli authorities, to achieve demographic dominance, the Jewish majority, both immigration and fertility levels had been influenced (Stypinska, 2007). However, the primary strategy for preserving a Jewish majority has been Jewish immigration into Israel. However, many political leaders and activists have backed pronatalist initiatives (Portugese, 1998; King, 2002).

2.3.1 Immigration policies

According to Israeli authorities, the main strategy of the national-building project has been to encourage Jewish immigration into the State of Israel to build a Jewish state by maintaining a Jewish majority; immigration can indeed affect the balance of power between the dominant group (the Jewish one) and the others (the Arabs) (Goldscheider, 1996, 1998; King, 2002). Immigration has deeply affected the "growth and socio-demographic structure of Israel's population", boosting the Jewish majority of Israel's population (Della Pergola, 2013, p.43).

Since the state's early years, the main objective was to encourage the migration of as many people who regarded themselves as Jewish by religion or ancestry as possible to settle down and consolidate the Jewish majority (Goldscheider, 1996; Yonah, 2004; Stypinska, 2007). Indeed, the higher fertility rates of Arabs in Israel were outweighed by the higher Jewish than Arab immigration rates (Goldscheider, 1996). Immigration has also been considered a crucial symbol of the struggle between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East; Israeli Arabs indeed perceived Jewish immigration into Israel as reinforcing asymmetry between the two communities, further diminishing the Israeli Arabs' political power, and diluting national economic resources (Goldscheider, 1996, 1998). It was perceived differently by the Jewish community, which saw immigration as implementing the Zionist ideology and creating a safe place for Jews (Goldscheider, 1996).

Since the establishment of Israel in 1948 until the 1990s, the rates of immigration have fluctuated, and four significant waves of immigration can be identified (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998). Between 1948 and 1992, 2.3 million

Jewish immigrants came to Israel, for an average of over 50,000 immigrants per year, 64% from Western countries and 36% from Middle Eastern (or Asian-African) countries (Goldscheider, 1996). The proportion of people from Asian-African countries dropped from over 70% during the 1950s to less than 10% from the early 1970s to the 1990s (Goldscheider, 1996). During the period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, most migrants were from Russia e the region of the FSU; 91% were from Europe, mainly from Eastern Europe (Goldscheider, 1996).

The first wave: 1948-1951

The first immigration wave occurred between 1948 and 1951, immediately after the proclamation of independence, and is considered the period of "mass" immigration (Goldscheider, 1996, 1998). In the context of war and the transition to national independence, in this period, mass migration from various countries of origin towards Israeli occurred, doubling the size of the Jewish population (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998; Steinfeld, 2011).

However, in order to enable the arrival of thousands of migrants, new policies of immigration were implemented during the first period after the establishment of Israel (Goldscheider, 1996). They contrasted the immigration restrictions enforced by the British Mandate in the previous years (Goldscheider, 1996). The formal context of Israel's immigration policy is contained in the Declaration of Independence of 1948, which proclaims: "The State of Israel is open to Jewish immigration and the Ingathering of Exiles" (Goldscheider, 1996, p.84-85; Steinfeld, 2011). This policy was enacted together with the abolishment of British restrictions on immigration and "to define "illegal" Jewish immigrants retroactively as legal residents of the country" (Goldscheider, 1996, p.84-85; Steinfeld, 2011). The Law of Return of 1950 provided all Jews and their descendants down to the third generation and their respective spouses the right to migrate to Israel, granting citizenship and related socioeconomic and civil rights benefits (Goldscheider, 1998, Della Pergola, 2004). All these provisions constituted the foundation of Israel's immigration policy (Goldscheider, 1996).

Yet, the overall immigration policy aimed not only to encourage Jewish immigration but also to ease and facilitate the first stages of integration into society because also of the large scale of immigration (Goldscheider, 1998; Della Pergola,

2004). The Israeli authorities provide a broad range of provisions to facilitate the integration of new immigrants into the new country (Della Pergola, 2004). Ministry of Immigrant Absorption assistance includes: "Absorption basket; Income insurance during the first year following immigration and for immigrants who do not receive the Absorption basket or who are studying in courses; Hebrew studies (ulpan); Assistance in housing; Assistance in employment; Assistance in establishing an independent business – Business Entrepreneurship; Tuition fee Assistance at institutions of higher education; Assistance for soldiers. These provisions are offered to various categories of individuals: New immigrants; Minor immigrants; Immigrant citizens; Children of immigrants; Immigrant families; Returning minors; Returning residents" (Della Pergola, 2004, p.8).

In the first wave, 687.624 Jewish immigrants migrated to Israel, 350,000 immigrants arrived in the first 18 months, and the other 350,000 came during the following year-and-one-half (Goldscheider, 1996, 1998). Initially, the immigrants entered Israel as Jewish refugees of European origin, survivors of the Holocaust (332.802 out of 687.624); in 1948, 85% of the 100,000 immigrants had European origin (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998; ICBS, 2022). However, this immigration pattern changed because of the arrival of Jewish people from Middle Eastern countries (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998). In 1949 and 1950, only about half of the immigrants were from Europe (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998). By 1951, over 70% of the immigrants were from Asian (237.704) and North African (93.282) countries, mainly Iraq, Iran, and Libya (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998; ICBS, 2022). Because of this mass migration, the Israeli government had to extend and strengthen its political, economic, and cultural institutions as well as develop and expand the welfare system in order to guarantee basic needs such as housing, jobs, schooling, and health services; especially for those who did not speak the national language (Hebrew) and came from a state of deprivation in a context of postwar in Europe (Goldscheider, 1996; 1998; Stypinska, 2007). This became even more difficult when Jewish people from the Middle East came, whose language, education, and culture (their life of style etc.) were substantially different from European ones; Israel was just established and characterized by a fragile economic base and immersed in a war (Goldscheider, 1996, 1998; Stypinska, 2007). However, the first stage represented a critical period for the State of Israel to increase the Jewish population and consequently consolidate the young and weak

country; in this period, indeed, Israel highly depended on the migrants seeing the migration policy as the primary means to consolidate the Jewish majority and preserve the "demographic balance" (Joppke & Rosenhek, 2001; Stypinska, 2007).

The second wave: 1952-1967

The second primary stream of immigration to Israel began in the mid-1950s until 1967, when over half the immigrants were from North African countries (around 280.000), particularly from Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt and also, people from the FSU began to arrive in the 1960s (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998; Stypinska, 2007; ICBS, 2022). In the second wave, fewer than 600.000 immigrants arrived in Israel; the immigration rate was slowed down between 1955 and 1957 when 165.000 immigrants arrived in Israel, and between 1958-60, 75.970 immigrants came, and it picked up again from 1961 to 1964 when a further quarter of a million (228.793) arrived, the majority came from North African states (115.876) (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998; ICBS, 2022). The frequent arrival of Jews from the Middle East and more distant Arab State was due to conditions of vulnerability where the Jewish communities in these areas lived as minority communities following the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 (Goldscheider, 1996). Israel became, for them, the more plausible option for survival against the persistent discrimination in these regions (Goldscheider, 1996). However, the social difference between the different shares of immigration increasingly became more evident, especially regarding educational attainment levels and occupational skills (Goldscheider, 1996). The migrants with fewer occupational skills and lower levels of education were not simply integrated into the labor market, creating social uneasiness, so several selective immigration regulations were made in order to minimize the negative economic impact of immigrants (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998).

The third wave: 1968-1989

After the second wave, characterized by a fluctuating and relatively low volume of immigration, the third wave began after the 1967 war (Goldscheider, 1998). The third major immigration wave lasted from 1967 to 1989, mainly from

Eastern Europe, especially from the Soviet Union and Romania, and from Western countries, principally from the United States; these regions represented the principal areas of immigration because they welcomed the most prominent Jewish communities outside Israel (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998). However, some restrictions on immigration from the Soviet Union were implemented (also because of the existence of alternative migration countries like the United States), limiting the arrival of Russian immigrants until 1989 (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996). Between 1972 and 1979, 267.582 immigrants came to Israel, 51% (137.134) from the Soviet Union (Eastern Europe), slightly less than 7% (18.418) from Romania, and around 8% from the United States (20.963) (ICBS,2022); between 1980 and 1989, 153,833 immigrants arrived in Israel between, whose 59% were from Europe (70.898), especially Eastern Europe (29.754) and the United States (18.904); 11% (16.965) were from Ethiopia; and around 7% were from Argentina (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998; ICBS, 2022). The third wave was characterized by a period of economic prosperity, geographic expansion due to the outcomes of the post-1967 war period, and military and political confidence due to the victory of the war (Goldscheider, 1996, 1998). The previous experiences gained due to the two major immigration waves led to significant attention on high-quality integration, contrasting with minimum integration standards and elementary health care offered in the previous waves (Goldscheider, 1996, 1998). Israeli authorities paid more attention to more adequate services and living accommodations, such as adequate housing, jobs, and provisions for education, especially for university-level education for immigrant children; despite these improvements, there were significant differences in the subsidies provided to European and Western newcomers and those offered to the immigrants came earlier from the Middle East (Goldscheider, 1996, 1998).

The fourth wave: from the 1990s

The last and fourth immigration wave began in 1989 and continued through the 1990s and 2000s: the first years of the waves were characterized by high levels of the arrival of Russian Jewish immigrants (Goldscheider, 1995, 1998). Between 1990 and 1994, more than half a million (609.322) arrived in Israel, considered the largest arrival since the period of mass immigration from the establishment

(Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998; ICBS, 2022). Instead, between 1990 and 1999, 956.319 immigrants came to Israel, mostly from the former European republics of FSU (771.213). Instead, 30.000 Ethiopian Jews came to Israel from 1989 to 1992 (Goldscheider, 1995, 1996, 1998). However, Russian immigration is considered particular because many of them are not regarded as "Jewish" according to the orthodox definition (also Ethiopian immigrants); approximately 20% of the immigrants from the FSU in the "early 1990s, and up to 60 percent by mid-1990s", were not "Jews" (Stypinska, 2007, p. 109-110). Naturally, immigration was essential for the survival of the Jewish character; the newcomers were supposed to reinforce the Jewish majority and consolidate the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in the face of the natural increase of Israeli Arabs (Leuprecht, 2011). Between 1948 and 1990, Jewish population growth was primarily due to the immigration rates, including non-Jewish immigrants (almost half of the total population increase), compared to Israeli Arabs, which increased entirely due to natural increase (nearly 98%) (Goldscheider, 1995). However, even though the acceptance of the immigrants both Jews and non-Jews, was aimed at counterbalancing the growth of Israeli Arabs, it also contributed to the increase of the share of the non-Jewish population (Goldscheider, 1995).

2.3.2 Fertility Policies

In the last chapter, fertility policies (pronatalist legislation) will be analyzed in detail (especially in light of women's role and subsequent implications). However, in this paragraph, I will briefly examine fertility policies to highlight the importance of demography as nation-building in the establishment and consolidation of Israel and how this fertility legislation reflects ethnic-nationalist ideologies, fostering the majority of the dominant ethnic group, the Jewish one. The fertility rate has been a pivotal variable in determining the natural increase; it characterized the difference in natural growth between the Arab community and the Jewish community, where the former had much higher fertility levels than the latter (Steinfeld, 2011). This fertility differential had created the so-called "demographic anxiety", focusing on the relative size and growth of the Jewish and mainly Palestinian communities and, consequently, leading to demographic implications

for maintaining the Jewish majority (Steinfeld, 2011). To ensure Jewish dominance, even though Israeli authorities did not implement an official policy on national fertility, some measures designed to increase Jewish fertility vis-vis Arab fertility were implemented (Steinfeld, 2011). Those constituted an unofficial policy (Steinfeld, 2011). After the mid-1950, fertility became crucial to increase the Jewish proportion of the population fundamental when Jewish immigration rates started to fluctuate; the government increased its support for demographic research by intensifying fertility policies as well (Toft, 2011; Steinfeld, 2011). Indeed, Israeli Arabs have grown entirely by natural increase, whereas Jewish population growth has been raised primarily through immigration (Leuprecht, 2011).

As said previously, Bachi considered fertility as the key to determining the demographic balance between Arabs and Jews in Israel, besides immigration which, until that time, was considered the primary tactic to secure the Jewish majority (Steinfeld, 2011). He indeed was concerned by the relatively low Jewish fertility rates and high Arabs fertility levels; without immigration, the percentage of Jews would have decreased even more, and it constituted a real demographic threat to the Jewish majority's survival (Steinfeld, 2011). Bachi believed that the duty of Israeli authorities was to intervene as much as possible in order to encourage families to increase their fertility levels (more than two or three children per family) since Jewish fertility would not increase unassisted (Steinfeld, 2011). He suggested several policies to raise Jewish fertility; they are included into broad categories: propaganda designed to influence fertility patterns and foster a positive attitude towards large families and economic policies aimed at easing the financial hardship of childbearing more than one/two children (Steinfeld, 2011). Through his studies and suggestions, Bachi was able to bring the fertility issues to the attention of the future Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion (Steinfeld, 2011).

In 1962, the prime minister institutionalized a Committee for Natality Problems to develop policy recommendations regarding fertility (Portugese, 1998; Toft, 2011). At the end of 1968, the government realized a Demographic Center in the prime minister's office, which endorsed larger Jewish families through media and low-interest housing loans (Portugese 1998; Toft, 2011). As part of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, this institution tasks with researching and supporting the state leaders on the issue of national fertility and especially on how to secure the growth of the Jewish majority vis-vis the no-Jews (King, 2002). Indeed, it

"promotes the formulation of comprehensive government demographic policy meant to maintain a suitable level of Jewish population growth, and acts systematically to implement this policy," underlining the ethnonationalist orientation (King, 2002, p. 377). Another important policy is family allowances or child allowances. Israeli authorities have instituted child allowances since 1959, and this legislation emerged partly from pronatalist motivations and partly from socialist principles (Doran & Kramer, 1991; King, 2002; Steinfeld, 2011). The child allowance system consists mainly of families obtaining more subsidies per child as they have more children (King, 2002). However, a separate child allowance institution, established in 1970, provided allowances to families where at least one member had served in the Israeli Defense Forces, which was considered an attempt to foster only Jewish births (King, 2002). This is because Arab citizens were almost excluded from programs regarding veterans' families (King, 2002). Yet, in 1994, Arab citizens became eligible both for the regular family allowances and Veteran's Allowances (King, 2002). Thus, granting children's subsidies is not excluded based on ethnicity or religion (King, 2002).

As said previously, by that legislation, Israeli Arabs benefited more than Israeli Jews (almost 40% of children's allowances went to them, even though they constituted about 20% of Israel's population) (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003c). Israel even intensified these pro-natalist policies during the 1990s and even more in the 2000s, significantly impacting the lowest strata of society (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003c). Since the tax reform of 1975, children's allowances have increased rapidly. In 2000, Israel decided to increase the children's subsidies for the fifth child to 845 shekels ($200) from 296 shekels in 1980 and 69 shekels in 1965 (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003c). For the sixth child, Israel increased the children's allowance from 81 shekels in 1965 to 844 shekels in June 2001, and "the monthly children's allowance for six children increased from 8.1 percent in 1960 to 18.2 percent in 1970 and reached as high as 43.4 percent in June 2001", moreover in 2001, "the monthly children's allowance for seven children was $930, much above the minimum wage in Israel, which was approximately $770 at that time" (Winckler, 2002, p.52; Della Pergola, 2003c).

Fertility policies, especially pronatalist initiatives, naturally impact women's roles as mothers and homemakers (King, 2002). It has been very persistent that the idea of women being responsible for the national population

growth, regarded as workers and builders of the nation, calls them to reproduce the Jewish population biologically (King, 2002). In implementing fertility policies, Israeli authorities have often sought to limit access to reproductive technologies (such as contraception or abortion), which may prevent or terminate a pregnancy, also because of the maintenance of high fertility levels (Portugese, 1998; King, 2002; Steinfeld, 2011). Compared to the European and American counterparts getting legal access to abortion and contraception by the end of the 1970s, Israeli women's access was limited, meeting opposition from both religious and pronatalist (ethnonationalist) factions (Yishai, 1993; King, 2002; Steinfeld, 2011). Only in 1977, after years of struggle, Israeli women obtained legal access to abortion even though under particular circumstances, women seeking an abortion need approval from a hospital committee to get access to abortion, encountering bureaucratic hurdles and economic burdens (Portugese, 1998; King, 2002; Steinfeld, 2011). All these attempts to restrict access to reproductive technologies can be included under the umbrella of the government's pronatalist fertility policies. Therefore, in Israel, both ethnonationalist, religious, and civic/cultural nationalist ideologies have "resulted in a mix of progressive and regressive policies as regards women" (King, 2002, 378). However, the condition of women and their access to abortion and contraception due to the implementation of fertility policies (pronatalist norms) will be analyzed in detail in the last chapter.

Concluding Remarks

As seen by this chapter, demography plays a key role in driving the implementation of different policies and provisions in order to preserve the Jewish ethnic character of Israel. The Jewishness of the state is fundamental for the existence of a Jewish democracy, where Jewishness is intertwined with Jewish ethnicity, Jewish religion, and Jewish nationalism.

Indeed, religion is embodied in the State and has also been used to create the national identity of the Israeli people. Judaism indeed contains "pro-natalistic values that are translated through strong religious institutions in Israel" (Okun, 2017, p.477). Religion, naturally, is not the main drive of fertility. However, the profound relationship between religious institutions and state authorities and the subsequent spread of traditional values (that are religious as well) influence (in part)

the choice to have a large family. For secular Jews, religious traditionalism, nationalism, and familism are interrelated and partially in conflict with common values related to the low fertility to SDT countries (Okun, 2017). Inglehart and Welzel (2005) explained the strong interconnection between religious values, values of nationalism, and familism, based on evidence from the World Values Surveys (Okun, 2016). Yet, it is also crucial to underscore that the majority of Israelis identify themselves as not secular. They are characterized by higher fertility levels shaping the fertility pattern in society. However, it does not exclude that as well secular people have fertility rates above the replacement level (above two children per woman).

At the same time, the demographic struggle against the Arab share of the population within and outside of Israel is a persistent variable in the Israelis' life, shaping both the individual and the collective choices. This demographic competition fosters an increase in fertility rates. Fertility and Immigration policies have indeed been crucial in securing the Jewish majority. However, it is fundamental to analyze other factors considered determinants in shaping fertility patterns in Israel as well as in society overall; the role of the woman in both society and family as well as the view of women for the nation, the family ad state support for childbearing, policies in supporting women's employment and education, provisions on access to abortion and contraception, the familiarism ideology and child's value. All these elements will be analyzed in the last chapter.

3 Gender, Politics and Religion: the role of the Israel woman

The status of women within a society is fundamental to understanding fertility patterns. Fertility is a crucial determinant of population growth and composition, and it is influenced by various factors such as cultural practices, public policies, and economic considerations (Pew Research Center, 2015). Women play a central role in fertility patterns, as they are the ones who bear and give birth to children. In recent decades, women in many countries have experienced significant changes in fertility patterns, with declining fertility rates and later childbearing being common trends (Della Pergola, 2004; Testa, 2012). The status of women and their level of economic and social participation can also play a role in fertility patterns; for example, women who have higher levels of education and more prestigious occupations may have lower fertility rates due to the demands of their careers (Testa et al., 2011; Testa, 2012). At the same time, women who face barriers to education and employment may have higher fertility rates due to a lack of alternative options and the potential economic benefits of having children (Testa et al., 2011; Testa, 2012). Israel is an interesting case regarding fertility and women, as the country has a relatively high fertility rate compared to other developed countries, as well as high levels of educational attainments and employment among women. According to data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the TFR among Israeli women in 2021 was 3.1 children per woman, which is among the highest in the developed world (ICS, 2022). This high fertility rate is influenced by a variety of factors, including cultural values, public policies, and economic considerations (מרכז טאוב - Taub Center Staff, 2019). At the same time, Israeli women have made significant strides in education and employment in recent decades, and they have a relatively high level of economic and social participation compared to women in other countries (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Cohen & Liani, 2009; Shavit & Bronstein, 2011; Okun, 2011; Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Chazan, 2018; Bowers, 2020). Although the striking improvements in women's rights in the last decades, women still face challenges related to gender inequality and disparities in fertility rates among different socioeconomic and demographic groups, as seen in the first chapter (Weinreb et al., 2018).

For example, fertility rates are higher among women with lower education levels than those with higher education levels (Weinreb et al., 2018). This raises important questions about the relationship between fertility and the status of women in Israel and how fertility patterns may be influenced by cultural, economic, and policy factors. This chapter will explore the status of Israeli women in Israel firstly (in particular Jewish women), the construction of motherhood in Israeli discourse, the role of religious institutions, and how these factors intersect with public policies and programs. Then, the Pro-Natal Program will be analyzed, primarily how conservative ideologies such as familism and pronatalism interact with women, as well as reproductive rights and gender equality. What economic considerations, such as the availability of support for families, influence fertility patterns among different socio-economic and demographic groups, and how these factors intersect with public policies and programs aimed at supporting families and promoting gender equality. Finally, in the last part, the chapter will explore the challenges women face in the workplace and related to balancing family and work life by also examining women's employment and education patterns, the structure of the Israeli labor market, and household behaviors in influencing gender roles, and fertility patterns.

3.1 Gender Roles: Women Living in a Jewish State

Women in Israel have a relatively high level of fertility compared to other developed countries, which is influenced by various factors, including cultural values, public policies, and economic considerations. For example, cultural norms and expectations around family size and gender roles can influence fertility patterns, as can economic considerations such as the opportunity costs of childbearing, the balance between work life and family, and the availability of public and private support for families (which will be explained in the following paragraphs) (Testa et al., 2011; Testa, 2012; Azmoude et al., 2017). As said previously, Israel has experienced several improvements in women's education and employment rates in recent years. During the 1970s and 1980s, there were significant changes in the social and economic status of women in Israel, characterized by an increase in the number of women entering the workforce, and

women's education levels, particularly in higher education, began to approach those of men (Chazan, 2018).

These changes were eventually reflected in legislation, which initially took on a more liberal form, replacing protective measures with laws that prohibited discrimination against women in the home and workforce (such as the 1988 "Equal Opportunities in the Workplace Law") (Chazan, 2018). The fight for women's rights also became more institutionalized, with the appointment of an advisor on the status of women in the Prime Minister's Office in 1978 and the creation of a standing committee on the advancement of women and gender equality in the Knesset in 1992 (Chazan, 2018). In addition, the National Authority for the Advancement of Women was established in 1998, and advisors on women's affairs were mandated in all local authorities in 2000 (Chazan, 2018). In the early 2000s, the number of women entering the workforce in Israel increased, almost reaching the same percentage as men (Chazan, 2018). However, many of these women found themselves in lower-paying jobs, often in part-time positions and earning less than their male counterparts (Chazan, 2018). As men continue to hold leadership positions, women of various social backgrounds consistently rank among the poorest and most underutilized (Chazan, 2018). Gender inequality and its adverse effects have been further entrenched (Chazan, 2018). In 2015, the right-wing government led by Benjamin Netanyahu was re-elected, causing a shift away from a commitment to coexistence with neighboring countries, religious pluralism, social equity, and solidarity (Chazan, 2018). This government promotes a narrow, ethnocentric interpretation of Israeli identity and aspirations, leading to increased social divisions and internal conflict (Chazan, 2018). Efforts toward gender equality have stalled, with retrogressive steps being taken in several areas (Chazan, 2018). The status of women in the workplace has worsened, with gender discrepancies in income increasing by more than 2% in 2016 alone, and the covid crisis has further worsened women's employment conditions (Chazan, 2018; Bowers, 2020). Progress on gender equality in the Israeli Defense Forces has been slowed in order to accommodate religious sensitivities (Chazan, 2018). In Israel, military service is often seen as a prerequisite for political leadership, but as women are underrepresented in combat positions and higher ranks in the military, they have limited opportunities to advance in politics and have a say in the policies that affect them (Granek & Nakash, 2017).

Although women were formally granted equal rights, the representation of women in the Knesset is very low, and they have historically had limited participation in local politics, party caucuses, and behind-the-scenes power negotiations; in 2013, only 22.5% of them were women, including just four female ministers (Goldscheider, 1996; Granek & Nakash, 2017). The underrepresentation of women in political leadership positions in Israel has been linked to gender-specific obstacles, such as the concentration of political power in the hands of men and the socialization of women into traditional family roles (Goldscheider, 1996). While there have been political parties in Israel that advocate for women's rights, they have had little influence on political power; this lack of female representation has resulted in policies and decisions being made by male-dominated governments that do not fully consider the perspectives and needs of women (especially regarding women's reproductive choices), particularly in areas that significantly impact women's lives, such as maternity leave, spending on childhood education and access to abortion and contraception (Goldscheider, 1996; Granek & Nakash, 2017). State policies that prioritize the needs of the militaristic nation, such as promoting multiple births to increase the number of soldiers, are often made by male-dominated governments, while policies that significantly impact women's lives, such as the length of maternity leave, are not adequately considered from a female perspective (Granek & Nakash, 2017). Besides these considerations, some of them will be explored in detail in the following paragraphs; this chapter will analyze another factor that may contribute to these gender disparities, that is the construction of motherhood in Israeli society, which is shaped by cultural, religious, and economic forces (Berkovitch, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Bloomfield, 2009).

The role of women as mothers is often emphasized in Israeli society, and motherhood is often seen as a central aspect of a woman's identity and purpose; this emphasis on motherhood can create pressure for women to have children and can shape women's expectations and aspirations around family formation (Berkovitch, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Bloomfield, 2009). At the same time, the interference of religious institutions in Israeli society, particularly the Orthodox Jewish community, can also influence the construction of motherhood and reproductive decision-making.

Israel is a state where religious institutions have a dominant role in civil matters, characterized by a continuous demographic threat where fertility has

played a particular role in consolidating Jewish dominance and securing the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. The personal status law, which includes marriage, divorce, and inheritance, is controlled by religious courts, which means that women's rights within these areas are not equal to those of men and are often dependent on the interpretation of religious law by male religious authorities (Strum, 1989; Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Babst & Tellier, 2012). For example, under Jewish law, only men can initiate divorce proceedings, and a woman must receive her husband's consent in order to obtain a divorce; this can result in women being trapped in abusive or unhappy marriages because they are unable to get a divorce without their husband's consent (Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). These are just a few examples of how the intersection of religion and state law can impact the rights and freedoms of women in Israel. The influence of religious institutions is particularly pronounced in the realm of reproductive health and family planning, as religious authorities often hold significant power and influence in these areas (Goldscheider, 1996; Tal, 2016; Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). This can create barriers for women seeking to access reproductive health services and can limit women's autonomy and agency in reproductive decision-making (it will be analyzed more in the next paragraph). The intersection of cultural, religious, and political factors in shaping the construction of motherhood and women's experiences in Israeli society raises essential questions about the status of women concerning fertility and family formation. For example, how do cultural and religious norms around motherhood and gender roles impact women's fertility patterns and reproductive decision-making? In this paragraph, we will explore these issues and examine the status of women in Israel with fertility. We will also delve into how cultural, religious, and political factors shape the construction of motherhood and women's experiences in Israeli society. Through this analysis, we aim to shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of fertility and the status of women in Israeli society.

3.1.1 The Intersection of Nationalist and Religious Discourse in the Construction of Motherhood in Israel

It is clear that, in the context of Israeli society, women's identities and roles have been heavily influenced by both religious and nationalist discourses that prioritize their reproductive function and connect it to the nation-building project (Berkovitch, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Bloomfield, 2009). This has resulted in the development of a pronatalist environment that encourages motherhood while encouraging their participation in the workplace (Berkovitch, 2001; Shafir & Peled, 2002; Frenkel, 2008; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004). While women in Israel have made significant progress in various areas, it appears that they still face challenges in fully participating as equal citizens and achieving true power and agency in society (Granek & Nakash, 2017; Chazan, 2018). According to Jewish religious law (halakha), women's bodies are often depicted as fertile and capable of giving birth to children, which is seen as a way for them to fulfill their role in building the nation, consequently bearing children is considered a sacred obligation and a visible sign of God's blessing as well as a collective pursuit (Portugese, 1998; Landau, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004; Bloomfield, 2009; Sperling, 2010; Steinfeld, 2011; Levush & Law Library Of Congress, 2012). In Jewish tradition, the words for son (*ben*) and daughter (*bat*) are connected to the words for building (*banyan*) and home (*bayit*), respectively, implying that children help to build and create a home for their parents, underlying the role of children in giving meaning to the life of women (Bloomfield, 2009). When Zionism emerged, although it was meant to be an alternative to Judaism, many of its leaders maintained a solid connection to the religious foundations of Judaism (Bloomfield, 2009). This connection was partly because Judaism served as a cultural bond among Jews living in the dispersed Diaspora and with the Jewish past (Strum, 1989; Bloomfield, 2009). The trauma of the Holocaust and the devastating loss of European Jewry only served to strengthen these beliefs about the importance of family and children for many survivors (Portugese, 1998; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011; Sperling, 2010; Tal, 2016; Granek & Nakash, 2017).

Many saw producing large families as a way to recover from this tragedy and to ensure the continuity of the Jewish people by suggesting that the role of women in bearing children is seen as a central and sacred responsibility within the Jewish faith and that it is closely tied to the survival and continuity of the Jewish people (Portugese, 1998; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011). Zionism found the narratives surrounding women's fertility in the Jewish religion to be particularly important in constructing the rhetoric and imagery of their modern nationalism by using them as a means of ensuring Jewish survival; as a result, women's natural fertility became an essential part of the nation-building project and a necessity for Jewish survival (Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011). Fertility and parenthood became a moral obligation, particularly within religious communities which view high fertility as an important part of the family ethos (McDonald, 2000; Granek & Nakash, 2017). For much of the 20th century, the patriarchal culture of familism (which emphasizes the importance of the family unit) structured political agendas and shaped policy initiatives (Portugese, 1998). Pro-natalist policies (policies that encourage or support having children) may have emerged from a variety of reasons that were justified by patriarchal ideology but may not necessarily be entirely reflective of it; the history of the struggle for a Jewish state has always been closely tied to population growth and ensuring a secure demographic foundation for national self-determination (Steinfeld, 2011). In the face of the Arab population living in Israel, the size of the Jewish people and demography have therefore been viewed as a national security issue (Steinfeld, 2011). From this perspective, the focus on fertility in Israel can be understood as a matter of the country's political survival. Women's reproduction was indeed not only a physical necessity but also played a crucial social role by becoming a means of political enfranchisement in the nationalist struggle (Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011). In Jewish discourse, the importance of women in building the nation (being a collective mission) is often tied to their reproductive bodies, being primarily a mother and a wife rather than as an individual or a citizen (Berkovitch, 1997; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004; Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011; Babst & Tellier, 2012; Levush & Law Library Of Congress, 2012; Raucher, 2014).

However, these religious narratives have evolved as they have been incorporated into the nationalism of many Zionist leaders, blending the religious origins of these ideas with the ideological constructions of gender and nation-

building (Bloomfield, 2009). The centrality of Jewish survival to Judaism has taken on a new meaning in the context of Zionism by appropriating the religious narratives of gender and transforming them into secular ones (Bloomfield, 2009; Raucher, 2014). This approach was in line with the biblical motif of Jewish perseverance and the need to ensure the survival of the Jewish nation (Bloomfield, 2009; Levush & Law Library Of Congress, 2012). The role of women in bearing and raising children was seen as central to the development and stability of the nation, and their rights and interests were often subordinated to the needs and goals of the family unit and the larger national community (Raucher, 2014). Women's "unique" responsibility was to fulfill their duty consisting in giving birth to as many healthy Jews for the Jewish state (Steinfeld, 2011; Raucher, 2014). David Ben-Gurion, as the first Prime Minister of Israel, was a strong advocate of motherhood in the early years of the state by providing motherhood with a public role and framing it within the political sphere; this incorporated ideological gender constructions into the national context (Berkovitch, 1997; Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). He frequently emphasized the symbolic importance of the Jewish birthrate to the existence of the nation, and he institutionalized these ideas through specific pronatalist policies such as "Heroine Mothers" in 1949; it presented motherhood as a public role and linked it to the protection of the "motherland" through the boys that women gave birth to, who were likely to become future soldiers (Bloomfield, 2009; Babst & Tellier, 2012; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). This initiative helped bring the role of motherhood into the public sphere of political life by giving it a national significance through the notion of "motherhood as a national mission" (Berkovitch, 1997, p. 605; Bloomfield, 2009). Furthermore, Ben-Gurion defined women's national responsibilities in terms of their reproductive potential, creating a clear definition of a "good" woman, which is that having at least four children otherwise, they were betraying the Jewish mission (Bloomfield, 2009). This statement suggests that women who did not have a sufficient number of children were seen as not fulfilling their responsibilities to the nation.

Although the idea of gender equality has been promoted as an essential component of the Israeli symbolic system, this does not necessarily mean that women are entitled to the same rights and duties as men as individuals (Berkovitch, 1997; Bloomfield, 2009). The concept of equality is promoted with an emphasis on

the distinctive characteristics of women and their unique contribution to the nation related to their reproductive capacity (Berkovitch, 1997; King, 2002). Members of parliament from religious parties have emphasized in their speeches the "uniqueness" of women and the inherent differences between the sexes (Berkovitch, 1997). The Israeli approach to reproduction is heavily influenced by its militaristic character, which equates childbirth with military service for men (Morgenstern-Leissner, 2006; Sperling, 2010; Granek & Nakash, 2017). This results in societal pressure for women to bear children in order to be entirely accepted as members of the collective or nation and to receive social recognition (Berkovitch, 1997; Sperling, 2010; Morgenstern-Leissner, 2006; Granek & Nakash, 2017).

This suggests that the promotion of equality may not be based on universal principles but on the specific roles and characteristics attributed to women within the nation (Berkovitch, 1997; King, 2002). The Defense Service Law, passed by the Parliament in 1949, established military service as a critical component of "Israeli citizenship" and elevated the Israeli army to a position of supreme importance as a "social educator", outlines the categories of individuals who are exempt from military service in Israel, including married or pregnant women, women with children, and women who declare that reasons of conscience or religious conviction prevent them from serving (Albeck, 1972; Berkovitch, 1997). This law does not exempt men from military service for these reasons; this exemption was based on the belief that nothing should distract them from fulfilling their duty as "Jewish mothers" (Berkovitch, 1997). The exemption of married women from military service suggests that the government saw their role as mothers as more important than their potential contributions as soldiers or citizens. This reinforces the idea that women's societal roles were primarily defined by their reproductive and nurturing functions rather than their individual capabilities or rights as citizens (Berkovitch, 1997). In the beginning, the religious parties, together with other exponents, opposed the draft for women for several reasons, including the fact that their military service would lead to a decrease in the Jewish birth rate which would pose a threat to "Jewish demography" and prevent them from fulfilling their primary duty as mothers (Berkovitch, 1997). All this suggests that motherhood was seen as a central and vital role for women in Israeli society and was closely tied to national identity and demographic concerns. The integration of

women into the military in Israel is indeed structured in a way that their military roles do not significantly impact the societal roles they are expected to fulfill, and their roles as mothers are prioritized (Berkovitch, 1997). When presenting the Equal Rights Law, The Minister of Justice saw the role of a Jewish mother in nurturing and educating the next generation as a critical way in which Israeli Jewish women contributed to the development of the new society (Berkovitch, 1997). The fulfillment of this role (being a mother) is seen as a key way women contribute to the nation, and it is highly valued and honored. The debate following the emanation of Equal Rights Law focused on the law's impact on the institution of the "family" rather than on the question of whether women should be guaranteed equal rights as a civil right (Berkovitch, 1997). Members of parliament argued that women "deserved" equality because they contributed to society and fulfilled their roles as "Jewish mothers", or that equality would itself enhance family life (Berkovitch, 1997). Furthermore, the law was intended to apply to women who were either wives or mothers (Berkovitch, 1997), suggesting that these roles were central to women's identity and status in Israeli society. This led to the promotion of equality for women being closely tied to their roles within the family and their contributions to the nation rather than on the principle of universal, equal rights. As well Geula Cohen, a female member of the Knesset during the 1970s and 1980s, expressed similar views on the role of women as mothers within the national context, stating that the Israeli woman is an essential part of the family of the Jewish family and that she serves as a symbol of the nation through her role as a wife, mother, sister, and grandmother to soldiers (Bloomfield, 2009). Women in Israel are indeed expected to prioritize motherhood and see it as a central and symbolic role within the nation; this expectation is reinforced by the cultural and social environment in which they are raised, which emphasizes the importance of motherhood for establishing connections and affiliations (Amir & Benjamin, 1997; Remennick, 2000; Bloomfield, 2009). In doing so, Israel implemented policies that heavily promoted childbirth and created specific social roles for mothers; this included legislation such as maternal awards, labor laws, and reproductive policies that defined what it meant to be a good woman and what it did not (Bloomfield, 2009; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004).

In Jewish scripture and interpretation, reproduction is seen as a specifically female role, and the female body is viewed as designed explicitly for childbearing

(Bloomfield, 2009). This perspective has influenced modern Israeli society through pronatalist reproductive policies, which made it clear that the public sphere expected women to fulfill their duties to the nation through motherhood and valued their reproductive capabilities (Bloomfield, 2009). These narratives entered the culture through practical legislation that brought women's private lives, including their fertility and reproduction, into the public sphere as a national resource (Bloomfield, 2009). As a result, the concept of motherhood became politicized and incorporated religious narratives into Israel's political and social culture, the fabric of Israeli society (Bloomfield, 2009). While the discourse surrounding reproductive legislation in Israel today may no longer have explicit religious undertones, it is still heavily influenced by the need for a solid Jewish demographic presence and a concern for women who wish to become mothers (Bloomfield, 2009; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004). These issues have become deeply ingrained in Israeli culture, shaping how women are constructed in society (Bloomfield, 2009).

The religious origins of these ideas have been absorbed into the national culture and have had a significant impact on the women's (both religious and secular) choices made for their own bodies (Bloomfield, 2009; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004). Thus, social norms prioritize motherhood as a natural and universal expectation for women, and infertility is often viewed as a personal failure (Remennick, 2000). This cultural emphasis on reproduction is reflected in the fact that the government fully subsidizes infertility treatments, even though this comes at the expense of other unmet healthcare needs (Remennick, 2000). These treatments are seen as helping women fulfill their national duty to bear children and support the nation and are tied to a narrative of nationalism that emphasizes the reproductive role of women's bodies (Bloomfield, 2009). As a result, individual experiences of fertility become both personal and a matter of public importance in the context of national survival (Bloomfield, 2009). As a result, married women who struggle with infertility may feel pressure to undergo long-term and invasive procedures to achieve pregnancy, regardless of the personal cost, including financial, occupational, and physical sacrifices (Remennick, 2000). Bloomfield (2009), in her paper, underlined indeed religious narratives of Jewish female identity that shape the politicized reproductive policies in Israel through several interviews with Jewish women from different religious and social backgrounds.

Consequently, specific gender roles have been necessary for the survival of the Jewish nation, as relegating women to reproduction function is crucial for Jewish continuity and dominance in Israel; it ties a woman's social and national identity to her reproductive body (Bloomfield, 2009). Women are affected by these narratives, and they contribute to their perpetuation (Bloomfield, 2009; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). Nation-building relies on women and assigns them a specific role; every time a woman bears a child, she actively participates in this collective effort (Bloomfield, 2009; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). In this way, the narratives surrounding motherhood and fertility shape the role of women in Israeli society and how they understand their contributions to the nation.

However, it is difficult to provide specific data on the pressure felt by women to be mothers in Israel, as this is a complex and multifaceted issue influenced by a variety of cultural, religious, and economic factors. As said previously, motherhood is often considered a central aspect of a woman's identity and purpose in Israeli society, and women may face social and cultural pressure to have children and fulfill their roles as mothers. Remennick, in his study (2000), noted that childlessness is seen as a problem that needs to be fixed, and infertile women are often subjected to invasive questioning about their reproductive plans. This pressure to have children is compounded by the child-centered nature of Israeli society, where social events and outings often revolve around children and can exclude childless women (Remennick, 2000). This intense focus on motherhood and childbearing can make it difficult for infertile women to keep their fertility struggles private, leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion (Remennick, 2000). Additionally, traditional gender roles place the burden of reproductive failure on women, even when the cause may lie with the male partner, resulting in feelings of guilt and responsibility for infertile women (Remennick, 2000). Consequently, infertility is regarded as a sickness that causes significant emotional distress to Jewish women who often face social stigma, and the government has a moral obligation to address this issue (Remennick, 2000; Granek & Nakash, 2017). As a result, fertility treatments are heavily subsidized and considered a vital national resource.

Nevertheless, these policies also reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, positioning motherhood as a central aspect of women's lives and identities. Remennick (2000) found that women in Israel faced significant social

pressure to have children and that this pressure was especially strong among certain religious and cultural groups. In Donath's interviews, some women may feel like the path to motherhood is "automatic" and that they do not have the option to fully consider their own desires and needs (Donath, 2015; Granek & Nakash, 2017). This pressure can also contribute to feelings of distress and regret among women who may not have thoroughly examined their motivations for becoming a mother (Granek & Nakash, 2017). These policies shape social and material conditions that encourage higher fertility, though they also operate within the broader religious contexts of Judaism, which also pressure women to bear children (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). Although fertility rates have been declining and the proportion of childless women has been increasing, it continues to be relatively low compared to western countries, as having children is a cultural value (Herzog, 1999; Frenkel, 2008). Childlessness is more common among certain groups of women in Israel; for example, women who are more educated and have higher levels of income are more likely to be childless, as are women who are single or divorced; Remennick (2000) found that women in Israel who were more educated and had higher levels of income were less likely to have children and that this may be due in part to the economic and opportunity costs of childbearing. He says that the social pressure to conform to pronatalist ideals and the stigma surrounding childlessness can be particularly devastating for women who are less educated and do not have a career or other non-familial aspirations (Remennick, 2000). This reflects that women in Israel may face competing pressures to pursue education and employment and fulfill their roles as mothers (Remennick, 2000). It is especially true for women unable to pursue long-term and burdensome infertility treatments at any personal cost (Remennick, 2000). This suggests that the psychological response to infertility stigma is graded by an individual's conformity to dominant norms and that in Israel, resistance to this stigma may be more feasible for educated professional women who have the necessary resources to do so (Remennick, 2000). Overall, it suggests that motherhood is highly valued in Israeli society and that women may face social and cultural pressure to have children and fulfill their roles as mothers. Pronatalist policies and ideologies in Israel glorify motherhood by placing significant pressure on women to view motherhood as a necessary and essential part of their identity and restricting the autonomy of women who may wish to pursue other life paths or doubt about becoming a parent (Berkovitch, 1997; Remennick, 2000; Birenbaum-

Carmeli, 2003; Bloomfield, 2009; Granek & Nakash, 2017). This belief is supported by both institutional and normative/individual levels, with factors such as Jewish religious tradition, demographic competition with Arab neighbors and citizens, fear of child loss in military conflict, and a children-centered culture all contributing to relatively high fertility rates among Israeli Jews (Remennick, 2000; Sperling, 2010; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). Women have made significant progress in education and the workforce, but there are still significant gender disparities in income and representation in leadership positions (Sasson-Levy, 1992; Babst & Tellier, 2012). Although the compulsory conscription of women to serve in the military is seen as a proof of gender equality (since military service signifies as valid and complete citizenship), they are often assigned to support roles, face limited promotion opportunities, and the period of military service is shorter for women than for men (Albeck, 1972; Sasson-Levy, 1992; Sered, 2000; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Morgenstern-Leissner, 2006; Tal, 2016). The militarism, demographic concerns, and the ongoing conflict in Israel have contributed to the exclusion of women from political power and decision-making, giving priority to security and military matters (Sasson-Levy, 1992; Berkovitch, 1997; Morgenstern-Leissner, 2006; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Babst & Tellier, 2012; Chazan, 2018).

3.1.2 The Role of Religious Institutions in Shaping Women's Status in Israel

Even though women in Israel are legally considered equal to men, this is not always reflected in their treatment, facing significant barriers to full equality due to the interplay of cultural and religious patriarchy (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Babst & Tellier, 2012). Gender-specific subordination is often justified for preserving traditional cultural values, and women who challenge these values may be seen as a threat to their group and often face barriers to political participation due to a biased judiciary and legal system (Babst & Tellier, 2012). Women are also subject to laws based on religion, which is a legally recognized element of the state Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Babst & Tellier, 2012). In addition, women have traditionally been seen as domestic beings, while men have held all leadership positions in the

orthodox Jewish establishment, including rabbis, cantors, judges, circumcisers, and ritual slaughterers (Heschel, 1983; Sered, 1997). This has led to the institutionalization of traditional gender roles within the modern Israeli state (Sered, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). The chief rabbis and other religious officials in Israel are political appointments, and religious, political parties have often been influential coalition partners in the country's political system (Goldscheider, 1996). These parties have used their political power to gain control over "personal status" issues, such as marriage and the definition of who is Jewish, which have significant political significance in Israeli society (Goldscheider, 1996). The Orthodox interpretation of Jewish law is the only one recognized, and rabbinical courts are exclusively Orthodox, which long held authority over religious rituals and institutions, as well as the regulation of marriage and divorce (Strum, 1989; Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Babst & Tellier, 2012). The Marital Status Law of 1953 delegates jurisdiction over these matters to religious courts based on the religion of the couple, such as rabbinical courts for Jews or Shari'a courts for Muslims (Lavee & Katz, 2003). This all-male hierarchy has prioritized traditional family roles and institutionalized the subordinate position of women in both the practice of Judaism and in marriage and family life (Goldscheider, 1996). The Equal Rights Law of 1951 guarantees equal treatment of men and women in public life, but in practice, women's freedoms are limited by a strong emphasis on traditional gender roles and family values, supported by religious authorities and backed by law (Babst & Tellier, 2012). This is particularly evident in issues related to marriage and family life, as there is no secular, civil alternative to a religious ceremony, making it difficult for people of different religions to intermarriage (Babst & Tellier, 2012). The religious establishment has ignored the religious needs of women and reinforced their disadvantaged status as independent decision-makers (Goldscheider, 1996; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). While women have access to education, some ultra-orthodox Jewish communities in Jerusalem receive state funding for a school curriculum that excludes world history and shields women from images that do not align with their community's norms, limiting their understanding of gender equality (Babst & Tellier, 2012).

Women's freedom of dress is generally respected, but some have reported being denied access to public facilities (like markets) without modest clothing,

restricting their mobility (Babst & Tellier, 2012). As a result, women have been disadvantaged and powerless concerning the rituals of Judaism, such as prayer services, religious leadership, and ritual dietary supervision, as well as their roles in marriage and family life (Goldscheider, 1996). The religious establishment's interpretation of Judaism and its politics further reinforce the lower status of women (Goldscheider, 1996). According to Jewish law as it is practiced in Israel, marriage and divorce are indeed structured in a way that perpetuates the inferiority and vulnerability of women (Goldscheider, 1996; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000). Under Jewish law in Israel, marriage is seen as a one-sided transaction in which the man betroths the woman and not the opposite marriage (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000). Jewish law regards marriage as a system of mutual rights and responsibilities based on traditional gender roles, with the husband working outside the home and providing for the wife and the wife working inside the house and taking care of the household and children and serving the husband (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This results in inequality and discrimination in spousal obligations and rights during marriage, and in the divorce process marriage, by imposing severe limitations on the divorce process and inequity in favor of men (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). Jewish law promotes traditional gender roles and a double standard for men's and women's sexual behavior, particularly for married individuals (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). A married man's sexual relationships with a woman other than his wife have little legal consequence, except in rare cases where it may be grounds for divorce (a long extramarital relationship) (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). However, a married woman's sexual relations with a man other than her husband have severe consequences, including immediate divorce and loss of economic rights, and the woman is prohibited from marrying either her former husband or the man with whom she had an affair (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). Additionally, any children resulting from a woman's extramarital relationship are considered bastards who face significant social and marriage restrictions within the Jewish community, whilema child born to a married man and a woman who is not his wife (assuming the mother is not married) is not considered a bastard under this law (Albeck, 1972; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). It also imposes strict limitations on

the divorce process and results in inequalities for women; in the divorce process, the process for a man to obtain a divorce is relatively straightforward; a husband's voluntary provision of the bill-of-divorce (get) is required for the divorce to be valid, while the wife's consent is not necessary for the divorce to be valid (Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). If the get is invalid, the wife is still considered married, and any sexual relations she has will be regarded as adultery, with the consequences of stigmatizing their children as bastards (Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). In contrast, men are not subject to such restrictions and can initiate a divorce without the consent of their wives (Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). The discriminatory divorce process under Jewish law often leads women to forfeit their legal property and financial rights to avoid being trapped in the unbearable situation of an agunah (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000). In other words, women's economic well-being is threatened due to the religious laws surrounding divorce (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000). The term "agunah" refers to a woman who is unable to obtain a divorce (a "get") from her husband, according to Jewish law (Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). This can happen if the husband refuses to grant the divorce or if he is missing or deceased and his whereabouts are unknown (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). In such cases, the woman is considered to be still married, even if she has remarried or is living with another man; this leaves the woman in a state of limbo, unable to remarry or have children with another man within the Jewish community, and often facing financial and social difficulties as a result (Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000). This can have significant legal and social consequences for the woman, including being considered an adulterer and ostracized by her community (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000). The concept of the agunah is rooted in Jewish law, which requires both parties to consent to a divorce for it to be considered valid (Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). If a husband refuses to give his wife a get, she cannot obtain a divorce and is viewed as an agunah (Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). The process of divorce in Israel often results in women giving up their legal property and monetary rights in order to avoid being in the difficult position of being an agunah (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). This often involves the woman paying

whatever the husband demands in terms of property rights, child support, and so on (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000). Women who do not agree to pay for their freedom to remarry or who do not give up their legal rights to the marital property have no legal recourse and are considered agunot, or "chained" or "anchored" to their husbands (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). This double standard reflects traditional gender roles and reinforces the inferiority and vulnerability of women in these legal matters (Goldscheider, 1996). The Israeli legal system, based on Jewish law, has a doctrine called the "tender years presumption" which assigns custody of young children to the mother during and after divorce; this is based on the belief that a young child needs their mother's care (Albeck, 1972; Lahav, 2013). The combination of a liberal Constitution, which guarantees gender equality, with religious courts for family and personal law in Israel has resulted in the preservation of gender-biased religious practices that conflict with women's constitutional rights and hinder their freedoms (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Babst & Tellier, 2012).

The maintenance of religious laws in family law has made it impossible for women to achieve full equality (Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Babst & Tellier, 2012). The legal system in Israel, which is based on religious laws and controls marriage and divorce, prioritizes the preservation of ethnonational boundaries over gender equality (Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). However, in Israel, there are both religious courts, which have jurisdiction over marriage and divorce, and civil/family courts that follow civil law and handle issues such as property, alimony, custody, and visiting rights (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003). Except for Muslims, Israeli citizens can choose which court to use (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003). Property division and child custody may be decided in either civil or religious courts, but the Get must be issued by a religious court (Lavee & Katz, 2003). To prevent conflicting decisions, the law dictates that once one spouse brings a case to a particular legal system, all proceedings must continue within that system (Lavee & Katz, 2003). The civil courts are often seen as more favorable to women, while the rabbinical courts are often viewed as more favorable to men, so each spouse has the incentive to be the first to file suit in the court of their choice (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Toren, 2003).

In addition, cohabitation, both between heterosexual and homosexual couples, is recognized by many laws in Israel and is a well-established part of the legal and social systems in the country (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Nevertheless, the

dominance of religious laws, which play a significant role in the institutionalization of familism, is still a topic of discussion and analysis in the country (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Researchers have examined the relationship between the Jewish religion and nationhood in Israel and how this affects the construction of Jewish identity (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). The transmission of collective memory and belief through religion is seen as a crucial factor in the maintenance of the Jewish people's integrity and continuity in both Israel and the diaspora, and for many Israeli Jews, marriage according to Jewish law is a crucial aspect of this (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This system also perpetuates gender inequality by assigning women the role of "bearers of the collective" (Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010). The institutionalization of religious family laws emphasizes the importance of familism, high fertility, marriage, and stability within marriage (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003; Okun, 2017). This suggests that religious family law in Israel influences citizens' life (mainly by regulating marriage and divorce) and serves as a cultural and social code for dictating the proper roles and behaviors for men and women (Okun, 2017).

3.1.3 "Be Fruitful and Multiply": Ultra-Orthodox Fertility

The pro-natalist views held by those concerned about the demographic consequences of the fertility difference resonated with the ultra-Orthodox, whose pro-natalism was based on the divine commandment "to be fruitful and multiply" (Steinfeld, 2011). Fertility rates may vary significantly among different religious groups, particularly in Israel, where differences between the Ultra-Orthodox, religious, and secular populations are particularly pronounced (Okun, 2017). These differences may be influenced by religious beliefs and practices and cultural and societal norms related to childbearing and family size (Okun, 2017). The ultra-Orthodox population in Israel has grown significantly in recent years, making up 12.9% of the total population in 2021 (Israel Democracy Institute, 2021). This growth is driven by high fertility rates, modern living standards, and young age at first marriage (Israel Democracy Institute, 2021). The ultra-Orthodox population is also very young, with 60% of its members under 20 years old (Israel Democracy Institute, 2021).

While fertility rates among the ultra-Orthodox have slightly declined over the past decade, they are still much higher than those of other Jewish groups in Israel, with an average of 6.9 live births per woman between 2017 and 2019 (Israel Democracy Institute, 2021). In comparison, fertility rates among other Jewish women in Israel are 4.3 for religious women, 3.0 for traditional-religious women, 2.4 for traditional non-religious women, and 2.1 for secular women (Israel Democracy Institute, 2021). Religiosity appears to be a significant predictor of attitudes toward childbearing, including ideal family size, among Ultra-Orthodox, religious, and traditional Jews in Israel (Okun, 2017). These groups tend to have strong ideals of early marriage and high fertility, which can largely explain their demographic behaviors (Okun, 2017). This suggests that religiosity may play a role in shaping views on childbearing and family size among these populations, especially the community's preference for living in segregated areas and participation in organized religious learning is linked to higher fertility levels (Okun, 2017; Bein et al., 2021). The variables influencing the fertility patterns in the Haredi community can be summarized:

1. Religious beliefs and values: Many members of the Haredi community place a strong emphasis on having large families and may view having many children as a religious obligation; for example, religion values large families and encourages its followers to have many children and Haredi men in Israel often cite the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" as a reason for having large families (Strum, 1989; Goldscheider, 1996; Portugese, 1998; Landau, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004, 2010; Bloomfield, 2009; Sperling, 2010; Steinfeld, 2011)
2. Economic considerations: The Haredi community in Israel has relatively high rates of poverty and unemployment, and having a more significant number of children may provide a source of financial support for families (Okun, 2017).
3. Social norms and expectations: Within the Haredi community, there may be social norms and expectations that encourage large families and discourage the use of birth control; some research found that Haredi women in Israel who reported feeling pressure from their families to have more children were more likely to have larger families (Bloomfield, 2009; Tal, 2016).

4. Limited access to education and employment opportunities: The Haredi community in Israel has relatively low educational attainment rates and labor force participation, which may discourage some individuals from pursuing higher education or entering the workforce (Goldscheider, 1996; Tal, 2016). This may contribute to a greater emphasis on family formation and childrearing.

The ultra-Orthodox community in Israel has a crucial role in putting pressure on the government and influencing the status of women since this community has a significant influence on the country's political landscape and has often advocated for policies and practices that reflect its traditional gender roles and values (Fischer, 2012; Tal, 2016). This can have implications for the status of women within the community and in the broader society, as these policies and practices may limit the autonomy and agency of women and reinforce traditional gender roles (Tal, 2016). In addition, the ultra-Orthodox community has been a significant force behind efforts to restrict access to abortion in Israel and has often opposed measures to promote gender equality, such as legislation to combat gender-based violence and discrimination (Arian & Shamir, 1994; Sered, 1997; Shetreet, 1999; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Fischer, S, 2012; Tal, 2016). The ultra-Orthodox community also exerts significant influence on the Israeli political system through its political parties and pressure on the government; the Orthodox community, made up of various subgroups, has always been a minority but has been represented in the Knesset and included in nearly all government coalitions since the country's founding (Sered, 1997). One stream of Orthodox Judaism, represented by the National Religious Party, is strongly nationalistic; instead, traditional Orthodox Judaism has specific gender-based roles and positions (Sered, 1997). The ultra-Orthodox parties often held the balance of power in government coalitions and controlled the Ministries of Health and Welfare, allowing them to ensure that their pro-natalist beliefs were turned into action by economically supporting families through child allowances, housing assistance and funding from community institutions, which has contributed to optimal conditions for the ultra-Orthodox population (Landau, 2003; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Tal, 2016).

It was primarily due to the political power of the ultra-Orthodox that child allowances remained consistently high, especially for higher-order children (Steinfeld, 2011). In addition, political parties representing the ultra-Orthodox

community have often been influential coalition partners in Israeli governments, and have used their political power to advocate for policies and practices that reflect the values and priorities of the community; these parties have indeed often opposed measures that are seen as challenging the traditional gender roles and values of the community, such as the inclusion of women in the public sphere, gender segregation or the recognition of non-Orthodox forms of Judaism, the repeal of the social clause in the abortion law, and exceptional state subsidies were given for fertility treatments (Arian & Shamir, 1994; Shetreet, 1999; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Fischer, S, 2012; Tal, 2016). As long as these support systems remain in place, the ultra-Orthodox population is expected to continue growing and increasing its political power (Landau, 2003). Consequently, the political influence of the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel has contributed to the maintenance of traditional gender roles and values within the community and has had implications for the status of women within the community and in the broader society. However, the ultra-Orthodox community lives in a fragile condition characterized by poverty and lower level of educational attainments compared to the less religious Jewish people; according to projections from the ICBS, by 2019, only 40% of Israeli elementary school students will be enrolled in the national public school system, with the majority either in the independent school systems of the Haredi or Arab sectors (Tal, 2016).

According to the Israel Democracy Institute (2021), during the 2018-2019 school year, 58% of Haredi girls in the appropriate age range took at least one matriculation (Bagrut) exam, a significant increase from the 31% of girls who took these exams a decade earlier, in 2008-2009. However, the percentage of Haredi boys taking these exams decreased slightly, from 16% to 15% over the same period. In total, 14% of Haredi students (both boys and girls) received a matriculation certificate in 2018-2019, compared to 81% of students in the State and State-Religious education streams (Israel Democracy Institute, 2021). Ultra-Orthodox students tend to focus on fields of study that will lead to employment within their community, such as education, paramedical fields, business administration, and law (Israel Democracy Institute, 2021).

They often choose to attend colleges with lower entrance requirements; in comparison, 31% of non-Ultra-Orthodox Jewish students attend universities, while only 11% of Ultra-Orthodox students do (Israel Democracy Institute, 2021). The

high poverty rate among Haredi communities is driven by two main factors: large family size, which divides and reduces household income, and low employment rates among Haredi men, which fell from 85% in 1979 to below 50% in 2012 (Tal, 2016). According to data from a report of ICBS (2022) named "*Selected Data for International Women's Day 2022*" Ultra-orthodox students have lower educational attainments level than the rest of the population. In ultra-Orthodox supervision, 58.8% of twelfth-grade students took the matriculation exam in 2020, compared to 94.2% in general supervision education and the supervision of the religious education administration. The rate of those eligible for matriculation under ultra-Orthodox supervision was 22.7% for girls and 4.3% for boys, compared to 86.8% and 89.5% under general supervision and the supervision of the religious education administration, respectively. According to data from the Israel Democracy Institute (2021), the poverty rate among the Haredi community in Israel was significantly higher than the overall poverty rate. In that year, the poverty rate among the Haredi community was approximately 44%, compared to a poverty rate of roughly 22% for the overall Israeli population. The low employment rate among Haredi men in Israel is a problem because it contributes to poverty within the Haredi community (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). High levels of poverty can lead to social and economic issues within a community, such as poor health outcomes, educational disparities, and difficulty in meeting basic needs (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). In addition, the fact that a large portion of Israel's elementary schoolchildren is being educated in independent systems outside of the national public school system could lead to educational disparities and social divisions within the country (Tal, 2016). It can also have broader implications for the country, as high levels of poverty can strain the resources of the social safety net and lead to increased inequality. Given the high fertility level, Israel's population appears to be becoming more religious, influencing fertility patterns. In 1995, approximately 37% of the population identified as religious; in 2021, that figure rose to around 54% (ICBS, 2022). The role of religion, specifically Judaism, in shaping traditional gender roles and family dynamics in Israel can significantly impact fertility patterns (Goldscheider, 1996; Bein et al., 2021).

Goldscheider (1999, 2015) suggests that among the more religious in Israel (Jews or Muslims), the role of women is typically focused on family and childbearing and is not considered equal to that of men (Okun, 2017). The

increasing religiosity in Israeli society is evident in various ways, including the growing number of ultra-Orthodox Jews in the population and the rising number of people who follow traditional Jewish religious practices (Fischer, 2012). Several factors may contribute to this trend. For instance, studies have shown that in Israel, lower-income families are more likely to report becoming "more religious" (Fischer, 2012). This relationship has been linked to the exclusion and exploitation of Mizrachi (Jews who have African and Asian origins) and other religious and traditional populations in Israeli society (Fischer, 2012). Religion has provided these groups with a way to achieve membership, recognition, and status in alternative stratification systems (Fischer, 2012; Okun, 2017). Additionally, religious groups in Israel have increasingly demanded that the public sphere adheres to certain religious norms (Fischer, 2012). Other factors contributing to the trend include demographic changes, cultural and social norms, and economic and political conditions (Fischer, 2012). It is worth noting that this trend is not universal, and there are also segments of the population in Israel that are not religious or are less religious than in the past (Fischer, 2012). However, regardless of the specific drivers of this trend, it is clear that the increasing religiosity in Israel has significant implications for the country's social and political landscape. For instance, women were expected to sit in the back for stricter segregation of the sexes in public spaces, including on public buses. In some cases, women who have not followed these rules or who have refused to comply have faced verbal and physical abuse (Fischer, 2012). This demand is part of a more significant movement among more extreme ultra-Orthodox groups to enforce the separation of the sexes in communities and neighborhoods, including through the use of separate sidewalks and the exclusion of women from specific public spaces (Fischer, 2012). There have also been instances of women and girls in areas with large ultra-Orthodox populations being attacked for not adhering to specific standards of modesty and covering their bodies (Fischer, 2012).

Although the status of women in the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel is generally lower than that of men, for example, Haredi women are not allowed to become rabbis or hold political leadership positions in Haredi cities, attitudes towards gender roles and opportunities for women within the Haredi community are not uniform, and there are some signs of change among younger generations (Tal, 2016; Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). For example, many Haredi girls are

seeking professional opportunities, and some parents believe that a better education may increase a woman's status in the marriage market (Tal, 2016; Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). In addition, the percentage of Haredi men engaged in full-time religious study in Israel has been increasing in recent years, with data showing an increase of nearly 15% from 2014 to 2017 (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). This trend, along with high rates of unemployment and fertility within the Haredi community, has contributed to a growing poverty problem within the community (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). As a result, women in the ultra-Orthodox community increasingly take on financial responsibilities for their families, even though they have traditionally been confined to the home (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). Consequently, the percentage of Haredi women who work outside the home has risen in correlation with the increase in the number of men in the community engaging in the full-time religious study (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). According to estimates from 2017, approximately 75% of Haredi women work outside the home (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). However, there has also been a shift in the types of employment Haredi women seek (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). While in the past, a significant proportion of Haredi women worked in education, recent data shows that the percentage of Haredi women employed in education has decreased from 64% to 42% by 2017 (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021).

Instead, more Haredi women are working in commercial employment sectors such as technology, graphics, and retail, which often have longer working hours and are not tailored to the needs of working mothers (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). These changes have shifted gendered roles within Haredi households, with men taking care of household chores (Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). However, while in other societies, the entry of women into the workforce is often associated with a decline in fertility rates, this does not appear to be the case among Haredi women this is likely because of the increase in the employment rate among Haredi women does not lead to a drastic change in gender roles (Tal, 2016; Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). This may be because work is not typically viewed as having inherent value for Haredi women but rather serves an instrumental purpose, such as supporting their husbands' studies or enabling families to have more children (Tal, 2016; Kook & Harel-Shalev, 2021). The Haredi women in the study by Kook and Harel-Shalev (2021), although they have been undergoing a massive process of change (high level of employment rate among them), did not seek equality; they

described a variety of actions, choices, and desires that showed how they actively engaged with religion, traditional norms, and values, and maintained relationships with the ultra-Orthodox community while carrying on their job.

3.2 The Dynamics of Pronatalism, Conservative Welfare and Reproductive Rights: Familism, Pro-Natal Programs, and Abortion

According to a comparative analysis of welfare regimes by Stier et al. (2001), based on the framework provided by Esping-Andersen (1990), Israel can be classified as a country with a conservative welfare regime. Conservative regimes typically prioritize familiarism or familism, where individuals rely heavily on their families for welfare, and the interplay of the welfare state, labor markets, and household behavior tends to reinforce patriarchy (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Okun et al., 2007; Katz, 2009). In addition, these regimes often expect women to fulfill traditional caretaking roles and uphold a clear division of labor based on gender, with men typically serving as the primary providers (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Okun et al., 2007; Katz, 2009). This conservative nature is reflected in Israel's family law, which is based on patriarchal religious principles and societal expectations that Israeli women should prioritize motherhood and reproduction (Triger, 2004; Okun et al., 2007). However, this patriarchal regime is partially challenged and partially supported by the country's social welfare system, which consolidates the traditional gender roles, which includes direct cash transfers to mothers with children, with the size of the transfer increasing with the number of children in the family (King, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003a; Okun et al., 2007). Single mothers who do not receive child support payments from their children's fathers are also eligible for state support (Gal & Ben Arieh, 2003; Okun et al., 2007).

Israel's economic stability and supportive government policies have allowed both Jews to afford larger families by implementing a range of pro-natal policies (and initiatives (a combination of financial incentives and public services) aimed at encouraging women to have children and promoting high fertility rates (Della Pergola, 2003a, 2003c). These include mother-child allowances which provide financial support to mothers for each child they have, support for fertility treatments, such as in vitro fertilization, tax-supported preschools, labor laws that

prioritize family responsibilities and other provisions that help working women manage their duties, creating an environment that supports and encourages large families (King, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003a, 2003c). According to Stier et al. (2001), this strategy compensates women for the time and effort they invest in child care and housework rather than encouraging their participation in the labor market. The conservative-corporatist regime in Israel supports traditional gender roles and division of labor through normative expectations and institutional support (Stier et al., 2001). The country's well-developed public health system also supports this pronatalist approach, which is consistent with its status as a developed nation with a modern welfare state (Della Pergola, 2003a). As a result, Israeli households have been able to accumulate income, resources, and durable goods due to the country's relatively high standard of living and social welfare, which encourages having children, enabling them to afford larger families (Della Pergola, 2003a, 2003c). Familism, or the emphasis on the family unit and the importance of having children, is a cultural value that is prevalent in Israel and may be seen as a supportive context for these pro-natal policies (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Nevertheless, there is also a complex and multifaceted relationship between familism and pro-natal policies in Israel, with both cultural values and government policies influencing and shaping each other. The combination of familism and pro-natal policies in Israel has been described as a form of "conservative welfare", in which the state supports traditional gender roles and the centrality of the family unit (Stier et al., 2001; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This approach to welfare has significant implications for the status and roles of women in Israeli society, particularly concerning reproductive rights, including access to abortion, contraception, and in vitro fertilization technology. These rights have been the subject of ongoing political and social debate, with different groups advocating for or against access to certain reproductive technologies or procedures (Tal, 2016).

Studies have shown that the emphasis on motherhood and providing benefits and incentives for having children can reinforce traditional gender roles and discourage women from pursuing education and career opportunities (Goldscheider, 1996; Sered, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). At the same time, implementing pro-natal policies may reinforce familism as a cultural value in Israel (Tal, 2016). For example, providing incentives and benefits for having children, such as maternal awards or support for fertility treatments, may help embed further

the idea that having children is an important responsibility and a central aspect of women's roles in society (see the following paragraph). As argued in the previous section, this situation is further complicated by the role of the Orthodox religious establishment in shaping these policies; the Orthodox religious establishment has often been resistant to change and the recognition of women's rights (Strum, 1989; Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Babst & Tellier, 2012). Political parties based on or influenced by the Orthodox religious establishment have often supported policies that promote a high fertility rate and efforts to restrict access to abortion (Shetreet, 1999; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Fischer, S, 2012; Tal, 2016). As a result, the only form of Judaism recognized and supported by the government in Israel is Orthodox Judaism, which reinforces the disadvantaged position of women within the community (Strum, 1989; Goldscheider, 1996; Halperin-Kaddari, 2000; Halperin-Kaddari & Yadgar, 2010; Babst & Tellier, 2012). Overall, the dynamics of conservative welfare and reproductive rights in Israel are complex and multifaceted, with cultural, historical, social, and political factors playing a role. The interplay between familism, pro-natal policies and reproductive rights with their significant implications for the status and roles of women in Israeli society will be explored in this part, as how these variables have shaped the country's approach to welfare and family policy.

3.2.1 The Intersection of Familism and Pro-Natal Policies: Implications for Women's Status and Roles

Familism

Familism, or the prioritization of family over individual needs, is a significant cultural value in Israeli society and has significantly impacted various aspects of social and economic policies (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022).

This importance of the family can be seen in daily practices, attitudes, demographic trends such as high marriage rate, low divorce, etc., the formation of identity, and a sense of belonging (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). This value is reflected in various social and economic policies,

including pro-natalist policies that encourage childbirth and support families, such as the provision of financial incentives for having children and the availability of extensive public services for families, including education, health care, and social welfare (Tal, 2016). However, Israel is becoming a society characterized by individualistic and materialistic features as western countries; it is witnessing a family transition through a process of individualization, such as the western-developed countries, driven by two main forces: modernization and westernization (Goldscheider, 1996; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Toren, 2003; Katz, 2009; Sharabi et al., 2019; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). This transformation from collectivist and altruistic values to the individualist and materialistic values is reflected in the values and priorities of its citizens (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Sharabi et al., 2019). Also, the role of the family in Israeli society has undergone significant changes; Israel, like other industrialized countries, has indeed experienced rapid economic growth, an increase in the education levels, and participation of women in the workforce, particularly among married women with young children (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Sharabi et al., 2019; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). This shift has led to a decline in the traditional nuclear family model, with a breadwinning father and a stay-at-home mother, and an increase in the prevalence of two-income families, same-sex families, cohabitation, single-parent families, etc. (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003). In 2006, both Israeli men and women placed a greater emphasis on the extrinsic work outcome of income than they did in 1981 (Sharabi et al., 2019). Both men and women prioritize income and interesting work as the top two desired outcomes in their careers; for the first time, women's desire for high income and to be more independent is equal to that of men (Sharabi et al., 2019). These findings reflect the transformation of Israel into an individualistic and materialistic society, with this trend being particularly evident among younger people (Sharabi et al., 2019). It is worth noting that the changes in the role of the family in Israeli society have not been uniform and have varied across different socio-economic groups and religious communities (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003; Okun, 2013; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022).

According to a study by Fogiel-Bijaoui (2002), the traditional collectivist ideology is still prevalent among ultra-Orthodox and religious communities, while the new individualist ethos has gained ground among secular and traditional communities. Nevertheless, this shift towards individualism is also reflected in

Israel's changing marriage and fertility patterns (Goldscheider, 1996; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Kulik & Erantal, 2009; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). The study found that marriage rates have declined among secular and traditional communities, remaining stable or even increasing among ultra-Orthodox and religious communities (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Similarly, fertility rates have declined among secular and traditional communities, while they have remained relatively high among ultra-Orthodox and religious communities (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). These findings suggest that the changes in the role of the family in Israeli society have been more pronounced among secular and traditional communities, while they have been less pronounced among ultra-Orthodox and religious communities (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). This trend is consistent with post-industrial societies, but in Israel, there is also a noticeable persistence of strong family ties and a focus on the importance of the family; the striking feature is the persistence of familism and child value (high fertility also in secular families), although the welfare of Israel is not as generous as Western ones (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019), the extensive involvement of women, including mothers of young children, in the labor market in Israel is a contributing factor to the country's "care deficit," which refers to the difficulty in providing affordable, quality care for families; the average number of working hours in Israel is higher than in most other OECD countries (OECD, 2021), and women are increasingly represented in demanding professional fields and in occupations with low wages and little flexibility (Benjamin, 2011; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Moreover, Israel cut public spending on social services; these findings contrast with Israeli society's pro-natalist and family-oriented nature at institutional, cultural, and individual levels (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). However, marriage and the formation of families are integral aspects of Israeli society, although the data provided before (Toren, 2003; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Familism remains a prominent aspect of Israeli society, characterized by a traditional gender division of labor, with women expected to be mothers and homemakers and men expected to be breadwinners (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). It also dictates that marriage is the only acceptable framework for having children and that divorce is aberrant (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This can also be seen in the low rates of divorce and the low prevalence of non-family living arrangements in the country,

suggesting the critical value of family (Goldscheider, 1996; Toren, 2003). Familism is exemplified both by the traditional multigenerational family structure and the modern nuclear family (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Data on the timing of marriage and the prevalence of marriage in the country suggest that forming new families is a normative experience for most people (Goldscheider, 1996). While the timing of marriage may be shifting later into adulthood, the importance of family formation as a significant transition into adulthood remains evident in Israeli society due to the high levels of marriage (Goldscheider, 1996; Lavee & Katz, 2003). The high level of marriage and low divorce rates indicate strong family ties (Goldscheider, 1996; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). The extension of life expectancy and the increase in age at marriage have not resulted in a significant rise in people living independently or in nonfamily living arrangements compared to other Western countries like the United States (Goldscheider, 1996). According to a report by ICBS (2022) called "*Family Day - Families and Households in Israel*", in 2020, there were approximately 2.17 million families in Israel, of which about 1.71 million (79%) were Jewish, and the majority of families in both groups lived in a family unit, with 88% of Jews and 96% of Arabs aged 15 and over living in a family setting (ICBS, 2022). Among the Jewish population, about 29% of couples had no children in the household, compared to about 10% among the Arab population (ICBS, 2022). From the data "*Marriages and Divorces 2017-2020"* of ICBS, the divorce rate slightly decreased from the previous year; In 2019, Israel registered 15.992 divorces, while in 2020, 15.307. However, during the period (2010-2019), the number of newly divorced couples generally grew from 13,042 to nearly 16 thousand, respectively. In 2020, 91.2% of marriages in Israel were between Jews, 6.9% were between Jews and non-Jews, and 1.9% were between non-Jews; the majority of marriages in Israel are also between individuals who are not previously divorced, with 92.5% of marriages in 2020 being first marriages for both partners (ICBS, 2022).

Nevertheless, it is essential to note that in Israel, non-marriage (cohabitation) and marriage postponement (due to the increasing education levels) among older and younger women, respectively, can have significant implications for fertility patterns (Blossfeld & Huinink, 1988; Oppenheimer, 1997; 2019Taniguchi, 1999; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009; Okun, 2013). This is because the vast majority of childbearing in Israel occurs within marriage, so non-marriage

among older women may be associated with childlessness or one-child families (Okun, 2013). According to data from the ICBS's report (2022), there were 1.88 million couples, with 95% married and the remaining 5% cohabiting couples. Of these cohabiting couples, 94,000 were Jewish, and the rest were from other populations. Most Jewish cohabiting couples were childless, with only 23,000 having children under 17 years. The age group of cohabiting couples is generally younger, with nearly half of cohabiting couples having a woman under the age of 35, compared to 21% of married couples. Among cohabiting couples where the woman is under 35, only 9% have children under 17 living with them, compared to 79% of married couples in the same age group. Additionally, cohabiting couples in Israel are more likely to include individuals who are not Jewish or Orthodox Jews than married couples; marriage postponement among younger women is often linked to fertility postponement (Okun, 2013). It is worth noting that Israeli fertility patterns and marriage behavior vary significantly among different population groups. For example, research has demonstrated that the ultra-Orthodox Jewish population in Israel tends to have higher fertility rates and lower rates of non-marriage compared to other Jewish population groups (Della Pergola, 2009). This may be partly since military exemption, which facilitates lower ages at marriage and more prolonged exposure to childbearing chances is granted to the majority of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish population (Della Pergola, 2009). Additionally, transfer payments at the community level, such as public financing of community-specific educational networks or housing projects, may also help to reduce the cost of children for this population group (Della Pergola, 2009). On the other hand, secular Jews in Israel have been found to have lower fertility rates and higher rates of marriage postponement and non-marriage compared to other population groups (Della Pergola, 2009).

This may be influenced by factors such as the high cost of housing and the availability of childcare and educational facilities (Della Pergola, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to consider these factors when examining Israel's fertility patterns and marriage behavior. Okun (2013) also showed significant differences in marriage behavior between population groups in Israel, with the traditional and secular groups having higher proportions of never-married individuals compared to the ultra-Orthodox and religious groups. All groups have experienced increases in the proportions of never-married individuals, although these increases are not always

statistically significant, and the differences between religiosity groups remain (Okun, 2013). According to the ICBS's report named "*International Women's Day 2022*", at the end of 2019, 10.3% of Jewish and other women aged 45-49 had never been married, compared to 11.2% of Arab women in the same age group. This was a change from 2009, when the percentage of never-married women was 7.1% among Jews and others and 12.5% among Arab women. These increases in the proportions of never-married individuals are likely to be related to the postponement of the first birth in recent birth cohorts among secular and traditional Jews (Okun, 2013). Proportions of never-married individuals also differ by religiosity and nativity status, with native-born secular women showing statistically significant increases in marriage postponement (Okun, 2013). Other research has shown that religious Jews have lower rates of non-marriage and marriage postponement compared to secular Jews and traditional Jews (Bystrov, 2012). Native-born secular Jews have also been found to have higher marriage postponement rates than secular immigrant Jews (Bystrov, 2012). Additionally, studies have argued that there are differences in marriage behavior between different religious and ethnic groups in Israel; however, it is worth noting that despite showing signs of SDT behavior, including marriage and fertility postponement, increasing childlessness, and increasing non-marriage and cohabitation, secular Jews in Israel have consistently had higher total fertility rates compared to other OECD populations, suggesting the importance of having children (Okun, 2013). Child and family values are underlined by the ICBS report (2022), which includes information on the desired age to start a family, the desired number of children per family, attitudes towards raising children and marriage, and the religious lifestyle of family members living in the household (ICBS, 2022). The data shows that in 2019, 16% of Jews and others aged 20 and over believed that the desired age to start a family for a man was up to 24, compared to 7% of Arabs who held this opinion (ICBS, 2022). Similarly, among married people, the majority of Jews and others (61%) and Arabs (63%) believed that the desired number of children per family was three to four (ICBS, 2022). More than half of persons aged 20 and over (56%) agreed that spouses who want children must be married, with higher agreement among Arabs (95%) than Jews and others (48%) (ICBS, 2022). Ultra-Orthodox Jewish families had the highest percentage of couples with children under 18, while secular Jewish families were more likely to be coupled without

children or single-parent families (ICBS, 2022). In the Arab population, couples with children over 18 were slightly more common, and families were generally larger than the Jewish people, with a similar pattern of larger families in more religious communities (ICBS, 2022). The data shows that Arab families are larger on average than Jewish families and that there is a similar pattern of an increase in the average number of persons per family when the level of religiosity is higher among both populations (ICBS, 2022). Although the religious and secular gap among Jewish families is higher than among Arab families, the data suggests that Jews and Arabs in Israel generally prioritize having children (ICBS, 2022). Children are highly valued in Israeli society, not just by their parents but by the community as a whole (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Della Pergola, 2009). The welfare of children is seen as a collective responsibility, and the government provides various benefits and services to families with children, such as birth allowances, monthly children's allowances, tax deductions, funded housing loans for young married couples, discounts for public child care and summer camps, and free pre and postnatal care at mother and child health clinics (Doron & Kramer, 1991; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006). It will be analyzed in the last paragraph. Familism, however, enhances the traditional family; indeed, there is a strong emphasis on the conventional roles of men as providers and women as second-wage earners, which is reflected in the country's wage policies, social services, and welfare payments (Becker & Moen, 1999; Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Adva Center, 2001; Kraus, 2002; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003; Cohen & Liani, 2009; Raz-Yurovich, 2013; Mann & Hananel, 2022). This distinction has resulted in an economic disadvantage for single-parent families, particularly those headed by women (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Granek et al., 2017). In the report of ICBS (2022), there were 137,000 lone-parent families with children aged 17 or younger in Canada, making up around 12% of all families with children in this age range. These families included 246,000 children, and the average number of children per family was 1.79. In comparison, two-parent families had an average of 2.52 children. Approximately 87% of lone-parent families with children aged 17 or younger were headed by women, and of these, 22,400 were never-married mothers. This represented about 19% of all lone-parent mothers with children in this age range. Indeed, compared to other developed countries, Israel has the highest poverty rates among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

member states (Nathanson, 2017). In 2015, single-parent families had a poverty rate of 21.8%, compared to 17.0% for all families with children (Nathanson, 2017).

Nevertheless, the data in Israel shows that single-parent families, particularly those headed by women, are more likely to experience poverty due to the lack of a second income and the challenges of finding full-time employment while also caring for children (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Most single parents are women also because women are more likely to be granted custody of children in case of a divorce or separation (as said previously). This is partly due to traditional gender roles and expectations and the fact that women are more likely to be the primary caregivers for children. These single-parent families are disproportionately affected by economic deprivation also due to welfare policies in place, which are based on the traditional gender roles of male breadwinners and female caregivers (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). As a result, many children in single-parent families in Israel are classified as "poor children" (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Furthermore, women may be more likely to become single parents due to financial insecurity, as they may have lower earning potential and less access to financial resources than men (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This can be especially true for women who cannot work outside the home due to childcare responsibilities (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). These statistics highlight the negative impact of wage and welfare policies on women and reinforce the idea that normative families are the best option for women to provide a decent standard of living for themselves and their children (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; King, 2002). Societal attitudes and biases may also play a role, as single mothers may face stigma and discrimination due to their status as single parents (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Moreover, it has been observed that familism is more prevalent in social strata with lower levels of education and occupational opportunities and where the proportion of women in the labor force is relatively low (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). These strata are typically found on the periphery of Jewish society, such as in development towns, poor neighborhoods, and ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, and also includes a significant portion of the Arab population (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002).

Additionally, familism may be more prevalent in these social strata because individuals in these groups may have fewer economic and social resources and may rely more heavily on the support of their family network (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). One possible reason is that familism may be more prevalent in these social strata

due to the lack of access to education and job opportunities, making it more difficult for individuals in these strata to achieve economic independence and autonomy. This may lead them to rely more on their families' support and adhere more closely to traditional gender roles and responsibilities within the family. It is also possible that familism may be more prevalent in these social strata due to the greater importance placed on the family as a source of social support and identity in the face of economic and social challenges (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Fischer, 2012). In these contexts, the family may serve as a source of emotional and practical support and may be seen as a critical source of social and cultural continuity (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). There are also neomodern families, which combine traditional religious elements with more modern, postmodern features (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). In these families, couples are married in an Orthodox ceremony but exhibit more modern tendencies, such as both husband and wife working for wages, with the husband as the main provider and the wife as the second wage earner (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Jewish families in this category tend to have an average of three children, while Arab families in this category tend to have an average of four (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). The neomodern family is the most common family model in Jewish society and is also becoming more prevalent in Palestinian Arab society in Israel (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that there will be significant changes in the institution of the family or the familistic nature of Israeli society shortly due to the institutionalization of religious laws and the norms that come with them (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). These laws and norms significantly shape the collective identities and sense of belonging of all the ethnoreligious groups in Israel (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002).

The persistence of familism in Israel has been persistent for several reasons. One can be the religious establishment (explained in the previous paragraph), including religious courts and laws, which has traditionally played a significant role in shaping societal norms and values, including those related to familism (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003). According to Inglehart and Welzel (2005), there is a strong correlation between religious traditionalism and familism, or the emphasis on strong family ties and obligations (Okun, 2016). The authors suggest that this association may be due to religion's central role in shaping traditional family values and expectations (Inglehart, and Welzel, 2005). Familism may be more prevalent among social groups with limited access to education and job opportunities in Israel

(Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This may be because familism is often associated with traditional and religious values, which may be more prevalent in these groups. Other research has also explored the link between religious belief and familism, finding that more traditional or conservative religious communities often place a high value on close family relationships and fulfilling family obligations (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). The religious establishment, which is largely controlled by the Orthodox community, has often prioritized traditional family roles and has institutionalized the subordinate position of women in both the practice of Judaism and in marriage and family life (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003). The religious establishment has often promoted traditional family values and has played a significant role in shaping societal norms related to familism, opposing efforts to expand reproductive rights, including access to abortion and contraception (Tal, 2016). This opposition is often rooted in a belief in the sanctity of human life and the importance of procreation in Judaism (Tal, 2016). Familism is also entrenched in the national identity as it emphasizes the traditional importance of the family and traditional gender roles within the family, with women seen as mothers and wives (as explained in the previous paragraph about motherhood discourse construction) (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). It is seen as a "national asset" in Israel due to its role in reinforcing the unequal gender division between men and women in society (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This division, which positions men as the "fighters" in the public sphere and women as the "protected" ones in the private sphere, is evident in various aspects of life, including language, myths, norms, customs, and the legal system (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). The perpetuation of war in Israel further reinforces this gendered division, as men are expected to play a central role in national defense while women are marginalized (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). There is evidence from surveys that motherhood is an important aspect of identity for many women in Israel (Toren, 2003; Bloomfield, 2009; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Additionally, a study by Herzog (2004) found that motherhood was an essential aspect of identity for many Israeli women and that this was particularly true for those who identified as traditional or religious (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Other research has also demonstrated the centrality of motherhood to women's identity in Israel and how children are vital to have a meaningful life (Bloomfield, 2009; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Halperin, 2015; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). It is worth noting that many studies suggest that the importance of motherhood to women's identity may be related to

the cultural and social context of Israel, which places a strong emphasis on familism and the central role of the family in society (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Familism among Jews is often regarded as a mere religious component, but it serves as a central part of the social and cultural fabric of the country (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). One reason for the existence and importance of familism in Israel may be related to the country's history and demographic concerns (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). The emphasis on familism and the promotion of childbirth may be seen as a way to increase the population and ensure the country's long-term viability as a strategy for survival against the Arab community in a context of ongoing conflict (Goldscheider, 1996; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003). This perception is fueled by a belief in a "demographic threat" and is a significant component of the national strategy. The role of religion in shaping this perspective should also be noted, as religious discourse contributes to this strategy for the Jewish community (Goldscheider, 1996; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Even secular individuals living in a religious society may be influenced by the familism and nationalism often associated with religion, which may be in conflict with values associated with low fertility in communities with a strong emphasis on individualism (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Lazerwitz & Tabory, 2002; Okun, 2011). One of the main ways familism has influenced policies in Israel is through implementing pro-natalist policies (Della Pergola, 2009). Pro-natalist policies aim to increase fertility rates by providing incentives and support for having children. These policies are intended to encourage and support large families, which is seen as a positive value in a society that places high importance on familism. Familism is indeed a substantial value in Israeli society; according to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2016, 73% of Israeli Jews consider strong family bonds to be central to their Jewish identity, considering family essential for their life.

Consequently, the centrality of the family in Israeli society has been influenced by various factors, including religion and religious adherence, the impact of the holocaust, the ongoing conflict in the region, and concerns about demographic changes between Jews and Palestinians (Peres & Katz, 1981; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Yet, it has also been argued that the neoliberal political economy has played a role in fortifying and preserving the importance of familism and the family in Israeli society (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). The study of Berkovitch and Manor (2022) shows that although

the “care deficit” or “care crisis” - the increasing difficulty in providing affordable, high-quality care for the needs of parents, children, elderly parents, and other family members - resulted from the neo-liberalization processes which have led to changes in the labor market and in welfare policies that support young families, familism continues to be a crucial value. This is because of the presence of grandparents providing additional help (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Women, particularly mothers of young children, have become more involved in the labor market, which has long working hours and demands almost complete commitment to the job (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). This has led to a reliance on grandparents, particularly grandmothers, to care for grandchildren in times of need (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). The lack of state support for young families, such as limited public spending on families with children under 18, a high cost of daycare relative to average wages, and a lack of policies promoting workplace daycare centers, has further contributed to the care deficit in Israel (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). However, it does establish the extended family as a source of belonging, responsibility, and meaningfulness and influences decisions related to employment, fertility, and place of residence (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). Children in Israel thus rely on their parents for financial support, including assistance in purchasing a home and other forms of wealth transfer; adult children often receive help from their parents with household chores and childcare (Okun, 2011; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). According to the 2009 Israeli Social Survey, 51% of secular respondents aged 20-49 receive assistance in taking care of chores, 46% receive monetary support and help in making bill payments, and 70% of those with children under 13 in the household receive help in taking care of or babysitting children (Okun, 2011). This ongoing support from parents and grandparents may create a context in which higher fertility is more appealing or feasible, given the economic and time constraints involved (Smooha, 2005; Okun, 2011; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022).

Furthermore, familism, the idea that the family holds a central position in society and individuals’ personal lives, plays a role in easing the burden on the state to provide support for families. Instead of the government implementing policies to provide affordable and high-quality childcare for working parents, young parents often rely on their own parents for childcare and financial support (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). This reliance on the private sphere for family support can alleviate the pressures on the state caused by neoliberal policies and supports the

continuation of these policies (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). This continues to keep alive the familism's logic: mothers provide childcare, while fathers contribute financially to support their families.

Pronatalism

At individual, societal and institutional levels, Israel is pro-natalist and family oriented, focusing on encouraging large families for several reasons (Friedlander & Feldmann, 1993; Portugese, 1998; Remennick, 2000; Tal; 2016). Tal, in his book (2016), gives three reasons; one of these is Jewish nationalism, with the belief that having large families is a way to ensure that Israel remains predominantly Jewish and maintains sovereignty. Another motivation is the aftermath of the Holocaust, with the desire to replace the lost Jewish lives as an act of defiance and solidarity with the victims (Tal, 2016). And the third one is also a religious perspective that sees birth control and abortion as immoral and a cultural inclination to glorify large families, so-called familism (Tal, 2016). Despite facing challenges in housing and education, Israelis often rank high in happiness surveys due to the importance of family ties and interaction in their social and cultural lives (Tal, 2016). The Israeli government has implemented several pro-natal policies, including child allowances, housing assistance, preschool subsidies, property tax discounts, and grants for new mothers, to encourage larger families (King, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003a; Tal, 2016). These incentives have successfully increased the country's population, although they may not be the only factor contributing to this growth (Tal, 2016). The government has justified these policies by citing the need to maintain a Jewish majority and address security concerns in the young and sparsely populated state (Tal, 2016). Israel has a long history of pro-natalist policies, a prominent feature of Israeli society, which aim to encourage childbirth and increase the fertility rate since the country's early years (Okun, 1997; Fargues, 2000; King, 2001; Winckler, 2002; Sperling, 2010).

As noted by Della Pergola (1992), pronatalism may be seen as a necessary response to the challenges facing the nation, with the concept of "birthing the nation" becoming increasingly important in terms of relying on women's fertility to maintain population growth (Okun, 1997; Fargues, 2000). The origins of pronatalist ideas in Israel can be traced back to the state's establishment, with

various initiatives and policies implemented to encourage childbirth and support families with children (Fargues, 2000). Instead of implementing a state-wide pronatalist policy, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion preferred private initiatives within the Jewish community to increase fertility (King, 2001). To increase birth rates and encourage larger families, the Israeli government implemented a pro-natal program to remove economic and social barriers and provide support in areas such as education, housing, and insurance (Tal, 2016). These incentives have included awards for mothers who have large families, day-care subsidies for working mothers, flexible and reduced working hours for mothers, low-interest loans for couples who want to have more children, and child allowances for families with multiple children, leading to the establishment of the social security system; it provides universal children's and elderly allowances as well as selective allowances such as unemployment benefits, the implementation of compulsory education laws, the creation of personal welfare services, and the development of comprehensive health services (King, 2001; Tal, 2016; Weiss-Dagan & Cnaan, 2020). In 1949, Prime Minister Ben Gurion announced that he would award a symbolic prize to mothers who had their 10th child, and the first social benefit established by the state was a 12-week monetary leave for new mothers (Okun, 1997; Winckler, 2002; Sperling, 2010; Raucher, 2014). In Israel, free prenatal care and maternity services in hospitals have been provided to all mothers, and since 1954, the National Insurance Institute (NII) has offered grants to Israeli mothers and has a division specifically dedicated to providing child allowances, which are paid to mothers as a nontaxable payment (Tal, 2016).

The NII, established in 1953, originally only included three basic programs: old-age and survivors' benefits, work injuries, and maternity (Rosenhek, 2002; Tal, 2016). In 1959, the Israeli government established a program of child allowances, which marked the beginning of a progressive expansion of the NII into the field of social security; the institution of children's allowances was a way to support large families and ease the financial burden of raising children by providing a monthly, tax-exempt grant to families with four or more children under the age of 14 (raised to age 18 in 1965) (Fargues; 2000; King, 2001; Rosenhek, 2002; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Tal, 2016; Weiss-Dagan & Cnaan, 2020). In 1968, the national insurance law provided a birth grant worth around 50% of the average monthly wage (reduced to 15% in 1989) for each child delivered in

a recognized hospital (Fargues, 2000). These policies were designed to help offset the financial costs of raising children (Fargues, 2000). In addition, Israel has implemented laws to support women's professional careers during and after pregnancy, including the law on women's work in 1954, which granted the right to maternity leave, and the law on severance pay in 1963, which provided financial compensation to women who left work to care for their infants (Fargues; 2000). In 1968, the Fund for Encouraging Birth" was created to provide low-interest loans to couples wanting to have more children, although this fund was not available to Israeli Arabs because one of the eligibility requirements was military service (Sperling, 2010). The 1970s saw significant expansion and institutionalization of the Israeli welfare state, particularly in statutory social security programs administered by the National Insurance Institute (NII) (Rosenhek, 2002; Manski & Mayshar, 2003). This was partly driven by growing awareness of the socioeconomic conditions of disadvantaged groups, particularly those of Oriental Jewish origin (Rosenhek, 2002; Manski & Mayshar, 2003). To address these issues and prevent potential threats to the political order, the government and NII decided to broaden various welfare schemes and increase benefit levels, particularly for families with more than three children (Rosenhek, 2002; Manski & Mayshar, 2003). The initial criteria for receiving child allowances were based on parents' employment status and salaries, making it a progressive, negative tax (Tal, 2016). In 1974, the Israeli finance minister appointed a committee to consider tax reform; one of the main recommendations of the committee was to change the child allowance system so that it was universal for all parents rather than just for families with more than two children or in a low economic bracket (Tal, 2016).

In 1975, the children's allowances program was expanded to become universal, applying to families with any number of children, but the size of the allowance varies based on the birth order of the child, with the first two children receiving minimal benefits and each child from the third and fourth on receiving a large benefit (Doron, 2001; King, 2001, 2002; Rosenhek, 2002; Winckler, 2002; Manski & Mayshar, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007; Tal, 2016; Weiss-Dagan & Cnaan, 2020). The children's allowance program is designed to provide supplementary income to families with low incomes and to ensure horizontal equity in the distribution of the tax burden among families of different sizes (Doron, 2001; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007). The program operates on

a point basis, with each point serving as a tax credit (Fargues, 2000; Doron, 2001; Rosenhek, 2002; Manski & Mayshar, 2003; Tal, 2016). The value of the credit increases as family income decreases, making the program particularly beneficial for large families with low incomes (Doron, 2001; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007). This dual function of the program, as both a negative income tax and a tax credit, helps alleviate financial strain on families and promotes equity within the tax system (Doron, 2001). These policies are designed to encourage and support families in having children, address declining fertility rates, reduce poverty, and have contributed to the country's relatively high fertility rates (King, 2001; Rosenhek, 2002; Sperling, 2010). The program was implemented partly in response to the high poverty rates among Mizrahi Jews, who were often poor and had large families (Rosenhek, 2002; Manski & Mayshar, 2003). While the program had a short-term impact in reducing poverty among Israeli children in the mid-1970s, the percentage of Israeli children living below the poverty line has steadily increased (Manski & Mayshar, 2003). Research has indeed shown that while these policies have had a positive effect on fertility rates among disadvantaged populations, they have had a limited impact on fertility rates among more affluent populations (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003a). The children's allowance program, which provided higher benefits for families with four or more children, has had a particular influence on those families by providing financial support for the upbringing of their children (Doron, 2001; Winckler, 2002; Nahmias & Stecklov, 2007). These policies have been especially beneficial for poorer families, as the allowances for children beyond the fourth are meant to "subsidize the earlier ones" (Winckler, 2002). In 1995, the Knesset passed the National Health Insurance Law, which guarantees free healthcare services to all Israeli citizens (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). The Israeli government passed the Large Families Law, also known as the "Families Blessed with Children Law," in 1995 (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). This law, primarily supported by religious parties representing large ultra-Orthodox families, provided significant benefits to large families, including increased child allowances, while reducing benefits for small families (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). Furthermore, in 2000, the Israeli Knesset passed the "law for assistance for blessing families," also called Halpert, initiated by the ultra-Orthodox Jewish party and Arab parties (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003a; Steinfeld, 2011). The law increased children's allowances significantly for families with five or more children, included

a reduction in municipal taxes, and increased birth allowances for families with five or more children (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003a; Steinfeld, 2011). All these provisions display the political power of religious parties, consequently, of all religious establishments in influencing the different legislations and pursuing their interests and of the religious community in Israel. Indeed, these legislations have been especially beneficial for the Ultra-orthodox community, characterized by larger families than the secular one. Israeli family policies have undergone shifts, moving away from a pronatalist focus and towards a social welfare model (King, 2001). The tension between the goals of pronatalism and the provision of social benefits to increase fertility arises because pronatalism often seeks to raise birth rates among specific racial or ethnic groups, while modern democracies struggle to justify and maintain social policies that discriminate based on race or ethnicity (King, 2001). Indeed, these allowances have also been used by Arabs, suggesting the pro-Natalist intent toward Jews failed because of preserving the democratic variable of the state of Israel (King, 2001). However, this does not mean that pronatalist ideology has disappeared (King, 2001). Rather, the connection between pronatalism and family policy has weakened, with family allowances that were previously considered part of a "population policy" becoming more closely associated with social welfare policy (King, 2001). In the 1980s and 1990s, the Israeli government established several new social security and social service programs that focused on particular groups instead of the universal programs created in the 1960s and 1970s (Doron, 2001; Weiss-Dagan & Cnaan, 2020).

These policies, including the expansion of the children's allowance program, the inclusion of housewives in the old-age national insurance program, increased benefits for childbirth and pregnancy, and improved benefits for disabled children, were primarily aimed at benefiting small, specific groups of people (Doron, 2001). In 1994, maternity leave payments were raised to 100% of wages and incomes, and pregnancy benefits for women unable to work due to health issues were significantly increased (Doron, 2001). Israel's social policy has thus changed in recent decades, moving from a collectivist approach to a more neo-liberal agenda, with an emphasis on privatization and selective provision of social services, including massive cuts in the welfare budget (Doron, 2001; Ajzenstadt, 2009; Almog-Bar & Ajzenstadt, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Weiss-Dagan & Cnaan, 2020). According to Almog-Bar and Ajzenstadt (2010), the decline of the welfare state and

the shift towards market-oriented policies in the second half of the 20th century had a negative impact on women, who were disproportionately affected by the privatization of welfare, education, and health services. This shift burdened women, who were often forced to replace state-funded aid and seek employment in a competitive market (Almog-Bar & Ajzenstadt, 2010). This trend can also be seen in the cuts to children's allowances, which remain universal but now require parents to save a portion for their children's use when they reach 18 (Shalev, 2000; Weiss-Dagan & Cnaan, 2020). Despite these changes, Israel maintains a comprehensive network of social welfare services, including social security provisions, compulsory education laws, personal welfare services, and health services (Doron & Kramer, 1991; King, 2001; Rosenhek, 2002; Weiss-Dagan & Cnaan, 2020). In Israel, various benefits and incentives are currently in place to encourage larger families (Tal, 2016). The Israeli government provides multiple benefits to families with children through the National Insurance Institute, including child allowances, discounted daycare, special stipends for public school children, scholarships for higher education, and preferential treatment for access to public housing (Tal, 2016). Prenatal care and maternity services in hospitals are free, and all Israeli mothers are entitled to a grant from the National Insurance Institute after giving birth (Tal, 2016). The amount of this grant varies based on the number of children the mother has had and whether the birth was multiples (twins or triplets) (Tal, 2016). Daycare centers offer discounts for families with two or more children, and there are also special stipends available for public school children from large families (Tal, 2016). In addition, large families are eligible for preferential treatment when applying for public housing and may receive housing stipends for the first two years of their rental period (Tal, 2016). There are also scholarships available for higher education for students from large families, and families with two or more children can receive discounts on daycare services, while those with four or more children are eligible for stipends for public school education and special scholarships for higher education (Tal, 2016). Large families are also given preferential treatment for access to public housing and may receive housing stipends for the first two years of their rental period (Tal, 2016). These benefits are intended to encourage larger family sizes and address societal inequalities, but they also come with a cost to the government, which subsidizes the discounts and stipends for childcare and education, as well as the public housing units (Tal, 2016).

In Israel, social policies have been generally geared towards supporting families with multiple children, particularly those with three or more children. Studies found that social policies such as the child allowance program in Israel, which provides direct cash transfers to mothers of families with children, had a more significant impact on larger families with four or more children compared to smaller families with two or three children, especially with low incomes (Della Pergola, 2003a; Okun et al., 2007). Similarly, Della Pergola (2003c) found that pronatalist policies in Israel, including the child allowance program and the birth grant, had a more significant impact on fertility among lower-income groups, who tend to have larger families. These findings suggest that the children's allowance program in Israel is helping to sustain the economic well-being of larger families, particularly those with low incomes. Additionally, Winckler (2002) found that these pronatalist policies had a substantial effect on the fertility rates of Mizrahi Jews, who are more likely to have larger families compared to Ashkenazi Jews. However, it should also be noted that while these policies may benefit families with multiple children, they may not necessarily improve the overall economic condition of these families or lift them out of poverty. Research has shown that the percentage of Israeli children living below the poverty line has steadily increased over time, despite the existence of these policies (Rosenhek, 2002). For example, the child allowance program, which provides direct cash transfers to families with children, has been described as a pronatalist, as the size of the allowance increases with the number of children in the family (Winckler, 2002; Della Pergola, 2003a).

This program has significantly impacted fertility rates, particularly among disadvantaged populations with large families, who rely on allowances as a significant source of income (Rosenhek, 2002). Furthermore, maternity leave, paternity leave, and other policies related to family support are geared toward promoting high fertility and large families in Israel. However, it is also worth noting that these policies have not uniformly impacted all of Israel's families. Research has revealed that these policies have disproportionately benefited families with more children and those with lower socio-economic status, while families with fewer children and higher socioeconomic status may receive fewer benefits or may not be eligible for specific programs (Gal & Ben Arieh, 2003; Rosenhek, 2002). According to Berman (1999) and Friedlander and Feldman (1993), the high fertility among the Ultra-orthodox community can be attributed to state policies that provide

expanded child allowances and other benefits to larger families, such as assistance in housing for young couples, effectively making these families state-funded (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Landau, 2003). In addition to receiving financial aid, members of these families are also exempt from certain obligations, such as tax payments and military service (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). However, these subsidies only provide for basic survival, leading to a dependence on state aid and a lack of financial stability and consequently placing a heavy burden on the state's financial capacity (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Raucher, 2014). Therefore, while it can be said that Israeli social policies have generally aimed to support families with two or more children, they may not have had the same impact on all families in the country. Though, in the 2000s, something changed when Benjamin Netanyahu became the Finance Minister in Ariel Sharon's government in Israel and implemented policies to reduce state expenditure and encourage more people to enter the workforce (Steinfeld, 2011). These policies included the abolition of increased child allowances introduced by the previous laws, which were seen as providing a negative incentive for participation in the labor force for the opportunity to "live off their children" (Steinfeld, 2011). The fertility rate among Muslim citizens of Israel dropped from 4.5 children in 2003 to 4 children in 2005, a decrease of 18%, following these reforms. (Steinfeld, 2011). Approximately half of the children born in Israel at the time were either ultra-Orthodox Jews or Palestinian citizens, and 70% of Haredi men did not work, relying on minor income from their religious studies instead (Berman & Klinov, 1997; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Steinfeld, 2011). Furthermore, the Israeli government increased child allowances for the second, third, and fourth children in March 2009 (Steinfeld, 2011). The first child received NIS 159 per month, the second, third, and fourth children received NIS 259 each, and any child beyond the fourth only received NIS 159 (Steinfeld, 2011). However, the agreement stated that entitlement to the allowances depended on regular school attendance and receiving Ministry of Health inoculations, which effectively discriminated against Bedouin and ultra-Orthodox families (Steinfeld, 2011). Additionally, the funding for the child allowances came from people with one to two children who wanted an increase for the first child, but due to a lack of money, it was decided to start with the second child without heavily incentivizing more than four children (Steinfeld, 2011). Another motivation was the desire to increase the fertility of the working population due to concerns about the effects on

the social security system caused by an aging population (Steinfeld, 2011). Despite coalition constraints and long-term demographic goals, increased payments for the second, third, and fourth children were continued, but not for the fifth and beyond (Steinfeld, 2011). As a result, child allowances remained pro-natalist, encouraging small families to become larger ones, but not incentivizing the further expansion of already large families of Haredim and Palestinian citizens, who were perceived as posing existential demographic, cultural, and economic threats to the state (Steinfeld, 2011). Therefore, familism is a substantial cultural value in Israel shaped by both post-industrial and religious influences. The structure and dynamics of families in Israel are characterized by a clear gender division, with men typically occupying the role of providers and women often relegated to caretaking responsibilities (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This division is reinforced by wage and welfare policies, as well as religious laws and norms. While some families in Israel have embraced more modern, post-industrial family structures, many continue to adhere to traditional familistic values and practices responsibilities (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This persistence of familism is due, in part, to the institutionalization of religious laws and the central role of religion in shaping national identity and belonging responsibilities (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). However, pro-natalist policies also contribute to the continued dominance of familistic values in Israeli society's responsibilities (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). Nevertheless, the emphasis on familism in Israeli society may have both positive and negative consequences for women. On the one hand, it may provide support and resources for mothers and families. On the other hand, these policies reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, particularly the idea that women's primary function is as mothers and caregivers. This can limit women's autonomy and opportunities for career advancement and economic independence (it will be explored in detail in the last paragraph). As the following paragraph shows, familism and pro-natalist ideology may impact access to reproductive rights, as they may influence attitudes towards abortion and contraception. This is because of their contribution to perpetuating gender inequality by enhancing traditional gender roles, which can limit women's autonomy and agency. The emphasis on familism and pro-natalist policies may discourage the use of contraception and abortion, as these practices may be seen as conflicting with the value of having large families. As explained previously, women may face pressure to prioritize childbirth and motherhood over their own career and

personal goals. They are also likely to face barriers to accessing employment and other opportunities due to their roles as caretakers.

3.2.2 Reproductive Rights: A Focus on Abortion and Assisted Reproductive Technologies

The value placed on having children, so pro-natalism, is indeed reflected in women's social and health status (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004). While procreation is highly valued and given political significance, the expectation of motherhood can be oppressive for women unable or unwilling to have children (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004). Israel's reproductive policy is indeed overtly pronatalist that underpins the centrality of family and aims to encourage reproduction and childbearing by providing various benefits, including free fertility services and maternity services, maternity grants for new mothers, and substantial child allowances for large families (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003, 2004; Della Pergola, 2003a; Birenbaum-Carmeli & Dirnfeld, 2008; Levush & Law Library Of Congress, 2012; Raucher, 2014). A combination of historical, religious, and other cultural factors contributes to such a pro-natalist climate and the importance of motherhood, including the Jewish religious tradition, a desire to replace those killed in the Holocaust, and an "insurance policy" mentality due to the risk of military and terrorist attacks; additionally, there is intense demographic anxiety related to the difference in fertility rates between Muslim Arab and Jewish populations (Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Levush & Law Library Of Congress, 2012; ; Raucher, 2014; Tal, 2016; Alon et al., 2019). These factors have led to policies that promote childbirth, such as generous state support for assisted reproductive technologies while limiting support for family planning and restricting access to abortion (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Tal, 2016; Granek & Nakash, 2017). This policy is intended to reproduce Jews at any cost and reflects a potent form of social control over women's bodies. Consequently, abortion has been seen negatively and ostracized, assisted reproductive technologies (ART), such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), are generously subsidized by the government through the National Health Insurance and widely supported by both secular and religious parties (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004; Birenbaum-Carmeli & Dirnfeld, 2008; Della Pergola, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011; Tal, 2016). This means that almost anyone in Israel can receive unlimited rounds

of IVF treatment at no cost until the birth of two live children (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). Despite the availability of a comprehensive range of free healthcare services for all citizens through the National Health Insurance Law, contraception is instead only partially covered and only for girls until age twenty, unlike the majority of European countries where contraception is covered by health insurance (Landau, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli & Dirnfeld, 2008; Tal, 2016; Granek & Nakash, 2017; Treister-Goltzman et al., 2021). This contrast underlines the pro-natalist feature of the state (Steinfeld, 2011; Granek & Nakash, 2017). Also, sex education emphasizes the pronatalist ideology. In 1987, sex education became mandatory in Israeli schools except for religious and Muslim schools (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). The programs, titled "Family Life Education and Sex Education," aimed to strengthen the connection between sexuality and the traditional family (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). To appease religious parties, the programs emphasized the uniqueness of the Jewish family and the sanctity of marriage (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). They also included a section on the demography of Jews (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). The main message of the programs was that contraception should be used to space children for the health of both mother and children rather than to prevent pregnancy altogether (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). Sex education was accepted as long as it conformed to Jewish tradition and did not endanger the future of the Jewish people (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). This perspective on sex education remains prevalent in the contemporary Israeli educational system (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003).

Abortion

Israel's reproductive health policies have indeed been marked by inconsistency, with a focus on supporting working mothers and early childhood education but limited access to birth control and abortion for women (Tal, 2016). These policies have been criticized for being patriarchal and infringing on women's rights to control their bodies and pregnancies. Indeed, reproductive health policies have been closely linked to demographic concerns and have, therefore, limited access to abortion (King, 2002). Furthermore, the importance placed on motherhood has resulted in the condition where women's reproductive autonomy is not fully recognized; a woman's right to abortion is restricted by law, and she

does not have the general freedom to decide to end her pregnancy (Levush & Law Library Of Congress, 2012). While women in Western Europe and the United States had gained legal access to contraceptives and abortion by the late 1970s, Israeli women faced opposition from religious and pronatalist groups (Yishai, 1993; King, 2002). In 1975, it was estimated that a large portion of induced abortions was performed illegally, often at a high cost (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). The fight for increased access to legal abortion in Israel faced strong opposition from religious and ethnic-nationalist factions due to its demographic and religious implications; fertility would have decreased because of the possibility of getting an abortion (Levine, 1994; King, 2002; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). Nevertheless, in 1977, abortion was legalized in limited circumstances and currently requires approval from a medical-social hospital committee, representing a tedious bureaucratic process for women seeking abortion (Levine, 1994; Portugese, 1998; King, 2002; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Tal, 2016). The Israeli government's policy on abortion requires that women seeking the procedure must appear before a committee and meet one or more of the following four conditions: the age of the pregnant woman (since 2014, legal abortion for women under 19 or over 40 and as well as those aged 19–33), the legal status of the future child (conceived through incest, rape, or out-of-wedlock pregnancy), potential harm to the woman's physical or mental health, and indications of defects or abnormalities in the development of the fetus (Yishai, 1993; Levine, 1994; Amir & Benjamin, 1997; Landau, 2003; Boland & Katzive, 2008; Bloomfield, 2009; Levush & Law Library Of Congress, 2012; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Tal, 2016).

Originally, there was also the proposal of a fifth clause consisting of abortion when experiencing social or economic conditions hindering the child's well-being (Yishai, 1993; Levine, 1994; Steinfeld, 2011; Raucher, 2014; Tal, 2016). In 1979, the government attempted to pass a bill that would allow the abortion committee to authorize terminations on social grounds, but it was defeated in a tie vote in the Parliament (Yishai, 1993; Levine, 1994; Steinfeld, 2011; Raucher, 2014; Tal, 2016). Yet, one month later, the clause allowing for abortions on social grounds was finally repealed, and this repeal was especially backed by religious parties claiming the clause was both an affront to religious beliefs and demographic problems (Yishai, 1993; Levine, 1994; Steinfeld, 2011; Raucher, 2014; Tal, 2016). This repulsion against the social clause was because the majority

of the Ultra-orthodox community lived in poverty; consequently, this clause would have allowed Haredi women to get abortions due to their social conditions, decreasing their fertility rates (Raucher, 2014). However, the criteria allowing abortion reflect a compromise between various political perspectives, including the rights of the woman to control her own body (promoted by a small feminist group), the right of the child to have basic life chances (advocated by a secular welfare position), the legitimacy of the newborn not to be an illegitimate offspring (important to the religious ultra-orthodox perspective), and the importance of maintaining a high birth rate among Jewish families (a key concern in Israeli nationalistic and sectarian ideology) (Amir & Benjamin, 1997; Steinfeld, 2015). Abortion in Israel is only publicly funded for health-related reasons; to obtain an abortion, women must pay to submit a request to a committee, which may or may not approve the procedure under certain conditions, and some committees that review requests for the procedure can be discouraging and offensive (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Landau, 2003; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Tal, 2016). Moreover, the process of seeking an abortion in Israel incurs fees that are not covered by health insurance, representing an economic burden for poor women or single women, but women under twenty are exempt from these costs (Tal, 2016). Women who seek to exercise their reproductive rights may also face intrusive interrogations and stigmatization and be considered deviants by the committee in charge (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Tal, 2016). Research led by Amir and Benjamin (1997) shows how the abortion committee works and the process women have been through, displaying intrusive interrogations which compromise the free women's choice to get an abortion. The process for obtaining an abortion requires women to appear before a committee and justify their request based on specific criteria, such as age, the circumstances of the pregnancy, potential fetal abnormalities, and potential harm to the woman's physical or mental health (Amir & Benjamin, 1997; Tal, 2016). The committee is eligible to ask private questions regarding women's attitudes towards sexual behavior and commitment to motherhood, their relationship with the man involved in the pregnancy, and their willingness to terminate the pregnancy, and may even attempt to educate them on contraception in a disciplinary manner (Amir & Benjamin, 1997). In the research, some social workers have reported that the committee may even attempt to discourage the woman from seeking an abortion or try to educate her about

responsible sexual behavior, also providing information about the potential negative effects of abortion on fertility and emotional well-being, despite a lack of evidence to support these claims (Amir & Benjamin, 1997; Tal, 2016). This process has been criticized for stigmatizing women seeking abortions and placing the burden on them to prove their eligibility rather than focusing on the availability and accessibility of reproductive healthcare (Amir & Benjamin, 1997; Steinfeld, 2011). Some argue that this process serves as a way for policymakers to prevent "unnecessary" abortions, as defined by their standards, and may constitute a mechanism for disciplining women who are deemed to have failed in their responsibilities toward sexual and reproductive behavior (Amir & Benjamin, 1997). The committee's approach has thus been criticized for imposing a patriarchal, judgmental attitude on women and for effectively constituting women as "deviant" or "irresponsible" if they seek an abortion (Amir & Benjamin, 1997). Because of these strict rules, it is difficult for single women and married women to obtain permission for abortions, and many of them are constrained to lie about their mental health, claiming that they have a mental illness or that they have engaged in extramarital sex to be approved (Landau, 2003; Steinfeld, 2011). This can be problematic if they later need a divorce from religious courts (Steinfeld, 2011). According to Michael Feingold, most women have to lie to get an abortion, and many of them who obtain illegal abortions are married and between the ages of 19 and 40 (Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). Judy Seigel, the health correspondent for *The Jerusalem Post*, argued that 50% of abortions performed illegally result from women avoiding the embarrassment and shame of the committee process (Steinfeld, 2011). Furthermore, abortions can also be financially burdensome for poor women, as health insurance only covers abortions in cases of health concerns, rape, incest, or if the woman is under 19; consequently, such insurance is not valid for women who want to abort for other circumstances (single women, married women carrying a child who has not conceived with their husband, women aged over forty) (Steinfeld, 2011, 2015; Tal, 2016). Moreover, women aged 33 to 40 are only eligible to receive financial support for an abortion if their pregnancy was caused by rape or sexual abuse or if there is a medical emergency that requires an abortion to be performed (Steinfeld, 2015). In 2010, the Ministry of Health allowed more clinics to perform pregnancy terminations until the 12th week but simultaneously increased prices by 61% for abortions for single women and married women

pregnant due to extramarital affairs (Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). Israel has thus implemented policies that encourage motherhood and idealize the maternal role, but at the same time, it has also legislated the good Israeli woman through issues such as abortion (Bloomfield, 2009). This has served as a significant focus for internalized motherhood narratives. There is indeed evidence to suggest that the limited access to abortion in Israel has impacted attitudes towards abortion and fertility in the country (Bloomfield, 2009). One study conducted by Yishai (1993) found that the limited access to abortion in Israel, due to both religious and pronatalist opposition, has contributed to the country's relatively high fertility rates. The study found that in the late 1970s when most Western European and American women had legal access to contraceptives and abortion, Israeli women had limited access to these reproductive health services. This limited access, combined with the cultural and religious norms that place a high value on procreation and the importance of childbearing for the continuation of the Jewish people, may have contributed to Israel's relatively high fertility rates. Another study by Portugese (1998) also found that the limited legal access to abortion in Israel has had an impact on attitudes towards abortion in the country. The study found that the strict requirements for obtaining an abortion in Israel, including the need to obtain approval from a hospital committee, have led to negative attitudes towards abortion among some population segments. This may be partly due to the stigmatization of abortion as a transgressive act and the cultural and religious values that place high importance on procreation and the continuation of the Jewish people. For example, Amir and Binjamin (1997) found that the subjection of women who wish to exercise their reproductive rights to intrusive interrogations and stigmatization as transgressors has negatively affected attitudes towards abortion in the country. Other researches (Manski & Mayshar, 2003; Bloomfield, 2009; Marienberg, 2013; Tal, 2016) argued the tendency of ultraorthodox women towards abortion and contraception, which are generally not accepted and discouraged within the ultra-Orthodox community and that access to abortion might be limited; this may partially affect the high fertility rates among ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel.

In Vitro Fertility Technologies

Despite its restrictions on abortion and lack of support for contraception, the Israeli government actively promotes fertility treatments through assisted reproductive technologies such as IVT, sperm donation, electro-ejaculation for men with spinal cord injuries, freezing of eggs for women undergoing cancer treatment, and surrogacy; this underpins the pronatalist feature of Israel (Shalev & Gooldin, 2006; Landau, 2003; Toren, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003, 2004; Bloomfield, 2009; Sperling, 2010; Tal, 2016; Alon et al., 2019). The most performed is In vitro fertilization (IVF), a form of assisted reproductive technology to help with fertility.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Israel became a leader in in-vitro fertilization (IVF) research, with a high number of IVF clinics per capita and a high rate of IVF usage (Doron and Kramer 1992; Toren, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003, 2010; Steinfeld, 2011). As a result, the rate of IVF usage in Israel is significantly higher than in Europe and the global average, with Israeli women using these treatments about five times more than European women and ten times more than the international average (Granek & Nakash, 2017). In 1990, Israeli doctors performed 1,800 IVF cycles per million Israelis, compared to 240 in the US and 416 in the UK, and in 1996, 2.1% of babies born in Israel were conceived through IVF, while in 2012, the number of treatment cycles using in vitro fertilization (IVF) in Israel reached nearly 40,000, leading to a total of 9746 pregnancies and 7565 live births (Shalev & Gooldin, 2006; Landau, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Granek & Nakash, 2017). In 2016, 41,143 IVF cycles were performed in Israel, the highest rate in the world in relative terms, and the IVF share of total births was 4.7%, one of the highest percentages in the world (Alon et al., 2019). It is estimated that the cost of IVF treatments alone accounts for 2% of the Israeli health budget (Granek & Nakash, 2017). The success and growth of the assisted reproductive technology (ART) industry in Israel can be attributed to several factors, including the country's strong economic and technological development, public funding for ART and research in such field, and the desire of many Israelis to have large families while also starting to have children at an older age, which often requires the use of ART (Birenbaum-Carmeli & Dirnfeld, 2008; Alon et al., 2019). Israeli religious authorities and courts have also generally been supportive of reproductive technologies considered as a means of supporting the Jewish population growth, including controversial ones such as embryo transfer after divorce and post-mortem sperm aspiration (Shalev, 1998; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli &

Dirnfeld, 2008; Bloomfield, 2009). The Public Health Insurance Law of 1995 entitles infertile couples to an unlimited number of in vitro fertilization (IVF) or other relevant treatment cycles necessary for producing two children, with a modest copayment required from the patients for these costly services (Remennick, 2000; Landau, 2003; Raucher, 2014; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2010; Granek & Nakash, 2017). The policy of legal surrogacy agreements, passed in 1996, made Israel the first country in the world to legalize such agreements, justified as a means of offering compassion to childless women (Shalev, 1998; Shalev & Gooldin, 2006; Landau, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003, 2004; Sperling, 2010; Alon et al., 2019). Israel's policy measures regarding reproductive technologies, such as in vitro fertilization, have presented an opportunity for all Israeli women aged between 18 and 45, regardless of social class, religious background, marital status, or sexual preference, to access these treatments in an attempt to become mothers (Toren, 2003; Landau, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003, 2004, 2010; Birenbaum-Carmeli & Dirnfeld, 2008; Bloomfield, 2009; Granek & Nakash, 2017; Alon et al., 2019). However, these policies also place a significant emphasis on motherhood as the primary goal in women's lives, potentially leading them to subject themselves to lengthy and potentially harmful fertility treatments (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). According to Donath's research (2015), the decision to forgo having children or to regret having them is not a binary choice in Israel. The idea that children are a "blessed burden" that should be desired and valued at all costs, including enduring numerous rounds of IVF treatment, is exacerbated in the Israeli context, where the "demographic" problem, motherhood as a normative requirement and past traumas for both Jewish and Arab women add emotional weight to the pressure to have children (Granek & Nakash, 2017). This pressure does not allow for ambivalence, conflict, distress, or regret (Granek & Nakash, 2017). In Donath's interviews (2015), women described the path to motherhood as "automatic," meaning they are expected to embrace the cultural identity of motherhood without considering the consequences of this supposed choice. In such a context, choosing not to have children may be seen as unacceptable (Granek & Nakash, 2017). As Benjamin and Ha'elyon (2002) and Granek and Nakash (2017) have argued, the widespread availability of fertility treatments in a context of pronatalism, which is supported by religious and demographic ideologies, can create a context in which being a "good mother" is seen as requiring the pursuit of motherhood at all costs, including

using unlimited rounds of IVF regardless of potential health risks. Studies conducted in Israel have shown that women undergoing fertility treatment demonstrate a strong desire to achieve pregnancy at almost any personal cost, including physical discomfort, health risks, and negative impacts on their relationships and work routines (Solomon, 1991; Remennick, 2000). Even after multiple unsuccessful IVF cycles, when the chances of pregnancy are low, many women continue treatment (Solomon, 1991; Remennick, 2000). The desire to become biological parents, often motivated by a desire for genetic continuity, is a significant priority for both women and men in Israel (Remennick, 2000). Adoption is thus not a popular option in the Jewish Community (Parmet & Lasker, 1991; Remennick, 2000; Tal, 2016). Indeed, in a study conducted by Parmet and Lasker in the USA (1991), Jewish males were found to strongly prefer to father their children genetically rather than adopt them. This desire to have their "own children" and pass on their own genes to their children may be influenced by patriarchal attitudes, which value male control over family life and children as a critical aspect of social relations in a patriarchal society (Parmet & Lasker, 1991). It may also be influenced by Jewish tradition and experience, which have placed great emphasis on the importance of preserving Jewish heritage and separating from other groups in Jewish tradition and history (Parmet & Lasker, 1991). Some traditions consider mixing with non-Jews as a source of contamination, and the Holocaust and history of persecution may also play a role in the importance placed on replenishing or preserving the Jewish gene pool, entailing the continuity of genetic material (Parmet & Lasker, 1991; Bloomfield, 2009; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2010). This explains the pursuit of genetic kinship, which is seen as necessary for the survival of the collective group, leading to the state providing full support for technologies that allow for genetic parenthood, such as IVF, while denying support for alternatives such as adoption (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2010). The belief that one's genetic heritage is meaningful and connected to historical times has been used to support political claims in Israel (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2010). This emphasis on genetic heritage may be influenced by a desire to protect the "essence" of the Jewish collective group (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2010). Therefore, Israeli society is highly supportive of assisted reproductive technologies; however, it does not provide the same level of support for contraception and abortion, leaving many women unable to make their own reproductive choices (Tal, 2016). This asymmetry in public

policy deeply undermines women's autonomy about their bodies and reproduction capacity.

3.3 The Dynamics of Conservative Welfare: Woman's Employment patterns, Education, and Household Behaviors

As argued previously, the study of conservative Israeli welfare, particularly regarding women, is of great importance in understanding the high fertility rates in the country. Employment patterns, education, and household behaviors are key factors that contribute to the reproductive choices made by Israeli women. As seen previously, there is a strong cultural and social emphasis on motherhood and fertility, which is reflected in the state's pro-natalist policies and initiatives.

These policies often prioritize and financially support assisted reproductive technologies and motherhood over the accessibility and affordability of contraception and abortion options, limiting women's ability to make free reproductive decisions. This creates an asymmetry in reproductive healthcare and societal pressure for women to become mothers, reinforcing the idea that motherhood is a fundamental aspect of being a woman. The traditional gender roles and expectations within Israeli society further perpetuate this pressure. Although Israeli women have relatively high levels of education and employment, they are segregated in low-wage fields (gender segregation) and often face barriers to career advancement. As we will see later, the structure of Israel's workplace, such as the high women's presence in the public sector, is fundamental in the persistence of a high fertility rate while encouraging women to enter the job force. Indeed, traditional gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers are indeed still prevalent, with women often taking on the majority of household and childcare responsibilities. This has implications for women's ability to participate in the labor force and achieve economic independence and reinforce their roles as caretakers within the household. The intersection of these factors creates a complex landscape for women in Israel, where the expectation of becoming mothers and fulfilling traditional gender roles can often conflict with the desire for economic stability and personal fulfillment. This paragraph will delve into the dynamics of Israeli

conservative welfare and workplace, especially employment and education patterns, work-family balance, and household behaviors; we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and systemic factors that contribute to the country's high fertility rates and how they impact women's agency and opportunities.

3.3.1 Exploring Public Policies on Women

Studies have shown that progressive social policies and a strong public service sector can provide women with more opportunities to join the labor force and increase their economic activities (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Alestalo et al., 1991; Kolberg, 1991; Kolberg & Esping-Andersen, 1991; Daly, 2000; Korpi, 2000; Orloff, 2002; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). Policies that support women's employment can help alleviate the tension between home demands and market activity (Gornick et al., 1998; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Mandel & Semyonov, 2005; Stier et al., 2001; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009; Testa, 2021). Indeed, there is an increasing amount of research highlighting the influence of social policies on women's decision to engage in paid employment and their ability to maintain it over time (Glass & Riley, 1998; Gornick et al., 1998; Stier et al., 2001; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Uunk et al., 2005; Hofferth & Curtin, 2006; Stier & Yaish, 2008). Especially policies (implemented in Israel) such as maternity leave benefits, flextime, greater tolerance of absenteeism, and reduced-hours employment for mothers in the public sector may help to support individuals in balancing the roles of motherhood and work (Albeck, 1972; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Gornick & Jacobs, 1998; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Kolberg, 1991; Kolberg & Esping-Andersen, 1991; Okun et al., 2007). These policies are believed to facilitate the combination of motherhood and paid work, also affecting the employment continuity of women, especially when they have young children, by providing support and resources that allow them to balance their roles as both caregivers and providers (Stier et al., 2001; Okun et al., 2007).

The state, through its role as a lawmaker and implementer of family policies, and as an employer, can create protected labor markets for women where their rights are ensured; this can increase women's participation in the labor force, enhance their economic independence and power within the household and society, and

allow them to balance work and family responsibilities better (Bianchi, et al. 1999; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). By implementing various support systems and benefits targeted at families with children, the state recognizes its responsibility for the care of young children and helps facilitate employment for mothers (Kamerman, 1991; OECD, 2001; Orloff, 2002; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). Comparative studies have found a positive correlation between family policies and women's labor force participation (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Daly, 2000; Korpi, 2000; Orloff, 2002; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). For example, Gornick et al. (1998) found that in countries with supportive policies, the presence of young children is less of a barrier to their mothers' economic participation (Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). Stier et al. (2001) also demonstrated that in supportive environments, women could maintain continuous employment while their children are young and may even earn higher incomes as a result. Concerning fertility patterns, there is debate over whether leave policies actually increase fertility rates (Balbo, et al. 2013; Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017; Thomas et al., 2022). According to many studies, improved maternity leave policies can increase fertility (Thévenon & Gauthier, 2011; Fallon et al., 2017) and increase women's labor force participation (Matysiak & Weziak-Bialowolska, 2013; Fallon, et al. 2017). Another review of the impact of family policies on fertility by Gauthier (2007) found the evidence to be "mixed," a conclusion supported by other research in the field (Matysiak & Szalma, 2014). Some countries, such as Slovenia, have implemented generous leave policies but have still experienced low fertility rates (Stropnik & Sircelj, 2008). In other cases, generous leave policies have been accompanied by significant increases in fertility, such as in East Germany, while in others, they have been accompanied by stable and high fertility rates, such as Czechoslovakia and Sweden (Buttner & Lutz, 1990; Hoem, 1990, 1993, 2005; Salles, 2006; Thomas et al., 2022). Particularly, in the seventies, the Scandinavian countries had the lowest fertility rates in Europe, while some of these countries have currently the highest fertility rates in the EU, although they have been declining in recent years (Testa & Manzocchi, 2021). This increasing in fertility was the results of interventions that helped mothers balance their work and parenting (Testa & Manzocchi, 2021). Germany is another case which displays the role of political measures such as family allowances and childcare services that eased the reconciliation of work and family (Testa & Manzocchi, 2021). Research has argued

that countries with more generous maternity leave policies, for example, tend to have higher fertility rates decreasing infant mortality (Ruhm, 2000). DiPrete et al. (2003) argued that countries could reduce the costs of children through various policies and arrangements, which in turn allow women to increase their fertility; these arrangements can directly lower the financial costs of children and indirectly improve the compatibility of work and family demands on women's time (Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). Thus, policies that support working mothers, such as affordable childcare and flexible work arrangements, have been found to positively affect fertility and children's well-being (Baum & Rodgers, 2018). Nevertheless, the extent of this impact is often limited and complex and can vary significantly depending on the specific policies implemented and also the social, economic, and cultural context in which they are implemented. Testa and Manzocchi (2021) argued that leave and financial incentives, which have had limited effects while long-term, sustained interventions such as providing childcare services and promoting flexible work schedules constitute more effective strategies.

One study by Thomas et al. (2022) analyzed the impact of maternity leave policies on fertility rates in low-fertility countries. The study found that leave policies were associated with higher fertility rates in countries with low fertility rates by allowing individuals to balance parenting and work responsibilities, potentially increasing fertility rates (Thomas et al., 2022). However, some authors noted that the impact of leaves on fertility was limited and that other factors, such as the availability of childcare, work-family balance, and cultural values such as attitudes toward motherhood and childbearing, can be more critical in determining fertility rates; structural attributes of the labor market that ease mothers' employment and weaken the link between fertility and work (Hakim, 2003; Pollak & Cotts-Watkins, 1993; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009; Testa, 2021; Thomas et al., 2022). Family policies that promote childbearing may thus increase the desirability of having children (Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). Maternity, paternity, and parental leave policies can help to equalize the distribution of domestic and formal work between men and women by allowing mothers to return to work and encouraging fathers to take on more housework and childcare responsibilities (Thomas et al., 2022). By equalizing the gender balance of labor, leave policies can reduce the cost of childrearing for women and potentially increase fertility rates (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011; Testa & Manzocchi, 2021; Thomas et al., 2022). Indeed,

promoting gender equality in both the workplace and at home by encouraging fathers to take paternity leave can help couples make the decision to have more children (Testa & Manzocchi, 2021). By ensuring an equal distribution of responsibilities, couples are more likely to have more children (Testa & Manzocchi, 2021). According to a study by Stier, Lewin-Epstein, and Braun (2001), the combination of strong family orientation, the cultural value of motherhood, and social policies toward children have resulted in high employment levels among Israeli women, also among those having children.

Another study by Orloff (2002) found that family policies, such as parental leave and childcare provisions, positively impact fertility rates in welfare states and women's capacity to access the workplace (Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). Another study by Gornick and Meyers (2003) examined the relationship between family policies and fertility rates in various developed countries, including Israel. They found that countries with more generous family policies, such as extended maternity leave and affordable childcare, tended to have higher fertility rates (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). In the case of Israel, the authors noted that the combination of a strong pronatalist ideology and supportive social policies contributed to the country's relatively high fertility rate, increasing their work participation (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006).

Consequently, some research underlines other factors that have contributed to the country's relatively high fertility rate (besides the type of leave); both pronatalist ideology and attitude towards motherhood, cultural values, political context, the structure of the workplace, and economic conditions (availability of childcare) have affected the fertility patterns of Israel. In Israeli society, there is a solid cultural value placed on motherhood and the role of women as caregivers for their families (Toren, 2003). This is reflected in the women's position in Israeli society, which can be seen by considering their health and social status (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004). This resulted in the country's family-oriented public policies, such as maternity leave and protection for pregnant women in the workforce (Toren, 2003; Della Pergola, 2003a, 2003c). Indeed, while the country has comprehensive prenatal health services leading to low mother and infant mortality rates, once a child is born, women are largely left to their own devices with few state services to assist women in succeeding in their careers while raising their children, balancing work and family (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004; Granek &

Nakash, 2017). The National Insurance Institute will cover the total cost of medical care and hospitalization during childbirth and any additional hospital stay (typically 3-7 days) for a child born in Israel (Albeck, 1972; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Morgenstern-Leissner, 2006). In 1954, the Employment of Women Law in Israel guaranteed new working mothers paid vacation for 12 weeks at 75% of their current wages; this allowed pregnant women to begin their maternity leave six weeks before their due date and continue it after giving birth (Albeck, 1972; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Tal, 2016).

In 2010, the law was amended to extend maternity leave to 26 weeks, including 14 paid weeks and 12 unpaid weeks, providing the total salary for all duration of the leave; according to the European Commission (2021), it represents the minimum standard (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2004; Stier & Yaish, 2008; Okun et al., 2007; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009; Tal, 2016; Granek & Nakash, 2017; Vaknin, 2020). This is considered to be relatively short compared to the European average, which is around 18 weeks; the length of maternity leave can vary significantly across different countries, for example, in some countries such as Estonia and Norway, women are entitled to up to 85 weeks of paid leave, while in other countries such as the UK and Ireland, women are allowed to just a few weeks of paid leave (European Parliament, 2016; Okun, et al. 2017; Vaknin, 2020). Israel's policy toward women's employment and childcare follows a combination of social democratic and liberal models (Vaknin, 2020). According to some research the Israeli state is committed to promoting women's employment through measures such as protecting pregnant workers from being fired, providing relatively generous maternity allowances, and allowing shortened work hours after maternity leave (Della Pergola, 2003a, 2003c; Vaknin, 2020). Israel subsidizes free education from age 3; however, for children under the age of 2, the state follows principles similar to those of liberal countries, only financing education based on a variety of factors, including their income, where they live, and the size of their family (useful mainly for low-income families); however it usually leaves other families to seek private daycare options which can be very expensive ranging from NIS 3000-5000 ($750-$1244) per month (Gal & Ben Arieh, 2003; Okun et al., 2007; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009; Tal, 2016; Granek & Nakash, 2017; Vaknin, 2020). Although subsidized childcare is also available, some women find that the conditions, including child-to-adult ratios, are not acceptable; as a result, many women in Israel face challenges

in balancing work and family life (Granek & Nakash, 2017). However, according to the OECD, in 2017, the preschool enrollment rate for children ages 3 to 5 in Israel was 99%, compared to the average of 87% among OECD countries (Vaknin, 2020).

This suggests that almost all children in this age group attend preschool in Israel. Yet, formal childcare systems and government support for young families in Israel are also limited; for example, public spending for families with children under 18 is lower in Israel (1%) compared to the average for OECD countries (1.33%) and the UK (2%) (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022).

The cost of daycare for two children is 30% of the average wage, higher than the average of 17% for OECD countries (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). The percentage of children aged up to three in licensed daycare centers is 20%, compared to 23% in the UK, 31% in Finland, and 31% in Germany (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). In addition, no policies are encouraging the establishment of daycare centers in workplaces (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022), and the extent of benefits in the form of tax exemptions or young family stipends is the lowest of all OECD countries (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). However, mothers in Israel are allowed to work one hour less per day without pay reduction if they have children under the age of eight if they have only one child and under the age of 12 if they have more than one child, and they are also entitled to paid leaves for children who are sick (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006; Stier & Yaish, 2008). The government also recognizes part-time work (commonly held by women) as full-time in terms of employment rights and benefits (Stier, 1998; Stier et al., 2001; Stier & Yaish, 2008). In 2013, a law was passed in Israel that granted fathers eight days of paternity leave; however, paternity leave is rarely used in practice (Tal, 2016; Gromada, and Richardson, 2021). Nevertheless, Israel has few services supporting working women, putting more emphasis on motherhood than on parenthood, to help them to have advancement in careers while also raising children (Dagan-Buzaglo & Hasson, 2015; Mann, 2017; Granek & Nakash, 2017; Mann & Hananel, 2022) and as a result, it ranks near the bottom on the OECD index for work-life balance (Mann & Hananel, 2022). As we see later, Israeli policies are more concentrated on increasing the employment rate among women than helping them advance their careers; this will be shown by women's high employment level while being segregated into low-wage positions. Furthermore, the tendency of young parents to

rely on their own parents for assistance with childcare and financial support are crucial factors in enabling these families to make raising children more affordable and feasible; this compensates for the lack of certain policies or the expensive childcare for children younger than two years (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). However, a recent survey by the Ministry of Economics found that women in Israel continue to bear the majority of household and childcare responsibilities; in 73% of the families surveyed, the majority or all of the work was the mother's responsibility (Mann & Hananel, 2022). Thus, the limited support for working mothers in Israel affects especially single mothers (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Ajzenstadt, 2009; Granek & Nakash, 2017; Granek et al., 2017; Nathanson, 2017). In the late 1990s, the Israeli government reduced the role of the public sector as an employer and increased the use of temporary employment agencies in the private sector by also reducing child benefits, unemployment compensation, and income support and implementing also stricter eligibility guidelines (Ajzenstadt, 2009; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). These economic changes had significant consequences for single mothers from lower socio-economic backgrounds; the 1992 Single Parent Act provided income support for single mothers with children under the age of seven, but the new plan only extended this benefit to mothers with children under the age of two (Ahdut, 2007; Ajzenstadt, 2009). In 2002, there were 98,300 single-parent families with children under the age of 17 in Israel, with the mother being the lone parent in 91% of these families (89,200) (Swirski, et al. 2002; Ajzenstadt, 2009). After implementing the economic plan, 3,000 single mothers who were previously eligible for benefits lost their eligibility altogether (Shachak, 2003; Ajzenstadt, 2009). An additional 45,400 single-parent families experienced an average reduction of 30-33% in their welfare benefits (Ajzenstadt, 2009). The National Insurance Institute of Israel also lowered the maximum amount of alimony provided for child support in cases where the father is unable or unwilling to pay (Ajzenstadt, 2009). This change also resulted in the termination of other payments tied to alimony, such as subsidies for public transportation, assistance with professional medical care, and assistance with rental costs (Ajzenstadt, 2009). As a result of these reductions, single mothers were forced to enter the workforce without the support of child care or other family-friendly policies, which limited their possibility of career advancements because they had to accept work in line with their mother's responsibilities (Ajzenstadt, 2009). Women employed through

temporary employment agencies do not have the same benefits as those employed in the public sector, such as paid leave for pregnancy or sick child care (Ajzenstadt, 2009). These challenges made it difficult for single mothers to find work, and many were left below the poverty line (Ajzenstadt, 2009). All these put a significant burden on women to manage childcare responsibilities while trying to advance their careers, which can have negative impacts on their health, well-being, and socioeconomic standing (Granek & Nakash, 2017).

A review of work-family conflict and its consequences for women found that it can affect work satisfaction and performance, relationships, and stress levels (Granek & Nakash, 2017). The combination of the length of maternity leaves, limited affordable childcare options, and cultural pressure for women to prioritize motherhood can create added pressure for mothers in Israel, being generally constrained to prioritize family over career (Granek & Nakash, 2017). Consequently, women's decisions regarding paid work, including whether to work, how much time to devote to it, and which occupation to pursue, are influenced by their motherhood responsibilities (Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). In the following paragraphs, we will delve into employment and education patterns, workplace structure, work-family balance, and household behaviors to comprehend the level of gender equality and what variables, besides social policies, influence fertility patterns.

3.3.2 The intersection of Women's Employment, Education, and Workplace Structure in the Context of High Fertility Rates

Since the 1950s, the Israeli state has promoted high fertility rates and women's participation in the paid labor force (Goldscheider, 1996; Berkovitch, 1997; Frenkel, 2008). This policy was motivated by the desire to achieve a Jewish majority and establish an independent national economy; women's contributions were crucial for production and reproduction (Berkovitch, 2001; Shafir & Peled, 2002; Frenkel, 2008; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). The country's progressive family policies and strong cultural values around motherhood have contributed to high levels of women's labor force participation and fertility rates but have also created tensions as women try to balance their various responsibilities and roles; Israeli women face pressures to participate in the labor market and are economically

independent, leading many to try to balance their roles as mothers and working professionals (Stier & LewinEpstein, 2000; Toren, 2003; Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006; Frenkel, 2008; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). This has resulted in a significant portion of the female population being classified as "working mothers," or women who can combine paid employment with their responsibilities as caregivers for their families (Toren, 2003; Frenkel, 2008). Research has shown that the combination of strong family values and supportive social policies in Israel has contributed to high levels of women's labor force participation and economic independence (Toren, 2003). A study comparing different welfare systems found that Israel and Italy, both of which have a strong family orientation and supportive social policies for working women, have large proportions of women in continuous full-time employment and others in persistent unemployment, reflecting the "institutional duality" of these countries (Stier et al., 2001; Toren, 2003). However, Esping-Andersen's analysis (1990) of women's employment looks at the percentage of women participating in the labor force and the degree of occupational gender segregation in the workforce, which are crucial factors in the persistence of gender inequality (Mann & Hananel, 2022). The term gender segregation refers to women's tendency to choose certain occupations or vocational paths that are often low paying (or lead to low-wage occupation) and have low social status (England, 2005; Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Mann & Hananel, 2022). Moreover, gender inequality can be because women's roles as earners are often considered less important than their roles as mothers and homemakers, and their husbands' careers are given priority (Becker & Moen, 1999; Adva Center, 2001; Kraus, 2002; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Toren, 2003; Cohen & Liani, 2009; Raz-Yurovich, 2013; Mann & Hananel, 2022). This often leads women, and mothers in particular, to prioritize shorter working hours and proximity to work, allowing their husbands to work farther from home and for longer hours (Albertsen et al., 2008; Simpson, 1998; Mann & Hananel, 2022). Indeed, family responsibilities, particularly the presence of children, can limit women's economic involvement (Stier et al., 2001; Mann & Hananel, 2022). These gender differences result in what is commonly referred to as the "motherhood penalty," a pay gap that exists not only between men and women but also between mothers and childless women (Mann & Hananel, 2022). Multiple factors contribute to gender inequality and differences in experiences of work-life conflict among women, such as social norms and perceptions of gender roles (Coltrane, 2000; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009;

Mann & Hananel, 2022), the private views of women and their spouses (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Mann & Hananel, 2022), welfare regime and availability of specific family and gender-oriented policies for working parents (Stier et al., 2001; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006), and local labor market characteristics, including the size of the public sector (Stier et al., 2001; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). All these factors influence the rate of women's labor force participation. In all countries, regardless of the welfare regime, part-time employment is a common way for women to enter the workforce while still fulfilling their mothers' responsibilities (Stier et al., 2001). Both women and employers see the benefits of part-time employment, as it allows for flexibility and reduces absenteeism because it enables women to balance their roles as mothers and workers (Stier et al., 2001). Consequently, high levels of part-time jobs among women suggest the persistence of traditional gender roles where women are the primary caregivers and the first responsible for household chores. In societies with a conservative welfare regime, part-time employment is indeed seen as a way for mothers to enter the workforce without disrupting traditional gender roles (Stier et al., 2001). These jobs are often concentrated in female-dominated sectors and have a more permanent nature (Stier et al., 2001). Despite this, part-time workers in conservative regimes often receive employment benefits and union protection similar to full-time workers. As a result, it is expected that these societies will have high rates of part-time employment among women, particularly married women and young mothers (Stier et al., 2001). Data from a report (2022) of ICBS named "*Selected Data for International Women's Day 2022*" are used in analyzing Israeli women's employment and education patterns. Women are generally very educated, and the gender gap in schooling years narrowed over the years (Goldscheider, 1996; Chazan, 2018). In the past two decades, the number of Israeli women in higher education has significantly increased and now exceeds that of men (Goldscheider, 1996; Cohen & Liani, 2009; Chazan, 2018). The proportion of women in Israel with a higher education degree is among the highest in the world (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Cohen & Liani, 2009; Shavit & Bronstein, 2011; Mandel & Birgier, 2016). In 2020, a higher percentage of girls than boys were entitled to receive a matriculation certificate, with 73.8% of girls qualifying compared to 63.4% of boys. Similarly, a higher percentage of girls met university entrance requirements, with 62% qualifying as compared to 52.8% of boys. The gap between girls and boys was more

comprehensive in the Arab education system, with 77.7% of girls and 57.1% of boys entitled to a matriculation certificate in the twelfth grade. In the Hebrew education system, the corresponding figures were 72.6% for girls and 65.2% for boys. In addition, dropout rates were lower for girls than for boys. Among those who completed secondary school in 2011/2012, 53.2% of women went on to study for a first degree within eight years, compared to 34.6% of men. Also, in the highest level of education, women were more likely to attend universities (55.1%), the Open University (54.4%), and academic colleges (58.7%), while they were significantly more likely to attend academic colleges of education (78.0%) compared to men. Women also constituted a higher percentage of students studying for higher degrees, including second (63.3%) and third degrees (53.2%), as well as teaching certificates (75.5%) and other academic diplomas (48.6%). Regarding the employment rates, women's participation in the labor force has steadily increased (Goldscheider, 1996; Toren, 2003; Okun, 2011; Kimhi, 2012; Kraus, 2002; Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Chazan, 2018), but still lower than man's employment rates. The employment rate for women has increased significantly over the past three decades and currently stands at 75%, higher than the average rate in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, which is 66% (Okun, 2011; Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Bowers, 2020). In 2021, the employment rate for women aged 15 and over in Israel was lower than that of men, 55.7%, compared to 61.8% for men, while the participation rate (including both employed and unemployed people) of women aged 15 and over was 58.6%, compared with 65.1% among men. These rates decreased after the covid crisis; in 2018, the participation rate was around 60% for women and nearly 68% for men (ICBS, 2022). The unemployment rate for women in the labor force was slightly lower than that of men, at 4.9% compared to 5.0%. In analyzing in detail, in 2021, the women's age participating in civil labor changed drastically, reaching a higher level at age cohorts as 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 76.4 and 82.1 and 79,7 respectively; it can note that 15-17 and 65+ age-cohorts are the lowest participation rates compared to the others, 9.6 and 7.1 respectively (ICBS, 2022). The percentage among Jewish women is even higher at the age cohorts of 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 86.9, and 89.9 and 89.7, respectively (ICBS, 2022). This suggests that the participation rate in the labor force among women is exceptionally high from the age of 25, and consequently, this rate is highly skewed by the participation rate among women aged 15-18 and 65 over.

However, there is a vast difference among different ethnic groups. The employment rate among Muslims in Israel was 37.2% (48.6% for men and 25.9% for women), significantly lower than the rates for Jews (63.0%), Christians (60.0%), and Druze (48.9%) (ICBS, 2022). This underlines that the inequality is even more profound for non-Jewish women. However, of all employed women, 70.0% worked full-time (35 hours or more per week) instead of 87.1% of employed men who worked full-time (ICBS, 2022). A higher proportion of women worked part-time, with 30.0% of employed women working less than 35 hours per week, compared to 12.9% of men. A small percentage of women working part-time did so involuntarily (1.5%), meaning the majority wanted to work fewer hours, while 0.8% of men working part-time did so involuntarily (ICBS, 2022). The high level of voluntary part-time, which is prevalent among women, suggests that women decided to work fewer hours to compensate for their time outside their homes to balance their roles as mothers and workers (Toren, 2003; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Stier et al., 2001; Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). Indeed, from data from ICBS (2022), Jewish women tend to take part-time more for the care of children or the nature of the work (typically in the public sector) (18,9% and 25,9%) compared to men 1,6% and 19,8%, respectively. Jewish men tend to take part-time jobs more because of studies or being self-employed or employees who own a company (35,5% and 29,4%, respectively) compared to women (18% and 17%, respectively). Several studies have found that the increase in female labor force participation in recent years is primarily due to the rise in the involvement among mothers, even with young children, especially in the Jewish subgroup (Stier & Yaish, 2008; Stier & Herzberg, 2013; Kraus, 2002; Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Motherhood does not prevent women from participating in the labor market, but it does limit the amount of time they can spend on paid work (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). In both the Jewish and Arab subgroups, mothers tend to work less than non-mothers, although the differences are reduced over time, even mothers having children younger than two years who are not entitled to access to free education starting from 3 years of the child (Kraus, 2002; Stier & Herzberg, 2013; Stier & Yaish, 2008; Tal, 2016; Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Indeed, the labor force participation rate in 2021 for single-parent mothers was 82.7% higher than that of mothers (77,2%), partially because single parents are more needed to work than married women having already economic entry from their husbands (ICBS, 2022). However, the number of children of single

parents drastically influences the employment rate; lone-parent women with two children had the highest employment rate at 84.6%, while those with four or more children had the lowest rate at 51.3% (ICBS, 2022). Though in 2021, 77.2% of married mothers participated in the labor force, with participation rates of 77.7% for mothers with one child, 79.8% for mothers with two children, 78.1% for mothers with three children, and 71.1% for mothers with four or more children (ICBS, 2022). This suggests that a high percentage of married mothers participated in the labor force, with participation rates varying slightly based on the number of children they had; the highest participation rate was for mothers with two children (no difference having one or two children), while the lowest was for mothers with four or more children. As argued previously, mothers were more likely to work part-time; in 2011, only about a third of Jewish mothers of young children and less than 15% of Arab mothers of young children worked full-time (ages 25-45) (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). In 2021, the percentage of part-time mothers did not drastically change, steading at 28.4% of employed mothers working less than 35 hours per week, with 31.3% of those whose youngest child was 0-4 years old working part-time, compared to 25.2% of mothers with children aged 10-14. This suggests that the age of women's children shapes the choice of part-time. While educational opportunities in Israel are relatively equal for men and women, the labor market remains highly segregated by gender in terms of occupational distribution, and social and economic rewards have remained quite stable in the last decades; the higher level of education among Israeli women does not result in higher-wage occupations, leading to the persistence of gender segregation in the workplace and the gender wage gap (Goldscheider, 1996; Toren, 2003; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Chang, 2004; Blackburn & Jarman, 2006; Preston, 1999; Cohen & Liani, 2009; Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Mann & Hananel, 2022). Several factors may contribute to the wage gap between men and women (Geva, 2015; Shahor et al., 2021; Mann & Hananel, 2022). These include differences in the number of hours worked, different vocational training choices, and different occupational choices; men tend to work longer hours and often choose occupations that pay higher salaries (Shahor et al., 2021; Mann & Hananel, 2022). One of the possible explanations for the wage gap between men and women is the impact of childcare responsibilities on women's careers (it will be explored lately) (Shahor et al., 2021). Gender segregation can thus be seen in education fields; women were particularly well-represented in

Paramedical studies (83.2%) and Education and teacher training (78.5%) but were underrepresented in Physical sciences (37.1%), Engineering and architecture (33.2%), and Mathematics, statistics, and computer sciences (31.0%) which are vocational paths led to the most highly remunerative occupations (ICBS, 2022). Women may be more likely to choose lower-paying occupations, which may contribute to the wage gap. Studies found that among women with a college education, the ten most common occupations were elementary school teachers, high school teachers, kindergarten teachers, registered nurses, social workers, lawyers, special education teachers, office managers, private teachers, school counselors, and sales and marketing managers (Cohen & Liani, 2009; Shahor et al., 2021). In contrast, among men with a college education, the ten most common occupations were software developers, managers in professional services, application programmers, high school teachers, lawyers, CEOs and senior managers, sales/marketing managers, electronics engineers, accountants, and mechanical engineers (Shahor et al., 2021). Only two of these occupations, lawyers and sales/marketing managers, were common to both genders; this data shows that women are often concentrated in lower-paying occupations, contributing to the wage gap between men and women. Further education in these fields may not necessarily lead to higher wages for women because they are already studying in areas with lower pay (Shahor et al., 2021). Women are underrepresented in higher-paying occupations, contributing to the wage gap (Geva, 2015; Shahor et al., 2021). When examining Israeli women's occupations in more detail, it was indeed found that over a third of women were employed in traditionally female occupations, such as caregivers in households, nursing professionals, and primary school teachers, and in the majority of these occupations, more than 80% of those employed were women. (Toren, 2003; ICBS, 2022; Cohen & Liani, 2009; Mann & Hananel, 2022). In 2021, 56% of academic professionals and 29% of managers were women. In the high-tech field, 131,000 women were employed, making up 34.1% of the total employment in this sector (ICBS, 2022). In 2021, there were 174,400 self-employed women in Israel, 9.1% of all employed women. Among mothers, the percentage of self-employed women was slightly higher at 10.6% (ICBS, 2022). This suggests that women tend indeed to choose safer occupations which are likely in the public sector characterized by low salaries (Adva Center, 2001; Shahor et al., 2021). Indeed, the most common women occupations (cited previously), such as public

administration, education, health care, community, and social services, and business research and development, represent different fields of the public sector; women indeed make up a large portion of the workforce in the public service sector (Stier, 1998; Adva Center, 2001, Rein, 1985; Toren, 2003; Okun et al., 2007; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). Research has indeed shown that structural characteristics of the public labor market can create more favorable conditions for women to maintain their employment and quickly return to work after taking time off for family responsibilities (Stier & Yaish, 2008; Okun et al., 2007). This suggests that these types of environments can be more supportive of women, even with high family responsibilities, reducing the likelihood of women leaving the workforce and providing more supportive conditions for combining work and family obligations (Stier & Yaish, 2008; Okun et al., 2007; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). The welfare state can also act as an employer through the public sector, offering employment opportunities that consider women's dual responsibilities and preferred roles (Okun et al., 2007). Previous research has indicated that the public sector offers benefits such as maternity leave, flextime, and greater tolerance of absenteeism for mothers, which may help to alleviate the conflict between paid work and family responsibilities (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Gornick & Thomasobs, 1998; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Kolberg, 1991; Kolberg & Esping-Andersen, 1991, Okun et al., 2007). Public sector employment is believed to offer women the chance to have "good jobs" mainly in professional occupations, which can improve their social standing and provide benefits, flexible working hours, and opportunities for advancement and leadership (Wright et al., 1995; Gornick and Thomasobs, 1998; Stier & Yaish, 2008). These jobs are considered "family-friendly" and may enable women to maintain their involvement in the labor force even when they have significant family responsibilities (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kolberg & Esping-Andersen, 1991; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Okun et al., 2007; Stier & Yaish, 2008). In the public sector, women experience more stability than in the private one. It is worth noting that public sector employees in Israel are more likely than private sector employees to be covered by collective work agreements, which provide additional benefits to employed mothers beyond those required by law (Radai, 1997; Okun et al., 2007). These agreements allow for more generous policies regarding shortened work days with full pay for mothers of infants and older children, and they have also recently been expanded to allow mothers to use some

of their paid sick leave to care for ill children (Radai, 1997; Okun et al., 2007). Additionally, the public sector is known for being more understanding and tolerant of family responsibilities and absenteeism, and it offers schedules, including reduced hours, that are convenient for mothers, particularly in teaching (Stier, 1996, 1998; Okun et al., 2007). Overall, public sector employment in Israel offers advantages that may help alleviate the conflict between paid work and traditional family roles for employed mothers, such as the right to shorter working hours and paid leave for caring for sick children (Okun et al., 2007). A study by Stier, and Yaish (2008), argued that around 80% of women in the public sector are still employed two years after starting their job, while only 75% of women in the private sector are still at their job after two years of employment; additionally, by the fifth year, about 50% of those in the public sector are still at their job, compared to less than 40% in the private sector. The stability of employment in the public sector becomes even more pronounced over time (Stier & Yaish, 2008). Moreover, female-dominated occupations offer a more stable employment environment for women, particularly mothers, due to the flexible work arrangements, part-time employment, and shorter hours they often provide (Mandel & Semyonov, 2006, 2006; Stier, 1996, 1998; Okun et al., 2007; Stier & Yaish, 2008). Female-dominated occupations reflect traditional gender roles; consequently, they are more in line (work hours, part-time, etc.) with the mothers' preferences, being the primary caregivers. Previous research has proved that a higher percentage of women in an occupation is linked to a slower rate of employment exit (Taniguchi & Rosenfeld, 2002; Stier & Yaish, 2008). Additionally, Stier (1996) found that women in female-dominated occupations are more likely to be able to interrupt their employment when facing high family demands and return to paid work more quickly. Moreover, the public sector has many advantages in terms of employment. First, women are less likely to leave their jobs than women in the private sector, with a 12% higher likelihood of exiting employment (Stier & Yaish, 2008). Additionally, following childbirth, women in the public sector are still less likely to leave their jobs (Stier & Yaish, 2008). Regarding re-entry into the workforce, e-entry was faster in the public sector than in the private sector, at 29% and 38%, respectively (Stier & Yaish, 2008). Re-entry rates during the first two years were only slightly higher in male-type and mixed-type occupations compared to female-type occupations, although the rates balanced out after that (Stier & Yaish, 2008). Overall, relatively

few variables affected the likelihood of re-entry, with family constraints having only minor effects on women's decisions to return to work (Stier & Yaish, 2008). Married women were slightly less likely to re-enter the workforce, but the presence of young children did not affect mothers' re-entry (Stier & Yaish, 2008). Women in more prestigious occupations were more likely to return to work, indicating that cost-benefit considerations also play a role in women's employment choices (Stier & Yaish, 2008). Finally, women whose last job was in the public sector were more likely to re-enter the workforce after childbirth (Okun et al., 2007), while those whose last job was full-time were less likely to do so, supporting the idea that a family-friendly environment, such as part-time employment and employment in the public sector, can encourage women's continuity participation in the labor force (Stier & Yaish, 2008). It has indeed been demonstrated that employment continuity is a key factor in determining wages, and the wage gap between men and women is often attributed to women's unstable labor force attachment throughout their lives (Budig & England, 2001; Gupta & Smith, 2000; Okun et al., 2007). Consequently, by encouraging women to stay connected to the paid workforce over the long term, public-sector employment may also indirectly decrease the gender pay gap (Mandel & Semyonov, 2005; Okun et al., 2007). However, as Okun et al. (2007) argued, public sector employment can be a double-edged sword for women. It may assist them in balancing work and family responsibilities during the first steps of family formation (Okun et al., 2007). Additionally, some studies have indicated that women employed in the public sector may experience lower pay discrimination than women in the private sector (Yaish & Kraus, 2003; Okun et al., 2007). Nevertheless, public sector employment may also limit women's opportunities for advancement and wage increases, potentially exacerbating the gender wage gap despite the increased employment continuity that it may provide (Goldscheider, 1996; Nielsen et al., 2004; Okun et al., 2007). Overall, public sector employment may positively and negatively affect women's wages and career advancement. Studies have shown that in Israel, although both men's and women's wages increase with the increase in their level of education, this increase is much more significant among men than women (Stier & Herzberg, 2013; Mandel & Birgier, 2016). This results in the broader gender pay gap among educated men and women, where women earn 58% and 73%, respectively, of their well-educated male counterparts, with the gap being the smallest among low-educated workers, with women making

64% of men's monthly wage and 87% of men's hourly wage (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). While men experience significant increases in their salaries with higher levels of education, women do not see the same benefits (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Highly educated women in Israel struggle to translate their education and career attainments into higher earnings (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Studies have found that during the 1980s, the increase in women's education did not improve their relative economic position and that the gender earnings gap during this time was not due to productivity-related factors (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). A possible explanation for this may be the mismatch between qualifications and pay caused by an excess of academically educated women in lower-paying occupations; additionally, as said before, occupational choices and fields of study may contribute to an imbalance between demand and supply for highly educated women (Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Shahor et al., 2021). According to Shahor et al. (2021), the work-family balance impacts gender inequality and the wage gap between men and women because of the impact of childcare responsibilities on women's careers (Shahor et al., 2021). This can affect a woman's wages not only while she has young children but also as her children get older, as women often work fewer hours while their children are young, which can impact their professional experience and advancement (Shahor et al., 2021). As a result, even when children are older, and women are available to work more hours, they may still earn less money (Shahor et al., 2021). Additionally, the high cost of childcare may limit women's ability to work in professions that require an increased number of work hours (Shahor et al., 2021). Despite the high employment rate among women, the gender pay gap continues to be significant. According to data from ICBS (2022), in 2019, the average income for an employed woman in Israel was NIS 8,308 per month, compared to NIS 12,193 per month for a hired man, a difference of 32%. As said previously, women tend to work fewer hours than men, on average 36.3 hours per week and 44.1 hours per week, respectively. Although the wage gap between women and men has decreased over the past decades, it has only reduced by about ten percentage points, from 43% in 1990 to 32% in 2019 (ICBS, 2022). In 2016, the average income of an employed Israeli woman was 65% of that of an employed man, while full-time female employees in Israel earned 78% of their male counterparts' earnings, which is lower than the OECD average of 85.7% (Mann & Hananel, 2022). Among OECD countries, only Japan, Estonia, and South Korea have a higher pay gap (Mann &

Hananel, 2022). This suggests that Israeli women have a higher participation rate in the labor force than women in other developed countries; they also experience a more significant gender pay gap. One reason for this is the labor market norm of very long working hours and high fertility rates in Israel, which leads to a particularly high "motherhood penalty" (Mann & Hananel, 2022). Between 2013 and 2019, the monthly gender pay gap remained stable at 32%, as did the hourly gender wage gap (ICBS, 2022). In terms of industries, the highest monthly gender wage gaps in 2020 were found in professional, scientific, and technical activities at 47%, while the lowest wage gaps were found in transportation and storage, postal and courier activities at 22% and in education at 23% (ICBS, 2022). Moreover, in 2018, Israelis worked more hours than workers in any other Western economy, with a full-time work week of 45 hours compared to an average of 40.3 hours among OECD member countries (Mann & Hananel, 2022). This situation is further exacerbated by Israel's tendency to have high fertility rates (Mann & Hananel, 2022). This high fertility rate is supported by social norms which foster traditional gender roles by emphasizing the importance of motherhood and government policies that encourage childbirth (Berkovitch, 1997; Shalev & Gooldin, 2006; Granek & Nakash, 2017; Mann & Hananel, 2022). However, this gender segregation has had a particular impact in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic; the pandemic indeed disproportionately impacted women in the workforce, with more women than men losing their jobs or going on sick leave (Bowers, 2020). During the COVID-19 crisis in Israel in 2020, 56% of unemployment benefits claims were filed by women, and women were disproportionately affected in almost all industries except for real estate (Bowers, 2020). In the health professional industry, 83% of those filing unemployment claims were women, while they made up 76% of all workers in the industry (Bowers, 2020). In the information and communication technologies industry, 54% of those filing unemployment claims were women, while they made up 41% of all workers in the industry (Bowers, 2020). Young women aged 20-24 were significantly affected, with 60.5% losing their jobs compared to 39.5% of men in the same age group (Bowers, 2020). Women were more likely to lose their jobs or go on sick leave due to working fewer hours, holding part-time or junior positions, earning less, and having difficulty gaining seniority after taking maternity leave (Bowers, 2020). Many women in Israel were the primary choice within a family for caring for their children due to

school and daycare closures; consequently, they had to leave the workforce to care for household chores (Bowers, 2020). Data shows that women with children worked an average of 23 hours per week, compared to 36 hours per week for men with children; in addition, 46% of those filing for unemployment benefits had at least one child under the age of 18, and 18% had a child under the age of 2 (Bowers, 2020). During the pandemic, single women and ultra-Orthodox Jewish women were disproportionately affected by job loss (Bowers, 2020). The employment rate for women in couples with children decreased by ten percentage points between March and April 2020, while the employment rate for men decreased by seven percentage points (Bowers, 2020). Furthermore, the employment rate for women in single-parent households decreased by 13 percentage points during this same period, while the employment rate for men in these households remained relatively unchanged (Bowers, 2020). Yet, it cannot be denied that there has been significant progress in various labor market outcomes in Israel over the last 40 years, especially regarding women's participation in paid work (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). This is reflected in the increase in women's labor force participation and full-time employment, as well as a decline in occupational segregation and an increase in the percentage of women in prestigious occupations, such as management (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). This trend is seen across all groups of women and has been driven by the increasing levels of education among women, which increases their earning potential and allows them to join prestigious occupations (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Nevertheless, there is still much to be done.

3.3.3 Gender Roles: Household Behaviors and Work-Family Balance

According to research by Agassi (1982) and Biebly and Biebly (1989), women report having a stronger sense of identity tied to family roles, and men tend to have a stronger sense of identity tied to work roles; this may be especially true in traditional societies where the ideology holds that women's roles in the workplace should be secondary to domestic and maternal duties. However, as societies become more egalitarian and the division of labor between men and women becomes more balanced, the relative importance of work and family roles may shift (Cohen & Liani, 2009). Cohen and Kirchmeyer (2005) found that in societies with more egalitarian ideologies, women may have a smaller share of their identity tied to family roles and a greater share tied to work roles. Examining the

condition of Israeli women is important for understanding the cultural context of the work-family interface. Research has shown that work and family identities often vary by gender, with women tending to have a stronger family identity and men having a stronger work identity (Agassi, 1982; Biebly & Biebly, 1989; Cohen & Liani, 2009).

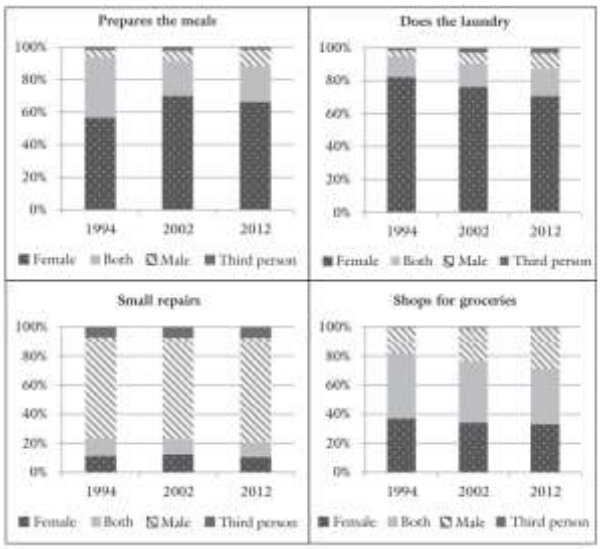
This highlights the importance of cultural values surrounding the appropriate division of labor between men and women in the work and family spheres which are key factors in understanding the work-family interface among women (Cohen & Liani, 2009). However, according to the gender role theory, women tend to view their role in the family as a central part of their social identity, which may lead to a conflict between their work and family roles when both are highly important to them (Cohen & Liani, 2009). This conflict may be further intensified if there are negative consequences for not fulfilling these role demands (Cohen & Liani, 2009). Research has also proved that although women's roles in the workplace have expanded, the expectations placed on them in the family role have not decreased; Grandey et al. (2005) also found that this conflict between work and family roles may be more prevalent for women than men (Cohen & Liani, 2009). Despite a strong work ethic among both men and women in the country, traditional gender roles still dominate in terms of division of labor in the home, with women taking on most housework and childcare responsibilities (Agassi, 1982; Lieblich, 1993; Cohen & Liani, 2009). Indeed, according to Lieblich (1993), Israeli women tend to have a stronger sense of self-tied to their family roles than their work achievements, compared to American women who have a stronger sense of self-tied to their work. Agassi (1982) also found that Americans tend to have a more egalitarian ideology and a stronger self-image as wage earners compared to Israelis and Germans. According to a study by Katz (1989) involving a representative sample of employed mothers, housewives, and husbands in Israel, working mothers had the highest overall burden of work and household responsibilities, averaging 13.5 hours per day; husbands had the second highest burden at 12.7 hours per day, while housewives had the lowest at 9.7 hours per day (Cohen & Liani, 2009). The study also found that husbands did not significantly increase their contribution to household and childcare responsibilities when their wives were employed and instead devoted most of their time to their jobs (Katz, 1989; Cohen & Liani, 2009). These findings suggest that traditional gender roles remain prevalent in Israeli

society, with men primarily responsible for work and women primarily responsible for the home (Cohen & Liani, 2009). This led to a high level of conflict for working women. A study by Cohen and Liani (2009) argues that working full-time and having children are both associated with increased work-family conflict for Israeli women. This finding is supported by research showing that the more time one spends in a given role, the more likely one will view a second role as conflicting with the first (Byron, 2005; Cohen & Liani, 2009). Additionally, such findings suggest that Israeli women may encounter challenges in their careers due in part to traditional gender roles and division of labor in the home if balancing working full time and having children (Cohen & Liani, 2009). Indeed, Israeli women tend to spend more time on housework, and child care than men (Glickman et al., 2003; Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006), which may contribute to the increased conflict they experience (Cohen & Liani, 2009). It appears that while it is possible to combine work and family in Israel, it may come at the cost of increased conflict between the two (Cohen & Liani, 2009). Another research about work-family balance by Frenkel (2008) found that although some of the male participants described being extensively involved in caring for their children, none of them saw the birth of a child as a turning point in their career or as an identity marker. The study underlines how the perception of pregnancy and childbirth as significant events impact especially women's professional identities, careers, and their ability to meet the ideal worker standard, leading many of them to quit their job in hi-tech industries that are characterized by male-type occupations in which work hours do not match with mother's responsibilities (Frenkel, 2008). The study underlines the higher level of work-family conflict women experienced compared to their husbands, especially in male-type occupations (Frenkel, 2008). Consequently, women voluntarily leave their job when they are too demanding (Toren, 2003; Frenkel, 2008). Concerning housework responsibilities often fall on women's duties. Although preliminary studies conducted in Israel and other countries have also found that men's involvement in child care and housework increased during the last decades, with changes in various aspects of family life in recent decades (Kulik, 2007; Kulik & Erantal, 2009) also due to the coronavirus crisis (Bowers, 2020), which forced fathers to work at home, the situation is still unequal where women are still the primary caregivers, spending much more time taking care of all household chores. In 2018, data from ICBS showed that women in couple

households spent an average of 43 hours per week on housework and childcare, while men in these households spent an average of 27 hours per week on these tasks (Bowers, 2020). According to research conducted by Agassi (1982) and Lieblich (1993), traditional gender roles are still prevalent in Jewish society in Israel, with women taking on the majority of housework and childcare responsibilities. Despite both men and women having a strong attachment to their work and the rise of women's participation in the workplace, the division of labor within families remains traditional, with men and women adhering to traditional gender roles (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006). To understand the gender roles and divisions in household chores, it is interesting to take into consideration the study by Mandel and Birgier (2016) that used "*Family and changing gender roles*" of the Modula of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), by selecting surveys of three different periods, 1994, 2002 and 2012 focusing in the Jewish population (in order to comprehend the overall change in attitudes towards traditional gender roles in Israeli family). The surveys focused on working women's ability to balance paid work and child-rearing (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). The study underlines that attitudes toward gender roles have remained relatively consistent, despite the significant increase in women's labor force participation in recent years. Similar results were obtained when examining the data by religiosity level (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). This means that similar responses to these questions, even as the number of mothers in the labor force has increased, may indicate that women's entry into the workforce has not significantly impacted subjective perceptions about their motherhood duties or responsibilities for childcare (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). In spite of the overall trend of becoming more conservative in attitudes toward gender roles over time, younger generations tend to hold more egalitarian views compared to older ones (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Mandel & Birgier, 2016). This no significant change in gender role attitudes in Israeli society over the years, even as women have made significant strides in terms of labor force participation and occupational and economic attainments, represents a paradox (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Since this paradox, it is crucial to analyze the division of family work. Suppose the division of household labor within households may reflect traditional gender roles; in that case, there is no change in the partition of family work as suggested by feminists, indeed more egalitarian beliefs about men's and women's roles can lead to a more equal split in family tasks (Kulik, 2007; Mandel & Birgier,

2016); instead, as economic theories predict, as women's paid work and occupational mobility increase, the time they devote to unpaid work, such as household tasks, should decrease leading to a more egalitarian division of household chores (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). As seen in figure 3.1, despite the increase in women's economic activity and motherhood, there was no observed change in the outsourcing of household tasks between 1994 and 2012 (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Women continue to take on the majority of household duties, such as doing the laundry (with a decrease from 82% to 71%) and preparing meals, while men tend to be responsible for minor repairs at home (with around 70% of men indicating that they perform these tasks at all three points in time) (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). The only household responsibility that is relatively balanced is grocery shopping, but this balance has not changed meaningfully since 1994 (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). An interesting factor in pinpointing is a third member's presence in helping take care of household tasks. It is probably due to the tendency to outsource housework; for example, grandparents, particularly grandmothers, tend to assist their children in the family tasks (Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). A study Lewin-Epstein et al. (2006), which compared the division of household chores between Germany and Israel, underlined that Israeli couples are much more likely to outsource housework and report that a third party is responsible for at least one major household chore (21% vs. 4% in Germany). This highlights the importance of family bonds, and traditional familism is still prominent in Israeli society despite the tendency of the high level of employed women. Also, the number of hours invested in household tasks by men and women was mostly the

Table. 3.1. Distribution of household tasks by the answers to the question: "In your household, who does the following things?"

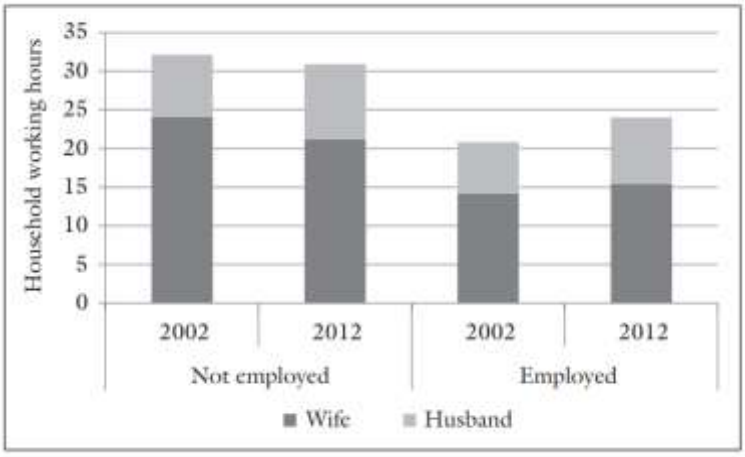


Source**: Study by Mandel and Birgier (2016)**

Data: **"Family and changing gender roles"** of the Modula of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), surveys of 1994, 2002 and 2012

same between 2002 and 2012 (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Figure 3.2 shows that employed and unemployed women spent significantly more time on household tasks than men. The number of weekly hours men and women devote to household tasks has changed slightly over the decade, with an increase for employed women and men and a decrease for unemployed women (Mandel & Birgier, 2016).

Table. 3.2 Wife's and husband's housework (in average weekly hours) by year of survey and by employment status of the wife



Source: **Study by Mandel and Birgier (2016)**

Data: **Family and changing gender roles" of the Modula of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), surveys of 2002 and 2012**

Additionally, spouses of employed women increased their time spent on household tasks by 2 hours (from 6.6 hours to 8.5 hours), while employed women increased from around 14 to just over 16 hours (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). However, employed women still invest almost double the amount of time in household tasks compared to their spouses (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Despite the increase in women's participation in the public sphere, there has been no corresponding increase in men's involvement in household tasks, which is supported by persistent gender perceptions regarding motherhood duties and women's responsibility for childcare (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Another feature to highlight is that unemployed women spend more hours doing household chores than employed women (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006; Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Despite the significant improvements in women's economic status and labor force participation

in recent decades gender roles and the division of labor within the household have remained essentially unchanged in Israel (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Stier & Lewin-Epstien, 2007; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009; Mandel & Birgier, 2016) This unexpected finding may be influenced by family policies that support women's integration into the workforce while enforcing traditional gender roles (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). However, some research analyzed that the level of women's education influences the type (egalitarian/traditional) of the division of family tasks (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006; Kulik, 2007). These authors underlined that women with higher education tend to have more liberal views on gender roles and may also have spouses with similar levels of education, leading to a more egalitarian division of household tasks (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006). Conversely, when the wife is less educated, regardless of the husband's education level, the division of labor tends to be more female-centric (Kulik, 2007). Moreover, the changes in the gender system are asymmetric, with women changing more than men; some women have not only started to leave traditional homemaking roles in favor of paid work but have also entered previously male-dominated occupations, such as managerial and professional positions (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). In contrast, men have been resistant to entering traditionally female-dominated professions or to equally sharing household tasks with women; according to England (2010, 2011), this may be due to the devaluation and low rewards associated with roles traditionally held by women, whether in the home or the labor market (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). This can incentivize women to leave these roles and discourage men from entering them (England, 2011, 2011; Mandel & Birgier, 2016). However, the transition is still in the beginning; the persistence of high fertility levels and traditional gender roles, although the increasing employment rates among women, suggests that the Israeli context is essential in shaping employment and fertility decisions (Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). Similar to work decisions, family decisions are also influenced by context, including culture, ideology, social norms, and social policies, which affect the relationship between work and fertility (Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). The case of Israel is crucial to illustrate how culture and ideology shape the relationship between women's work and family patterns (Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009). Therefore, the stagnation in normative attitudes towards traditional gender roles suggests that these rigid gender boundaries remain strong and have yet to be really defied.

Conclusion

The present thesis aims to provide an in-depth examination of the factors that influence fertility in a country like Israel. Israel was selected as the object of this study because it represents a fascinating case as it belongs to the most developed countries, yet it seems immune to the problem that plagues them: the persistence of a low birth rate. Therefore, this thesis aims to investigate and delve deeper into the factors influencing fertility in Israel. First, this work provides an analysis of demographic compositions and fertility patterns of the Jewish community in the USA and UK compared to that of Israel, highlighting how the latter presents a higher birth rate compared to other developed countries. Then, throughout the thesis, various factors contributing to this phenomenon were explored, particularly the issue of national security and the culture and politics in Israel, which have crucial importance for fertility in both the public and private domains. In addition, the relationship between religion and state was analyzed as to how it influences public life and individuals' private sphere in Israel.

Demography, mainly fertility, results in playing a crucial role; it has been conceived as a national security issue, shaping the policies and provisions implemented in Israel to preserve its Jewish ethnic character. The Jewishness of the state is fundamental for the existence of a Jewish democracy, where Jewishness is intertwined with Jewish ethnicity, Jewish religion, and Jewish nationalism. The Arab threat, the demographic struggle against the Arab population, has been central in fostering the rise in Jewish fertility rates. Such a demographic threat consists of a constant variable in Israelis' lives, shaping individual and collective choices. These elements have been essential in shaping fertility and immigration policies to secure the Jewish majority.

Religion, particularly Judaism, is essential in analyzing fertility because of its place in Israeli culture and society. The deep relationship between religious institutions and state authorities and the subsequent spread of traditional values (which are often religious in nature) influence, to some extent, the choice to have a large family. This is because many Jews do not consider themselves religious persons, religious beliefs and practices are ingrained in their lives due to being a part of the national culture. This suggests that even the most secular Israeli Jews are not entirely secularized, as the public life of the vast majority of Israelis contains

religious overtones related to Jewish national identity (Okun, 2011, 2017). For secular Jews, religious traditionalism, nationalism, and familism are interconnected and partially in conflict with common values related to low fertility in developed countries (Okun, 2017). Therefore, examining the relationship between religion and the state, and the role of demography as national security issue in shaping public life and individuals' private sphere in Israel has highlighted the importance of understanding these factors' interconnectedness in understanding the country's fertility patterns.

However, the determinant factor that profoundly influences the fertility rate and stands out most from this research is the status of women and how motherhood is constructed culturally. This emphasizes the importance of women's role in fertility analysis in any country, not just Israel. In this last part, the study of the role of women in Israel, particularly Israeli Jewish women, is explored to understand their role in fertility patterns and their implications on the life of Jewish women. In the context of national security, the role of women in shaping these patterns should be considered. Women's identities and roles are shaped by religious and nationalist ideas and discourses which have culturally constructed the idea of motherhood, by linking women's reproductive function to nation-building; this results in societal pressure for women to prioritize reproduction (Berkovitch, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Bloomfield, 2009). These ideas, also rooted in religion, strongly impact women's choices regarding their bodies (Bloomfield, 2009). In Israeli society, motherhood is highly valued and seen as a central aspect of women's identity and purpose, leading to pressure for women to have children. Women's rights and interests are often subordinated to the needs of the family and nation (Raucher, 2014). Additionally, the study has shown that religious institutions hold significant power and influence in matters related to reproductive health and family planning in Israel, which can present obstacles for women seeking access to reproductive health services and constrain their autonomy and agency in making reproductive decisions (Goldscheider, 1996; Tal, 2016; Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). Religious institutions and communities, particularly the Orthodox Jewish one, influence the construction of motherhood and reproductive decision-making. Due to religious control over civil matters, women's rights are often subordinated to men's rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Goldscheider, 1996). The Jewish law tends to persist the women's inferiority where women's rights are not

equal to men's. In such context, familism and pronatalism enforce this motherhood's importance. Familism is a cultural value that supports pro-natal policies by enhancing traditional family bonds. Familism and pro-natal policies are interconnected and have been described as "conservative welfare" (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Stier et al., 2001) that promotes traditional gender roles and the centrality of the family unit. This affects reproductive rights and access to abortion, contraception, and fertility treatments. Policies promote childbirth but restrict access to abortion and contraception, reinforcing traditional gender roles and positioning motherhood as a central aspect of women's lives and identities. This analysis of the conservative welfare policies in Israel and their impact on reproductive rights and gender equality for women in the country has highlighted the importance of considering these policies in understanding the high fertility rate in Israel.

Therefore, to deeply understand the status of women, it is also fundamental to analyze the relationship between employment patterns among women and fertility patterns. Israel is characterized by high levels of education and employment among women (Okun, 2011; Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Bowers, 2020), while fertility rates in Israel remain above replacement level, yet it does not result in an egalitarian society. Israeli women face gender segregation in low-wage fields, a wide-gender pay gap, and barriers to career advancement. The structure of the job market and employment patterns among women in Israel reflect the dominant ideologies of the society, particularly the emphasis on familism. This is exemplified by the high presence of women in the public sector, characterized by a more family-friendly environment, part-time jobs, and government policies that support working mothers, such as child allowances and maternity leaves. Israeli governments "help" to balance work-family life by providing types of employment, such as in the public sectors, characterized by a family-friendly environment, family supports, and flexible work arrangements. Since the high pressure on women due to motherhood cultural value, these certain employments are mainly occupied by women, which enables them to work while taking care of their mothers' duties. All these factors contribute to the persistence of high fertility rates, which is also supported by social norms that foster traditional gender roles by emphasizing the importance of motherhood.

Furthermore, the shortage of specific family policies since Israel's welfare is not as generous as certain Northern European countries are compensated by inter-generational support, which facilitates family formation by being a source of caregiving. In addition, the division of labor within households in Israel has remained unchanged. Consequently, this high fertility rate is supported by social norms which foster traditional gender roles by emphasizing the importance of motherhood and government policies that encourage childbirth. Israeli policies are more concentrated on increasing the employment rate among women than helping them advance their careers. This explains the high employment level among women but segregation into low-wage occupations; additionally, women are the primary caregivers. These policies thus support women's integration into the workforce while reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Conclusively, the thesis aims to show that fertility in Israel is influenced by a variety of factors, including political and religious discourses, conservative welfare policies and ideologies, and societal pressure for motherhood; especially this study has shed light on the complexity of the factors influencing Israel's high fertility rate and the crucial role of women in shaping these patterns. The persistence of high fertility rates and conservative gender roles despite increasing employment among women and some changes towards a more egalitarian society suggests that the Israeli context, mainly culture, ideology, social norms, and social policies, play a significant role in shaping women's work and family decisions, where women are still constrained by their traditional gender duties, when deciding how many hours or where to work or to quit their job if too demanding. Therefore, the stagnation in normative attitudes towards traditional gender roles suggests that these rigid gender boundaries remain strong and have yet to be really defied.

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Thesis Summary

The aim of this final work is to analyze the dynamics behind Israel's exceptional fertility by providing an examination of factors contributing to such a high rate. In particular, this thesis aims at illustrating the Israel demographic by exploring various dynamics that cross several elements. The study of several factors, from cultural to demographic and political ones, and their intersection shed light on Israel's complex and multifaced nature of fertility dynamics in Israel.

Indeed, Israel's high fertility rate is a demographic phenomenon that has attracted significant attention recently. This is because of the widespread decline in fertility rates across the globe in recent years, with more than half of the world's population now having fertility rates below replacement level; this trend is particularly affecting the majority of developed countries that have fertility rates that are not just below the replacement level but far lower, resulting in a dramatic and irreversible demographic shift toward population decline (Testa et al., 2006). Many scholars and researchers have been studying the reasons and possible policies for this drastic demographic change. Despite this seemingly unstoppable demographic transition, Israel remains untouched. Although grouped in the developed countries, Israel seems to be immune from all these demographic shifts, contrary to its western fellows, challenging its middle eastern neighbors as well. Compared to other developed countries, especially western countries, Israel has an exceptional level of fertility, with a total fertility rate (TFR) that has consistently remained above the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman (OECD, 2022). It is also outstanding that Israel's fertility rate is challenging those of its neighbors in the Middle East; Israel's birth rate is much higher than in some nearby regions (Della Pergola, 2009). This is particularly remarkable given the small size of the country and its relatively high level of economic and social development. Consequently, the author wishes to provide a comprehensive examination of the factors contributing to Israel's high fertility rates. The research thus explores the demographic, economic, social, cultural, religious, and political factors that have influenced fertility patterns in Israel and also considers how these factors have interacted with one another to produce the current demographic landscape.

The research is structured into two parts; the first part, called "Part I Israel and Demography," includes the first chapter, and the second part, "PART II

Exploring the Dynamics and Factors of High Fertility Rates," contains the remaining two chapters.

As said previously, this thesis aims to examine the reasons for the significant birth rates compared to the Western world. One potential explanation for this discrepancy may be attributed to the prominent role of the Jewish religion in Israel. However, as the first chapter shows, more than this reasoning alone is needed to fully account for the variation in fertility rates, as Jewish people worldwide are not consistently reproducing at rates comparable to or closely resembling those in Israel, even the secular Israeli people. Therefore, the first chapter consists of an introductive part that provides a comparative analysis of the different demographic compositions among various Jewish communities across countries. Firstly, there is a brief overview of the fertility patterns of Jewish in Western countries, such as European countries, especially the United Kingdom and the United States, characterized by the largest Jewish community in this part of the world, highlighting how Jews in those countries present a lower birth rate compared to Israel. This is followed by an examination of the demographic situation in Israel, including a discussion of the country's total fertility rate, with the relative demographic factors and fertility patterns across various ethnic and religious groups. The comparative fertility analysis is, consequently, useful in understanding religion, particularly Judaism, cannot be the (sole) answer and the driving fertility variable for high fertility rates in Israel. In western countries, the Jewish community is characterized by very low fertility among secular Jews, below the national average birth rate. In contrast, the most religious ones are characterized by a fertility rate far higher than the replacement level and the national average one, suggesting that the degree of religiosity affects fertility rates.

Comparison between Israel fertility and Jewish Fertility in the West World

Religion cannot be considered the only driving fertility variable

In Israel, there is a significant difference in fertility patterns between various religious and ethnic groups; the most religious Jews (Haredi or ultra-Orthodox community) have much more children than very religious non-Jews, and Jewish families vary according to their religious lifestyle (ICBS, 2020). Yet, the birth rate, especially within the Jewish community, is strikingly high, characterized by a secular population sector having fertility above the replacement level, unlike the secular population in other developed countries (Okun, 2017). Particularly this secular pole is experiencing the same SDT trend of western countries (like delayed marriage, late childbearing, and so on);

Israel characterized by an exceptional fertility rate

nevertheless, this postponing childbearing is compensated by higher fertility at later ages (the 30s into early 40s) and higher fertility among more educated groups (Bystrov, 2012; Weinreb et al., 2018).

The remaining part analyzes the factors contributing to Israel's high fertility rate. The second chapter mainly examines demography as a national security issue in the politics and culture of Israel, leading to the crucial importance of fertility in the public and private domains. Demography is widely acknowledged as a critical aspect of national security, particularly in the case of Israel, a Jewish democracy. Therefore, the examination of the Arab fertility patterns, especially Muslims, characterized by high levels of fertility, and the demographic trend of Arab Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza strip and West bank is crucial for understanding the overall security situation. Indeed, the National and Ethnic ideologic features of Jewish democracy as a state that is both democratic and Jewish are essential to comprehend, then, how demographic variables, especially migration and fertility policies, have played a role in Israel's nation-building project since its establishment.

Demography as a National Security Issue

Demography, mainly fertility, results in playing a crucial role; it has been conceived as a national security issue, shaping the policies and provisions implemented in Israel to preserve its Jewish ethnic character. The Jewishness of the state is fundamental for the existence of a Jewish democracy, where Jewishness is intertwined with Jewish ethnicity, Jewish religion, and Jewish nationalism. The demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in Israel has essential implications for the country's identity as a Jewish democracy and its relations with neighboring Arab countries. This issue is of paramount importance for Israel's national security, as a demographic shift towards a majority Arab population could threaten the country's ability to maintain its Jewish character, being Israel's *raison d'etre* (Stypinska, 2007). The Arab threat, so the demographic struggle against the Arab population, has been central in fostering the rise in Jewish fertility rates. Such a demographic threat consists of a constant variable in Israelis' lives, shaping individual and collective choices. These elements have been essential in shaping fertility and immigration policies to secure the Jewish majority.

The Ethnic Jewish character as Israeli democracy's *raison d'etre*

The role of the Arab threat in shaping fertility policies in national building project

Furthermore, the thesis delves into the intertwined relationship between religion and the state, affecting public life, individuals' private sphere, even those

who consider themselves secular, and how religion has been used to construct the political discourse and the Israeli (Jewish) identity. Religion, particularly Judaism, is essential in analyzing fertility because of its place in Israeli culture and society. The deep relationship between religious institutions and state authorities and the subsequent spread of traditional values (which are often religious in nature) influence, to some extent, the choice to have a large family. This is because many Jews do not consider themselves religious persons, religious beliefs and practices are ingrained in their lives due to being a part of the national culture. This suggests that even the most secular Israeli Jews are not entirely secularized, as the public life of the vast majority of Israelis contains religious overtones related to Jewish national identity (Okun, 2011, 2017). For secular Jews, religious traditionalism, nationalism, and familism are interconnected and partially in conflict with common values related to low fertility in developed countries (Okun, 2017). The case of Israel illustrates that families who live in societal contexts that align with their religious lifestyles will find their religiosity strengthened by their surroundings, and even non-religious families in such a society will be impacted by the religious environment, as is evident in Jewish Israel (Lazerwitz & Tabory, 2002). Therefore, examining the relationship between religion and the state in shaping public life and individuals' private sphere in Israel has highlighted the importance of understanding these factors' interconnectedness in understanding the country's fertility patterns.

Strict Relationship between religious institutions and the state authorities

The role of Judaism in shaping Israeli identity and culture

The last chapter includes a comprehensive analysis of the role of women in Israel, especially Israeli Jewish ones. Studying their status is essential in comprehending the fertility patterns and their implications on the life of Jewish women. Indeed, the determinant factor that profoundly influences the fertility rate and stands out most from this research is the status of women and how motherhood is constructed culturally. This emphasizes the importance of women's role in fertility analysis in any country, not just Israel. This last part aims to explore the factors that have contributed to Israel's high fertility rate, focusing primarily on the role of women regarded as individuals with reproductive duties. In the context of national security, the role of women in shaping these patterns should be considered.

Women living in a Jewish State

The thesis thus explores how political and religious discourses have constructed motherhood as a fundamental value for both the existence of Israel as a Jewish state

and women's identities since the formation of Israel. Women's identities and roles are shaped by religious and nationalist ideas that link their reproductive function to nation-building, resulting in societal pressure for women to prioritize reproduction (Berkovitch, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Bloomfield, 2009). These ideas, also rooted in religion, strongly impact women's choices regarding their bodies (Bloomfield, 2009). In Israeli society, motherhood is highly valued and seen as a central aspect of women's identity and purpose, leading to pressure on women's aspirations around family formation and shaping their reproductive choices (Berkovitch, 1997; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Bloomfield, 2009). As a result, women's rights and interests are often subordinated to the needs of the family and nation (Raucher, 2014).

The role of Nationalist and Religious Discourse in the Construction of Motherhood

Then, the chapter analyzes the role of religious institutions in promoting traditional gender roles through the Jewish law as well. Indeed, religious institutions play a significant role in shaping society, and this is particularly evident in the Orthodox Jewish community's influence on the construction of motherhood and reproductive decision-making. Religious institutions hold considerable power and influence in matters related to reproductive health and family planning in Israel (Goldscheider, 1996; Tal, 2016; Bloomfield, 2009; Steinfeld, 2011, 2015). This can present obstacles for women seeking access to reproductive health services and can constrain their autonomy and agency in making reproductive decisions. Due to religious control over civil matters, women's rights are often subordinated to men's rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Goldscheider, 1996). The Jewish law tends to perpetrate women's inferiority, where women's rights are unequal to men's.

How the religious institutions and Ultra-orthodox community shape Women's status and motherhood's discourse

Jewish Law plays a significant role in perpetrating women's inferior status

In such context, familism and pronatalism enforce this motherhood's importance. This last part indeed explores the conservative Israeli welfare, particularly pronatalism (focusing on the pro-natal policies such as children's allowances destinated to large families) and familism, and how much these conservative ideologies intersect with the overall fertility rates, women's agency and issues of reproductive rights and gender equality for women in Israel. Consequently, the author analyzes how conservative welfare with public policies and societal pressure for motherhood affect reproductive choices for Israeli women. Although Israel society is witnessing a

The Intersection of Familism and Pro-Natal Policies and their implications on women's agency

cultural transition toward a more individualistic and materialistic one, familism continues to be an important cultural value that supports pro-natal policies. This is exemplified by analyzing the demographic composition of Israeli society, characterized by high fertility rates, low divorce and high marriage rates. Familism and pro-natal policies are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and have been described as "conservative welfare" (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Stier et al., 2001) that promotes traditional gender roles and the centrality of the family unit. This reflects the economic disadvantage for single-parent families, particularly those headed by women (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Granek et al., 2017). These single-parent families are disproportionately affected by economic deprivation due to welfare policies in place, which are based on the traditional gender roles of male breadwinners and female caregivers (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002). This also affects reproductive rights and access to abortion, contraception, and fertility treatments. Policies promote childbirth through fertility treatment such as in Vitro Fertility Treatments, which is publicly subsidized, while restricting access to abortion and contraception; this reinforces traditional gender roles and positioning motherhood as a central aspect of women's lives and identities.

Implications on Reproductive rights such as Abortion and Fertility treatments

Therefore, to deeply understand the status of women, it is also fundamental to analyze the relationship between employment patterns among women and fertility patterns. This last part of the chapter first provides an excursus on the overall impact of public policies on motherhood and fertility, and analyzes Israel's public policies on maternity and women. Many research noted that the impact of leaves on fertility was limited and that other factors, such as the availability of childcare, work-family balance, and cultural values such as attitudes toward motherhood and childbearing, structural features of the labor market that ease mothers' employment and weaken the link between fertility and work, can be more critical in determining fertility rates, (Hakim, 2003; Pollak & Cotts-Watkins, 1993; Ekert-Jaffe & Stier, 2009; Testa, 2021; Thomas et al., 2022). Consequently, a combination of factors has contributed to Israel's relatively high fertility rate; besides social policies such as maternity leaves, both pronatalist ideology and programs and attitude towards motherhood, cultural values, political context, the structure of the workplace, and economic conditions (availability of childcare or inter-generational support) have affected the fertility patterns of Israel. Then the thesis delves into the dynamics of employment,

Dynamics of Conservative Welfare by analyzing Woman's Employment patterns, Education, and Household Behaviors

education, work-family balance, and household behaviors to understand the cultural and systemic factors contributing to the country's high fertility rates and their impact on women's agency and opportunities.

Although Israel is characterized by high levels of women's education and employment, also among mothers (Okun, 2011; Mandel & Birgier, 2016; Bowers, 2020), which could imply a society where women can be professionally realized, it results in a persistent traditional gender roles-based culture. Also, the job sector's structure is analyzed, displaying that Israeli women face gender segregation in low-wage fields, a wide-gender pay gap, and barriers to career advancement. The structure of the job market and employment patterns among women in Israel reflect the dominant ideologies of the society, particularly the emphasis on familism. This is exemplified by the fact that women comprise a large portion of the public sector workforce, characterized by a more family-friendly environment, part-time jobs, and collective work agreements, which provide additional benefits to employed mothers beyond those required by law such as maternity leaves or paid sick leave to care for ill children (Radai, 1997; Okun et al., 2007). The welfare state acts as an employer through the public sector, offering employment opportunities that consider women's dual responsibilities and preferred roles (Okun et al., 2007). Israel's authorities indeed "help" to balance work-family life by providing types of employment, such as those in the public sectors, characterized by a family-friendly environment, family support policies, flexible work arrangements, and greater tolerance of absenteeism for mothers, which may help to alleviate the conflict between work and family responsibilities (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Gornick & Thomasobs, 1998; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Kolberg, 1991; Kolberg & Esping-Andersen, 1991, Okun et al., 2007). Since the high pressure on women due to motherhood cultural value, these certain employments are mainly occupied by women, enabling them to work while taking care of their mothers' duties. All these factors contribute to the persistence of high fertility rates, which is also supported by social norms that foster traditional gender roles by emphasizing the importance of motherhood.

Israeli Society characterized by gender segregation in low-wage fields and a wide-gender pay gap

Role of the public sector in women's employment

Furthermore, the shortage of specific family policies since Israel's welfare is not as generous as certain Northern European countries (European Parliament, 2016; Okun et al., 2017; Vaknin, 2020; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022) are compensated by inter-generational support, which facilitates family formation by

being a source of caregiving. Additionally, the division of labor within households in Israel has remained unchanged, although preliminary studies conducted in Israel and other countries have also found that men's involvement in child care and housework increased during the last decades, with changes in various aspects of family life in recent decades (Kulik, 2007; Kulik & Erantal, 2009) also due to the coronavirus crisis (Bowers, 2020), which forced fathers to work at home. Indeed, the situation is still unequal, where women are still the primary caregivers, spending much more time taking care of all household chores, while men are primarily responsible for work (Cohen & Liani, 2009). Attitudes toward gender roles have remained relatively consistent, despite the significant increase in women's labor force participation in recent years. It may indicate that women's entry into the workforce has not significantly impacted subjective perceptions about motherhood duties or childcare responsibilities (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Consequently, this high fertility rate is supported by social norms which foster traditional gender roles by emphasizing the importance of motherhood and government policies that encourage childbirth. Israeli policies are more concentrated on increasing the employment rate among women than helping them advance their careers. This explains the high employment level among women, even mothers, but segregation into low-wage occupations; additionally, women are the primary caregivers. These policies thus support women's integration into the workforce while reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Persistence of traditional gender roles in the division of household chores

Therefore, the study of Israel's fertility rate offers a unique opportunity to examine the interplay between demographic, social, political, and cultural factors and how they shape reproductive choices and behaviors. Exploring how gender norms and stereotypes, as well as public policies, have shaped women's reproductive decisions and behaviors in Israel could also reveal insights into the role of women and their agency in reproductive choices. Additionally, the impact of the "demographic threat" on fertility in Israel can also offer a fascinating case to study how religious beliefs, practices, and both state and religious institutions shape fertility patterns and how they influence society. Indeed, the thesis shows that fertility in Israel is affected by a variety of factors, including political and religious discourses, conservative welfare policies and ideologies, and societal pressure for motherhood; especially this study has shed light on the complexity of the factors influencing Israel's high fertility rate and the crucial role of women in shaping these

patterns. The persistence of high fertility rates and conservative gender roles despite increasing employment among women and some changes towards a more egalitarian society suggests that the Israeli context, mainly culture, ideologies, social norms, and social policies, play a significant role in shaping women's work and family decisions, where women are still constrained by their traditional gender duties, when deciding how many hours or where to work or to quit their job if too demanding.

It is important to underline that Israel is undergoing a transition towards individualism and materialism, similar to that of Western-developed countries, driven by modernization and westernization (Goldscheider, 1996; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavee & Katz, 2003; Toren, 2003; Katz, 2009; Sharabi et al., 2019; Berkovitch & Manor, 2022). This shift from collectivist and altruistic values to individualist and materialistic values is reflected in the values and priorities of its citizens (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Sharabi et al., 2019). There has been significant progress in various labor market outcomes for women in Israel over the last 40 years, including increased participation in paid work and full-time employment, a decline in occupational segregation, and an increase in the percentage of women in prestigious occupations, such as management (Mandel & Birgier, 2016). Both men and women prioritize income and exciting work as the top two desired outcomes in their careers; for the first time, women's desire for high income and to be more independent is equal to that of men (Sharabi et al., 2019). Nevertheless, as the thesis shows, this transition is still at the beginning, and there is still a need for further improvements. The changes in the gender system are asymmetric, with women changing more than men who are more resistant (Mandel & Birgier, 2016).

The stagnation in normative attitudes towards traditional gender roles indeed shows that these rigid gender boundaries remain strong and have yet to be really defied. Therefore, Israel's high fertility rate is a phenomenon that offers a rich case study for understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of fertility dynamics, as well as their implications in women's lives from a demographic and social perspective.