

"Between the Market and the Temple: The Struggle over Sabbath in Israel"

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Globalization creates new opportunities for religions to cross boundaries and borders but also significant challenges in the form of global capitalism and consumer culture that threaten to secularize the public sphere. The purpose of this work, which focuses on the religious-secular debate in Israel, is to examine the impact of secularization on the status of religion. The work is based on a survey conducted among Jewish Israelis who shop on Saturdays in order to study their general belief system and the relation between consumer practices that contradict religious norms (restriction of work on the Sabbath), religious-secular identity and commitment to liberal values.

The commercial activity on Saturday is a striking example of the secularization of the Israeli public sphere as since the early 1990's out of town shopping centers cater to the desires of a growing public that, like elsewhere, perceives shopping centers as a favorable leisure activity. This change can be related to the power of global capitalism and consumer culture that undermines traditional ways of life. But, despite the evident secularization of the public sphere, religion remains an important force in Israeli society as large numbers of Israelis describe themselves as traditional, commitment to liberal values associated with secularization is weak, and, institutionally, relations between religion and state remain firm. To explain this gap, an analytical distinction is proposed here between two identified forms of secularization: an "ideological" secularism and a secularism associated with the "practice of every-day life". The ideological secularism is rooted in liberal values and is translated into a series of struggles over civic rights. The secularism of everyday life, conversely, is rooted in socio-economic changes associated with consumerism and consumer culture and is translated into "practical" decisions of leisure and consumption. Treating these two secularisms as separate allows us: a) to study the relations between them; b) to question the extent of the secularization of the public sphere; and c) to question the status of religion in contemporary Israeli society.