Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements

Neturei Karta

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Summary of movement

The Neturei Karta ('Guardians of the City' in Aramaic) is a relatively small movement within the milieu of anti-Zionist *haredim* (singular: *haredi*) or strictly Orthodox Jews. Although the millenarian idea that Zion – one of the Hebrew Bible's names for Jerusalem – would be restored to the Jewish people is deeply ingrained in Jewish thought, the vast majority of religious Jews opposed the Zionist movement when it emerged in the late nineteenth century. They believed that the Jews would only return to their promised land by divine auspices and not through human intervention to 'force the end', which they considered sinful. The Neturei Karta was born within this backdrop of religious anti-Zionism. Founded in 1938, Jerusalem, it is controversial for its extreme opposition to the existence of the state of Israel, including by supporting the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO). It is infamous for making common cause with former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a notable Holocaust denier, and Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam – an African American religious movement – who has often been accused of anti-Semitism. Although usually dismissed as a fringe phenomenon, the Neturei Karta's beliefs provide a valuable perspective on the notion of millenarianism within Judaism and how this influences intra-Jewish politics.

History/Origins

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A Neturei Karta follower in the US holding up an anti-Zionist placard (public domain)

The birth of the Neturei Karta is inextricably linked with the emergence of Zionism in the late nineteenth century, which culminated in the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In 1897, the Zionist Organisation defined Zionism as 'a movement seeking "to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law"' (Engel 2009: 1). The term 'Zionism' is derived from 'Zion', one of the Hebrew Bible's names for Jerusalem.

The idea of proactively finding a separate home for the Jews was initially a response to the rise in nationalism and citizenship reforms in nineteenth century Europe, alongside persistent anti-Semitism (Engel 2009: 14). In Western and Central European nation-states, Jews arguably entered the citizenry as equals as a result of various reforms. These liberalising reforms, however, did not remove significant levels of antisemitism. For instance, the conviction of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish Army Captain, for espionage against the Third French Republic in 1894 exposed just how prevalent antisemitism still was in France (Engel 2009: 48). Dreyfus's Jewishness was used to explain his 'treachery' not only by the monarchists and right-wing press who opposed the Republican regime, but also by a substantial segment of the French public. Dreyfus was eventually exonerated, but not before the damage from these antisemitic attitudes also affected the rest of Europe.

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The vast majority of Jews in Europe lived in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires (Engel 2009: 18). The breakup of these two multi-national Empires into sovereign nation-states initially took on a more ethnic-based, nationalist and often violently antisemitic character compared to developments in Western Europe. When antisemitic attitudes began to escalate in Western Europe as well, a number of Eastern European Jewish intellectuals developed ideas that could be termed 'Jewish nationalism' – that Jews in different locations and of different backgrounds were bound together as a single nation (Engel 2009: 22).

The notion of Jewish peoplehood was not entirely unheard of before the development of Jewish nationalism. The idea that God had promised the Land of Israel to the People of Israel in perpetuity had long been asserted in the Jewish tradition. Beginning in the sixth century BCE, however, the country was conquered by a succession of foreign powers, culminating in conquest by the Romans who effectively negated unique Jewish claims upon the territory (Engel 2009: 8). Jewish prayers then evolved such that the loss of their homeland became associated with God's punishment for the Jews' failure to obey divine law. Jewish liturgy came to include prayers of restoration, reflecting the hope that one day divine punishment would be lifted and the Jews' mastery over the promised land would be restored (Engel 2009: 9).

The basic idea of Zionism, however, was based less on ancient Jewish beliefs than on a practical concern for the existential safety of Jewish people (Engel 2009: 23). Zionism gained momentum when it was clear that antisemitism was rising in both Eastern and Western Europe, most notably after the Dreyfus affair in France.

As part of this development, however, the early proponents of Zionism did not initially call for the establishment of a sovereign state. They did call for mass Jewish emigration and resettlement – though not necessarily in Palestine, which was then still part of the Ottoman Empire. Some alternative suggestions included small regions in Asiatic Turkey, North America and East Africa (Engel 2009: 38, 61). It was only later that the decision to focus on Palestine gained traction.

Jewish immigration and resettlement in Palestine grew within this context but was not confined to those with explicitly Zionist motivations. Some Jews immigrated out of purely religious or practical reasons. Jerusalem was also already home to a significant population of Sephardim (singular: Sephardi), or Iberian Jews, who had settled there from the fifteenth century, seeking refuge from the Catholic Inquisition that culminated in the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal. They were welcomed by the Ottomans who recognised them as a *millet* – a confessional community that could have its own courts and apply its own laws (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 52).

In the nineteenth century, the Sephardim were joined by the Ashkenazim – European Jews mostly from Eastern Europe and Russia. However, the Ladino-speaking Sephardim, many of whom were also fluent in Turkish and Arabic, regarded the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim as uncultured (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 52). Also, the Sephardim, who were Ottoman citizens and thus had to pay significant taxes, felt threatened by the Ashkenazim, who chose not to become citizens. Instead, the Ashkenazim sought protection from European consuls and were able to raise their own monies to establish their own courts and other institutions (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 55).

The Ashkenazim eventually outnumbered the Sephardim. The combined numbers of Ashkenazim and Sephardim meant that Jerusalem became known as the centre of the old *yishuv*, or the 'old settlement', as

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the pre-Zionist Jews of Palestine became known to the growing Zionist community (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 51). A large proportion of the old *yishuv* started referring to themselves as *haredi* – a Modern Hebrew adjective derived from the term *hared*, found in the Book of Isaiah 66:2. The term can be translated as 'the one who trembles at the word of God', referring to Jews who are extremely rigorous in their religious practice. *Haredim*, the plural form, is mentioned in Isaiah 66:5. In Jerusalem, the *haredi* population – predominantly Ashkenazi with a substantial Sephardi minority – historically opposed Zionism. Today, the *haredim* are often referred to as 'Ultra-Orthodox', a term which many of them find pejorative.

By the time the Zionist Organisation was established in 1897, the majority of Orthodox rabbis within Israel and outside it fiercely opposed Zionism. As the Zionist movement grew, however, some Orthodox Jews came to align themselves with it despite disagreeing with its political premise. For them, the non-religious Zionists' primary concern with anti-Semitism was a mistake – the resettlement of historic Palestine was, instead, a solution to the spiritual crisis affecting diasporic Jews. This is the faction that formed the Mizrahi Party in 1902 (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 60). A significant number, however, became alarmed by the secular nationalism of the majority of Zionists and quickly left the movement. In 1912, they formed Agudat Israel to oppose Zionism worldwide (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 60).

In 1917, the British government released the Balfour Declaration in the midst of its confrontation against the Ottomans during the First World War. The Declaration led to the establishment of British Mandatory rule in Palestine after the Ottomans were defeated. During the British Mandate, Agudat Israel supported the peaceful immigration and resettlement of Jews in Palestine but still rejected the establishment of a Jewish state. Its leaders even tried to negotiate for these terms with Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, the great grandfather of King Abdullah II of contemporary Jordan. These moves were highly controversial and met with hostility from many Zionist activists. In 1924, for example, one Agudat Israel leader, Jacob Israel de Hahn, was shot dead by an agent of the Haganah, a paramilitary organisation and precursor to the Israeli Defence Force, for betraying the Zionist cause (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 61).

At the same time, the Agudat Israel began to make gradual concessions to Zionism, which angered many *haredim* in the old *yishuv*. In 1935, these *haredim* broke away and formed the Edah Haredit, or 'the community of those who fear God'. The Edah Haredit became an umbrella organisation for purist, anti-Zionist *haredi* groups that totally refused to participate in Zionist state-making (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 62).

The Arab uprising of 1936, however, triggered new complications. Among other things, it spurred the Agudat Israel to cooperate in the establishment of a fund for Jewish defence while some members of the Edah Haredit were elected to Jerusalem's municipal council in 1939, despite their misgivings about proto-Zionist state institutions. Amid these developments, the Neturei Karta splintered from the Agudat Israel in 1938 to preserve its more radical opposition to Zionism (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1997: 502).

Meanwhile, the escalating violence between Zionist Jews, anti-Zionist Jews and local Arabs forced the British government to commission an investigation by Lord William Wellesley Peel (1867-1937) on the effectiveness of Mandatory rule. In 1937, the Peel Commission published its findings which concluded that the British Mandate was untenable. The Commission recommended the partition of Palestine into three territories: a separate Jewish state; a British-controlled zone containing significant Christian holy sites; and an Arab-populated district attached to Transjordan (Engel 2009: 114–115). The partition proposal was

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eventually supported by the Zionists but bitterly opposed by the Arabs, who wanted a unified state with proportional representation (Bregman and El-Tahri 2000: 23).

The Mizrahi Party accepted the Commission's recommendation conditionally, asking that the Jewish state's constitution comply with *halakhah*, or Jewish religious law. Agudat Israel was split – its members in the Diaspora gave qualified support for partition, while members within Jerusalem opposed it. In the end, Agudat Israel narrowly voted in favour of partition, softening its anti-Zionist stance and becoming part of the newly created state of Israel's government (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 62).

These developments in relation to the establishment of the state of Israel were also profoundly affected by the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. Zionist activists within Israel were especially in favour of all Jews moving to the Jewish state as the only viable response. Their rationale was that Jews were simply not safe anywhere else if they could be massacred *en masse* in a country – Germany, in this case – in which they had lived and prospered for centuries and considered their homeland (Engel 2009: 144). At the same time, not all Diasporic Jews felt as strongly about mass emigration to Israel. A significant proportion of the six million Jews in the US, who constituted more than half of world Jewry, were happy to reside in America *and* remain Zionist, and disagreed with the notion that the Israeli government should have dominant influence over Zionism (Engel 2009: 145). It is against this backdrop that the groups that constituted the Edah Haredit and the Neturei Karta remained staunchly anti-Zionist.

In terms of numbers, the Neturei Karta is a minority within a minority. According to some estimates, its 5,000 or so followers are mostly concentrated in Jerusalem, with tiny pockets of influence in *haredi* communities in London and New York (Jewish Virtual Library 2017). The total population of *haredim*, meanwhile, is growing exponentially worldwide. *Haredim* now constitute nearly one-sixth of more than six million Israeli Jews and between 12 and 16 percent of the 270,000 Jews in Britain (Lavi 2014; Staetsky and Boyd 2015: 5–6). Despite its small size, however, the Neturei Karta has exerted considerable influence on debates about the relationship between Judaism and Zionism which continue to this day.

A documentary film about a Neturei Karta member in Jerusalem can be viewed here (Chaplin 2006)

Beliefs

The Neturei Karta's beliefs need to be contextualised within the landscape of Orthodox Judaism more generally. Orthodox Judaism grew as a movement in the nineteenth century in opposition to the *haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, and the emergence of Reform and Liberal denominations within Judaism (Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1994: 99–100). Among other things, Orthodox Jews objected to revisions of Jewish liturgy in Reform and Liberal Judaism, especially the downplaying or removal of references to the restoration of Zion and the coming of the Messiah (Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1994: 96). Orthodox Jews also reasserted the traditional Jewish belief that the Torah – the first five books of the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – was literally revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai by God (Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1994: 11). They rejected critical attempts to study the human origins of biblical authorship. Strict adherence to *halakhah*, or religious law, also became a central component of Orthodox Judaism (Geberer 2013).

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There is a difference, however, between Jews who identify as Modern Orthodox and the *haredim*. Modern Orthodox Jews usually dress similarly to the majority of the population, except that men might wear the skullcap (*yarmulke* in Yiddish, or *kippah* in Hebrew), and women might wear longer-length or longer-sleeved dresses. There are also fewer career obstacles for Modern Orthodox Jewish men and women, many of whom often go into the professions if they are from middle-class backgrounds. In contrast, *haredi* Jews are often called 'Black-Hat Orthodox', a reference to their distinctive clothing. They observe strict gender segregation – for example, in the past, the *haredim*'s uncompromising insistence on gender segregation on public transport in Israel sparked off bitter protests by non-*haredi* Israelis (Scheindlin, Kaufman, and Gurvitz 2011). Also, *haredim* are more likely to go into business or to become religious teachers or functionaries instead of entering the professions (Geberer 2013).

There is also considerable internal diversity amongst the *haredim*. The most well-known communities are Hasidic Jews, who trace their origins to the eighteenth-century movement led by Israel ben Eliezer (c. 1700-1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov ('Master of the Good Name'). Hasidim can usually be recognised by their dress – Hasidic men characteristically wear black hats, beards and side-curls, black suits, and white shirts, along with their *tzitzit*, or ritual fringes attached to their prayer shawls. Hasidic women usually wear high-necked dresses that cover their wrists and knees – if they are married, they cover their heads with a *sheitel* or wig (Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1994: 86–87). Hasidim can also be intensely devoted to their *rebbes* – the plural form for the Yiddish equivalent of the Hebrew 'rabbi' – sometimes believing that they have near-supernatural powers (Geberer 2013). These outward characteristics often mask the divergent views on Israel and Zionism amongst different Hasidic groups. The Satmar, for example, are vehemently anti-Zionist while the Lubavitchers, also known as the Chabad movement, are much more pro-Israel (Geberer 2013).

Although its followers are often mistaken for Hasidim because of their appearance, the Neturei Karta is actually *haredi* Litvish – a Yiddish term for Ashkenazim who follow Lithuanian religious beliefs and rites. Historically, the majority of the Litvish opposed the Hasidim and were part of the Baal Shem Tov's Mitnaggdim ('Opponents') (Jewish Roots 2017). In practice, however, the distinction between Hasidim and Mitnaggdim matter less to the Neturei Karta than the anti-Zionist credentials of the various *haredi* groups. One of the Neturei Karta's more prominent rabbis, Moshe Hirsch (1923/24-2010), once responded to the question of how many Neturei Karta there were in Jerusalem by saying:

> *All those…who want to link the past to the present and not break with it as Zionism is trying to do, transforming the Jewish people from a religious entity based on the teaching of God to a national entity, a godless national entity, they are Neturei Karta (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 65).*

Millennial Beliefs

A strict and uncompromising interpretation of millennialism is integral to the Neturei Karta's raison d'être and informs most of its beliefs and practices. As with other anti-Zionist *haredi* groups, the Neturei Karta bases its strict anti-Zionist stance on three sacred oaths in the Babylonian Talmud. The term 'Talmud' refers to the canonical rabbinical teachings in the early *yeshivot* (Jewish academies). There are two

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compilations – the less influential Palestinian Talmud, compiled around the early third century CE in Western Aramaic, and the more prestigious Babylonian Talmud, compiled around two centuries later in Eastern Aramaic. The Babylonian Talmud remains the main text studied in contemporary *yeshivot*, *kollelim* (higher academies) and *batei ha-midrash* (houses of study) (Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1994: 49).

The three divine oaths that apply to Israel and the nations, as codified in the Babylonian Talmud, are: Israel should not calculate or predict the advent of the messianic era; Israel should not incite the nations; and the nations should not oppress Israel excessively (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 65). However, it is difficult to ascertain the status of these oaths by referring to other major *halakhic* works. For example, they are not mentioned in the *Mishneh Torah* ('Repetition of the Torah'), the *halakhic*

code written by Maimonides (1135/1138-1204), considered one of the foremost rabbis in Jewish history (Ravitzky 1996: 63). The religious Zionist counterclaim that resettling the Holy Land is a biblical commandment is also absent from Maimonides's enumeration of the 613 commandments, or *mitzvot*, contained in the Torah (Ravitzky 1996: 64). Yet many anti-Zionist *haredim* and religious Zionists interpret Maimonides's silence as self-evident endorsement for their positions.

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Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, or Rambam. Wellcome Images, a website operated by Wellcome Trust, a global charitable foundation based in the United Kingdom.

The lack of emphasis on settling the Land of Israel in the thought of Maimonides was in fact challenged by another leading medieval rabbi, Nahmanides (1194-1270), particularly in his written criticism of Maimonides's *Sefer Hamitzvot* ('Book of Commandments'). In a famous comment that is often cited by religious Zionists today, Nahmanides asserted the importance of conquering and settling the Land of Israel in every generation and by every individual Jew (Firestone 2017). Yet when Nahmanides's more activist

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stance about settling the Land of Israel gained popularity, opponents to the idea reinvigorated the three oaths and worked them more assertively into the realm of halakhic debate (Ravitzky 1996: 220).

Anti-Zionist *haredim* believe that Zionism violates all three oaths by 'forcing the End' because Zionism is about encouraging *aliyah* – immigration and resettlement – and establishing a state *before* the coming of the Messiah. This, in turn, has incited aggression from the Arab nations and exacerbated anti-Semitism in other nations (Ravitzky 1996: 47, 56). According to these anti-Zionist *haredim*, the Jews will only be delivered from exile *after* the coming of the Messiah, not the other way around.

Thus, for anti-Zionist *haredim*, the very existence of the state of Israel is illegitimate regardless of whether it conforms to the *halakhah*, as advocated by religious Zionists. At the extreme end of anti-Zionist *haredim*, the Neturei Karta holds that the creation of the state of Israel – via the worldly and political activism of its Zionist advocates – is the ultimate heresy, because it usurps the messianic prerogative (Ravitzky 1996: 68). Instead, Jews are divinely ordained to remain in exile and to refrain from politics until the coming of the Messiah (Ravitzky 1996: 62).

Some anti-Zionist *haredi* teachings also stress that the Holy Land is not a utopian abode for all Jewish people but rather is the site of a cosmic struggle, fraught with danger. 'Unworthy' Jews who move there, especially those who have been influenced by 'false ideas' in the Diaspora, will be struck with terrible spiritual decline. These beliefs have only been strengthened by the policies and social realities in the modern nation-state of Israel, where many non-religious Jews neither observe the holy Sabbath nor obey other *halakhic* obligations (Ravitzky 1996: 50–51).

This black-and-white anti-Zionist theology has also informed the interpretation of the Holocaust amongst the Neturei Karta, the Edah Haredit and the Satmar Hasidim. Many other *haredim* were theologically uneasy about the Holocaust, which raised painful questions about messianic redemption, the role of Jewish people in the world, the implications of Jewish passivity and the need for political sovereignty. Some major *haredi* factions even avoided these questions and denied that the Holocaust held any theological meaning (Ravitzky 1996: 59). For the Neturei Karta, Edah Haredit and Satmar Hasidim, however, the Holocaust was a collective punishment on the Jewish people for the offense of Zionism. According to this rationale, catastrophes that befell the Jews were not the result of hostilities from their anti-Semitic enemies, but because of sins committed by Jews. To them, the collective sin of Zionism necessitated collective divine punishment, in which those who persecuted the Jews no longer cared to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked (Ravitzky 1996: 61, 66).

As an extension of this logic, the Neturei Karta and other anti-Zionist *haredi* groups believe that the biblical Israel – not the modern state – can be redeemed by penitence alone (Ravitzky 1996: 61). This is why, for the Neturei Karta, any kind of political or institutional cooperation between Orthodox Jews and Zionists does not legitimise the latter but discredits the former (Ravitzky 1996: 67). This has translated into the Neturei Karta's zealous withdrawal from all institutions of the state – its followers do not participate in elections to the Knesset, or Israeli parliament; they do not enter government institutions; and they do not accept any funds from the state or its representatives, even to support their *yeshivot* and communal activities (Ravitzky 1996: 67). By contrast, some other *haredim* have organised as political parties and play a pivotal role in the Knesset. These are, namely, Yahadut Ha-torah (or United Torah Judaism, a coalition of the predominantly Ashkenazi Agudat Israel and Degel Ha-torah parties) and Shas (a Sephardi *haredi* party)

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(Kook, Harris, and Doron 1998: 1–2).

In theory, the Neturei Karta nevertheless feels obliged to uphold a sense of Jewish solidarity, which informs its followers' protests against Zionism and the Israeli state to save the Jewish people from future damnation. Also, several of the movement's rabbis call for divine, rather than military or political, destruction of the state of Israel without the shedding of any Jewish blood (Ravitzky 1996: 78). For them, it is up to God to destroy the wicked – they would therefore never organise paramilitary activity to overthrow the state. According to their beliefs, this would make them no different from the Zionists (Ravitzky 1996: 76).

At the same time, the Neturei Karta is unique among anti-Zionist *haredim* because of its willingness to support the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the former Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a Holocaust denier. Although these actions could be seen as contradicting the Neturei Karta's commitment to political passivity, it sees these alliances as a corrective to Zionism and as a way of upholding the three divine oaths – reversing Zionist efforts to 'force the End'; undoing the incitement of other nations; and upholding the exilic obligation for Jews to be ruled by Gentiles (Ravitzky 1996: 77). When Neturei Karta representatives attended a Holocaust-denying conference in Iran in 2006, however, the Satmar and the Edah Haredit issued strong condemnations, rebuking them for going too far (Shamir and Press 2006; Wagner 2006). Many non-*haredi* Jews are also particularly resentful because the Neturei Karta sees *them* as beyond the pale.

The Neturei Karta's extreme opposition to Zionism and the state of Israel is a little-known aspect of Jewish millenarianism amongst many non-Jews, who would probably be more aware of religious Zionist groups in Israel and in the Diaspora. Yet the Neturei Karta's anti-Zionism is a crucial example of the range of interpretations of millenarianism and apocalypticism within contemporary Judaism. As a movement, the Neturei Karta is opposed to *any*
activity that dilutes or challenges its purely messianic designation of the Land of Israel.

Practices

The religious practices of the Neturei Karta do not differ significantly from those of other Orthodox Jews, especially the *haredim*. These would include strict observance of the Shabbat, or Sabbath – refraining from all work from Friday evening to Saturday evening – and other injunctions in the *halakhah*. As strictly Orthodox Jews, many *haredim* – including the Neturei Karta – might also object to the use of computers, television and mobile telephones at all times (Chaplin 2006).

These religious practices are complicated, however by the spectrum of political attitudes among Orthodox Jews towards the state of Israel – from 'radical delegitimation to virtual beatification' (Ravitzky 1996: 7). As anti-Zionist purists, the Neturei Karta's followers refuse any material support from the state – for instance, they even refuse to buy 'Zionist' milk or bread (Chaplin 2006). Moshe Hirsch (1923/24-2010), a prominent Neturei Karta rabbi and self-styled 'foreign minister' of the movement, immigrated to Jerusalem in 1955 but never became an Israeli citizen (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 64).

The group can be especially scathing towards other *haredim* who compromise with the state even slightly.

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When the Edah Haredit – the umbrella body of anti-Zionist *haredim* based in Jerusalem – accepted some state funding for its schools in the 1970s, the Neturei Karta condemned it in its newspaper. In retaliation, the Edah Haredit issued a *herem*, or ban of excommunication, against Rabbi Haim Katzenelbogen, the leader of the Neturei Karta at the time (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 66).

Similarly, the Neturei Karta has often adopted a harsher stance compared with other *haredim* in other matters. In the 1970s, for example, *haredi* residents in the Jewish settlement of Ramot protested against the construction of a six-lane motorway which would connect them to Jerusalem. They objected because the secular settlers would inevitably violate holy law by driving to their neighbourhoods on the Shabbat (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 101).

After numerous protests by *haredi* settlers, the road finally opened in 1978. But the *haredi* protesters then took to throwing stones at motorists from the bluffs above. Eventually, some *haredi* factions agreed with the government's proposal to build a US$10 million barrier that would block the sight of passing vehicles. This was rejected by the Neturei Karta and other *haredi* factions. The government then proposed the construction of a US$90 million bypass, which was again blocked by the Neturei Karta (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 101).

The Neturei Karta and its *haredi* allies then intensified their protests by placing nails along the road. Eventually, the police were called in to arrest the demonstrators and raided an anti-Zionist Hasidic *yeshiva* in Jerusalem. The protests escalated, this time supported by the Edah Haredit, whilst Neturei Karta supporters in London picketed in front of the Israeli embassy, carrying banners comparing the Israeli police to the Nazis. The demonstrations only ended when the minister of the interior, Yosef Burg, flew to New York to ask the Satmar *rebbe* there to telephone the Edah Haredit in Jerusalem and ask them to call off further protests (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 102).

Over the following decades, the Neturei Karta has employed similarly overt tactics in its protests against Israel on various other issues. In London, for example, the group regularly attends pro-Palestine demonstrations in Trafalgar Square and in front of the Israeli embassy. Its supporters sometimes carry the Palestinian flag whilst wearing their prayer shawls and fur-rimmed hats during these protests, which often take place on the Shabbat. Because they are not allowed to drive on the Sabbath, they make the journey from their homes in Stamford Hill to central London entirely on foot, which can take up to two hours. Their visibility often makes them vulnerable to aggression by other, pro-Israeli Jews (Klaushofer 2002).

In this way, the Neturei Karta are atypical amongst most anti-Zionist *haredim*, who confine their often-vehement disagreements about Zionism to within the *haredi* community. One significant exception is the Lubavitch or Chabad movement, which is relatively pro-Zionist and pro-Israel, and actively engages in outreach towards non-*haredi* Jews (Kahn-Harris 2014: 64). Generally, however, it can be argued that anti-Zionist positions within the relatively more insular *haredi* communities attract far less attention than the anti-Zionist views held by non-religious or non-Orthodox Jews. Anti-Zionist groups such as the Satmar Hasidim hardly ever articulate their views in public in the Diaspora and rarely have contact with non-*haredi* Jews. The Neturei Karta is exceptional in that it expresses its anti-Zionist stance very visibly and publicly even though, as part of the *haredi* community, it remains insular in other ways (Kahn-Harris 2014: 75).

A short film about the Neturei Karta in London can be viewed here (Englehart 2016)

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Controversies

The extreme and controversial stance of the Neturei Karta towards Israel and Zionism, coupled with its highly visible *haredi* appearance, often makes it stand out for different reasons in the eyes of different parties. Pro-Palestine activists often hail it as an exemplar of anti-Zionist expressions of Judaism, while pro-Israel or Zionist Jews are far more contemptuous of it (Klaushofer 2002). Neturei Karta followers have often been subjected to harassment and even violence by Zionist supporters, while asserting that their beliefs are non-violent. In some instances, however, the line between the movement's non-violent beliefs and its actions has been blurry.

Between the 1930s and 1970s, for example, the Neturei Karta embarked on a series of modesty campaigns under the leadership of Rabbi Amram Blau (1894-1974), who was also one of the movement's founders. The first phase of the campaigns, in the 1930s and 1940s, was confined within *haredi* neighbourhoods in Jerusalem and focused mostly on women's dress. During this phase, Blau established modesty patrols under the auspices of the Edah Haredit to enforce dress codes – often coercively – upon *haredi* women (Inbari 2012: 110).

After the establishment of the state of Israel, these modesty campaigns moved beyond the confines of *haredi* neighbourhoods, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. This next phase of the campaigns targeted mixed-gender sporting and cultural activities in non-religious parts of Jerusalem. These protests began as small vigils but grew significantly after the police intervened and assaulted and arrested demonstrators (Inbari 2012: 111). In one protest against a youth club run by a working mothers' organisation, demonstrations were held daily for nearly a year. Approximately 170 demonstrators were arrested in total – Blau was detained for 21 days for participating in an unlawful gathering. Even then, he rejected a compromise from the state to build a wall which would separate the club from Mea She'arim, one of the oldest *haredi* neighbourhoods in Jerusalem's old *yishuv* (Inbari 2012: 119). During these decades, the Neturei Karta's protest activities were sustained substantially through donations from its supporters in the Diaspora (Inbari 2012: 120).

More controversially in connection with these modesty campaigns, two young *haredi* men torched Eros, a sex shop in Jerusalem, in 1972. They were arrested by the police – one of them was sentenced to one year in prison, the other to 18 months. Their use of violence caused an outcry in *haredi* circles – however, their actions were justified by Blau, based upon a passage in the book of Numbers 25 (Inbari 2012: 121).

In this passage, Pinchas (also spelled Phineas or Phinehas)—the grandson of Aaron the priest— becomes enraged and kills two people whom he observes having illicit sexual relations. Even though Pinchas acts unilaterally and violates the commandment not to commit murder, he escapes divine punishment. Based on this passage, Blau contended that he would never order his followers to commit murder but, like Pinchas, the two men acted violently out of their deep love and respect for the Torah. According to Blau, their faithfulness to the Torah outweighed the severity of their offence (Inbari 2012: 123).

In the 1960s, however, Blau was also the subject of a moral controversy when he became secretly engaged to a French convert to Judaism, Ruth Ben-David. Their marriage provoked a scandal among *haredim* because it explicitly defied a ruling from the Badatz – the Edah Haredit's court – forbidding the

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union. The ruling was sought by Blau's own sons who objected to the marriage of their father, who was 70, to Ben-David, 44, less than twelve months after their mother's death. Even the Satmar Hasidim intervened, offering Ben-David 25,000 Israeli Pounds if she would reject Blau's marriage proposal. In the aftermath of the wedding in 1965, Blau's sons shunned him – one of them, Uri, eventually became appointed leader of the Neturei Karta. Under Uri Blau's leadership, the Neturei Karta also severed its ties with the Edah Haredit and further internal factionalism ensued (Ettinger 2010).

The Neturei Karta's subsequent public activities and positions thus also need to be contextualised within this history of internal friction. Most notably, the endorsement of the PLO in the 1980s came from the more group's more radical wing, led by Moshe Hirsch (Friedland and Hecht 1996: 64). In the 1990s, Hirsch was attacked by a man who threw acid on him as he was leaving a synagogue in Jerusalem. Hirsch lost his left eye and had to wear a prosthetic glass eye, but the attack did not alter his political convictions (Baram 2010). The US branch's overtures towards Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam in the late 1990s was also led by supporters of this more radical faction (Noel 1999). According to some estimates, there are only around a hundred Neturei Karta followers who are active in this wing. The majority of the movement's followers, numbering in the few thousands worldwide, simply withdraw from Israeli state institutions and non-*haredi* Jews without getting involved in public protests (Levy 2012).

In recent years, this radical faction of the Neturei Karta has been embroiled in widespread protests by many *haredim* against compulsory conscription into the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Upon the establishment of the state of Israel, *yeshiva* students were granted exemptions from army conscription, partly because they formed a small minority of the population that was eligible for military service anyway (Heller 2017). In the following decades, however, the *haredi* population has grown exponentially and there have been growing calls for compulsory conscription to apply to them. In line with these developments, the IDF has accommodated the religious needs of *voluntary* recruits from *haredi* backgrounds. In September 2017, the Israeli High Court struck down the exemption for *yeshiva* students from compulsory military service as unconstitutional (Rabinowitz and Lis 2017).

The court ruling was delivered in response to an earlier amendment by the Knesset in 2015 to the Equal Service Law that allowed eligible *haredim* to defer their conscription until 2023. The amendment exacerbated anti-*haredi* sentiments among non-religious Israeli Jews while also fuelling fierce anti-IDF protests by many *haredim*, in which the Neturei Karta has been particularly vocal. In September 2016, a group of twenty Neturei Karta followers broke into the house of a pro-IDF Lubavitcher rabbi in Jerusalem and condemned him and his wife for their stance (Times of Israel Staff 2016).

These tensions do not appear to be abating, with President Benjamin Netanyahu's government still attempting to grant concessions to anti-conscription *haredim* with proposed new legislation (Harkov and Sharon 2017). Against this background, the Neturei Karta – while often dismissed as a radical fringe sect – provides a glimpse into the different layers of intra-Jewish conflict within Israel and in the Diaspora.

A short film about anti-IDF protests in Israel by the haredim can be viewed here (Xu 2014)

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