

CfP: GraphHNR 2023 – joint conference of the HNR community and Graphs & Networks in the Humanities, 18.–21.07.2023, Mainz

Halakhic Creativity of Sephardic Rabbis Educated in Israel after 1948: A Network Analysis

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Historically, Sephardic Rabbis have been known for their moderate religious leadership within their communities, following the principle of the 'golden mean' and seeking to organically adapt Halacha to contemporary challenges.¹ In the first decades after Israel's independence, young Israeli scholars of Sephardic ethnicity acquired proficiency in Rabbinic studies not in traditional Sephardic frameworks, but rather in Ashkenazi and/or Haredi (ultra-orthodox) institutions. The first generation of these scholars 'came of age' after the Six-Day War and began publishing Rabbinical works in the 1970s. They were among the founders of the Shas political party in the early 1980s and their students – the second generation of Israeli-Sephardi scholars educated in Israel – are now prominent Rabbis in their own right and have disciples of their own (third generation).² Our research aims to study the halakhic writings of these Rabbis, in order to understand the extent to which their long-term training in ultra-Orthodox/Ashkenazi frameworks has impacted their halakhic ethos.

To facilitate our research, we compiled an inventory of the halakhic writings of Sephardic Rabbis educated in Israel after 1948. Our inventory now includes significant biographical and bibliographic data on hundreds of Rabbis and thousands of books and articles. It includes biographical information about the authors, such as their ethnicity, date of birth and death, relatives, marriage connections, and educational background, as well as bibliographic information about the texts, including the subjects, publishers, and citations. We also collected information about the connections between these Rabbis, such as family relationships, teacher-student relationships, and Haskamot (pre-publication endorsement by senior Rabbis of books composed by younger scholars), including temporal information, to allow us to understand the development of these connections over time.

The inventory is stored and managed using the online framework Airtable, which provides a user-friendly interface for organizing and accessing the data. To analyze the data, we used a combination of Python programming and Gephi software for network analysis. We employed various network and temporal network measurements, including centrality, community detection, degrees of nodes, edges, and paths,³ as well as assortativity (the tendency to be connected to similar nodes).⁴ This allowed us to identify patterns and trends in the data and draw meaningful conclusions.

Our initial findings reveal that certain Ashkenazi figures tend to command high authority over Sephardic Rabbis of this period. However, this tendency is not overwhelmingly prevalent. . We also detected very limited preference of Rabbis to Rabbis sharing their ethnicity. The genres and structures of books authored by this cohort differ from those common in the of the Ashkenazi community and show a similarity to those of

¹ Zvi Zohar, **Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East**, 2013.

² Kimmy Caplan, Studying Haredi Mizrahim in Israel : trends, achievements, and challenges, **Studies in Contemporary Jewry** 22 (2007) 169-192; Nissim Leon, The Ethnic Structuring of "Sephardim" in Haredi Society in Israel, **Jewish Social Studies**, Volume 22, Number 1, Fall 2016, pp. 130-160.

³ Petter Holme, Modern temporal network theory: a colloquium in Petter Holme and Jari Saramäki, Hrsg, **Temporal Network Theory**. Computational Social Sciences. Cham: Springer International Publishing. 2019

⁴ Mark EJ Newman, Assortative Mixing in Networks, **Physical review letters** 89, no. 20 (2002)

Sephardic Rabbis in previous generations. Additionally, our analysis reveals geographical dynamics, with the activity of Israeli Rabbis of Sephardic ethnicity concentrated in larger, central cities with high concentrations of ultra-orthodox population, mostly Ashkenazi, rather than in peripheral areas where most of the population is Sephardi. Overall, these findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Sephardic Halakha in current and recent times and highlight elements of significant cultural and religious originality and creativity within this largely unexplored realm.

Additionally, this research has significant implications for the field of historical network research and the Digital Humanities. It identifies elements of significant cultural and religious originality and creativity that may enrich the world of Israeli and Jewish culture. The use of computational tools and techniques allowed for a more comprehensive and efficient analysis of the data, providing valuable insights that would not have been possible through traditional methods alone. Further research in this area could continue to explore the connections and relationships within Sephardic halakhic networks and provide a deeper understanding of the complexity and diversity of contemporary Sephardic Judaism.

Our research on the halakhic writings of Sephardic Rabbis in Israel fits well within the conference theme of "Graphs and Networks in the fourth dimension – time and temporality as categories of connectedness." Through our analysis of the connections and relationships between the authors and institutions involved, we were able to examine how these connections developed over time and identify patterns and trends in the data. By including temporal information in our analysis, we were able to better understand the continuity or discontinuity of Sephardic halakhic tradition and the influence of Ashkenazi/Haredi paradigms on these writings. The study of temporal data in the Digital Humanities presents unique challenges, but our use of network analysis techniques allowed us to effectively explore these connections and gain insights into the evolution of Sephardic Halakha over the past 50 years.