ISRAELI POLICIES OF IMMIGRATION AND IMMIGRANT
ABSORPTION: THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM IN THE
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF THE
MIZRAHIM [Note]
From the *Yishuv* [1] to the early years of Israeli statehood
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Milton Gordon, one of the most eminent American sociologists, describes
three ideologies determining the assimilation policies of the American
government and national discourse in regard to immigrants in different
periods of American history. Analysing three conceptual models, which
came to be known as 'Anglo-Conformity', 'Melting Pot', and 'Cultural
Pluralism' in his book *Assimilation in American Life*, [2] Gordon seeks to
explain how the nation 'in the beginning largely white, Anglo-Saxon, and
Protestant, ha[d] absorbed over 41 million immigrants and their descendants
from variegated sources and welded them into the contemporary American
people'. [3] The American experience of nation-building on the basis of
various immigrant groups is unquestionably one of the most significant for
the study of assimilation, and did in fact set the conceptual framework for it.
In this paper I will argue that the ideologies of immigrant absorption
mentioned above, which dominated the American scene at various times and
under a range of political and social conditions, can be applied to Israeli
immigration as well.

To be sure, Israeli experience differs significantly from that of any
other country, though the strategy of nation-building through immigration
has been also applied elsewhere. Although Israel's various aliyot were
composed of people coming from different cultures and countries (more
than one hundred in all), with variegated backgrounds and mentalities, the
immigrants were supposed to be united by the organic bonds of common
ancestry, fate, religion, culture, or psychological make-up. Regardless of the
relative ethnic homogeneity of its immigrants – which came into question
with the influx of ex-Soviet *olim*, more than thirty percent of whom did not
halachically qualify as Jews at all – Israel had experienced significant
difficulties in its struggle to realise the Zionist objective expressed by Zeev
Sterrnhell [4] as the creation of a 'state of Jewish people and . . . a melting
pot in which Jews lose their various former identities and gain a single new
identity'. The main issue I shall tackle in this paper is the causes behind the
drawbacks in the absorption of immigrants as designed and put into practice
by the Jewish state.

In order to take an objective stand on the examined issue, it is absolutely
essential to stress the following. The three theories of assimilation described
by Gordon should not only be viewed as descriptive models but also, and
most essentially, as goal models describing objectives which were sought
but not achieved. In the case of the *Yishuv,* and especially in the period
following the proclamation of Israeli statehood, a scholar is confronted with
a stunning tendency: the goal models do not correspond to the actual steps

undertaken to achieve the desired result. Fleshing out this claim further I will argue that the assimilation policies of Mandate Palestine, and later of the Israeli state, had in fact a dubious nature. With regard to the European immigrants the government applied the 'melting pot' model, while the non-European citizens were expected to adapt their cultures to the European core group. [5] Thus, the puzzle of *Yishuv*/Israeli assimilation policies lies in the coexistence of two state ideologies, or rather two contradictory messages broadcast simultaneously by different agents of the socio-political system and addressed to different immigrant groups.

Due to the specificity of the subject, comprehensive research should rely upon the combination of primary sources (political agendas of the ruling elite, speeches of politicians, media propaganda, and so on) meant to provide the set of ideal goals or ambitions, and the record of real measures and achievements, which will not necessarily be in line with the objectives proclaimed. Since my access to Israeli sources was very much limited, the primary illustrations for my argument came from the literature on the social and political history of the country, which was not specifically dedicated to the problems of assimilation. Therefore, the legitimacy of the conclusions I am coming to in this research shall be evaluated through the ambiguous nature of Israeli assimilation policies (as designed and carried out), and the unfortunate paucity and incompleteness of the primary sources I used to support it.

With this in mind, I shall, nevertheless, seek to apply the theories of assimilation elaborated by Milton Gordon to the story of *Yishuv*/Israeli immigration. The first of them, termed 'Anglo-Conformity' by Stewart and Mildred Wiese Coles, [6] presupposes complete obliteration and renunciation of the immigrant's cultural background in favour of the norms and values prevailing in the host society. This implies the presence of an already existing strong cultural canon and the use of authoritative tools to sustain and promote it against alien influences. The 'melting pot' model, which was so often referred to as the desirable mode of adjustment for immigrants both by Zionist ideologues and the politicians of the would-be Israeli state, involves the simultaneous blending of *all* immigrant and indigenous stocks and folkways into *one* unique new kind of culture. This model is more liberal, but its success is heavily dependant upon a number of variables, for instance, on the cultural compatibility of the immigrant groups, the ratio of the immigrants in the demographic composition of the host population, the sequence of waves of immigration, (the earlier groups being more likely to merge into the society), and so on.

Finally, 'cultural pluralism' allows for the equal representation of each and every brought-in tradition within the broader social framework that results in a culturally heterogeneous or rather multicultural canon. However, the latter model obviously pertains to societies with a well established democratic civil tradition and a clearly pronounced public consensus upon the major national issues, which allows for the political and social integration of the immigrants, regardless of their ethnic or cultural identity. Consequently, I will argue, that for the nation-building process, and especially one that did not grow out of an

already existing national awareness, and an agreed-upon umbrella culture, the liberal concept of 'cultural pluralism' can hardly be applicable at all. Taking into consideration the culture-making process of Israel, which on the one hand sought to negate the traditional legacy of Diaspora Jewry, and on the other, to invent a completely new Hebrew tradition supposedly springing out of the pre-dispersal Jewish civilisation, the first two assimilation strategies are more probable actors competing for attention on the Israeli social and political scene.

IMMIGRATION AND IMMIGRANT ABSORPTION IN THE PRE-1948 JEWISH PALESTINE (*YISHUV*)

According to the scheme elaborated by S. N. Eisenstadt in his book *The Absorption of Immigrants*, [7] the strategy of immigrant absorption implemented by the *Yishuv* should clearly be classified within 'the melting pot' model. Among its most characteristic elements Eisenstadt stresses strong neutralisation of the immigrants' cultural and social backgrounds, the absence or poor development of a particularist identification by any immigrant group, total transformation of leadership according to the institutional demands of the country, the complete dispersal of different waves of immigrants among the various strata of the different institutional structures, and so on. [8] Throughout this paper I shall challenge this scheme by arguing that it merely (and again, not entirely) pertained to the European immigrants who came to Palestine before the establishment of the Israeli state. To my mind, Eisenstadt underestimates, and even overlooks, significant social and cultural divisions within the society of the *Yishuv* which make it difficult to view its absorption policies (at both their theoretical and practical stages) exclusively in terms of the 'melting pot' theory.

To begin with, it is indeed simplistic and erroneous to presume that the issue of ethnicity, not mentioned in the above-cited scheme, was not relevant to the national discourse of pre-1948 Jewish Palestine, since the large-scale immigration of non-European Jews started only after the establishment of Israel. Long before the beginning of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine a clearly pronounced schism divided its Jewish community into Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Before the large scale Ashkenazi immigration in the second half of the nineteenth century the Sephardim constituted something of a Jewish aristocracy in Palestine, while the Ashkenazim were usually ultra religious (either descendants of the Hasidim who arrived in Palestine in 1777 or their opponents, the Jerusalem *Perushim*, or those elderly Jews making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land). Taking into consideration the specific occupational constraints imposed by the religious mode of life, we can state that the Ashkenazim were entirely dependent upon the charity coming from the European, and later mainly American, diaspora. However, certain activities, such as *Halukhah* [fund raising] or the representation of Jewish interests in the diaspora were enacted jointly by the two communities through their emissaries in Europe. In general, however, Ashkenazim and

Sephardim formed two separate entities, which not only differed in their lifestyle, occupational profiles, level of wealth and modernisation, but also in the modes of synagogue liturgy. These differences culminated in the establishment of a dual Rabbinate in 1917. [9]

When the Labour Zionists, the majority of whom were of East European origin, began to arrive in large numbers in Palestine, and especially during the period of British Mandate over Palestine, the very character of the Jewish community was significantly modified. This manifested itself in the eradication of Sephardi domination, first demographically and then politically, but it did not lead to the complete blending or fusion of the two communities, since the religious authority was already separated between the chief Ashkenazi and chief Sephardi Rabbis. Nevertheless, this separation did not result in grave social tensions, however hard the British authorities tried to play on the 'ethnic' differences by expressing explicit preferences and offering political promotion to the indigenous Sephardim while at the same time seeking to demolish Zionist enterprise from within. A substantial number of Sephardim consciously decided to abandon their religious and 'ethnic' affiliations, and enter the Ashkenazi political and economic mainstream (some of them were even appointed to the Va'ad Leummi, the National Council of Mandate Palestine). Looking at the history of the Sephardi community both in Europe (Amsterdam, France, Salonika, or early medieval Spain) and in the Ottoman Empire, the ability and desire to be integrated into the majority society by maintaining their own cultural peculiarities but at the same time displaying sympathy with and an ability to acquire certain features from their environment appears to be a crucial characteristic of Sephardi mentality.

Another 'ethnically' distinct group, the Oriental Jews or *Mizrahim,* (often erroneously confused with the Sephardim) who were not indigenous to Palestine and came to the *Yishuv* in the 1910s–1930s, were unable to integrate into the society so successfully. Among them there were 10,000 Yemenites who were encouraged to enter the country as an additional labour force, competing with the Arabs, to perform hard agricultural labour to which European Jews were not accustomed. Already at that time, the general stereotype of the Orientals as being similar, or 'conceptually parallel', [10] to Arabs assigned them a marginal position in society.

Although Oriental immigrants constituted merely ten percent of the total number of immigrants, they formed a distinct social group of marginals *par excellence* for several reasons. First of all, the *Mizrahim* came from poor and backward societies, such as Iraq or Yemen, where they generally fitted into the social and occupational patterns of the majority society, working as petty traders, dealers, or artisans at best. This occupational structure corresponded to the infamous 'non-productive' occupational profile despised and fought against by the Zionists. The bulk of the Orientals were illiterate, which forced them into the lowest social positions. Moreover, the communal elite chose alternative destinations for immigration (mainly France), which left the entire community without leadership and spokesmen capable of articulating communal needs and lobbying for its political interests.

Finally, the immigration of the *Mizrahim* was motivated by religious or economic reasons and had nothing to do with the Zionists' objectives, with which these people were barely familiar. Thus, they did not see much sense in breaking up their patriarchal cultures and abandoning Judaism in favour of the 'secular religion' of Zionism. To be sure, there were substantial groups of Ashkenazi refugees whose immigration did not have ideological causes either (the German Aliyah, for example), but the latter possessed two crucial advantages, which the Orientals clearly lacked. On the one hand, their higher educational and professional level paved their way to prominent positions in the host society. On the other, the cultural proximity to the European core of the Yishuv characteristic of the Ashkenazi immigrants (which was not the case with the Orientals) was seen as a guarantee of their assimilability.

In sum, their poverty, low educational level, ignorance of Zionist ideology, strong religious commitment (which was not encouraged by Labour Zionism), and, most importantly, cultural specificity, led unavoidably to the marginalisation of a substantial part of the Orientals. They faced difficulties in getting rid of their socio-cultural background in order to join the predominately Ashkenazi society of the *Yishuv* as full-fledged members. They came to occupy inferior social, political, and economic positions, and were looked down on as aliens and proletarians by the Ashkenazi majority. In most cases, even those who succeeded in improving their economic situation but stuck to their religious and 'ethnic' identity, preserved their culture and traditions in separate communities, which usually settled in the urban industrial outskirts (most notably in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv).

This does not mean, of course, that the non-religious European pioneers constituted a homogenous and solid social group. In accordance with Zionist imperatives, the Jewish colonisers were *supposed* to stress the importance of ideological belonging and downplay ethnic differences by all possible means. In practice, however, 'ethnicity'-based tensions characterised the relationship of the various Ashkenazi groups ('Russians', 'Poles' or 'Galicians'), [11] and especially that of the East European and Western European Jews. Nevertheless, on the conceptual level European Jews perceived themselves as constituting one cohesive cultural unit (especially distinct if viewed against the non-European Jewish population of the *Yishuv*), which made their ambition of homogenising and assimilating the European immigrants appear perfectly feasible. The causes of the inter-communal tensions stemmed not so much from cultural incompatibility, but can largely be explained by the realist conflict theory and could therefore be substantially mitigated by economic and social interaction between the different 'ethnic' groups, favoured by the specific socio-political organisation of the *Yishuv*.

This brings me to one important conclusion: 'ethnic origin' or 'ethnicity' *per se* does not suffice to erect and sustain boundaries between various Jewish groups. A more significant factor able to locate the causes of the ethnic rift and explain the Israeli strategy of immigrant absorption appears to belong to the cultural and ideological realms. Taking into consideration that

the most fundamental cultural differences manifested themselves between the European (Ashkenazi) immigrants whose cultural background approximated them with the already existing cultural canon of the *Yishuv*, and the *Mizrahim* who by virtue of coming from a Muslim environment encountered difficulties in conforming to this canon, it comes as no surprise that the very term 'ethnic identity' was almost exclusively applied to the latter. Hence, already in the period of the *Yishuv*, the classification of the immigrants within the *edot* [communities] and the 'ethnic' label were prerogatives of the weak, marginal or (often not in a numerical but in a socio-psychological sense) 'minority' groups, mainly non-European, while the European sabras [those born in Israel] were referred to as 'Israelis' or 'society'. [12]

In order to prove that the core of ethnic stigmatisation was predominately cultural, and the failure of social, political, cultural and economic integration stemmed, among other causes, from the adherence to behavioural and cultural patterns alien to the norms and values of the majority society, I would like to consider the example of 'The Young Orientals' (*Tseirei ha-Mizrah*), who won 20 mandates at the Second Delegates' Assembly in 1925. This organisation was formed in 1911 and featured young Yemenite activists whose goal was to enter the Histadrut, the General Confederation of Labour, and later transform it into a satellite unit of the Labour Party. In order to achieve this, they made deliberate attempts to acquire the behavioural and cultural norms of the majority society and adopt the prevailing worker's ethos (to join collective settlements and abandon religious practices). They used ethnic origin merely to consolidate their potential supporters among the Yemenite youth and to justify their claim to political representation (and a concomitant share in the distributed social benefits), but they did not want to encourage and promote Yemenite culture through holding political power.

It is noteworthy that the leadership of the party had not had any previous experience of public or political activity and had not held any positions within the community prior to their immigration to Palestine. Moreover, it appears justifiable to assume that the leaders of the *Tseirei ha-Mizrah* had more intensive reciprocal social contacts with the non-Yemenites than with the traditional elite of their own ethnic group. Therefore, the political success of the party, and its recognition and acceptance by the Ashkenazi political establishment can be attributed to their flexible behavioural strategy, which Hanna Herzog defines as 'orientation towards the future', rather than to their adherence to redundant traditions, which involved shaping their political identity against the background of the conditions in their new country with an emphasis on integration and communication with outside groups.

What was this 'background of the conditions in the country', the consideration of which made the integration of the Young Orientals, as well as of the bulk of the European pioneers and refugees possible? Due to the variety of motivations leading to the aliyah of different immigrant groups, and to the highly politicised character of the society of the *Yishuv*, it is not a

simple task to disentangle the complicated factors which ensured the successful integration of the European newcomers in that period. Therefore, I will not use the dichotomy proposed by Zvi Gitelman and S. N. Eisenstadt, both of whom distinguish between situational-historical and ideological factors favouring the rapid integration of the immigrants. Instead, I shall examine the political, economic, and social organisation of the *Yishuv* in its relation to the problems of immigrant absorption and to the question of 'ethnicity' as such.

Among the causes which made possible a certain social cohesiveness for the immigrant society of the *Yishuv*, the most obvious are the relatively similar cultural backgrounds, the high level of ideological commitment, and the fact that the social hierarchy of the society-in-formation was not yet entrenched, thus social mobility was not restrained by the already existing class boundaries or other economic or social variables. Another crucial factor was the prevailing spirit of enthusiasm – the 'heroic ethos' in Anita Shapira's terms – which stemmed from significant practical accomplishments, and offered the newcomers a clear and comprehensive behavioural model to follow, designed to ensure social acceptance, respect, and rapid integration. This behavioural model was personified by the members of the Second Aliyah – the patriarchs, who gained the privilege through their heroic endeavours (intensively mythologised by the culture-makers) to set up the moral framework to which the subsequent generations had to conform. In his book *Becoming Israelis: Political Resocialisation of Soviet and American Immigrants* Zvi Gitleman observes that the fact that

> the Jewish community in Palestine could absorb large-scale immigration without losing its identity was . . . due to its close links with the Zionist movement all over the world. . . . Those who had settled in Palestine were given greater authority and superior status within the movement. To live up to the standards they had set was the ambition of the would-be immigrant. It is easy to see that this created a climate highly conducive to the rapid integration of the newcomers. . . . They were expected to adapt themselves to the prevailing pattern of life and they were prepared to do so. [13]

By and large, by the early 1920s public consent was achieved regarding the basic values and national tasks which had to guide the future development of society. Among these 'publicly approved' agreements the one which stated that the immigrants had to get rid of the remnants of the ghetto tradition and opt for the 'new Hebrew' identity served as a common denominator for the later groups of immigrants. Furthermore, the Jewish settlers of the *Yishuv* started to elaborate their own political, cultural, and social institutions already at the beginning of the 1920s. This was facilitated by the relative homogeneity of the Jewish settlers and the high degree of their commitment and it also gave them obvious organisational advantages over the Arab nationalist movement which failed to design any political structure at all. Finally, the leading role of the *Sochnut* (the Jewish Agency, the virtual government of the Jewish community) in promoting political institutions contributed to the effective political resocialisation of the immigrants who came to the country (though not yet officially proclaimed),

which could offer them a great variety of political movements, each with its own agenda.

The amazing rapidity and scale of the country-building enterprise undertaken by the pioneers of the first three aliyo*t* allows me to assert that, starting from the Polish Fourth Aliyah (1924–1928) the immigrants, and later refugees, who entered the country were confronted with a society which demonstrated a high degree of self-awareness and distinctiveness, a comprehensive national ethos, clearly pronounced values, well developed behavioural patterns, an established political culture, and already functioning authoritative institutions. The establishment of the Histadrut (a nationwide network of trade unions) in the early 1920s, which eventually became one of the main accumulators of resources to be further distributed among the workers, and a powerful agent of employment for the newcomers, together with the high level of flexibility and adaptability demonstrated by the *halutzim* of the Third Aliyah played an extremely favourable role in the absorption processes. As the creation of the leading Labour Party, Histadrut not only provided health care through Kuppat Holim, [14] and introduced the immigrants to the cultural and educational facilities of the district in which they settled, but also encouraged their enrolment into various political organisations, thereby assisting in their political socialisation. [15]

The two subsequent waves of immigration – the Polish Fourth Aliyah and the German Fifth Aliyah (1933–1939) – were less ideologically motivated since they were caused by the violent *volkisch* antisemitism and the sway of National Socialism, but they were still absorbed by the host society. One of the reasons for their relative success [16] lay in the enthusiasm of the newcomers to be employed in any sector of the economy and their readiness to change their occupational profile according to the needs of the market. Thanks to their extreme adaptability and mobility, the high educational level of the immigrants (which was especially true of German Jews, among whom there were many professors, scholars, artists, intellectuals, and professionals with high qualifications) did not result in a dramatic increase in unemployment in a host society which needed manual workers more than intellectuals. Quite the contrary, since the better educated and better-off German Jews not only contributed to the improvement of urban amenities, raised business standards, and laid the foundations for the cultural institutions very much in demand in the society of the *Yishuv*, but also brought about the influx of capital, which stimulated the economy of the *Yishuv* which had been undermined by the severe crisis of the late 1920s.

In order to show the real mechanisms of absorption, I would like to examine the broad socio-economic context within which they were enacted. In their monograph *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society*, S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger maintain that the main actor in the complicated interplay of the economic, political, cultural, and social factors responsible for the success or failure of the absorption initiatives of the *Yishuv* was its consociational system, which (being secured on the political level and agreed upon on the public and

cultural ones) allowed the immigrants to participate fully in the economic, political, and social life of the *Yishuv*. Described schematically, the consociational model promoted equal access to public goods (such as housing, jobs, health services, and schooling) to all citizens through the extremely developed network of political, social, and religious units in which the political units (parties) had the most important role. [17] These units, although possessing a certain degree of autonomy in decision-making and distribution strategies, were brought together within a broader universalistic, or rather 'constitutional—federative framework' of supra-organisations, such as the Va'ad Leummi, the Jewish Agency, and the World Zionist Organisation. [18] These supra-institutions were responsible for allocating resources on the local level. This system turned out to be effective in segmenting the market and thus providing equal possibilities for employment, without depending on the relative strength and influence of this or that political party (the partisans of the leading party, the Mapai, having an advantage in comparison with the satellite parties).

Immigrants were allocated to political parties regardless of their origin, but with respect to their ideological views (when pronounced). Indeed, the consociational framework which distributed social benefits through political organisations contributed to the emergence of a comprehensive and pluralistic political system, and served as a primary agent of political socialisation by encouraging the citizens not only 'to take part in political work in electoral periods, but also to engage in organisational and educational activities and even to undertake volunteer duties . . . or to join a collective settlement.' [19] It was also seen as crucial that the immigrants for whom the parties were competing should settle among the adherents of the same political movement or send their children along the educational 'track' promoted by their party, and thus form ideologically and not ethnically homogeneous areas.

This does not mean, of course, that no cleavages existed among the partisans of competing political streams or that there was no comprehensive 'ethnic' pecking order in ascribing immigrant certificates to different political parties. And it did not involve either the dispersal of the immigrants across the territory of the country in order to prevent the emergence of ethnic enclaves. Like the Irish or German immigrants to the United States who were trying to establish their own (miniature) society within the majority society, in which they could communicate in their mother tongue, maintain familiar institutions, and organise mutual aid, support or protection against the uncertainties of the newly adopted country, the members of the German Fifth Aliyah, as well as the *Mizrahim*, who were socially opposed to them, tended to settle among their own kind, creating 'ethnic' or cultural zones. This pattern of settling in blocks was especially true of German Jews who segregated themselves from their mainly East European neighbours and through preserving a separate political, cultural, and social framework stressed and reinforced the differences between the in-group and others. Small communities, such as the *kibbutzim*, were often formed on the basis of a shared culture and origins. All this points to the coexistence of different

assimilation strategies and to the difficulties of eradicating the cultural and ethnic boundaries between different groups already in the *Yishuv*, the attitude of whom towards the newcomers was otherwise guided by the principles of the 'melting pot' model.

POLICIES OF IMMIGRANT ABSORPTION AFTER THE PROCLAMATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

However, in comparison with the challenge to absorb thousands of immigrants after the Second World War and the proclamation of the State of Israel three years later, the problem of assimilation did not loom unduly large or complex in the period of the *Yishuv*. For obvious situational-historical reasons, the immigrants from Europe constituted the absolute majority of the *Yishuv* population, and the cultural or 'ethnic' rift dividing the community into two parts was not yet conspicuous. The situation changed drastically with the establishment of Israel, forcing the young state to rise to the challenge of the large-scale immigration of Oriental Jewish refugees and a smaller but important group of Holocaust survivors. The arrival of the latter constituted a dividing line in the development of Israel national identity. However, because of the extreme delicacy and complexity of this issue I will not deal with it here but refer the reader to Dina Porat's *Trapped Leadership*, Moshe Sikron's *Immigration to Israel from 1948 to 1953*, and Tom Segev's *The Seventh Million*. [20]

There is hardly any need to talk about the demographic changes caused by the massive wave of Orientals at length because they seem obvious, but the popular claim, first articulated during the Wadi Salib riots of 1959, and later speculated on by the Black Panthers, Shas, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, and other Sephardi public figures, according to which the 'Israeli government, and namely the ruling Labour Party and the Jewish Agency . . . discriminated against non-European Jews in terms of not wanting them to come to Israel' should be more closely examined and refuted. Considering that the new state depended on demographic growth for its security, the opposite appears to be the case. In fact, all the sources I have looked at state that the Israeli government promoted the aliyah of all diaspora communities in accordance with Zionist ideological imperatives ('negation of the diaspora' and the 'ingathering of the exiles') and practical (defence and security) needs.

The obvious cultural 'otherness' and economic backwardness of the potential immigrants was not totally overlooked, though. Certain political and public forces – the country's most popular daily *Haaretz,* for instance – were advocating 'selective immigration' or the introduction of immigrant quotas (based on literacy level or employment prospects) and were calling 'to keep the *Mizrahim* out of the country as long as possible'. [21] Practical considerations prevailed, however, and Israeli emissaries travelled to Yemen or Iraq and propagandised aliyah among the local Jewish communities. Very often, there was no real need for these Jews to immigrate since they did not experience persecution or discrimination from the majority society. In some cases, like Iraq, Israel is believed to have operated 'subterfugically against

the lay and rabbinical leadership of that Jewish community.' [22] Therefore, it is not legitimate to claim that the Orientals were not welcomed or wanted by the State of Israel, or that their immigration came as a surprise. On the contrary, they were very much welcomed (similar to the ex-Soviet mass aliyah), but this does not mean that they were treated without prejudice or contempt.

This contempt – or rather 'Ashkenazi narcissism', as it would be termed later – could be observed in different social groups at the grass-roots level (in the form of a popular insult against the *Mizrahim* – '*chach-chach*', which means 'crap' in Hebrew), in the media, as well as in the official rhetoric of the ruling elite. Consider for example, a stunning extract from some research on the situation of the *Mizrahi* immigrants, written by Aryeh Gelbloom, a reporter of *Haaretz*:

> This is the immigration of a race that we have not known before in Israel. We are dealing with a people of record primitiveness, Their level of education borders on total ignorance and worse, they totally lack the capacity to absorb anything spiritual. Generally speaking, they are only slightly better than the Arabs, Blacks and Berbers among whom they used to live. In any case, they are of a lower order than the Palestinian Arabs. . . . But more than anything else there is one basic fact – their total inability to adapt to life in Israel and, above all, their chronic laziness and hatred of work. [23]

Gelbloom finishes his pseudo-anthropological research on a bombastic note:

> One day they will be joined by the Jews from the [other] Arab countries. What will this country, and the standard of its population, be then?
> The special tragedy of this immigration, as opposed to the poor human material from Europe [i.e., the Holocaust survivors], is that there is no hope for their children either. Raising their level from the depths . . . is a matter of generations. [24]

Though the above cited extract is extremely blunt and even borders on racism, it was by no means unique in Israeli public discourse in the early 1950s. Its significance for the current study lies in the fact that the reporter addressed the major issues which, in the unanimous opinion of the ruling elite and the general public, made the assimilation of the Orientals wholly troublesome: their low educational level, different moral standards, inability to perform the types of labour demanded by the economy of the country (which being a product of lower professional qualifications was often interpreted as 'aversion to work' or 'laziness' by the society which placed the cult of physical labour at the core of its national ethos), low level of modernisation, which was termed 'primitiveness', and most importantly, their intrinsic alienness and perceived inferiority to the country's culture and norms.

To be sure, the Orientals were not the only economically disadvantaged immigrant group arriving in the early 1950s. In fact, the bulk of the immigrants coming to Israel during these years consisted of ideologically unmotivated, penniless refugees battered either by the Holocaust (the European refugees) or by political and economic persecutions in their home

countries (the *Mizrahim*). However, the former had several significant advantages: they possessed higher professional qualifications, had a sound educational background and received reparations from Germany, in the form of small pensions paid in foreign currency, with which they could improve their miserable economic position. But the most crucial factor which determined the official and public perception of the Orientals was the lower cultural level assigned to them, whereas the European refugees who came from the same Ashkenazi world were believed to conform to the dominant cultural canon, and were seen as culturally superior. [25]

The Orientals, in contrast, were viewed as a separate race, which had adopted all negative traits of the Muslim environment in which it had dwelled. By associating Oriental Jews with the Arabs, Aryeh Gelbloom highlighted in fact another facet of their identity problem. The massive immigration of the Orientals coincided with the military conflicts of the young Jewish State with its hostile Arab environment. Therefore, one of the axes for the construction of the national ethos and the national identity was the notion of Jews versus Arabs, so that 'Jewish' came to mean more than anything else 'non-Arab'. In this context, the public perception of the Orientals as conceptually parallel to the Arabs resulted in the further marginalisation of and unabashed discrimination against these communities, primarily in cultural terms. The notorious remark traditionally assigned to the nation's greatest poet, Chaim Nahman Bialik – 'I despise the Arabs because they remind me of the Sephardi [in this context, Oriental] Jews' – clearly shows how deeply entrenched this perception was.

The blatant cultural narcissism of the Ashkenazi majority, as described above, leads one not to consider the official state policies of immigrant absorption applied to the Oriental communities within the framework of the 'melting pot' model. I believe that the ethnocentrism and cultural hierarchies constituting the national discourse are hardly compatible with this theory. In the case of Israel we are clearly confronted with the well-articulated intention to protect the already existing cultural canon by urging the incoming groups to get rid of their original culture and traditions and conform to the prevailing cultural canon. Instead of a cauldron or pot, which was supposed to melt all the 'ethnic' remnants of the immigrants into a unique and unified Israeli identity, we should speak about a *mould*, 'a form into which the new immigrants were expected to fit as a part of the program to build the state.' [26]

Moreover, adherence to the most important Zionist imperatives, such as the negation of the diaspora and the creation of a new Hebrew man, seemed to entitle the Ashkenazi ruling elite, the bulk of which consisted of the pioneers of the first three aliyot, to demand from the following generations of immigrants a similar rupture with their ancestral cultures. This appeal to the heroic ancestors was in fact a commonplace in the official political rhetoric, which addressed the problems of assimilation. It was perfectly articulated by David Ben-Gurion who claimed that the immigrants

must be taught our language and a knowledge of the Land and of the pains of immigration. They must conceive what the first settlers did with their bare hands, how they fought with the desert, with an inept government in the Turkish days and obstructions under the Mandate; and what they nevertheless did. Being privileged to enter Israel, they must be told that they too must toil, if perhaps less than their forerunners. [27]

One can easily observe here a special kind of ethnocentrism, which would later be termed 'cultural imperialism' by Sephardi intellectuals. In another speech, delivered in 1951, Ben-Gurion called for the eradication of linguistic and cultural differences between the various sections of society, by means of endowing immigrants with 'a single language, a single culture, and a single citizenship'. [28] The implicit message contained in this motto was that the majority of the newcomers had no significant culture of their own, and would easily adopt the Israeli one. In the following analysis of the concrete assimilation initiatives undertaken by a number of the social and political institutions and agents of the state I argue that the notion of 'culture' as defined by Israeli policy-makers was central to the absorption discourse of the state, which I define as a 'cultural mould' or 'cultural conformity'. Moreover, I will try to illustrate the inconsistency of the assimilation policies shaped by the economic and political tasks of the day, which not only failed to downplay the centrality of this issue, but further aggravated the cultural and social alienation of the immigrant groups from the host society.

Among other means of socialisation and assimilation, schooling [29] played a crucial role both in the *Yishuv* and in the post-1948 Jewish State. The promotion of Hebrew proved to be ineffective in eradicating the inter-communal chasm since a clear double standard existed in respect of European and Oriental immigrants. While in the official Zionist rhetoric the use of Yiddish was equated with disloyalty and viewed as a remnant of the ghetto tradition, or even as national betrayal, 46.8 percent of the European Jews spoke only Yiddish in 1948. [30] Consequently, the Yiddish tradition, including literature, folk dancing and songs, continued to shape the Israeli cultural discourse at least on a *symbolic* level, constituting a link with European culture. At the same time, Hebrew proficiency alone did not guarantee the cultural and social integration of the Oriental Jews, who were studying it *en masse*. Thus, it comes as no surprise that one of the slogans of the notorious Black Panther manifestations, picketing prime minister Golda Meir in the early 1970s, was 'Golda! Teach us Yiddish!'. For the economically and culturally deprived *Mizrahim* Yiddish was a dire symbol of Ashkenazi cultural imperialism.

Ashkenazi narcissism manifested itself clearly in the ideology and form of Israeli primary education, which aimed at the intensive assimilation of Oriental children by introducing them into the mainstream Israeli cultural discourse. Since this new Hebrew cultural canon had a crystallised European core already in the period of the *Yishuv*, the choice of literature or music, as described by the former Yemenite schoolgirl from Tel-Aviv, comes as no surprise:

> They [e.g. the teachers] taught us about Bialik. Okay. So it's good to know something about a Russian Jewish poet. But why didn't they teach us anything about my people too?' [31]

Perhaps, even more significantly than literature, the interpretation of history can shape the immigrants' self-perception and their view of their role in the common historical experience of the nation. The Oriental communities, which were not involved in the Zionist enterprise, were virtually excluded from the common Jewish history. Even in later periods, especially after Eichmann's trial in 1961, the study of Christian inquisition, East European pogroms and the Holocaust were central topics in history teaching in Israel. It created a type of Jewish victimhood or martyrdom which did not pertain to the *Mizrahim* and did not leave them any ground on which to construct their own historical identity. The histories of the Oriental communities were seen as of minor importance for the general development of Jewish civilisation which was increasingly perceived as a European phenomenon, and hardly detachable from the histories of the peoples among whom the *Mizrahim* had dwelled. The influence of the Gentiles on the Ashkenazim were in contrast viewed from the perspective of several key themes, such as assimilation, emancipation, antisemitism, or nationalism, and thus perceived as contributing to the shaping and conceptualising of Jewish nationhood, an achievement exclusively credited to the European Jewish communities.

The analysis of school textbooks and the structure of the school programme leads us back to Aryeh Gelbloom's article, which was concerned with the 'primitiveness' of the Orientals. History, literature, music, and arts textbooks reveal a clear-cut distinction between the notions of 'culture', or rather 'high culture', which applied to the Jews from Europe and 'heritage' or 'tradition', which applied to the cultural baggage of the Orientals. [32] Naturally, Oriental 'culture', wrapped in the terminology of folklore, was at best viewed with benign disdain, but in most cases fought against by all possible means. Schools provided a plethora of tools to do so by simply excluding non-European Jewish poets, writers, scholars and public figures from the teaching of Jewish history, which was presented in an exclusively European context. Furthermore, due to the power and prestige of teachers who preached European values to the Oriental children, they did not dare to question the teachers' position and stand up for their own traditions. Lawrence Meyer quotes a Kurdish boy who experienced this pressure in his school in Jerusalem in the late 1950s:

> The teacher gave us a feeling that our values were not good, like their values. For example, in music, before I went to school, I really liked Oriental music. But the teacher said to me that this music was 'primitive'. It made me feel that my music was not any good. On the radio all I heard was Western music. So, I said, 'My teacher is okay. She's right.' All around me was something else. I felt maybe my family did not know that they were primitive. [33]

This brings us to one significant outcome of the assimilation policies in the sphere of education, which echoes the American experience described by

Milton Gordon. According to him the pressure put on the immigrant children's sensibility by the general American society through public schooling and mass media communication resulted in their 'alienation from family ties and in status and role reversals of the generations which could easily subvert normal relationships of parent and child.' [34] Israeli education was similarly successful in shattering family bonds, which had far-reaching consequences due to the traditionally salient role assigned to family relationships in patriarchal communities. The feeling of cultural backwardness and inferiority and the concomitant feeling of shame because of their ancestral tradition inculcated in Oriental children in the school diminished the authority of the parents and created a conspicuous rift between the old generation, which stuck to their traditional way of life, and their children who were either born in Israel or brought there at an early age and wished to integrate into Ashkenazi society even if they had to jettison the culture of their families. Thus, the traditional structure of Oriental communities disintegrated and two unequal segments were formed: the one consisting of the elders became increasingly marginalised and was expected to eventually 'die out', while the other comprising the young generation was 'living on the fringes of two cultures' [35] and was tempted by the superficial 'glittering' aspects of the Ashkenazi materialistic culture to which it could never fully belong. Thus, their cultural 'otherness' was seen as the major obstacle to the integration of the Orientals into the majority society.

I will now turn to other areas of immigrant absorption (political socialisation, employment, settling, and so on) and see if these practical assimilation policies of the Israeli state were consistent and succeeded in improving the Oriental immigrants' economic and social position, which could partially compensate their 'cultural inferiority'.

The absorption of 700,000 Oriental Jews, which made up approximately one-third of Israel's population, would have been difficult under the best of circumstances. But the circumstances were not favourable at all, since the majority of the Orientals were completely unfamiliar with the political system when they arrived and they were equally ignorant of the principles of Labour Zionism, which dominated the Israeli political scene at the time and guided all the spheres of life ranging from schooling to agriculture. Moreover, the level of literacy, Hebrew proficiency and professional skills of the newcomers were extremely low and this created immediately a clear basis for discrimination against the non-Ashkenazi immigrants. At the same time, the system of socialisation and the ideology of assimilation had not changed significantly since the times of the *Yishuv*, and although the Law of Return (1950) automatically granted citizenship to all newcomers, it hardly made them full-fledged citizens in terms of political and social integration.

Instead of mitigating the objective causes listed above, which impeded the economic advancement of the *Mizrahim*, the government was trying to solve its own economic problems with the help of the newcomers. This is where the challenges of assimilation became interlaced with social problems,

bringing about a blend of diverse and far-reaching consequences. In order to provide more or less equal development on the entire territory of the country, including remote regions that were barely populated, and at the same time attempting to provide employment opportunities for the new immigrants, the government sent them off to the so-called development towns. These towns were usually situated in distant and underdeveloped regions of the country – notably in the border regions (Afulah, Bet Shean, and Kiryat Shemonah), the Negev (Beersheba), and Upper Galilee. This necessarily led to the cutting off of the *Mizrahim* from active participation in Israeli social, economic, and political life. Deprived of the skills needed to survive under alien economic circumstances, the majority of the Orientals, huddled in urban slums or in development towns, did not prosper as they had hoped when coming to Israel. As they were forced to work on the lowest levels of the industrial ladder, they failed to improve their economic conditions. In my opinion, the persisting differences in the educational and occupational characteristics of the contemporary *edot ha-Mizrah* [Oriental communities] and 'the society' are the legacy of the Labourists' policies of settlement, since 'ethnic and residential concentration is related to educational and job opportunities, marriage markets and interethnic marriages, and to a reinforced sense of ethnic pride'. [36]

Why did the government ignore this fact, which directly undermined the 'melting pot' objective it officially adhered to? I believe that the challenge of mass immigration and the resulting economic and social instability forced the state to find a unified solution, which addressed the economic needs of the country and at the same time employed the newcomers in a productive activity meant to develop and populate the backward areas.

But there was more to this than sheer economic planning. The consociational pattern of political and social organisation discussed above in relation to the assimilation policies of the *Yishuv,* which was characterised by the major role the parties played in allocating resources, did not disappear. The universalistic schemes – the 'party key' pattern – of the distribution of social goods to immigrants continued to operate, making the Orientals become heavily dependent on the host society. Gradually, however, the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by the various political and economic institutions, closely related to the former, which characterised pre-1948 Jewish society, was diminished by the growing influence and far-reaching powers of the state institutions (the Jewish Agency and the Histadrut being the most explicit examples), reflecting a strong tendency to centralisation. Hence, the parties that had previously possessed independent access to power and resources now became increasingly involved in a clientalistic framework. This manifested itself in the blatant rift between centre and periphery, with the latter being heavily dependent upon the former. [37]

This clientalistic scheme had crucial consequences for the situation of the Oriental Israelis. The majority of them 'came with virtually nothing' and became completely dependent on the welfare services provided through the parties and trade unions. Their ignorance of democratic principles and of the

Israeli political system made them an easy target for the competing parties, giving rise to a general spirit of paternalism in the sphere of immigrant absorption and immigrant–party relations. The already mentioned S. N. Eisenstadt observed that

> [f]requently, the immigrants were subjected to political pressure, especially on the local level, by the officials of those very bodies on whom they were so dependent. This political-manipulative relationship of Israeli groups and parties to many of the new immigrants was intensified by the fact that many of the administrative organs working in absorption were very closely linked to the various centers of political power. . . . [while the official state policy of 'the melting pot' presupposed the merging of *all* existing groups] in reality it was also assumed that the existing groups and parties were sufficient for the desires, needs and aspirations of the immigrants. . . . [38]

who had to conform to the already established political system. The fact that immigrant absorption and the social maintenance of the newcomers were almost entirely governed – or rather patronised – by the political parties, which could not but involve the newcomers in the complex political manipulation discussed above, adds to the dubiety of the role that 'ethnicity' came to play within the nation's political discourse. In fact, this political manipulation and struggle for potential adherents made the notion of 'ethnicity' a salient though ambiguous matter since on the official governmental level the very notion was publicly denounced as irrelevant and contradictory to the prevailing ideology of the 'melting pot', while on the local level it was often speculated on by the parties. In the mid-1950s, the influential Mapai, for instance, was lobbying for the creation of special ethnic units (or 'cells', as they were termed) within the main organisational body of the party. These were supposed to deliver a more specifically targeted political and social message to different ethnic groups. The 'ethnic cells' held special meetings during which the political issues were discussed in the language of the participants, not necessarily (and often not) in Hebrew. As a result, the party gained the votes of different ethnic groups that they succeeded in uniting under the broader institutional framework, while the immigrants were enjoying public goods such as housing, employment, health care, schooling, and the like.

Was the prevailing system of clientalistic relationships within Israeli society favourable for the integration of the Orientals, or did it hinder their social and political integration? In my opinion, political recruitment enacted in the way described above prevented the development of reciprocal contacts among different ethnic groups (and among the immigrants and 'society'), and encouraged affiliation with one's own in-group, which alone could guarantee social and economic advancement. Instead of diminishing the ties to the in-group, which are especially strong in the case of marginalised immigrant groups, and encouraging individual social and economic participation on a common ground with members of the host society, the practice was to foster ethnic loyalties, which allowed the immigrants to act jointly as a collective entity.

From another point of view, political recruitment as an important element of Israeli assimilation policies obviously managed to introduce the *Mizrahim* into the basic principles of the country's political organisation. By doing so it probably achieved the goal which it never intended to, namely to show to economically deprived and socially segregated groups that the only way for public advancement lay in lobbying group ('ethnic') interests in the political arena. It is not surprising then that the breakthrough of the Orientals into the centre of public life in the late 1970s took place in the sphere of politics – first by bringing to office the right-wing Likud party as a demonstration of social dissatisfaction with the results of the nineteen-year-long Labour rule, and later by pursuing independent political careers (the most famous example of this kind is David Levi, the country's first Oriental minister for immigrant absorption in the cabinet of Menachem Begin).

CONCLUSION

Having examined the ideological and practical aspects of Israeli policies of immigration and immigrant absorption as designed and carried out by the various political, economic, and social institutions of the State of Israel, it appears essential to analyse the actual consequences of the interaction between the immigrants and the given institutional system for the social composition of Israeli society. One of the most noticeable outcomes the scholar is confronted with may be defined as the emergence of a collective Sephardi (or *Mizrahi*) identity, adopted by the diverse ethnic groups of Northern African and Middle Eastern immigrants *against* the dominant Ashkenazi sabra identity.

One of the most prominent Israeli sociologists, Shlomo Swirsky, [39] gives an explicit socio-economic interpretation of the self-identification of the Orientals (which has both cultural and socio-political underpinnings). Among the most salient factors which he sees as responsible for the emergence of this pseudo-ethnic label he points to their common inferior economic position, similar patterns of settlement, and demographic characteristics. Economic marginalisation was certainly one of the most immediate consequences of the Labourist absorption policies of the Oriental communities. Purposeless, 'invented' jobs, segregated settlements and orientation towards work requiring only low qualifications – all these government-sponsored measures turned out to be ineffective in improving the economic situation of the Orientals, which, according to the findings of the Centre Adva published in 1996, is still substantially worse than that of the Ashkenazim. [40]

However, the rift that divides Israeli society into two opposed camps of Ashkenazim and Sephardim, and lumps the latter into one collective entity, is not exclusively a matter of economic deprivation or lower educational standards. The economic élan that characterised Israeli industry and the public sector in the mid-1990s increasingly attracted the Sephardim to these prospering spheres of the economy, as well as to private business, and resulted in the formation of a rich Sephardi elite. The core of the difficulties

in the social integration of the Orientals is clearly expressed by an Ashkenazi Israeli interviewed by Lawrence Meyer: '[It is not a matter of higher living standards] – a lot of them have money. . . . It is a matter of culture.' [41]

The inferior place assigned to the Oriental immigrants by the native Israelis of European origin should be viewed in terms of the well-established label of their 'cultural inferiority' and 'backwardness'. While the economic and social situation can be improved (and in the case of the *Mizrahim* it was improved), the issues of 'culture', although they are less tangible and evade a superficial explanation, are nevertheless absolutely crucial for the full-fledged integration of immigrant groups. In Stanley Waterman's words:

> [Culture] as a shell permits immigrants and established residents to access one another without undue danger – unless the immigration is so large as to threaten the Establishment through sheer numbers, unless immigrants (thought to have been successfully assimilated) reject the incorporation, unless the immigrants directly challenge the customs of the receiving society. [42]

Being subjected to Ashkenazi arrogance in the most intimate spheres of human existence – in their traditions, customs, family relationships, religious observances, behavioural patterns, and family structure – the Orientals could not but elaborate a shared mentality or 'common consciousness', [43] as a response to what they often term a 'colonialist Ashkenazi narcissism'. Perceived as similar by the outside group, the Orientals came to see themselves in similar terms, fleshing out the 'ethnic' label from within.

One may ask why the most disadvantaged groups of European immigrants (Romanians, for instance) did not develop similar patterns of self-identification and define themselves simply as 'Israelis' or 'the society'. First of all, their European origin allowed them to be perceived as culturally close to the European core of Israeli mainstream culture. Secondly, the cultural benevolence of the majority society allowed them to avoid emphasising their 'ethnic' origin and enter the majority society on equal terms with other Ashkenazim. And thirdly, European immigrants were not subject to the centralised programmes of resettlement as were the Orientals, and thus they successfully evaded ethnic concentration, which stigmatised the Orientals who settled in 'development towns'. As a result they were socially mobile and this made a separate 'ethnicity-based' political framework unnecessary. Contrary to the Sephardim who turned 'ethnicity' into an important political tool – see for example the party agenda of Shas – Ashkenazi political organisations always tended to cut across 'ethnic' lines and were formed on an ideological basis. [44]

It is therefore not surprising that one of the recent trends in Israeli ethnicity is the emphasis on cultural distinctiveness which certain sociologists tend to view as a form of protest that, together with increased political involvement, is meant to advance the Orientals to the central place in both the cultural and political arena, previously monopolised by the Ashkenazim. The large-scale (and conspicuously different from Ashkenazi practices) celebrations of Lag

Ba-Omer [45] or *Mimouna* (two Middle Eastern festivals which have recently acquired a symbolic meaning as among the most visible Oriental traditions), the reforms of the Ministry of Culture (now Ministry of Science, Culture and Sport), which declared its adherence to the principles of multiculturalism and the mushrooming radio stations broadcasting exclusively Israeli music – all these transformations (perhaps not yet fully grasped by the public) indicate the intention of the Orientals to challenge the prevailing cultural canon as a means of asserting their equal rights in the sphere in which they used to be the most underprivileged.

However, all the disintegrative factors discussed above do not signify the complete failure of Israeli assimilation policies. The causes of some of them should be located not within the ideological discourse of the state but within the distinct socio-economic context of the time, which prompted the government to try to strike a balance between several crucial tasks simultaneously, seeking to solve the challenges of massive immigration and the immediate economic needs of the country. In doing so, successive Labour governments were predetermined to launch unpopular measures, which should not be interpreted as deliberate discrimination against specific immigrant groups.

Many integrative measures proved to be central for the integration of the Orientals into the Israeli national paradigm. One of the crucial institutions that inculcated the basic values of the host society in the *Mizrahim* was the Israeli Army. The prestige commonly associated with army service in Israeli society, the heroic and even romantic halo surrounding it as a result of its successful military campaigns, combined with its universalistic and democratic essence made it particularly attractive for a growing number of immigrants. In fact, the army can be considered the most successful 'melting pot', which mitigated the cultural, linguistic, or social differences of the recruits. Equal access to power positions in the army, which is still unparalleled in the system of power and resource allocation of the civil society, seems to explain why more and more Orientals opt for a military career.

Therefore, it would be erroneous to speak about the failure of the assimilation project. What we see is rather that the social difficulties of assimilation persist more in the Oriental communities than in the European ones. The steadily growing number of intermarriages between members of different 'ethnic' communities indicates that Israeli society is capable of bridging the social or cultural gaps more successfully than any governmental intervention could possibly have achieved.

* * *

Throughout the four thousand years of its existence the Jewish people has preserved its unique sense of identity, a blend of religion, ethnicity, and traditions, wrapped in commonly shared tragic experiences. Throughout their long historical journey, Jews have been trying to discover who they are and redefine their identity in accordance with the changing historical

circumstances and the pressures of hostile environments, while at the same time maintaining their unique spiritual core. It would have been naive to expect that the short history of Israeli statehood would provide a comprehensive answer to this quest for Jewish identity. It certainly managed to develop a completely new psychological and cultural type, which is a far cry from that of the Jewish diaspora. However, it appeared to be less flexible and liberal in embracing the myriad of cultural peculiarities and 'ethnic' backgrounds brought by the successive waves of immigration. The blatant ethnic, religious, economic, political, and most essentially, cultural rifts which characterise contemporary Israeli society and which are often exaggerated by the media or certain political groups speculating on social or ethnic tensions might question the very existence of a cohesive Israeli nation. However, repeating David Ben-Gurion's famous claim mentioned in the introduction, the historical process of nation-building 'is only just beginning and is a very prolonged one.' [46]

Notes

1. *Yishuv* (Hebrew): 'settlement'. A term commonly used to refer to Jewish society in Palestine prior to the proclamation of the State of Israel.

2. Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

3. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 84.

4. Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 10.

5. The actual story, of course, was and still is far more complicated than that, since the society was not merely divided into privileged Europeans and the non-Europeans who felt marginal and discriminated against, but also had other no less significant rifts within it: sabras versus *olim,* religious versus secular, refugees versus ideologically motivated Zionists, professionals and *halutzim*, and so on.

6. Stewart Coles and Mildred Wiese Coles, *Minorities and the American Promise* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), Chapter 6.

7. S. N. Eisenstadt*, The Absorption of Immigrants* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), pp. 62–63.

8. Eisenstadt*, The Absorption of Immigrants*, p. 64.

9. *Encyclopedia Judaica* (New York: G. K. Hall and Company. An Imprint of Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1971), p. 530.

10. *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 41.

11. *Encyclopedia Judaica,* p. 531.

12. Hanna Herzog, 'Ethnicity as a Product of Political Negotiation: The Case of Israel', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7, No. 4 (October 1984), p. 518.

13. Zvi Gitelman, *Becoming Israelis: Political and Social Resocialisation of Soviet and American Immigrants* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), p. 20.

14. Kuppat Holim (Hebrew): 'Fund for the Diseased', a nationwide network of institutions providing medical insurance and health care, which continues to operate in Israel today.

15. The Histadrut continued to play an essential role in the social, political, and economic integration of immigrants until the late 1950s, when the Ministry for Immigrant Absorption assumed some of its responsibilities.

16. In his *The Seventh Million* Tom Segev refutes the idealistic picture of the *yekkes*' integration, claiming that they too felt rejected by the host society and stereotyped as 'disrespectful snobs, lacking in energy and vitality, but demanding too much'. If not for the influx of capital caused by the *ha'avra* agreement, the argument runs, the Zionist leadership would not have been supportive of the idea to bring to the country masses of people barely capable of contributing to the building of the state (Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), pp. 35–64).

17. S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 195–196.

18. Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends*, p. 196.

19. Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends*, p. 196.

20. Dina Porat, *Trapped Leadership* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1986); Moshe Sikron, *Immigration to Israel from 1948 to 1953* (Jerusalem: Falk Center, 1957); Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million*.

21. Zeev Chafets, *Heroes and Hustlers, Hard Hats and Holy Men: Inside the New Israel* (New York: William Morrow and Company, INC, 1986), p. 118.

22. Gitelman, *Becoming Israelis*, p. 25.

23. Quoted from Chafets, *Heroes and Hustlers*, p.118.

24. Chafets, *Heroes and Hustlers*, p. 118.

25. Chafets, *Heroes and Hustlers*, p. 119.

26. Lawrence Meyer, *Israel Now: Portrait of a Troubled Land* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982), p. 160.

27. Meyer, *Israel Now*, p. 160.

28. David Ben-Gurion's *Speeches*, cited in Meyer, *Israel Now*, p. 161.

29. It appears troublesome to speak about schools as agents of social and cultural integration for the children of immigrants, since they were separate even in the cities, and the Ashkenazi staff was often reported to be underqualified or simply unqualified. Meyer, *Israel Now*, p. 164 .

30. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 497.

31. Meyer, *Israel Now*, p. 162.

32. Stanley Waterman, 'Israelis or Immigrants: Cultural Politics and the Israeli Cultural Canon', Lecture delivered at Chatham House as part of the meeting organised by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 21 November 2000.

33. Meyer, *Israel Now*, p. 162.

34. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 107.

35. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 507.

36. Calvin Goldscheider, 'Creating a New Society: Immigration, Nation-Building, and Ethnicity in Israel', *Harvard International Review* 20, No. 2 (Spring 1998).

37. Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends*, p. 197.

38. Gitelman, *Becoming Israelis*, p. 25.

39. Shlomo Swirsky, *Orientals and Ashkenazim in Israel: The Ethnic Division of Labor* (Haifa: Mahbarot le'Mehkar u'Lebikoret, 1981), pp. 12–16, 23.

40. Center Adva cited from Marius Schattner, 'En Israel, l'enjeu sefarade', *Le Monde diplomatique* (March 1999), p. 6.

41. Meyer. *Israel Now*, p.166.

42. Waterman, 'Israelis or Immigrants'.

43. Swirsky, *Orientals and Ashkenazim in Israel*, p. 14.

44. The obvious exception to this trend is the recent massive Soviet aliyah , which established two quasi-ethnic parties to lobby for their interests (N. Sharansky's Yisrael Ba-Aliyah and A. Leiberman's Yisrael Beytenu).

[45] Lag Ba-Omer is celebrated by both Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities, though on a different scale and with substantially distinct rituals. The Sephardi way of celebrating Lag Ba-Omer includes pilgrimage to Tveria, picnics and ritual animal slaughter, uncommon among the Ashkenazim. The differences in customs between the two communities and the mass scale of gatherings and ceremonies in the Sephardi version of Lag Ba-Omer made the festival central to the formation of a distinct Sephardi identity as opposed to the Ashkenazi one.

46. David Ben-Gurion's *Speeches*, cited from Meyer, *Israel Now*, p. 152.