

In B.A.S. Relief:*

Antecedents of Jewish Ethnic Relationships in Israel

Most discussions of Israeli foreign policy inevitably focus on relationships between Arabs and Jews. Discussions of Israeli "internal" policy, however, usually involves an analysis of *Ashkenazi-Oriental/Sepharadi* relationships. This topic has been a major consideration in Israeli election campaigns, educational planning, and social policy deliberations. Despite the fact that they are both Jewish groups, some social scientists refer to *Ashkenazi* and *Sepharadi* Jews as "the two Israels" or "two nations" (Avineri, 1972; Elazar, 1978; Weingrod, 1962). Long before the Yom Kippur War in 1973, many Israelis came to the conclusion that the internal, ethnic issues might be as dangerous and crucial to the survival of the State as the foreign policy issues. This theme has become even more relevant in the wake of peacemaking with Egypt.

It is therefore important and urgent that we explore the antecedents to *Ashkenazi* and *Sepharadi* relationships in order better to understand them and the steps needed to prevent unnecessary conflict between the two groups.

This article examines four main historical factors which we feel have contributed to current *Ashkenazi-Sepharadi* relationships in Israel. These factors include the creation of Jewish "diasporas" resulting from exile and worldwide dispersion, the attitude and relationship of the European Zionist movement to Jews in Arab lands, the roots of ethnic conflict within the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine (the *Yishuv*), and the social impact of large waves of Oriental immigrants to Israel in the years immediately after the creation of the State.

Two Millenia of Separation and Dispersion

The first great dispersion of Jews from their homeland in ancient Palestine, or Israel, as it was then called, took place as a result of the destruction of the First

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* B.A.S. Jews of the *Babylonian* Exile Jews of *Ashkenazi* Exile and Jews of the *Sepharadi* Exile.

Temple by Babylonian (Iraqi) conquerors in 587 B.C.E. The majority of the Jewish population were taken captive to the north or fled south to Egypt and other areas of the Middle East and North Africa. After the fall of Babylonia, a minority of these Jews returned to Israel and built a Second Temple and established the Second Jewish Commonwealth. But the bulk of Jews living in the lands of the Middle East, whom we will refer to as *the Oriental Jews*, remained as foreigners among their host countries for over 2,000 years. By the second century C.E., Jewish communities reached from Morocco to Babylonia. With the appearance of Mohammed (570-632 C.E.) and the rise of Islam, the Middle East witnessed a spectacular period of cultural development. The Jews also participated in this cultural outpouring, as many great Hebrew poetic and religious works appeared at this time. By the eighth century a trickle of Jews had moved northward, some establishing themselves near the Black Sea and even in Kiev. The northward movement also led some African Jews into Iberia, yet Babylonia remained the major center of Judaism until the 11th century.

This pattern of migration set the stage for Jewish ethnic differentiation for the next few centuries. Those who remained in the Middle East comprised the first great ethnic group, the "Orientals." The Orientals managed to co-exist with their Moslem rulers, taking on over the centuries many of the physical and cultural traits of their countrymen. The Koran regards the Jews as the "People of the Book," who, upon paying special taxes, are entitled to a status of a "Protected

Minority" ("*Ahl al-Dimmah*"). Although conditions varied from country to country, the Oriental Jews, contrary to popular myth, lived a harassed existence in the Islamic world. With the establishment of Israel, their situation became intolerable. A recent article in *Echoes* (1980), the Bulletin of *Sephardi Communities*, ascribes this myth to Arab propaganda, in which the Arab attitude to Jews in their lands is pictured as "a veritable idyll between brothers, unsullied by any clouds of hostility: it is only Zionism which fouled the winds, poisoned the atmosphere, and caused hostility, violence, and bloodshed." (p.22). Albert Memmi, the Tunisian born Jewish author, now living in France, has persistently documented the falsehood of the "peace and harmony myth" as summarised in his following comments:

These are falsehoods which contain not a jot of truth. In the Middle Ages there were indeed short periods, when battles were taking place between the Muslims and the Christians, during which the Jews in some Muslim countries were well treated. However, this positive attitude only continued as long as the Muslims made use of the Jews in the areas of economy, politics or the army. In similar conditions, Christian Spain and Portugal had a good relationship with the Jews and even appointed Ministers from among them (Don Yitzhak Abarbanel etc.). Nevertheless, no historian will draw the conclusion from this that the attitude to the Jews in Christian Spain and Portugal in the Middle Ages was a good one.

The lot of the Jews in all the Muslim lands, over the whole historical period was, in general, one of cruel persecution, brutality and degradation; one can read about this at length in the history books about the Jews in Moslem countries and as regards North

African Jews, in the detailed book by Prof. H. Z. Hirschberg, "The History of the Jews in North Africa" . . .

This ideal life never existed. Moreover, it wasn't enough that the Jews were abandoned to the mob — there was also a constitution which in a certain sense gave this bondage legitimacy. This constitution is well known to us: since the days of Abas it has been included in the covenant of Omar. At best, the Jew is protected like a dog who is part of the owner's possessions — but if he raises his head, or behaves like a man, he must be beaten mercilessly so that he will always remember his position. Thus, the truth is that we lived lives of fear and degradation in the Arab lands. (Memmi, 1980: 22-23).

Porat, Roumani (1978) and other *Sepharadi* Jews have recently organized to claim reparations from the Arab states.

The Orientals settled in many old Afro-Asian communities, including the entire Maghreb, Iraq (Babylonia), Aleppo, Yemen, Persia, Bukhara, Kurdistan, Urfa, Afghanistan, and Georgia. The highpoint of Oriental Jewish life was during the 11th century, when they comprised 95 percent of the total world Jewish population of 1.5 million (Patai, 1973: 308). After this time Babylonia declined as the main center of Jewish activity, as the Jewish communities in Iberia (Spain) and Central Europe began to emerge as long-term forces.

The Jews in Iberia comprised the second great Jewish ethnic group, the *Sepharadim*. The word *Sepharadi* in Hebrew means "Spanish," as most *Sepharadi* Jews lived in Spain. During the Moorish occupation of Spain, which roughly coincided with the Dark Ages in the rest of Europe, Jewish culture flourished. Medieval Spanish became the

native tongue of the *Sepharadim*, and as the years passed Medieval Spanish and Hebrew combined to form a new language (the "Yiddish of the *Sepharadim*"), called Ladino, which to this day remains the main identifying element of the *Sepharadim*. The Jewish movement of mysticism, known as the *Kaballah*, emerged among the *Sepharadim* in the 10th and 11th centuries. One of the greatest accomplishments of the *Sepharadim* during the later Middle Ages was the codification of Jewish Law, especially Rabbi Joseph Karo's *Shulhan Aruch*.

The 16th century was the turning point in the saga of Jewish ethnic diversification. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 dispersed the Sepharadic community to modern-day Italy, Holland, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Palestine, and also to South American lands and eventually to North America as well. Moreover, the decline in Arab culture in the 15th and 16th centuries resulted in a corresponding decline in the worldwide significance of the Oriental Jews. Most importantly though, the Orientals began to lose their numerical superiority relative to the overall Jewish population. By the 17th century they comprised only 40 percent of the worldwide Jewish population, and that figure continued to decline until the Holocaust in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. The group that then took the cultural and numerical lead represents the third main Jewish ethnic group, the *Ashkenazim*. This group is descended mostly from the remnants of the Jewish community living in Israel during the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. The

Romans banished thousands of Jews from Israel and transported many of them to Europe, where over the years, they settled throughout the Continent. By the end of the eighth century some Jews had penetrated into Germany and all the way over to France. From the 11th century onward these Jews took on the name *Ashkenazim* (German, or Western), as distinguished from the *Sepharadim* in Spain. These Jews did not speak Ladino, and after the French expelled "their" Jews in 1306, Germany became the undisputed center of the *Ashkenazi* Jews. The *Ashkenazim* developed their own distinct language, Yiddish, which combined elements of Hebrew, German, and other European tongues. For the next seven centuries until the Holocaust, the history of the *Ashkenazim* was characterized by on-again-off-again persecution and a constant struggle to either live separately or to fit into the host society. Their history was also characterized, though, by extensive participation in the European movements of enlightenment and emancipation. The Hassidic and *Haskala* movements were direct Jewish offshoots of the Age of Enlightenment, and they served as the forerunners of the "Return to Zion" movements which emerged later. Through all this the *Ashkenazim* had assimilated to the cultures of their home countries to the same extent as their Oriental and *Sepharadi* brethren had in their countries of dispersion. With over 1,500 years of separation now standing between the three Jewish "ethnic" communities, one can easily see the great cultural diversity which developed.

Nevertheless, the Jewish people have always been "one people," chiefly because of religious persecution which served to unify the Jews down through the centuries, and an overall religious commonality and the messianic desire to return to Zion. Although thousands of *Sepharadi* and Oriental Jews (whom we will now refer to collectively as "Orientals") returned to Palestine over the years, and can truly be called "Zionists," the movement for *political* Zionism received its greatest impetus in the Western countries where the return to Zion meant establishing a Jewish State there, thus ending the centuries of dispersion by the ingathering of the Exiles. Despite the dangers, a small Jewish presence remained in Palestine straight through to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Zionism

Political Zionism arose out of a combination of ideologies which may be described as the 19th century "European tradition." Nationalism, Social Darwinism, Industrialization, Populism, and Socialism all contributed in varying degrees to the basic ideas of Zionism.

Zionism represents the Jewish movement for national liberation. Originally formulated in the late 19th century by Theodore Herzl and his followers, Zionism sought to develop a comprehensive ideology which would guide the Jewish people back to their homeland and eventually to nationhood. The political Zionist ideology revolved around the notions of socialism,

agricultural and industrial pioneering, and Jewish unity. The main goal was to assimilate all Jews into their historical homeland (*Eretz Yisrael*), so that the Jewish people could live free of the estrangement and persecution which had plagued them throughout the past centuries. The movement was fueled by the increasing pogroms in Poland and Russia, as young Jews there began to react against the culture of the vulnerable *Shtetl*, or Jewish village, and to seek the establishment of a new Jewish identity.

Because of the influence of Socialism, Zionism was basically secular, as it viewed the Jewish people as a nation in exile rather than as a purely religious group. The concepts of Zionism have been carried over and now serve as the official ideologies of the State of Israel. To this extent a critical examination of the Zionist movement can serve to explain how its deficiencies have also persisted beyond the establishment of the State.

One basic problem with the Zionist movement is that it virtually ignored the *Sepharadi*-Oriental Jews. Although Zionism sought to represent the nationalist desires of the entire Jewish people, in actuality it represented a European Jewish solution to the problem of European Jewry. It was formulated exclusively in Europe by Europeans, and it failed to recognize the existence of non-European Jews. Ironically, many modern historians and writers such as Amos Elon (1971) have neglected to chronicle the role of *Sepharadi* Jews among the "founders and sons" of Zionism and Israel. This omis-

sion, stemming from ignorance or neglect, has important implications for current ethnic relations and for the self-image of the *Sepharadi* Jews in the State today.

To repair the damage, the *Sepharadi* community places much emphasis on two pre-Herzl, *Sepharadi* Zionist leaders, Rabbi Yehuda Bivas of Corfu, and his pupil, Rabbi Yehuda Alcalay of the Danube river town, Zamlin, in Yugoslavia (Sitton, 1981). Both of these religious leaders travelled all over Europe to preach the return to Zion and the need to rebuild the Land, defend it, and revive the use of Hebrew as the native language. One contemporary Israeli historian, Shmuel Klein (1978), discovered that Herzl's parents lived in Zamlin at the same time that Rabbi Alcalay wrote his thoughts on the outlines of a Jewish State. Klein suggests that "perhaps the young Herzl picked up the kernel of his ideas on Zionism from discussions with his parents, who heard them from Alcalay". The implication of this hypothesis for Israeli *Sepharadim* is of great significance, and the importance attached to it is indicative of the perceived need to claim full rights to the Zionist State.

Although in the late 19th century the Orientals comprised 10 percent of the world Jewish population, the Zionists seemed totally ignorant of them. According to Elazar (1978), Zionist history books make no mention of the Oriental communities, and many European Jews in Poland and Russia in the early 1900s did not realize that Judaism extended far beyond the European-American World. Their notion of the Jewish world was

basically confined to their own *shtetl* and to the areas where their relatives lived, usually not too far away. Hazaz described it this way:

Listen! We the Jews of Eastern Europe had thought, in our innocence, that the Jews who lived in greater Russia . . . that it was these Jews who constituted the Jewish people, and no one else besides. True, we had known that Jews were to be found in Germany; but as far as we were concerned this was a Jewry whose relevance was fast disappearing as a result of Reform and assimilation which greedily ate into its body. We also knew that there were Jews in France, England, and overseas. But Oriental Jews! We simply forgot that such a thing existed! (quote by Rejwan, 1967: 101).

The facts are pretty well established that the organized, political Zionist movement was practically non-existent in the Oriental Jewish world (Smooha, 1978; Patai, 1953). In Iraq, for example, Zionism emerged weakly through local initiatives, and after the World Zionist Organization (WZO) failed to send propaganda materials, funds, and immigration (to Palestine) certificates, the movement faltered. Smooha (1978: 54) charges that the WZO "cooperated in one area only — receiving contributions," and made no effort to help until after the pogrom of Iraqi Jews in 1941, almost sixty years after the first Zionists moved from Europe to Palestine.

On the other hand, Avineri (1972) has described the Zionist movement in Yemen (especially in 1910) as an "incredible episode" which was "successful in inducing several thousand Yemenites to immigrate to Palestine." Smooha, however, examined this episode more

closely and discovered that the *Ashkenazim* imported the Yemenites "to carry out physical labor under the blazing sun of Palestine" (Smooha, 1978: 54). Furthermore, Smooha found that when they arrived in Palestine the Yemenites were allotted smaller homes and smaller tracts of land than were the *Ashkenazim*.

The relative absence of international Zionist activity in the Oriental communities is a fact of history that cannot be disputed. What can be disputed, however, is explaining *why* the Orientals were left out. We have already hinted at one cause — the fact that Zionism was formulated by and for European Jews. Not only were some of its notions alien to some Oriental Jews, but expanding the movement to the Middle East might have weakened and drained the European effort as the resources available to the Zionists were quite limited. However, the failure of the Zionists to even make any sincere attempt to include the Orientals either in their leadership or in the "*aliyot*" (immigrations to Palestine) cannot be justified by the above explanations. Perhaps another reason why political Zionism did not exist in the Oriental diaspora was because of its small size and remote distance from the *Ashkenazi* core. The Orientals were stereotyped, even then, by Western Jewry; as such they were not looked upon as potentially important contributors to the Zionist movement. Arab-Oriental culture was considered backward and deprived, and along with it so were the Oriental Jews. Elazar (1978), however, has shown that the Orientals in fact made great con-

tributions to building the State when given the opportunity and that they responded to the call to return to the homeland (after 1948) with greater enthusiasm than did the *Ashkenazim*.

Finally, Zionism did not appear in some Oriental countries because the Arab governments there prohibited such activity. Some Oriental Jewish leaders feared governmental reprisals, so the cards apparently were stacked against Zionism in those areas. However, while this situation was not pervasive, the *religious tie* to Zion was indeed widespread and could have provided vast resources for Zionism among Oriental Jews during pioneering days.

The Zionists missed an historic opportunity to bring the Orientals and the *Ashkenazim* together in the pursuit of a presumably common goal. Smooha (1978), Elazar (1978), Selzer (1967), and Rejwan (1967) have argued that *Ashkenazi* ethnocentrism led to the Zionists' neglect of the Orientals. Since the *Ashkenazim* were influenced by European social and political thought, they were also influenced by the "white man's burden" mentality, which led them to believe in their own cultural superiority relative to the Orientals'. The evidence supporting this argument is not convincing beyond a doubt, and perhaps "benevolent paternalism" is a fairer description of the *Ashkenazi* attitude towards Orientals (Zipperstein and Jaffe, 1980). Nevertheless, the absence of early and equal Oriental participation in the Zionist movement, mainly due to a lack of *Ashkenazi* interest, strained Oriental-*Ashkenazi* rela-

tions in the pre-State *Yishuv* and later in Israel.

Roots of Ethnic Conflict During the Yishuv Period

The *Yishuv* period lasted from 1882, the beginning of Zionist immigration to Israel, until the founding of the State in 1948. The term "*Yishuv*" refers to the Jewish community in Palestine and its semi-official government during those pre-State years. The *Yishuv* represented the communal substructure within the overall Ottoman and later British régimes. During the *Yishuv* period the Zionists laid the foundation for the structures and institutions which would eventually become those of the Jewish State. Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first Prime Minister and President, were among the main *Yishuv* leaders since the early 1930s. The history of the *Yishuv* thus represented the first step toward fulfilling the dream of Zionism. Immigrants streamed into Palestine, buying land from local Arabs, building towns and cities, and, spurred on by the optimism created in the wake of the Balfour Declaration, preparing for statehood. The Zionist ideals of equality and unity received much emphasis during this period, as the Jews in Palestine had to band together in order to overcome the enormous obstacles that obstructed the path to independence. Common enemies such as the British and the Arabs, and later the effect of the European Holocaust, all drew the Palestinian Jews closer together.

This image of a pioneering com-

munity, so prevalent in historical accounts of the *Yishuv*, has received much criticism recently. Smooha (1978) claimed, for example, that while the *Yishuv* laid the foundation for Jewish statehood, it also laid the foundation for ethnic conflict within the Jewish State. At the time of the first *Aliyah* (Zionist immigration) in 1882, the 300-year old *Sepharadi* Council of Jerusalem stood out as the sole representative of the Jews in Palestine. The incoming Zionists, however, saw themselves as the future leaders of the State of Israel. They disliked the *Sepharadi* Council's accommodation to Ottoman rule, so they basically ignored the traditional authority of the Council over the Palestinian Jews. By 1918, with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the increasing influx of Zionists into Palestine, the *Sepharadi* Council had lost virtually all of its power. The British had committed themselves to supporting the Zionist program for statehood via the 1917 Balfour Declaration, and the non-Zionist *Sepharadi* Council suddenly seemed an obsolete relic of Ottoman Palestine. Since the Zionists were mainly *Ashkenazi* and the *Sepharadi* Council obviously Oriental, ethnic relations in the *Yishuv* experienced a poor start.

Smooha argues further that the *Ashkenazi Yishuv* Establishment treated Oriental newcomers differently from *Ashkenazi* newcomers. The example of the 1910 Yemenite immigration has already been cited. The *Ashkenazim* have also been accused of feeling "superior" and "paternalistic" toward the Orientals, "thus rendering impossible any meaningful relations between them" (Smooha, 1973: 70). The lack of Zionist activity in the Oriental countries created

a further ideological gulf between the *Yishuv* leaders and the small trickle of Oriental immigrants (10.4 percent of all immigrants between 1919 and 1948 were Orientals, see Table No. 1).

Smooha concludes that ethnic relations in the *Yishuv* suffered because of *Ashkenazi* attitudes and practices. He contends that these practices carried over into the new State, thus preventing ethnic equality from the very beginning.

Hasson (1978) offers a different interpretation of group relations within the *Yishuv*. He agrees with Smooha that claims of harmonious relations within the *Yishuv* are oversimplified and exaggerated, yet he chooses to emphasize socioeconomic, rather than ethnic divisiveness. Many *Ashkenazim*, Hasson claims, entered Palestine as workers and remained in the working class. They did not feel any closer to the *Ashkenazi* bourgeois than did any other ethnic group comprising the *Yishuv* working class. Furthermore, the *Ashkenazi* élite was not always totally unified, as evidenced by the bitterness and tension created in the aftermath of the *Altalena* affair¹. Smooha takes for granted *Ashkenazi* unity, but this error does not seriously discredit his general claims of unequal treatment of the Orientals and the development of institutional practices which maintained the ethnic status hierarchy through the establishment of the State.

¹ During Israel's War of Independence in 1948 an arms ship belonging to the *Irgun Zva'i Le'umi* was destroyed by the *Hagana*. Ben-Gurion accused Begin of the *I.Z.L.* of trying to overthrow the newly-created government. The dispute was never settled and created enmity for many years (Begin, 1977, 211-216).

Table No. 1
Immigration to Palestine, 1919-1948 and 1948-1952, by
Immigrant's Country of Origin (in percentages)

Country of Origin	1919-1947	1948-1952
Asia-Africa (Oriental)	10.4%	51.2%
East Europe	57.7	33.6
Central Europe	20.1	4.7
Other (America and Oceania)	11.8	10.4
Total immigration:	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Bachi (1974: 93)

Mass Immigration in the Early Years of the State

After the State of Israel was established on 14 May 1948, and with the promulgation of the "Law of Return" shortly thereafter calling for all Jews to immigrate to Israel, hundreds of thousands of Jews flocked to Israel, mostly from Afro-Asian (Oriental) countries. The Jewish population of Israel at its birth numbered 649,000. By the beginning of 1952, another 689,739 Jews had immigrated to Israel, more than doubling the population size in less than four years.

Compared to the pre-State period 1919 to 1948, one most important change in the period after the establishment of the State was the dramatic increase in the percentage of Oriental immigrants. Over 300,000 Orientals

poured into Israel from 1948 to 1952, and they continued to comprise the majority of all immigrants for every year until 1964 (see Table No. 1). In some instances (such as operation "magic carpet" in Yemen) entire Oriental communities were transplanted to Israel, while in other cases some Orientals, mostly the better-educated or financially secure, chose to resettle in Europe or in North America. The vast majority of those Jews who left Arab lands, however, went to Israel.

Several factors accounted for the sharp rise in Oriental immigration. First, the very establishment of the Jewish State sent shock waves throughout the Arab world and consequently, the condition of the Jews became quite precarious. Persecution and harassment occurred frequently enough to persuade the Orientals to leave, and Israel opened her doors to them. Combined with the

presence of an almost messianic zeal among some religious Orientals to return to the Holy Land and a more pragmatic desire among other Orientals to seek greater economic opportunities, the choice of immigrating to Israel was not difficult to make and often represented the only possibility. The Orientals thus arrived in Israel feeling quite optimistic, as did the *Ashkenazi* establishment, for they perceived a large rate of immigration as essential to the survival and building of the new State. This optimism soon gave way, however, to the harsh realities of coping with problems of settlement and culture clash.

The suddenness of the large rate of immigration greatly taxed the resources of the young State. The War of Independence lasted until January 1949, but by that time thousands had already arrived and human and material resources had been nearly exhausted in the fight against the Arabs. Most of the Oriental immigrants were refugees, allowed to leave their home countries with only a minimum of money and personal effects. Upon arriving in Israel they had to be provided with food, clothing, shelter, language training, employment, medical care, and a whole list of other essential services. The Orientals, for their part, had arrived in a society that differed from their home countries in countless ways. Israel was already at that time a largely urban (63.4 percent of the population inhabited Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, and Haifa), Western, and industrial country with high ideological consciousness; socially and culturally different from the typical Middle Eastern states surrounding her. Because of the lack of contact during the previous hun-

dreds of years, and especially during the Zionist era, the Oriental newcomers and the *Ashkenazi* veterans found themselves total strangers to one another, and many *Ashkenazim* did not like what they saw. Many Orientals had dark skin, wore "traditional" clothes and ate "traditional" foods, and basically the sight of them took many *Ashkenazim* by surprise. A commentary in the Israeli daily *Ha'Aretz* about the Moroccan Jews, for example, contained many anti-Oriental overtones, generally reflecting the underlying Establishment attitude which guided policy toward them. The article is quoted extensively below:

A serious and threatening question is posed by the immigration from North Africa. This is the immigration of a race the like of which we have not yet known in this country . . .

Here is a people whose primitiveness reaches the highest peak. Their educational level borders on absolute ignorance. Still more serious is their inability to absorb anything intellectual . . . They are completely ruled by primitive and wild passions. How many obstacles have to be overcome in educating the Africans, for instance, to stand in line for food in the dining room and not to cause a general disturbance. When one Bulgarian Jew argued with them about standing in line, an African immediately pulled out a knife and cut off his nose . . .

In the living quarters of the Africans you will find dirt, card games for money, drunkenness, and fornication. Many of them suffer from serious eye, skin, and venereal diseases; not to mention immorality and stealing. Nothing is safe in the face of this asocial element, and no lock can keep them out from anywhere . . .

But above all there is a basic fact, no less serious, namely, the lack of prerequisites for adjustment for the life of the country, and first of all — chronic laziness and hatred of work. All of them, almost without exception, lack any skill, and are, of course, pen-

niless. All of them will tell you that in Africa they were 'merchants'; the true meaning of which is that they were small hawkers . . .

Certainly, all these Jews have the right to immigrate, no less than others. And they have to be brought here and absorbed, but if this is not done in accordance with the limits of capacity and distributed over periods of time — they will 'absorb' us and not we them. (Arye Gelblum, "The Truth About the Human Material, *Ha'Aretz*, 22 April 1949; quoted by Patai, 1953: 294-96).

Those *Ashkenazi* writers who chose to "defend" the Orientals wound up unconsciously ridiculing them too:

We need, like air to breathe, sizeable injections of naturalness, simplicity, ignorance, coarseness. These simpletons, these childish Jews, with their simplemindedness and their (natural) intelligence . . . are a life-elixir against our over-intellectual worrisomeness . . . (K. Shabatai, in *Davar*, 3 March 1950; quoted by Patai, 1953: 297).

Various groups of *Ashkenazi* and *Sepharadi* immigrants arrived in the country continuously from 1882 onwards. Nevertheless, the influence of the veteran *Ashkenazi* group was dominant throughout in shaping Jewish political and social institutions. *Ashkenazi* veterans had 80 years to shape the future State of Israel to their specifications. Thus when the mass of Orientals arrived they confronted an already well-established *Ashkenazi* core in Israel bent on preserving its western socio-cultural characteristics. Such attitudes as those seen in the above quotes existed to greater and lesser extents among many, but certainly not all, of the *Ashkenazim* responsible for implementing absorption policy. While policy was not formulated on the basis

of such attitudes, its implementation certainly was affected by the presence of such negative beliefs. These trends exemplified some of the undercurrents in official ideologies and policies.

From the beginning, the new State suffered from a lack of adequate resources to accommodate the massive waves of Oriental immigrants. On their way to Israel the newcomers were interviewed by representatives of the Jewish Agency (the body responsible for absorption of new immigrants) in order to arrange for services on arrival. Many immigrants felt bitter about the way in which the Jewish Agency bureaucrats treated them. They were not accustomed to the cold formality of Western officialdom. In many cases these absorption procedures tended to develop loss of self-esteem (Jaffe, 1979) and a sense of dependence among the immigrants. In other cases there soon developed a sense of bitterness among Orientals who felt that the *Ashkenazim* were trying to "change" them (Weingrod, 1966).

Upon arrival in Israel, all immigrants, Oriental and *Ashkenazim* alike, were housed initially in transit camps, called "*Ma'Abarot*" in Hebrew. The *Ma'Abarot* were usually comprised of rows of tents or tin huts, with no electricity, no private bathrooms, and only outdoor running water. Immigrants in the *Ma'Abarot* tended to remain close to their own ethnic groups (Matras, 1972: 18). The Orientals represented an overwhelming majority of the *Ashkenazi* residents managed to move on to better housing after a short while. Many *Ashkenazim* already had relatives

in the country, many benefited from German reparation payments, and some benefited from the practice of *protektzia* or bureaucratic favoritism. As a result, for the *Ashkenazim* the *Ma'Abarot* actually were "transit camps," but for some of the Orientals they often wound up as semi-permanent homes. Some *Ma'Abarot* still existed as late as 1972 long after the rate of immigration had tapered off, and these older camps were populated exclusively by Orientals.

As mentioned, conditions in the *Ma'Abarot* were quite harsh. Shuval (1963) described it this way:

Life in the transit camps was, of necessity bleak. The physical conditions left much to be desired: living conditions were crowded, food at the communal dining halls, although sufficient, was drab; there were few provisions for recreation; there were long waits for every conceivable need. One of the most depressing factors was the widespread unemployment. (p. 35).

Weingrod (1966), who studied the Moroccan immigration, claims that conditions in the *Ma'Abarot* were "chaotic," and that they were "often places of tension and demoralization" (p. 38). Indeed most accounts of the *Ma'Abarot* stress the primitive living conditions and the frustrations felt at both ends of the scale. The Israeli absorption authorities obviously were discouraged by the enormity of their task and with the apparent backwardness of the people they were trying to help. For the immigrants, on the other hand, the dream of returning to the Holy Land had suddenly turned into a nightmare of confusion and despair. Many felt that the local authorities were impatient and favored

the *Ashkenazim*. In the Moroccan case, Weingrod found that "the Moroccans experienced, or thought they experienced, discrimination levelled against them" (1966: 39). Indeed the rate of Moroccan immigration to Israel was occasionally subject to certain restrictions and subordinated in importance to the European immigration, but it would not be correct to say that the Moroccan immigrants suffered blatant discrimination. The significant point, though, is that they perceived some sort of unequal treatment, and this contributed later to Oriental feelings of group solidarity.

While they were not treated unfairly as a matter of policy, the Orientals wound up worse off for their experiences in the *Ma'Abarot*. As it turned out, the Orientals constituted an important source of labor for the new State. Matras found that the *Ma'Abarot* were "typically located near existing cities and towns, so that it would be possible to provide employment" (1973: 6). While the *Ma'Abarot* received health, welfare, and other essential services from the towns, the towns received much-needed laborers from the *Ma'Abarot*. This eventually led to a sort of geosymbiotic-cultural division of labor, as many Orientals lived in the *Ma'Abarot* and performed unskilled labor in the nearby veteran *Ashkenazi* towns. This existed as a general feature of the early immigration period. (Lissak, 1969: 13). Not every unskilled job was performed by the Orientals (indeed the presence of some *Ashkenazim* at the unskilled levels provided a basis for intergroup, cross-cutting affiliations to develop), and some Orientals were able to succeed economically in their new country.

However, at least until the late 1950s, one could say that a cultural division of labor existed as a result of the socio-spatial arrangement of the *Ma'Abarot*. This aspect of the immigration period also contributed to Oriental group solidarity in later years.

By the mid-1950s, when the rate of immigration began to stabilize at a much lower level, many trends had already emerged. Ethnic tension had occurred frequently enough to become a significant element in the young State. The division of society along ethnic lines had also begun to crystallize, as well as the institutional arrangements for the perpetuation of this division. These trends, as pointed out, were already apparent during the *Yishuv*; the mass immigration actually speeded things along and led to the almost immediate emergence of ethnic conflict in Israel.

As the rate of immigration and military pressures decreased, the State found more resources, foreign and internal, to attend to the housing problem of the Orientals in the transit camps. Most of the *Ma'Abarot* were closed, and in their place the State built "development towns" along the periphery of the country's borders, transplating many of the *Ma'Abarot* dwellers there. The idea behind the development towns was to fortify the edges of the country with civilian industrial and agricultural settlements and to prevent a sort of "urban sprawl" from developing in the Haifa—Tel Aviv—Jerusalem districts. Since the Orientals were in need of permanent housing on arrival in the country, many of them were sent directly to the development towns. Although the official goal was not to create a rural

ethnic core or hinterland-urban demographic division, the majority, 66 percent, of those living in the development towns turned out to be Orientals. In the following years, however, many Oriental Jews migrated to urban areas and many "outlying suburbs" of the larger cities are now integral neighborhoods of these cities (Geffner, 1974; Klaff, 1973, 1977).

Today some of the early development towns, such as Beersheva, Arad, Dimona, and Ashdod have become very successful; while others, such as Yerucham and Kiryat Shmona, have experienced a variety of problems. The Orientals living in these towns have, in their own eyes at least, wound up in inferior conditions relative to their *Ashkenazi* countrymen (Heller, 1973; Inbar and Adler, 1977). Many, but not all Orientals who were sent to moshavim (cooperative farming villages) and to public and immigrant housing estates in veteran towns, live in difficult, overcrowded housing situations, exacerbated by inaccessibility to mortgages, low income, high cost of housing, and relatively high birth rates.

By the end of the 1950s, then, the nature of Jewish ethnic relations in Israel had become fairly well established: The Orientals and the *Ashkenazim* were clearly becoming stratified along geographic and socio-economic lines and the official goal of "*mizug ha'galuyot*," mixing the exiles, was experiencing mixed success. A handful of Orientals even returned to their home countries after alleged mistreatment. Patai (1953) describes the case of a group of 150 Jewish immigrants from India who returned to the sub-continent,

claiming that in Beersheva "we were told that we should eat only black bread as we were black, and the white bread was only for white Jews" (p. 291). Ethnic stereotypes and tensions appeared in more serious forms. In the early 1950s an incident in Tel-Mond, in which an Iraqi Jew was killed, sparked a near-riot in the local *Ma'Abara* (Shumsky, 1955). Another serious outburst of ethnic conflict occurred in the Haifa slum of Wadi Salib in July 1959, when, after a Moroccan Jew was shot (non-fatally) by police for resisting arrest, angry mobs looted and vandalized *Ashkenazi* property and businesses in various parts of town for several days. The country was shocked, a commission of inquiry was set up, and its investigation led to some important social legislation ("children's grants") as well as gaining the cooperation of the riot's leaders by giving them new apartments (Toledano, 1977). However, the incident demonstrated that an ethnic time bomb was ticking in Israel, and it was one of the earliest definitive expressions of Oriental solidarity, albeit on a small scale. Although some have interpreted the Wadi Salib riots as an Oriental "movement" for social equality, its spontaneity and lack of organization precluded it from making substantial gains for all Orientals. The *ad hoc*, narrow response of the government, was unfortunate too, because it did not attack the root problems at an "early" stage.

Wadi Salib set a precedent for group violence which occurred more than a decade later with the emergence of the Israeli "Black Panthers."

On 28 February, 1971, two young Moroccan Jews were arrested for posting a petition on the walls of Jerusalem's City Hall. The petition read, "Enough! We are a group of exploited youth and we are appealing to all others who feel they are not getting a fair deal . . . Enough of being underprivileged. Enough discrimination. How long are we going to keep silent? Alone we can achieve nothing — together we will triumph" (*Jerusalem Post*, 1 March 1971). The petition was signed "*Pantherim Ha'Schechorim*" — The Black Panthers. Municipal political leaders were convinced that social workers were behind this "American import" to create change. Israelis were taken completely off guard by the incident. The country was in the midst of its post-Six Day War economic boom, and the ethnic situation appeared to be resolving itself as the Orientals were experiencing a steady rise in their standard of living. Most startling, though, was the name chosen. Why "Black Panthers?" The group had no connections whatsoever with its American namesake; even the nature of its demands differed substantially from the American Panthers (Iris and Shama, 1972; Cohen, 1972). Apparently the name was chosen for the anticipated shock waves it would create, and in this respect the group's leaders succeeded beyond their expectations. The group attracted considerable publicity in Israel and abroad, and was received by the public with much curiosity but with little sympathy.

Specifically, the Panthers demanded reclassification of their draft statuses

(since many had criminal records and were ineligible for conscription) in order to participate in the highly-valued regular army, job training, slum clearance and decent housing, school integration, and finally redefinition of their family status to that of immigrants in order to qualify for all the privileges involved therein. As Etzioni-Halevy (1975) has noted, "the striking fact about these demands is that they provide evidence of the *acceptance* by the Black Panthers of some of the basic premises on which the Israeli society and politicoeconomic system is based: for instance, acknowledgement of the legitimacy of Israel's government, which makes it appropriate to address demands to it; acceptance of the tenet that the government is responsible for allocating certain economic rewards such as housing and employment; and, finally, acknowledgement that the supreme test of full acceptance into (and participation in) Israeli society is admittance into the Israel Defense Army. As time went on, the Black Panthers did not radicalize their demands."

While they may not have radicalized their demands, the Panthers did engage in some unorthodox activities in order to attract attention to their cause. Throughout 1971 and early 1972 the group staged street demonstrations and clashed with police on several occasions. After a particularly wild outburst in May 1971, Prime Minister Golda Meir, who had received their leaders in her office a few weeks previously, publicly referred to the Panthers as "not nice boys" (*Jerusalem Post*, May 20 1971). In August 1971 a Panther street rally ended

up in violence with 7 injuries and 23 arrests. In March 1972 several Panthers seized milk which had been delivered to apartments in a rich neighborhood and redistributed it to families in poor neighborhoods.

Throughout all this time the Panthers experienced internal difficulties. They were unable to agree on priorities, such as whether to align themselves with the radical "*Matzpen*" movement or whether even to establish links with international dissident groups. Reports of factionalism and in-fighting emerged during the entire time the Panthers were active; several Panthers were occasionally hospitalized for injuries received while fighting one another. The Panthers in fact never had one single leader, and the membership in its ruling clique constantly changed. With few active members (500 at most, according to Etzioni-Halevy and others) and limited funds, the Panthers found themselves constantly beset with organizational difficulties and sometimes utter confusion. Ironically, like the Establishment they were protesting against, the Panthers formulated their strategy on an *ad hoc*, short-term basis.

While many Orientals sympathized with the Panthers, they, as the Wadi Salib leaders before them, failed to emerge as ethnic group leaders and were harshly castigated by many prominent Orientals (e.g., Mordechai Ben-Porat) who favored working within the Establishment. After two years of activity, with apparently little success other than the appointment of the blue-ribbon, 129-member Prime Minister's Commission on Disadvantaged Youth (1973),

the Panthers decided on making a bid for political power. They merged with *Knesset* Member Shalom Cohen and formed the Black Panthers-Israel Democrats Party. Eliezer Jaffe (1975), who headed the Jerusalem Municipal Welfare Department between 1971 and 1973 and had frequent contact with the Panthers, stated that the group "committed suicide" when they joined the political sphere. Indeed in the 1973 general elections the Panthers secured only 0.7 percent of the national vote, not even enough to win a single seat in the *Knesset*. Since then one branch of the Panthers has obtained one *Knesset* seat in the 1977 elections by merging with the Communist party, but this pushed them further into obscurity.

The effect of the Panthers, though, is still felt in Israel, and is often referred to. One constantly hears fears expressed in Israel of a "Panther revival" or of a new, more militant group emerging when and if peace really comes. The fear of further social unrest and possible disunity has prompted the government to take some positive steps toward narrowing the ethnic gap since the emergence of the Panthers, such as the appointment of the Prime Minister's Commission and the Begin administration's Project Renewal slum clearance program (Jaffe, 1980). While most people would acknowledge that as a political party and as a protest movement the Panthers failed, we feel that the Black Panther episode resulted in much more than

protest. Ethnic identity was strengthened considerably for Oriental Jews in Israel and elsewhere, and perhaps one day a well-organized Oriental movement will develop to pressure the government to grant greater equality of opportunity to the Orientals. This has yet to emerge, and while it appears that a new protest group could arise, we do not expect to see any general outbreak of ethnic violence or ethnic civil war in Israel, as some forecasters of doom or hopeful Arab propagandists contend. The Black Panthers were important in their own right if only for the shock and stocktaking effect they had on the *Ashkenazi* Establishment. They were a disorganized, young, and emotional group, but their message came across very clear: the government would not be allowed to maintain a complacent *status quo* approach to ethnic problems in Israel.

As Israel enters the 1980s we are still facing the social, economic, and political consequences of Jewish dispersion, misconceptions of early Zionism, early ethnic stereotypes, and results of mass immigration "absorption." There is less respect these days for the old "time-will-heal" approach to our ethnic problems, and there is a growing consensus concerning the need for structural and conceptual changes as well as for more direct citizen involvement in the shaping of Israeli society. There is little doubt too, that in the future more Oriental Israelis will be involved in these activities than ever before.

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NAMES

Gervase Cowell

In this land
 names reverberate
 with the resonance of ages
 or the sharpness of a memory
 young in pain.

Where is then the ordinary time
 when to say "the bus"
 is not to see
 dry flowers on the Haifa Road?

A time when Misgav Am
 lies quiet in the hills,
 when Yom Kippur is any year
 and Jerusalem is a football team.