# SOME COMMENTS ON THE "ETHNIC" PROBLEM IN ISRAEL*

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*In order to understand the dimensions and the prominence of the problem of the gap between Oriental and Western communities in Israel, it is necessary to go beyond the usual explanations in terms of population growth, relative social and economic position, or differences in cultural traditions. Rather, the problem is part of the confrontation between the socio-political center and the various highly mobile peripheries who wish to penetrate the center. In addition, there is a reaction to the early pioneering-socialist ideology that called on immigrants to introduce far-reaching changes into their life styles.*

## INTRODUCTION

I should like to offer several comments on the problem of ethnic groups (*edot*) in Israel today. Ostensibly, one could claim that the issue is simple and clear: the ethnic group problem exists because of the proliferation of 'oriental *edot*', because of their considerable demographic weight, because of their relative economic, social and educational 'backwardness' (the famous 'gap' which has been investigated and emphasized so extensively). Another reason is said to be the alienation between the cultures and traditions of these groups and the 'Western' culture of 'Ashkenazi' society which is also the dominant sector in Israeli society. In any event, these are the customary explanations for the existence of the ethnic problem in Israel. There can be no doubt that there are certain valid points in these explanations. The statistics on the ethnic gap are well known and I do not wish to repeat them, although I shall dwell on two central points in the structure of these statistical data. Nor can one deny that there are differences between the cultural traditions of the oriental ethnic groups and the cultural pattern which developed in Israeli society and its center from the Yishuv period to the political changeover of 1977, and perhaps even later. But however valid these explanations, they cannot explain satisfactorily the form, dimensions and prominence of the ethnic problem, nor the way in which it evolved.

I shall commence with several indications of the complexity of the problem, and shall then turn to more systematic analysis.

Let us commence with the structure of the statistics. Firstly, the data do not distinguish sufficiently between populations above and below the poverty line. The percentage of oriental immigrants, or, to use the official term, people of Asian-African origin, or the second generation of Asian-African families is very high within the poor population. If we offset this percentage from the calculations of the ethnic gap, then

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several aspects of the picture will undoubtedly change. Secondly, all the data, or at least – the great majority – relate to two global categories: people of Asian-African origin, generally known as the oriental ethnic groups or Sephardim, and those of European and American origin (including South Africa, Australia, etc.), generally denoted Ashkenazim or 'Westerners'. This distinction was first drawn, for reasons of technical convenience, by the Central Bureau of Statistics many years ago, and has gradually become a general categorization for dichotomous distinction between eastern and western ethnic groups, i.e., Sephardim and Ashkenazim. This categorization has put down strong roots in Israeli public consciousness. This consciousness and this differentiation now undoubtedly constitute part of Israeli reality, but the said differentiation, and in particular its symbolization and ideologization, was created *within* this reality, and is not, as is sometimes claimed, the 'natural' outcome of the proliferation of *edot*. The interesting fact (which Yohanan Peres has indicated in one of his recent works) that political voting and party distribution between Likud and Labor at the last elections are relatively homogenous as regards ethnic group differentiation is the outcome of the Israeli situation and its dynamics, and is in no way a 'natural' fact. This differentiation does not distinguish to sufficient degree between the various shades of the ethnic groups contained in the two categories. On the other hand, it classifies certain ethnic groups in unsuitable categories (the Bulgarian *eda*, for example, is Sephardi in origin, but is not generally included in that category).

We have merely hinted here at the complexity of the problem, but the main point is that the ethnic group problem, the ways in which it is perceived, the symbolization and ideologization, were in fact created within the framework of the consolidation processes of Israeli society, and not only in the wake of the economic or demographic confrontation between the veteran population (Ashkenazi) and the new (Sephardi) population. And from this point I would like to move on to the crux of the argument.

## CLOSURE OF THE CENTER: DEMANDS FOR PARTICIPATION AND ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS

I shall not try to explain the very existence of various differences between ethnic groups, but rather the form these differences and their perception have recently taken. In so doing, I shall relate to the above-mentioned dichotomization between the oriental and Ashkenazi ethnic groups and the considerable aggressiveness linked to this dichotomization. Inter alia, I shall deal with the extreme demands voiced by some of the activists of the oriental ethnic groups (particularly those associated with TAMI, the Israel Tradition Party, who also include Ashkenazis). These demands emphasize the decisive difference between Sephardi culture and Ashkenazi-Western culture, and make claims which could be interpreted as the drive towards a kind of oriental ethnic separatism: a society of oriental *edot*, an economy of oriental *edot*, etc.

The question is whether this ethnic awakening (with all its manifestations) does in fact stem from the existence of objective cultural differences and is truly directed at cultural separatism. In order to answer this question, I shall commence by analyzing a central issue related to the development of Israeli society which has often been linked to the ethnic issue – namely the political upheaval of 1977, and its continuation in 1981. The explanation which attributes the upheaval to the ethnic factor is well known, as are the numerous data showing that the percentage of Likud voters in 1977 was in fact greater among the oriental ethnic groups, and increased even further in 1981. But one cannot comprehend the 1977 upheaval, or even the 1981 perpetuation, in this fashion alone.

In 1977 there were three factors which caused the debacle of the Labor Party and shattered its dominance. The first of these was the voting pattern of a certain proportion of oriental Jews. There were, however, two additional factors: one (which also operated in 1981), was the age factor. Statistics showed, as is well known, that younger people – of all origins – have a greater tendency to vote for the Likud. The other factor (which was present only in 1977) was the organization of the DASH Party. The oriental ethnic groups were not prominent among the leaders and followers of that party. Rather the contrary, the great majority were Ashkenazis, socially and economically close to the Labor Alignment, to which most of them returned in 1981.

What was the common denominator of these three factors – the voting patterns of part of the oriental *edot* (we shall return to this 'part'), the voting pattern of young people, and the existence of DASH? It is clear that not all the young people nor the DASH voters were aware of the ethnic problem, or 'ethnically conscious'. What they shared was, apparently, a sense of non-participation, in the political (and to a certain degree also social) centers, lack of free access to it, and the lack of possibility to exert influence on it. Among all three groups there prevailed a feeling that the political center had fossilized. The strongest reaction against this fossilization was, apparently, that of the DASH voters, a response which accentuated the political dimensions, far more than the social and cultural factors (these latter aspects were emphasized more by the other two groups). At the 1981 elections, most of the DASH voters returned to the Labor Party while the voting trend of young people remained more or less the same. The social and political confrontation between these groups and the socio-political center was intensified in 1981.

In other words, it is my thesis that one cannot comprehend the crystallization of the ethnic problem as it appears today in Israel and its interweaving in the political struggle except through the prism of this confrontation between the socio-political center, as it evolved in Israeli society since 1948 (and, in effect, prior to that date) and the various peripheries in which highly intensive mobility processes were occurring. The peripheries differed widely from one another. It would be hard to describe a large part of the DASH voters as a social and economic periphery. They did, however, constitute a kind of political periphery, though it was largely identical from the social, economic and professional viewpoint with the political center. The young people were a much more dispersed periphery, while the oriental ethnic groups were a periphery of another kind, whose nature will be described below. In speaking of the oriental ethnic groups, it is necessary to emphasize the decisive importance of the mobile elements among them, and not necessarily of the neighborhood activists and the poorer populations. All the data indicate that the Likud's added power stemmed mainly from mobile elements within this periphery, and it is worth citing in this context the articles of Amiram Gonen (1982) and Dov Weintraub and Vered Kraus (1982). All these mobile and active peripheries found the center barred to them, and, to a certain degree, also alien to them from the social and cultural viewpoint. This is true mainly of the mobile groups among the oriental *edot*, and possible also of some of the young people. It is important to stress that the main concern of these peripheries (and possibly of DASH and the oriental groups in particular) was neither to set themselves apart from the center nor to create another center, but to penetrate the center, to be accepted within it and to feel an autonomous part of it, exerting independent influence.

I would like to offer several examples of this, all of which relate to the oriental *edot*, because our discussion focuses on them. One example is the High Court appeal submit-

ted by several oriental activists against the television series *The Pillar of Fire* (a history of the Jewish community in Palestine). (The appeal was rejected.) The central claim was that the series did not place sufficient emphasis on the role of the oriental ethnic groups in the Zionist endeavor. A second example is the interesting transformation of the Mimona festival of Moroccan Jews in recent years. The Mimona started out as the festival of a separatist group, celebrated in slightly aggressive fashion. It has developed into a celebration which emphasizes the unity between ethnic groups, a kind of attempt to obtain the sanction of the socio-political center for its unique tradition and authenticity. A further example is a radio interview given by the Cabinet Minister, Aharon Uzan, in early 1983. When he was asked why he had joined TAMI, and whether he in fact felt that he suffered discrimination, he said that he had never suffered economic problems. However, he had suddenly become aware of the fact that he lacked a matriculation certificate, that he did not know English, that nobody had ever helped him to achieve these things. He was apparently referring to his former colleagues in the Labor Alignment. He also claimed that while they had concerned themselves 'in colleagial fashion' with finding employment for Ashkenazi party members, they had not done so for him. In other words, here too we encounter a demand which can be interpreted as the desire to participate in the center. Numerous other examples could also be cited.

The sense of non-acceptance and non-participation can undoubtedly sometimes lead to the development of extreme ideologies of separatism, or to even more extreme manifestations. It is important to emphasize, however, that the roots of these emotions lie in the desire to take part and to be accepted within the center. It should also be stressed that the claim by many of the oriental activists and their patrons from overseas (often from the same countries of origin, who chose to settle in France, Canada or even the United States rather than to immigrate to Israel) that oriental culture must be preserved, often has paradoxical aspects. The patrons among them, tend to emphasize their own successful integration in their countries of residence, evinced not only in their economic role but also in the academic, intellectual sphere, that is to say, in areas which are esteemed in Western culture. The writer, Albert Memmi, for example, in an interview on the occasion of the Mimona in April 1983, noted that Paris is the natural place of residence for a writer writing in French. This statement most certainly does not reflect a strong desire for identification with oriental culture. Very often the attitude towards it is, at most, one of nostalgia.

DASH, to a large extent, voiced the same demand for participation in the center, but in their case it related mainly to the political and not to the socio-cultural sphere. This was because most members of DASH were – to use the phrase coined by Jonathan Shapira – members of part of the Israeli establishment which lacked political power.

From this point of view the picture was different among the oriental ethnic groups, particularly the more active elements among them (though not necessarily the 'official' activists). They undoubtedly sensed alienation from the center, or at least social and cultural estrangement. The question facing us is: what is the source of this estrangement? Does it originate solely, or even mainly, in the 'objective' differences between the various cultural traditions and different lifestyle, or is this not 'the whole story'? Cultural differences or estrangement indubitably existed; nor is there any question that in the first stages of absorption, and probably subsequently as well, the absorbing Israeli center developed a strong tendency to eradicate or reject many aspects of the cultures which the immigrants brought with them. But this phenomenon in itself is not a constant factor in modern immigration societies. Similar events occurred in the United States, during

the great migration, when the concept of the melting-pot was prevalent, as well as in other countries of immigration. In all these cases, many generations (sometimes as many as four) lapsed, and not merely one or 'one and a half' as in Israel, before a strong 'ethnic' reaction to this trend emerged.

## CONTRADICTIONS IN THE IMMIGRANT IDEOLOGY AND THE IDEOLOGY SECTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

Why, therefore, did the reaction occur in Israel at so early a stage? The reason would appear to lie in certain contradictions within the ideology of the absorbing society, in the transformation of this ideology, and in its clashes with the real conditions which evolved, to no small extent, out of these ideological roots. In contrast to American society, for example, the ideology of the absorbing society in Israel highlighted national unity and solidarity first and foremost. It emphasized that all the immigrants were in Israel by force of their Judaism, and dwelt on the Zionist revolution, namely, the fact that the Jews had come not only in order to realize the values of Jewish tradition which they had brought from their countries of origin, but also in order to change them. It was in the name of pioneering values, rather than European Western culture, that the Israeli ideology called on immigrants to introduce far-reaching changes into their lifestyles. This change was perceived as identical with the pioneering-revolutionary transformation brought about by the first pioneering waves of immigration. Another central point in this ideology was the concept of social and not merely national partnership – a partnership for joint action, for the development of the country. This idea was central to the ideology of the labor movement, which became the dominant force in the Yishuv and in the state.

From our point of view, the important fact is that acute conflicts developed within this ideology as well as in its interaction with the reality which was, as noted, constructed to a certain degree on the basis of these ideas, or at least by people who advocated them. The striking example of these processes is perhaps the acrimonious confrontation at the last elections between kibbutzim and the development towns in their vicinity. For many years, the kibbutzim served as the symbol of pioneering endeavor and of socialist Zionism. And yet it appears that precisely this very movement was less capable than any other sector of Israeli society (certainly less than the moshav movement but to a large extent also less than the urban sector) of finding ways of living and working together with the immigrants. Representatives of kibbutzim or kibbutz movements were later to argue that these immigrants had not experienced the Zionist revolution. From this point of view, the kibbutzim shared the opinion of Shmuel Dayan (labor leader and one of the first settlers of the moshav of Nahalal), who said that the immigrants should be regarded as children who need to be taught the essential ideas. But unlike the moshav settlers, the kibbutzniks did not succeed in doing even this. The important point is that in the central sectors of Israeli society (apart from the Moshav movement) no suitable ways were found of absorbing many of the immigrants, beyond mere bureaucratic procedures or location of suitable work frameworks. One could, of course, claim that this was an 'impossible mission', a statement that is certainly true for a modern country of immigration in general and one of non-selective immigration in particular. At the same time, in Israel the situation was characterized by two unique factors: firstly, the demographic weight of the oriental ethnic groups[1]. Secondly, in Israel, in contrast to the United States (where there was no ideological commitment to absorb the immigrants) a pioneer-

ing/socialist ideology prevailed in addition to the national ideology. This inspired the society and the establishment in their efforts to absorb the immigrants and to demand for themselves legitimization from the immigrant voters. The immigrants were naturally well aware of the contrast between ideology and reality, and understood that even if they advanced socially and economically, they would still not be full partners in the existing frameworks in general and the political and social centers in particular. This, to no small degree, was also the feeling of many younger people. In the first few years of economic distress, the everyday concerns (as well as the hope of successful absorption) kept this emotion in rein. As time went by, however, it intensified, also because it was nurtured by a process of stereotypization and of increasingly negative labelling of the oriental ethnic groups, and particularly the Moroccans. This process occurred not only in informal daily life, but also in certain institutional foci, and there are well known studies in the sphere of education and vocational guidance (see Stahl, 1979: 64-95 and Yogev and Rooletti, 1984, for example) which show to what extent labelling and prejudice affected teacher/pupil relations; evaluations of pupils and their vocational guidance.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the sense of deprivation and alienation was enhanced as the economic and social advancement of the oriental immigrants was speeded up. Studies by Weintraub and Kraus (1982), Gonen (1982), and others clearly indicate the fact that the more mobile elements within the oriental ethnic groups are encouraging this emotion, and translating it into political and possibly ideological expression. In this context, it is important to note that the full 'ethnic ideology' did not emerge from within the oriental groups themselves, but rather from within the establishment. The attempts in this direction by ethnic political lists and Sephardi leaders, who tried to create such lists, have failed in the State of Israel as they did in the pre-State period. The immigrants realized instinctively that their prospects for absorption would be greater through the existing parties. But within these parties, in the establishment in general and the labor movement in particular, there began to evolve towards the end of the fifties an 'ethnic ideology'. In the first period, considerable reference was made to the interim 'wilderness generation', a blanket definition for all new immigrants, including those from Europe, but towards the end of the fifties, the ideologization of ethnicity increased within the establishment. This ideology was ostensibly directed at responding to the 'natural demands' of the immigrants and granting them a sense of participation. In effect, however, this was the establishment's admission of inability or failure to absorb the immigrants, in terms of their own ideology, or the ideology of joint pioneering endeavor and natural and social ideals and values. In due course this trend became stronger. It was absorbed and consolidated in variegated ways, particularly among various activists of the oriental ethnic groups. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that it originated within the establishment, in Ben Gurion's famous statement that he was looking forward to a 'Yemenite Chief of Staff' and in other statements within the political system, as noted above.

In the context of the subject discussed above, namely the desire of oriental immigrants to participate in the center (and not to be distanced from it) one should note an additional point, which may also appear paradoxical. There can be no doubt that the Likud in general, and Herut in particular, did not create (as did the Labor Alignment) an ethnic ideology, although they did dwell on the 'ethnic issue'. The number of Likud ministers and Knesset members who belong to the oriental ethnic groups is relatively low. But Likud representatives have always spoken out on behalf of general-national values, stressing the general framework and the possibility of opening it to all. An

example of this is the reply of the then Prime Minister to an unfortunate slip of the tongue by Dudu Topaz, a popular television entertainer, who used a derogatory term about the oriental groups on the eve of the 1981 elections. In his reply, Begin claimed that he had heard the term for the first time on that day, and went on to recall two underground movement fighters executed by the British, one Sephardi and one Ashkenazi, noting that all the 'tribes of Israel' had fought together in that struggle. Cabinet Minister David Levi, for example, who no doubt is one of the most authentic leaders of the oriental ethnic groups, never uses the term oriental *edot*; to the extent that he refers to this population, he speaks of the 'deprived populations'. One could cite numerous additional examples.

This ideologization of the ethnic dimension is closely connected to the waning of the pioneering-elitistic aspect of the prevailing social ideology, and the emphasis on the egalitarian-distributory aspect. It also links up with the strengthening of the trend to make demands of the political center, demands which were fostered to a large extent by the center itself, as its paternalistic tendency was heightened. In the first stages of absorption, the paternalistic policy ensured the dependence of the various groups of immigrants on the center, but as these groups advanced and changes took place within the center, this policy only increased the distance of the immigrants from the center.

It must be emphasized once again that the sense of alienation of many oriental immigrants stems from their feeling that the political and cultural centers are barred to them, and their sense of estrangement from these centers, rather than from objective ethnic differences. I am not underestimating the importance of the latter, but their influence is not necessarily decisive. The example of the Bulgarian community can illustrate this point. The Bulgarians are Sephardis and their tradition is Sephardi. There can be no question but that they differ from Ashkenazis in many ways: food, customs and lifestyle. Nonetheless, these differences have not necessarily caused them to feel alienated, because they have succeeded to a large extent in integrating in some of the centers. The same is true of considerable (but perhaps 'silent') sections of the immigrants from Iraq, North Africa and Yemen.

## CHANGES IN THE CENTRAL SYMBOLS OF ISRAELI SOCIETY AND IN THE IMAGE OF PIONEER

In order to understand the above-described processes, one must take into account two additional factors: the changes which have occurred in images and symbols of the centers of Israeli society itself; and, above all, in the Israeli pioneering image, strikingly socialist in character, and the central image of Israeli society throughout the stated period. The unique Israeli flavor (connected with the country, its landscapes, antiquities and history) not only lingered on but was even enhanced. But the pioneering and socialist dimensions were considerably weakened. Their devaluation occurred in two differing directions, which yet to a certain degree reinforce one another.

In wide strata of the population, and within the upper strata of Israeli society in particular (including the leadership and particularly the second generation of Labor Party leaders and their social sector) living patterns developed which were increasingly based on the desire for a high standard of living emulating that of Western societies (and mainly America). The first trend was reflected in the development of Western or quasi Western life patterns in Israel. The second found expression in the development of a wide-ranging welfare state.

But meanwhile an additional change occurred in the consolidation of Israeli self-identity and collective consciousness. There was a shift in society's attitude towards Jewish history in general and the traditions of the various ethnic groups in particular, from almost total negation of this heritage, to admiration, almost sanctification. A decisive factor in this process was of course the Holocaust. But no less important was the growing awareness that the Zionist movement and the settlement endeavor in Israel, despite the cultural and creative innovations, had cut themselves off drastically from Jewish and Israeli history (and in particular the Jewish history of the Diaspora era) and had not succeeded, despite protestations to the contrary, in formulating a new cultural pattern. It was apparently this awareness which motivated the then Minister of Education, Zalman Aranne, when he broached his famous program for the fostering of Jewish consciousness. The detachment from Jewish Diaspora history was reflected clearly in the curriculum of Jewish history and Jewish literature, evolved by the Palestinian Jewish educational system in the nineteen twenties, and perhaps even before.

In this context, it is perhaps easier to understand the radical change which occurred in the attitude towards the heritage of the East and of the various ethnic groups. It is true that this heritage was an organic part of the curriculum in Hebrew literature during the Yishuv period and in the first few years of statehood. The golden age of Jewish literature in Spain was studied as an integral part of the Hebrew literature program, with strong emphasis on its secular dimension or tone. The decision to employ the Sephardi pronunciation was, of course, only one aspect of this trend. But these factors were not depicted as specific to the oriental groups; they were treated as part of the general heritage of the Jewish people, and in effect as part of the revolt against the experience of exile – mainly the Ashkenazi experience. The heritage of Eastern European Jewry, on the other hand, which took up a considerable part of the curriculum in literature and history, was studied to a large extent by negative, or at best, ambivalent reference. Emphasis was placed on the revolt of the Jewish 'Enlightenment' which rose up against traditional Judaism, and on the Zionist Revolution, which rebelled against the Enlightenment on the one hand and the traditional way of life of the Jewish *stetl* on the other. According to the altered approach today the heritage of the various ethnic groups is perceived as a separate and singular issue (though one can still discern tendencies to emphasize the integration in the overall heritage of the people) and this tradition is hallowed. The approach towards the heritage of the oriental ethnic groups is no longer ambivalent, and Israeli identity is certainly not presented as the antithesis of this heritage.

This awareness of the failure of the center and its ideologies to construct a well-formulated cultural system and a cohesive collective identity, helps explain the religious revival among certain sections of the public. This revival is striking among the Ashkenazis and is reflected in such phenomena as adoption of an extremely orthodox religious way of life, or less dramatic phenomena, such as the stressing of various traditional aspects in everyday life. The changes which have occurred in the attitude towards the heritage of the ethnic groups and the positive emphasis placed on it today can be comprehended within this general context of changes in the symbols of collective Israeli identification.

The second factor which has exerted strong influence on the processes of crystallization of Israeli reality is, as noted above, the existence of wide differences between the various oriental ethnic groups, as regards the consolidation of 'ethnic ideology'. The Bulgarians, it will be recalled, never developed a separatist ideology. The Yemenites, as well, who have maintained their authentic traditions and lifestyle more than other groups,

did not develop a separatist ethnic ideology to the same aggressive degree we are witnessing today. The picture is more complex among Iraqis. It is true that with the intensification of labelling, stereotyping and other processes which block the access to Israeli social centers, more and more Iraqis are perhaps tending to accept this ideology in various ways, but there can be no doubt that the main group advocating the extremist separatist approach is that of North African origin (and to a very small extent – tiny groups of Jews of Egyptian origin). How can one explain this? Here I would like to refer to the findings of one of the first studies of immigrant absorption more than thirty years ago (Eisenstadt, 1954), and to an article written by Bar-Yosef (1959) in the fifties on the Moroccan problem.

The findings of the first study indicate that a problem existed in that period (1949) with regard to at least part of the immigrants from North Africa. This problem was rooted in the background in the countries of origin of the immigrants. Because of historical circumstances[2], an extensive process of community, and to a certain extent, family disintegration, occurred there, and collective Jewish identity was undermined to a large degree. A strong dichotomy was created within the communities between traditional Jews and those who adopted modern patterns of life, and this dichotomy largely paralleled the division between poor and rich. The latter tended to migrate to France, and the former to immigrate to Israel. In other words, in contrast to the Yemenites and Bulgarians, and to some extent the Iraqis, it was mainly the weaker strata of the North African communities who immigrated to Israel, and the absence of the strong stratum – both well-established economic groups and potential modern leadership groups – was felt acutely. Within the stratum of traditional leaders, more tended to immigrate to Israel, but they were not always attuned to the different conditions in the new country. At the same time, this lack of awareness did not characterize all oriental immigrants, or the North Africans in particular. It should be emphasized, for example, that no disturbances or problems emerged within the Marrakesh community, which immigrated almost in its entirety. Hence, it should not be assumed that the North African group is problematic by nature, but rather that the problems stem, to a decisive degree, from the unique historical circumstances in which this Jewry found itself in the past century. And in the context of this discussion of historical circumstance, we can perceive from the development which has occurred in Israel that a comprehensive and complex process of mobility has taken place, indicating tremendous dynamism. At the same time, some elements of this process commenced at the starting points mentioned above.

## SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISRAELI SOCIETY AND THE ETHNIC PROBLEM

What conclusions can be drawn from this discussion? The main points would seem to be:

Firstly, the ethnic problem does not derive from the very existence of natural differences between ethnic cultures but from the Israeli situation and its internal dynamics. This does not imply that the problem stems from those phenomena or processes in Israeli reality which are often excessively emphasized, such as: alleged desire of Ashkenazis to 'exploit' oriental Jews; alienation; deliberate or inadvertant discrimination. All these (apart, it would seem, from the issue of deliberate discrimination) certainly exist but do not provide the central explanation for the evolvement of the ethnic problem into its present acute form. To a certain degree, the opposite is true: it was not the desire to exploit, etc., which operated here; it was rather the strong emphasis on Jewish solidarity

and national cooperation, unparalleled in any other modern country of immigration, which accelerated these developments. The acceleration occurred in the context of the processes of change within the Israeli center, as depicted above, on the one hand, and the mobility of the immigrants, on the other.

Secondly, on contrast to the religious sector, we do not discern among ethnic groups in Israel any desire (or possibility) to create a separate culture, and consolidate a separate cultural sector. The tendency is to blend and to create homogenization in various spheres of life.

Thirdly, precisely because the reasons for crystallization of the ethnic problem lie not in objective ethnic statistics but in profounder internal processes of change in Israeli society – this problem has generated tremendous potential tension, and that its development is of central importance for the future of Israeli society. It is possible that in this situation the tension is even greater than it would have been if the problem were purely and solely ethnic.

## FOOTNOTES

[1] This situation can perhaps be compared to the situation in the Eastern US in the first decade of this century. Because of the rise in the demographic weight of the immigrants to the US in that period, the well known restrictions on this immigration were introduced.

[2] The occurrence of processes of "partial" modernization in the countries of origin of the North African immigrants were affected by the pressure of French Western culture on the one hand and the traditions of Arab society on the other.

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