BOOK REVIEW

"... LO NEHKSHALIM ELA MENUHKSHALIM." (ORIENTALS AND ASHKENAZIM IN ISRAEL: THE ETHNIC DIVISION OF LABOR)

SHLOMO SWIRSKI
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Stephen Sharot
Department of Behavioral Sciences
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Israeli sociology is not renowned for theoretical pluralism or range of critical theoretical debate. The dominant theoretical trend, notably represented by S.N. Eisenstadt, has been heavily Parsonian, and the theoretical perspectives developed in America and Europe over the last decade or so appear to have made little impact on Israeli sociology; one has to search hard, and often in vain, for symbolic interactionists, phenomenologists, ethnomethodologists, structuralists, neo-Marxists, or "critical" sociologists. The emergence of a "radical school," centered in the University of Haifa, is, therefore, a welcome development. The major focus of research of the "radical" sociologists has been ethnic stratification and relations, and the book under review is their most comprehensive presentation on the subject.[1] The work includes some very interesting data and analysis. It also stimulates critical debate and this review is intended to contribute to that debate.

Swirski has divided his book into three parts: the first part presents a socio-historical analysis of the ethnic division of labor between Oriental[2] and Ashkenazi Jews in Israel; the second part contains recorded transcripts of conversations that Swirski and his associates had with Orientals; and the third part offers Swirski's scenario of how to change the situation. The first part is by far the most interesting and successful. Here, Swirski adopts the conceptual frameworks of dependency and the ethnic division of labor, and he cites, in particular, Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System*[3] and Michael Hechter's *Internal Colonialism*[4].

Swirski counterposes his analysis of the ethnic division of labor between Oriental Jews and Ashkenazim with the prevalent ideology of the "integration of the exiles," and with the "absorption through modernization" approach of Eisenstadt and several other Israeli sociologists. Swirski claims that the ideology of the scattered communities of Jews coming together in unity and brotherhood only serves to mask the true situation of ethnic division. The modernization approach is the sociological counterpart to this ideology, and is based on a number of false assumptions. One such assumption is that the basic essentials of modern society already existed in Israel at the time of the mass immigration from Asia and Africa, and that the immigrants entered the low ranks of a modern occupational structure. The sociologists working within the modernization perspective expected that social mobility of immigrants and their diffusion throughout the occupational structure would follow their acculturation to Western norms and values. In fact, Swirski argues, both the low and the upper ranks of the modern occupational structure emerged during the period of immigration and the following

years. He admits that economic growth was initiated by Zionist immigrants from Europe and that the development of capitalism was strengthened during the British mandate, but he emphasizes that, prior to the establishment of the State and the mass immigration, there were severe limitations on labor power, markets, and the accumulation of capital. In the first years of the State most industrial plants were small, with antiquated equipment, and there was a general lack of industrial expertise and of scientific and technological knowledge. It was the immigrants from Asia and Africa who made possible the rapid economic development from the middle 1950's; they provided a cheap, manipulable, and geographically-mobile labor force.

The low position of the Orientals was not the consequence, as the modernization approach would have it, of their traditionalism or the fact that they came from non-industrial societies. A large proportion of the Ashkenazim came from Eastern Europe, from the periphery of world capitalism, and they entered the process of industrialization at the same time or, at the most, one generation earlier than the Orientals. The low rank of the Orientals was a consequence of their absorption within the process of rapid economic development, and it was in the same process that the Ashkenazim became owners, managers, and professionals. Swirski describes this process in detail in the major sectors of the Israeli economy: agriculture, construction, and various industries.

Orientals were dependent for work, housing, finance, and social services on institutions and organizations dominated by Ashkenazim: private industry, the government, the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor in Israel), and the Jewish Agency. The policies and administration of these institutions served to reinforce the privileged position of the Ashkenazim and the inferior position of the Orientals. In agriculture, for example, the government gave more support to the strongest sector, the kibbutzim and the moshavim of *vatikim* (veteran settlers), than to the new moshavim of Orientals. Political institutions play an important part in the ethnic division of labor, not so much because they are manned by Ashkenazim, but because their desire to encourage investment and production leads them to aid and support the owners and controllers of capital who are mostly Ashkenazim.

The ethnic division of labor is accompanied by ecological separation, and it is here that Swirski draws upon the perspective of "internal colonialism" and uses the terms "center" and "periphery" to refer respectively to the large cities and the development towns. Seventy percent of the population of the development towns is Oriental, and in some development towns the percentage of Orientals is ninety percent or more. A disproportionate number of Oriental immigrants were sent by the state agencies to the development towns, and the majority of those who subsequently left for the urban centers were Ashkenazim. The Ashkenazi managers and senior officers who live in development towns are found in separate neighborhoods, and in most cases they are connected to plants or offices that have their centers in the large cities.

Swirski deals with other aspects of ecological separation, such as the ethnic differences among wealthy and poor neighborhoods in the large cities, but the case of development towns is dealt with in most detail. He argues that the Ashkenazi center is the major beneficiary of the considerable state investments in development towns. The large corporations of the center own the biggest plants in the development towns; government investments are channeled through them, and their offices take the major decisions on the use of capital in the towns in accord with the interests of the center. The development towns are dependent on the financial and managerial services of the center, and only low level occupations are open to the towns' populations; they receive lower wages than the workers in the center, there are few opportunities for advancement, and

the level of services, such as health, education, and cultural activities is low. Economic dependence is compounded by dependence in the political sphere; political institutions are hightly centralized and local branches are managed from the outside, in line with the assumptions of the center.

Swirski's description of the emergence and development of an ethnic division of labor provides an important corrective to the modernization approach, but I will argue that his approach is too one-sided, and ignores a number of important issues that impinge upon his central thesis. My criticisms of this section of the book will be directed to the following questions: firstly, how well does Israel fit into the general theoretical perspectives of dependency and the ethnic division of labor?; and secondly, how well does Swirski describe the system of stratification in Israel?

Swirski writes that, in comparison with structural-functionalism and pluralism that take "society" as their unit of analysis, the theory of dependence emphasizes the world system of interdependencies among societies and the influence of a society's place within the world system on its internal structure. But Swirski neither analyzes Israel's economic and political relationships within the world system nor the relationship between Israel's place in the world system and its social structure. He notes that Israel is heavily dependent on foreign capital and technology, but he does not discuss the fact that Israel does not fit into the major theses of dependency. The key hypothesis, that the greater the degree of reliance on foreign investment and aid, the slower the rate of economic growth, is clearly inapplicable to Israel. Another hypothesis, that dependency on foreign capital keeps the state weak and prevents it from fostering economic growth, would be an absurd proposition in Israel's case. An analysis of Israel within the world system perspective remains to be done. Swirski does not do it and he does not make clear in what sense the world system framework is relevant to his analysis.

The applicability of the center-periphery and internal colonialism model may also be questioned. In Hechter's analysis, the basic unit of analysis is the region: the relationship of dependency and exploitation between the English center and the Celtic periphery. An ethnic division of labor is never fully coterminous with regional divisions; individuals from the core settle in the periphery to direct economic enterprises and administer the region, and there is a migration of people from the periphery to the center. There is a clear difference, however, between the overlap of region and ethnicity in Britain, and the situation in Israel. The populations in the development towns are predominantly Oriental, but the majority of Oriental Jews live in the urban centers. There is a considerable ethnic division of labor in the major cities, but the terms "center", "periphery", and "internal colonialism" are hardly applicable here. There is more justification in using these terms with regard to the Arabs in Israel. Arabs are rarely mentioned in Swirski's book, and the dependency school in Israel appears to continue the general tendency among Israeli sociologists to analyze separately Oriental-Ashkenazi relations and Jewish-Arabic relations.

Swirski presents a dichotomous model of stratification in Israel. Leaving aside the question of the relationship between the ethnic division of labor within the Jewish population and the ethnic division of labor of Jews and Arabs, we will focus on the two Jewish categories in Swirski's presentation: the privileged Ashkenazim and the disprivileged Orientals. How economically homogeneous are these categories? Swirski admits that both the Ashkenazim and the Orientals are internally differentiated by status according to countries of origin, but he states that the economic differences among the Oriental *edot* (ethnic groups, - Moroccans, Iraqis, etc.) are insignificant compared with their common place within the ethnic division of labor. This, however, is stated rather than proved. Statistics on income and occupations show significant

differences between Ashkenazim and Orientals, but it may be premature to conclude that there is a single, clear-cut ethnic division if we have no statistics on, for example, the income and occupational distributions of Moroccans and Iraqis, or Poles and Rumanians. We are likely to find that all Ashkenazi groups have an economic distribution that ranks higher than all Oriental groups, but if we find considerable overlap between certain Oriental groups, say Jews from Iraq, with certain Ashkenazi groups, say Rumanians, the two-tier model of an ethnic division of labor may be called into question.

Apart from the different economic distributions of the *edot*, there is also the question of the degree of class homogeneity of the categories. Are there no important class divisions that cut across the Oriental population and each *eda*? Swirski presents one hierarchy, with the emphasis on the overlap between ethnicity and economic position. Here he follows the general tendency among Israeli sociologists to focus on inequality among ethnic groups and ignore class as a distinctive hierarchy. This is reinforced in Swirski's work by the use of the center-periphery and internal colonialism framework. The impression given is that the ethnic categories are homogeneous in terms of class and that nearly all members of disprivileged *edot* have faced similar levels of deprivation and discrimination. It would be foolish to deny the significance of the considerable statistical gaps in income and occupation between Orientals and Ashkenazim, but the considerable number of middle-class Orientals and working-class Ashkenazim should not be ignored. In 1980, 12.3% of Israeli-born men with parents from Asia and Africa were found in the academic, professional, and managerial occupational categories; a further 10.2% were in clerical work. The respective figures for Israeli-born with parents from Europe and America were 42.2% and 10.9%. The ethnic difference in the higher ranks of white collar work is considerable, but the Oriental middle class is sizeable enough to warrant attention, and in certain *edot* it may be very significant[5]. It is best to conceptualize class and ethnicity as two hierarchies, and to study how social rewards are determined by their complex interactions. Comparisons should be made among different ethnic groups within the same class and among different classes within the same ethnic group. Research in this area has hardly begun in Israel.

Swirski emphasizes the relationship of the proletarianization of the Orientals and the bourgeoisification of the Ashkenazim, but his dependency perspective provides little that is new in explaining why the Orientals became the proletarians and the Ashkenazim the bourgeoisie. The Ashkenazim were simply dominant from the beginning; they created the economic foundation of the state and controlled the massive import of capital, and the Orientals, not having sufficient resources as a basis for independent action, were dependent upon them. Swirski criticizes Sammy Smooha's work on pluralism in Israel[6] for beginning the analysis when the pluralist situation already exists, but Swirski's own analysis could be crititicized on the same grounds. Swirski shows how the frameworks and patterns of dependency changed during the period of industrial growth, but the basic relationship of dependency has remained the same. In order to account for the relative position of different groups in the system of dependency, socio-economic and cultural differences of Jewish communities in their countries of origin cannot be ignored. We can agree that there was no simple difference between modern Ashkenazi and traditional Oriental immigrants, but although Jews from Eastern Europe did not come from modern industrial societies, their importance in the urban commerce and industry of their countries of origin did prepare them for roles in a developing industrial economy. Secularization, especially in the form of nationalist and socialist ideologies, had made far greater inroads into Eastern European Jewry than among Middle Eastern Jews, and this is of great importance in accounting for the earlier

immigration of Ashkenazim and for their centrality in political mobilization and nation-building.

Swirski writes that the aim of the second part of his book was to investigate the level of a common consciousness among Oriental Jews. He wishes to show that a common consciousness of Oriental Jews now overshadows the separate consciousnesses of the *edot*, and he attempts to do this by conversations with a hundred activists. The transcripts of these conversations take up a third of the book; it is a laborious job to read them, and the pay-off is very small. The question of whether a common consciousness has emerged among Oriental Jews cannot be answered by interviewing one hundred activists; Swirski admits that they are not representative, and it is clear that the sample was chosen to illustrate a certain type of consciousness which Swirski supports. Swirski summarizes the motifs which appear in the conversations, but he makes no attempt at a sociological analysis of consciousness. He and his associates restricted their role to recording what was said, and, on occasion, prompting the participants in the direction which they favor. This is an unhelpful abrogation of the sociologist's role.

Since there is no attempt to investigate *eda* consciousness, there is no demonstration that a general Oriental consciousness has become the most important focus of ethnic identity. Swirski contrasts his approach with the sociologists working within the modernization perspective who saw ethnicity tied to traditionalism and expected a decline in ethnic identity and consciousness among Oriental Jews in Israel. Swirski argues that the common experience of Oriental Jews in Israel had resulted in an emergent oriental collectivity and identity, but he does not consider the *eda* consciousness as an emergent ethnic identity. This is an important omission, because the identities of "Moroccan Jews," "Yemenite Jews," and so on are also consequences of social processes, such as labeling and ecological concentrations, that have taken place in Israel. There is a need for research on the relative importance of *eda* and Oriental identities in a variety of social contexts.

The conversations with activists demonstrate common feelings among them of deprivation and of socio-economic and cultural domination by Ashkenazim, but there is little to indicate that these feelings have led to a highly valued Oriental identity or to a consciousness of conflict with Ashkenazim. As Swirski admits, many of the interviewees expressed mixed feelings: together with the recognition of deprivation among Oriental Jews and discrimination against them, there was a tendency to avoid direct accusations against Ashkenazim. The negative views expressed on Oriental leaders, including those who are active in promoting the interests of Oriental Jews, may have nothing to do with the characteristics of those leaders, but may express the interviewees' ambiguity concerning their ethnic consciousness: they feel that something should be done to improve the position of Oriental Jews, but they are suspicious of any attempt at a separate Oriental political program.

Swirski argues that the ideology of national unity serves to reinforce the ethnic division of labor. If Oriental Jews believe that they are part of the ruling system, or that the system is the only possible one, this is because they are subject to a strong ideological machinery, and, in the present historical circumstances, they are unable to express fully their humanity. But an analysis of beliefs in terms of ideological hegemony and false consciousness explains little, and Swirski does not attempt to account for the cultural-political content of the one social expression that clearly distinguishes Orientals and Ashkenazim - the voting pattern. The great majority of Oriental Jews, both working- and middle-class, support the Likud, a right-wing coalition party, and although Swirski takes this as evidence of an emerging Oriental social entity, he does not explain how an

Oriental consciousness, or a desire to emphasize the cultural components of an emergent Oriental ethnicity, is expressed in voting for a party dominated and ruled by Ashkenazim.

The political orientation of the great majority of Oriental Jews is hardly supportive of Swirski's program for change, which is the focus of the third part of the book. Swirski argues that there is only one way to create meaningful change in the ethnic division of labor: the foundation of an economic and organizational base controlled by Orientals. No other proposal, whether it is an expansion of welfare services, Oriental political organization, or street demonstrations, can bring about real change. Swirski argues that an institutional complex controlled by Orientals can be built on the foundations of existing social expressions of the ethnic division of labor, such as development towns and poor neighborhoods. One important focus of activity can be Project Renewal, a governmental project for the physical and social rehabilitation of poor neighborhoods. At present this is part of the system of dependency, but this could change if the residents from all the areas in the project established an organization which would control expenditure and investments. Similar developments would be required elsewhere: the residents of the development towns should establish a cooperative which would own and control industrial plants; the Oriental moshavim should establish an independent cooperative; and, in general, Oriental workers should break away from the Histadrut and establish independent unions, which would work for the participation of workers in all stages of production. An independent economic base would enable the Orientals to control other institutions in their areas, such as welfare and education, and it would also lead to an increased representation of Orientals in the political parties and in strategic political positions.

Swirski recognizes that his proposals require two changes: firstly, Oriental consciousness, cooperation, and organization at many levels: local, regional, and national, and in many settings: development towns, neighborhoods, moshavim, and factories; and secondly, a transfer of ownership and control of resources from institutions dominated by Ashkenazim to institutions dominated by Orientals. Swirski perceives that there are a number of problems to be overcome: there is a need for Orientals to break away from existing frameworks and to act in ways that will bring little immediate visible benefit; there is the need to struggle against the argument that Oriental organizations represent ethnic separation and harm national unity; and there is a need to develop new symbols, values, and communication networks. He believes that these problems can be overcome, but there is little in his data and analysis to support such a faith. In the past, feelings of deprivation and discrimination have motivated only a small minority of Orientals to establish and support specifically Oriental organizations, and there are few indications of significant change in the direction proposed by Swirski. At the political level, the widespread support among Orientals for the Likud, a stridently nationalist party, would appear to be an expression of a desire for incorporation within Israeli society through existing institutional channels.

Even if there was a pronounced rise in Oriental consciousness and activism, it is not clear how the transfer of the ownership and control of resources to Orientals would take place. Swirski expects Ashkenazi opposition and he discusses the possibility of overcoming relations of dependence. He notes that Third World countries have not been successful in escaping from relations of dependence, but he argues that the objective of the Oriental movements is different from that of Third World countries which need to develop an independent industry, financial structure, and technological base. Israel does not have the resources to strive for economic independence, and the objective of the Oriental organizations would be to make possible equal Oriental

participation in, and benefit from, Israel's economic relationships with the outside world. But is it realistic to believe that the present owners and controllers of capital will agree, under the pressure of workers' sanctions, to a transfer of resources to workers' cooperatives? Swirski appears to believe that this would be a peaceful process, and he suggests that the possible reaction of the Ashkenazi center is limited because the Orientals supply most of the manpower in industry and the army. This argument finds little support in what we know about fundamental historical changes in societies.

Swirski suggests the need for an ethnic rather than a class struggle; Orientals are not likely to find support among Ashkenazi workers, who will probably remain within the framework of the Histadrut, or among Arabs who are struggling as a national minority. He believes that the transfer of economic resources will necessarily precede political change, and argues that even if an Oriental political party gained power, it would not be able to make fundamental changes. The state acts within a social totality which includes private owners of capital and workers organizations; it cannot rebuild the economic structure from the foundations but can only contribute to the reproduction and expansion of existing structures. This may be true if the context of change remains a capitalist society, but if we look back on those societies where revolutions have occurred, changes in political regimes preceded changes in economic control. A related problem in Swirski's scenario for change is that he does not clarify the effects that the "New Zionist Revolution" will have on the legal and structural forms of the relations of production. Presumably, the ethnic upheaval will have a profound effect on the Israeli class structure, but although Swirski predicts a rosy picture of greater equality and democratization, technological and industrial development, and coexistence with the Arabs, the nature of the post-revolutionary system of stratification remains a mystery.

FOOTNOTES

1. Most of the chapters of the first part of the book have appeared in Hebrew as articles, coauthored by Swirski, in the journal of the "radical group": *Mahbarot Le'Mehkar U'Lebikoret*. Two articles in English overlap with chapters in the first part: Deborah Bernstein, 1980 "Immigrants and society - a critical view of the dominant school of Israeli sociology." *British Journal of Sociology* 31:246-264; Deborah Bernstein and Shlomo Swirsky, 1982 "The rapid economic development of Israel and the emergence of the ethnic division of labour." *British Journal of Sociology* 33:64-85.

2. Although I am not entirely happy with the term Oriental, I use it throughout the review to refer to Jews from Asia and Africa (excluding South Africa). I have followed here the English title of the book under review.

3. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

4. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

5. On middle-class Orientals see, Eliezer Ben-Raphael *The Emergence of Ethnicity: Cultural Groups and Social Conflict in Israel*. Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1982.

6. Sammy Smooha. *Israel: Pluralism and Conflict*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.