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Public Policy and Identity Formation: The Experience of Mizrahim in Israel's Development Towns*

INTRODUCTION

In the years 1949-1963, the young Israeli state planned and established twenty-eight small towns, mostly in remote regions of the Negev and the Galilee. These towns became known as “development towns” (DTs). The planning and the building process of the DTs paralleled other key political, geographic, and demographic events that altered the society of Mandatory Palestine (which became Israel). These included: the expulsion and flight of 750,000 Palestinian refugees during the war of 1948,¹ the abandonment of 416 Palestinian villages and towns,² the questionable definition of the state's borders which were expanded during the war, an influx of 800,000 Jewish immigrants,³ mostly from Arab countries in North Africa and the Middle-East,⁴ the conversion of the young state to landlord of more than 90%

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¹ The term “Palestinians” refers to Arabs who lived in Mandatory Palestine and their descendants.

² B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³ M. Lissak, *Mass Immigration in the Fifties: The Failure of the Melting Pot Policy* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999) (Hebrew).

⁴ Usually identified as “Mizrahim,” which means ‘Easterners’ or ‘Oriental Jews.’

of the land within its sovereign territory,⁵ and the establishment of a centralist regime with a durable planning system, backed up by Zionist ideology.⁶

Several years after their establishment, the DTs became sites of poverty and deprivation according to various indicators, and it was realized that the great majority of their inhabitants were (and still are) Mizrahim. Within the field of social sciences, Israeli academics have debated the reasons for the establishment of the DTs and their disadvantaged position relative to the rest of Israeli society. Until the early 1990s, two approaches led the debate: the modernist-functionalist and the neo-Marxist schools. During the 1990s, a third explanation crystallized that identified with the post-colonial school of thought.⁷

A parallel debate among Israeli social scientists focuses on patterns of identity formation among the Mizrahim in Israel and in the DTs. It brings together two voices: the first, identified with the modernist-functionalist school of thought, predicted an integration of the Mizrahim within the Israeli collective, corresponding to the idea of the ingathering of the exiles– the Israeli version of the American melting pot concept. The second, identified with the critical neo-Marxist school, portrayed a Mizrahi resistance identity, which has tangibly challenged the Israeli structure of power.

Based on research in Israeli development towns, this paper proposes a third voice, one which focuses on the creation of a ‘trapped identity’ - an identity that developed in the ‘gray areas’ between Israeli-Jewish and Arab culture, between inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, the group cannot assimilate into the mainstream of society, yet on the other hand, it is unable to mobilize a compelling communal identity. Trapped identity is thus identity that is left in an ambivalent, twilight zone, and is usually identified with lower class Jews. Therefore, the only available ‘path’ for Mizrahim to exit the trap as well as poverty remains individual assimilation into the dominant culture.

⁵ G. Forman and A. Kedar, "From Arab Land to 'Israel Lands': The Legal Dispossession of the Palestinians Displaced by Israel in the Wake of 1948," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22 (2004): 809-830.

⁶ A. Elhanani, *The Struggle for Independence: Israeli Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Tel-Aviv, Ministry of Defense, 1998) (Hebrew).

⁷ The division into three approaches is very simplistic and schematic. Within each approach, there are many voices and attitudes. However, methodologically this schematic division facilitates the proposed conjunctions between public policy and identity formation.

While debates about the reasons behind the establishment of the DTs and about theories of identity formation are very popular within the Israeli social sciences, little attempt has been made to analyze them in concert. This paper proposes to build bridges and move discussions forward rather than remaining mired in the claims made within these debates. The assumption of this article is that by bridging between policy and identity, we can explore the affiliation between economic, geographical and the cultural processes that stratify society, but also redefine the borders within society and their contents.

This article argues that the ‘trapped identity’ of Mizrahim in development towns is based upon a structural reason: being immigrants in an immigrant-settler society. An immigrant-settler society is a model that refers to colonial legacy, and therefore is associated with the post-colonial school of thought. This model identifies the structural and cultural processes of immigration, settlement, as well as state and nation building. As noted elsewhere,⁸ in this context, the immigration policy, like the policy of settlement in the DTs, resulted in turning the immigrants into relatively weak and assimilating communities, ‘sandwiched’ between a powerful ‘founding’ or ‘charter’ group on the one hand, and an excluded indigenous population on the other. Most recently, another excluded population has been added to the mix--groups of ‘aliens’ or labor migrants.⁹

This article contains two sections: the first addresses the policy of creating the development towns in light of the three main approaches in the social sciences during the 20th century: the modernist-functionalist approach, the Neo-Marxist approach, and the post-colonial approach. Data analyzed in this section is based on the review and classification of academic literature on the policy of establishing the towns. The second section focuses on place and identity among Mizrahim living in the towns. It explores their transformation by investigating patterns of identity formation, as well as focusing on key aspects of collective identity, namely, the role of a hegemonic state, cultural traditions, ethno-class stratification, and inter-generational changes.

⁸ D. Pearson, “Theorizing Citizenship in British Settler Societies” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 6 (2002): 989–1012; D. K. Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

⁹ B. Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); D. Stasiulis and N. Yuval-Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL'S DEVELOPMENT TOWNS: THREE APPROACHES

A. The Modernist-Functionalist Explanation

The modernist-functionalist approach regards society as a set of requirements and problems that the institutions of the nation-state are supposed to solve while concurrently trying to achieve public identification with the national agenda. In this context, cultural and social assimilation is the major objective of society within the general project of state and nation building. Assimilation is achieved through modernization, industrialization, and economic development.¹⁰ Modern, rational, and professional urban and regional planning is pictured as a powerful method for advancing development, spatial regulation, and social justice.¹¹

As in most other states in the post WWII period, these ideas were well fused into the young Israeli establishment, academia,¹² and planning institutions.¹³ In particular, it answered the desire for spatial development that employed 'modern' and 'rational' methods, and it remedied two main problems that bothered the Israeli establishment. Spatial population polarization was one problem, i.e., the 'frontier' (or peripheral regions) contained numerous tiny rural settlements where few Jews lived, whereas the geographic center of the country boasted a few big urban centers where the vast majority of the Jewish population was concentrated.¹⁴ The second problem was a large influx of Jewish immigrants – 55 per cent of whom were Mizrahim – which had tripled the Jewish population of the nascent Israeli state within eight years.¹⁵

The 'solution' was found in the first national plan, known as the '*Sharon Plan*'.¹⁶ It was influenced by several popular 'scientific techniques' such as Ebenezer

¹⁰ N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan, *Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); M.M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

¹¹ N. Taylor, *Urban Planning Theory Since 1945* (London: Sage, 1998).

¹² U. Ram, "The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology," in *The Israel/Palestine Question*, ed. I. Pappe (London: Routledge, 1999) 55-80.

¹³ Elhanani, *The Struggle for Independence*, 69.

¹⁴ G. Lipshitz and B.H. Massam, "Classification of Development Towns in Israel by Using Multicriteria Decision Aid Techniques," *Environment and Planning A* 30, no. 7 (1998): 1279-1294.

¹⁵ Lissak, *Mass Immigration in the Fifties*, 3-11.

¹⁶ A. Sharon, *Physical Planning in Israel* (Jerusalem: Gov. Printing Office, 1951) (Hebrew).

Howard's *Garden City Model*¹⁷ and Walter Christaller's *Central Place Theory*.¹⁸ Both Howard and Christaller constructed models that promoted urban diffusion.¹⁹ Indeed, one of the major principles of the *Sharon Plan* was dispersing 28 urban centers all over the state's territory, which were envisioned as regional, economic, and service centers for remote agricultural settlements,²⁰ as well as sites of absorption for new immigrants. These communities came to be called 'development towns.' By 1961, 200,000 Jewish immigrants lived in the DTs, many of them in public housing projects.²¹

However, the towns did not attain the prescribed social and economic goals set for them, and throughout the years, the gap between the socioeconomic level of the towns and mainstream Israeli society has increased. In 2000, the mean salaried income in the DTs was 20 percent lower than the Israeli average; the percentage of recipients of income-maintenance was double, and the percentage of students aged 20-29 was 30 percent lower than the Israeli average. The dominance of this approach soon became evident in the discourse on the relative backwardness of the DTs. Most planners and social scientists in Israeli academia claimed that the socioeconomic difficulties resulted from the imperfect planning processes of the towns. Among the criticisms of the planning process were the following:

1. There was no coordination between the construction of dwellings, infrastructure, public services, and employment, and this prevented consistent development in the DTs.²²

2. Israeli planners were not experienced enough in urban planning.²³

¹⁷ E. Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (First published in 1898 as 'to-morrow: A peaceful path to real reform', T.P. verso, Sussex: Attic Books, 1985).

¹⁸ W. Christaller, *Central Places in Southern Germany*, trans. Carlisle W. Baskin from die Zentralen Orte in Suddeutschland (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

¹⁹ O. Yiftachel, "Social Control, Urban Planning and Ethno-class Relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's Development Towns," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 418-438.

²⁰ S. Krakover, "The Development of Three Small Towns in the Northern Negev," in *The Land of the Negev*, ed. A. Shemueli and Y. Gradus (Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1979) (Hebrew) 569-611.

²¹ N. Lewin-Epstein, Y. Elmelech and M. Semyonov, "Ethnic Inequality in Home-Ownership and the Value of Housing: The Case of Immigrants to Israel," *Social Forces* 75, no. 4 (1997): 1439-1462.

²² E. Efrat, *The New Towns of Israel: A Reappraisal* (Munich: Minerva, 1988); E. Brutzkus, *Regional Policy in Israel* (Jerusalem: Town and Country Planning Dept., Ministry of the Interior, 1970).

²³ I. Troen, "The Transformation of Zionist Planning Policy: From Rural Settlement to an Urban Network," *Planning Perspective* 3 (1994): 3-23; E. Cohen, *The City in Zionist Ideology* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1970).

3. The spatial models of Howard and Christaller had already proven to be unsuccessful as models in other states by the time of planning the DTs.
4. These spatial models were implemented within a small-sized geographical territory, and as a result, too many towns were established that were too small and in very close proximity with each other.²⁴
5. The spatial models did not match the topographical reality.²⁵
6. Financial shortages in the new state prevented essential investments in transportation infrastructure, which isolated those living in the DTs on the periphery.²⁶

Several other social scientists pointed to social and economic planning and policy as the main reasons behind the difficulties of the DTs. For this group, there was an inherent contradiction between the desire to integrate immigrants and the desire to disperse them to peripheral regions, since the dispersion itself generated segregation.²⁷ In addition, it charged that the DTs were inhabited by Mizrahi immigrants from underdeveloped countries who were mostly poorly educated, unskilled, and had “oversized households.”²⁸ Many other Israeli researchers argued that the long-term economic development policy, primarily the decision to set up local labor-intensive and ‘traditional’ industries, was the main barrier blocking the growth of the towns.²⁹

The wide spectrum of criticism of the planning process and institutional negligence neglected to: a) scrutinize the structures of power relations in Israeli society, b) unravel from them the reasons behind the establishment of remote and peripheral small towns and their difficulties, or c) criticize the entire concept of rational policymaking. The first to do so were the neo-Marxist social scientists.

²⁴ E. Efrat, *Urbanization in Israel* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1984), 145-149.

²⁵ I. Aravot and S. Militanu, “Israeli New Town Plans: Physical Transformations,” *Journal of Urban Design* 5, no. 1 (2000): 41-64.

²⁶ Troen, “The Transformation of Zionist Planning Policy,” 3-23; Efrat, *Urbanization in Israel*, 142-144.

²⁷ Cohen, *The City in Zionist Ideology*, 56.

²⁸ S. Krakover, D. Soen and S. Seheri, “Migration Balance and Socio-Economic Image - The Case of Israel’s New Towns,” *Planning Outlook* 26, no. 1 (1983): 22-27.

²⁹ See: E. Razin, “Ownership Structure and Linkage Patterns of Industry in Israel’s Development Towns,” *Regional Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 19-31; Y. Gradus and Y. Einy, “Trends in Core-Periphery Industrialization Gaps in Israel,” *Geography Research Forum* 2 (1984): 71-83; Y. Gradus and S. Krakover, “The Effect of Government Policy on the Spatial Structure of Manufacturing in Israel,” *Journal of Developing Areas* 11, no. 3 (1977): 393-409.

B. The Neo-Marxist Approach

The neo-Marxist perspective in Israel started to criticize the making of DTs in the late 1970s. The social and economic gap between the DTs and mainstream Israeli society, highlighted by the concentration of labor-intensive industry, unstable employment, and dishonest terms of residence, had brought many Marxist and neo-Marxist researchers to re-examine the reasons behind the making of the DTs.

Contrary to the modernist-functionalist explanation, the neo-Marxist explanation argued that the State of Israel in the 1950s was not a modern state and did not have a developed economy or industrial sector. Only the exploitation of the Mizrahi proletarians enabled the development of a modern economy.³⁰ Urban and regional planning produced an uneven and stratified geographical space in terms of investments and wealth. One form of stratification was the location of labor-intensive industrial parks together with Mizrahi immigrants in the same remote places.³¹ Such a policy benefited the capitalists, the managers and the administrators, most of whom were Jews of European origin, known as 'Ashkenazim'.³²

The educational system established by Israel in the DTs trained the young Mizrahi generation to be "experts" in labor-intensive industrial vocations, according to the dominant specialties in each town.³³ Together with the poor educational system in the DTs, the Israeli land and housing regime contributed to the low stratification of the Mizrahim there by maintaining low land and dwelling value and keeping a considerable stock of public housing in the DTs, more than in any other type of settlement in Israel. The stock of public housing functioned as a means to settle relatively weakened inhabitants in the DTs (for example, poor Russian immigrants in the 1990s) and to prevent the growth of a developed dwelling market in the towns.³⁴ Consequently, landlords who sought to sell their apartments in order to leave the

³⁰ D. Bernstein and S. Swirsky, "The Rapid Economic Development of Israel and the Emergence of the Ethnic Division of Labour," *British Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (1982): 64-85.

³¹ Modern industry was located in the DTs' industrial parks. Yet, the intensive labor was carried out by Mizrahi workers who had few opportunities to improve their employment status.

³² S. Swirski, *Israel: The Oriental Majority* (London: Zed Books, 1989).

³³ S. Swirski, *Education in Israel: Schooling for Inequality* (Tel Aviv: Breirot, 1990) (Hebrew); S. Swirski and M. Shoushan, *The Development Towns of Israel: Towards a Brighter Tomorrow* (Haifa: Breirot, 1985) (Hebrew).

³⁴ E. Tzfadia, "Public Housing as Control: Spatial Policy of Settling Immigrants in Israeli Development Towns," *Housing Studies* 21, no. 4 (2006): 523-537.

towns found that the value of their apartment was not sufficient for living elsewhere in Israel.³⁵

How did geographical remoteness and isolation contribute towards the effective exploitation of the towns' residents? Harvey argues that capitalist industry utilizes space, spatial dispersal and geographical isolation and remoteness as instruments to oppress and exploit minorities.³⁶ Such oppression is usually executed in the labor-intensive industries. For capitalists, it is easier to exploit marginal groups in small peripheral towns by maintaining high rates of unemployment and low wages, developing a limited range of occupational resources, and employing unorganized labor. These are all possible because of the distance from public consciousness coupled with the isolation of the population somewhere at the periphery.

The neo-Marxist explanation is essential to understanding economic gaps between Mizrahim in the DTs and mainstream Israeli society. However, it fails to explain the function and class-position of the Palestinians in the stratified structure of Israeli society, the place of the Israeli-Arab conflict in the class relations of Israel, and the function of DTs within this conflict. Such a deficiency is similar to the failure of the modernist-functionalist explanations. Sociologist Uri Ram describes it as follows:³⁷

The major trends of Israeli sociology have simply managed to focus on Jewish society while conspicuously omitting the other components... the Arabs and the conflict. Alternatively they have addressed the Arab, and separately the conflict, but without linking either to broad societal issues.

In order to provide this link, a more comprehensive explanation has emerged since the 1990s that includes the question of Palestinians in Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Zionist settlement process. This new explanation, which emerged from social scientists' new view of Israel as an immigrant-settler society, became labeled as the post-colonial explanation, and it is this that I will now examine.

³⁵ Y. Yonah and I. Saporta, "The Politics of Lands and Housing in Israel: A Wayward Republican Discourse," *Social Identities* 8, no. 1 (2002): 91-117; R. Kallus and H.L. Yone, "National Home / Personal Home: Public Housing and the Shaping of National Space in Israel," *European Planning Studies* 10, no. 6 (2002): 765-779.

³⁶ D. Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

³⁷ Ram, "The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology," 62.

C. The Post-Colonial Approach

The emergence of the post-colonial approach within Israeli academic circles was regarded as part of a wide-ranging debate between the so-called “Zionist” researchers, usually identified with the modernist-functionalist approach, and the so-called “post-Zionists,” a group of ‘critical sociologists’ and ‘new historians’ who called prevailing Israeli historical narratives into question. This was one of the most serious and daring attempts to break new ground in Zionism’s many contradictions.³⁸

One form of the post-colonial approach, occasionally identified with post-Zionism, is based upon the traditional political-historical context of an immigrant-settler society.³⁹ Schematically, this type of society combines three social categories that are often hierarchical in terms of political and economic power: a dominant immigrant-founder group, usually identified as European settler-immigrants on non-European continents; later immigrants who are incorporated by the immigrant-founder group in the new-built nation; and a weak indigenous group, which is often excluded from ‘the nation.’ Public policy, normally dominated by and attentive to the needs of the founder group, is responsible for the deep divisions between the three major social categories.⁴⁰

A favorite practice in immigrant-settler society has been “spatial ethnicization”—the spatial dissemination of the members of the founder and later immigrant groups to ‘frontier’ and ‘internal frontier’ regions, while maintaining spatial division and segregation between the three groupings.⁴¹ The process of settling the frontier inculcates “collective” values and myths,⁴² and imposes new meaning upon the space as an object of identification.⁴³ It helps the dominant group extend its

³⁸ E. Nimni, *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2003); L.J. Silberstein, “Problematizing Power: Israel’s PostZionist Critics,” *Palestine-Israel Journal* 9, no. 3 (2002): 97-107.

³⁹ G. Shafir and Y. Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰ See: Pearson, “Theorizing Citizenship in British Settler Societies,” 1002; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies*, 1-38.

⁴¹ J. McGarry, “Demographic Engineering: the State-Directed Movement of Ethnic Groups as a Technique of Conflict Regulation,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 4 (1998): 613-638; See also Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*, 47.

⁴² A. Kellerman, “Settlement Myth and Settlement Activity: Interrelationships in the Zionist Land of Israel,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21, no. 2 (1996): 363-378.

⁴³ M. Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

control over the natives, as well as over their lands and resources, and it distances the weak immigrants by transforming them into ‘pioneers.’ Thus, unequal power relations within the entity known as a “nation” emerge, even though they are commonly represented as egalitarian, inclusive, and just.

The traditional political-historical context of an immigrant-settler society is a complementary analysis to the neo-Marxist one, but extends beyond neo-Marxism, as it analyzes distributive outcomes as they affect non-class-based groupings and refuses to collapse non-economic forms of domination into class categories alone. In this sense, one essential base of the post-colonial approach is the Gramscian cultural-political-economic analysis.⁴⁴ The Gramscian analysis attempts to dissect official policies and legal structures as well as ideologies and ascertain their influence on the structural stratification and tension between cultural groups. It illuminates how ideologies of nation and state-building diffuse throughout society into all of its institutional and private manifestations when individuals (later immigrants in this case) assimilate the worldview of the dominant group (‘founders’). Public policy in this order has an important function, namely, to “raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of the productive force for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling class.”⁴⁵ The latter are the founder group. Together with the immigrant-settler society context, Gramscian analysis has been found to be most relevant in explaining the making of DTs according to the post-colonial approach, and particularly in the identity formation of Mizrahim in DTs, detailed in the following section. To begin, it is necessary to analyze Israeli social structure in light of the immigrant-settler society.

The Israeli “founder group” is identified mainly with Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated to Israel from Europe often out of national and Zionist aspirations during the Ottoman and British Mandatory regimes. It is in this group’s image that “Israeliness” was formed, thus institutionalizing its cultural dominance. The indigenous people are the Palestinians. The term ‘later immigrants’ generally refers to two noticeable groups: Mizrahim and Russians.⁴⁶ The nation and state-building project in Israel, which was conducted in the shadow of the Israeli-Arab conflict,

⁴⁴ A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebook of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. by H. Quintin and N. Geoffrey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁴⁶ The term ‘Russians’ refers to immigrants from the Former Soviet Union who arrived in Israel during the 1990s.

included the Ashkenazim, the Mizrahim and the Russians, while excluding the Palestinians.⁴⁷

Deconstructing two central axioms within Zionism-- namely the “ingathering of the exiles” and “population dispersal”- facilitated the analysis of how the DTs were established according to the post-colonial approach.⁴⁸ Both are widely considered to be common sense ideals within Israeli society, comparable to the Gramscian notion of hegemony, and have been twisted into favorite policies by all Israeli governments.⁴⁹ Hence, their deconstruction is considered a critical act.⁵⁰

Similar to the American melting pot approach, the “ingathering of the exiles” represents a secular Zionist ambition (based upon biblical notions found in the prophets) to construct a national, modern and homogenous identity corresponding to the modernist-functionalist approach.⁵¹ However, the post-colonial approach claims that by arriving from Arab countries, Mizrahi immigrants reflected a distortion in the implementation of this ambition, as their primary culture was too similar to the native Palestinian culture.⁵² It must also be noted that other immigrant groups arriving in Israel during the late 1940s and 1950s also suffered from a policy of cultural erasure, especially Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe. Yet, because they were far closer to dominant Ashkenazi-Israeli culture, their traditional culture was never stigmatized to the same extent as Mizrahi culture, and thus they were able to be more successfully integrated into the Israeli mainstream.⁵³

Mizrahim were also regarded as a pivotal component in the making of an independent Jewish entity in Israel/Palestine,⁵⁴ and were provided with free immigration to Israel with citizenship granted immediately upon arrival. The stereotypes associated with the Mizrahim’s Arabism and the understanding that the national enterprise might only succeed by absorbing the Mizrahim, were fundamental

⁴⁷ See Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*, 22.

⁴⁸ See Yiftachel and Tzfadia, “Between Periphery and ‘Third Space’: Identity of Mizrahim in Israel’s Development Towns.”

⁴⁹ E. Tzfadia, “Immigrant Dispersal in Settler Societies: Mizrahim and Russians in Israel under the Press of Hegemony,” *Geography Research Forum* 20 (2000): 52-69.

⁵⁰ See Silberstein, “Problematising Power: Israel’s PostZionist Critics,” 97-107.

⁵¹ Y. Gorny, “The ‘Melting Pot’ in Zionist Thought,” *Israel Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 54-70; J. T. Shuval and E. Leshem, “The Sociology of Migration in Israel: A Critical View,” in *Immigration to Israel: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. E. Leshem and J. T. Shuval (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998) 3-50.

⁵² E. Shohat, *Forbidden Reminiscences* (Tel-Aviv: Kedem Publishing, 2001) (Hebrew).

⁵³ T. Segev, *Anemone Days* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1999) (Hebrew).

⁵⁴ See Shohat, *Forbidden Reminiscences*, 140-205.

in the formation of an inclusion-exclusion policy. “Judaization dispersal” was the spatial appearance of this policy, as we shall see later.

There is, however, a third component in Israeli social structure - the Palestinian population that remained in Israel after the war of 1948 and the lands belonging to the Palestinian refugees. Weaving links between the Palestinian case and the making of DTs is considered one of the major contributions of the post-colonial perspective upon the two other approaches. About 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled in the war of 1948 and left behind 416 abandoned villages and towns and millions of dunams of land.⁵⁵ Palestinians who remained in Israel and became citizens of Israel lost approximately 40-60% of the land they had possessed prior to 1948.⁵⁶ Most of the Palestinians who remained in Israel lived in Israel’s peripheral regions (the Negev and Galilee). Their presence has been viewed as a security problem, which demanded a Jewish presence in these regions, mainly on the nationalized lands of Palestinian refugees. Yosef Weiss, a central figure in the Zionist movement, and the first Director of the Israel Lands Administration, wrote:

*Some theorists... think that since the State was established, all the land belongs to it... ...but there is one flaw in it... The rights to the land belong to all the State’s citizens, including the Arabs... In this situation, we must ensure that most of the land will belong to Jews... and therefore we must continue with land redemption.*⁵⁷

The best way to redeem the land according to Weiss was:

*A struggle to conquer the land by settling it... a struggle to strike roots in the land.*⁵⁸

The axiom of ‘Judaization dispersal’ became the ultimate solution to the following problems: the elite’s phobia of Arabism, the desire to incorporate the Mizrahim into ‘the nation,’ the appetite for ‘redemption’ of the abandoned Palestinian lands, and the need to increase the Jewish presence in peripheral regions in which Palestinians constituted the majority. The dispersal was realized by the Sharon Plan,

⁵⁵ See Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, xiii-xx.

⁵⁶ A. Kedar, “The Legal Transformation of Ethnic Geography: Israeli Law and the Palestinian Landholder 1948-1967,” *NYU Journal of International Law and Politics* 33, no. 4 (2001): 923-1000.

⁵⁷ Y. Weiss, *The Struggle over the Land* (Tel Aviv: Taversky, 1950) (Hebrew), 143-145, translated by this author.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 10, also translated by this author.

which called for the building of twenty-eight new towns, most of them in the Negev and Galilee, and some in abandoned Palestinian towns. In other words, the making of the DTs functioned as a mechanism for gaining control over Palestinian land and population as well as turning the Mizrahim into relatively weak, distanced and isolated communities, while at the same time incorporating them into ‘*the nation*’ as essential members of the frontier ethos, though not into the dominant society.

How was this dispersal policy implemented? Two major practices were utilized. First, public housing was offered in the DTs to Mizrahim who were living in tents or tin huts in provisional absorption camps.⁵⁹ Secondly, Mizrahim were often transported directly from the airport or harbor to public housing in the DTs. The long-term housing and employment policy, which was well delineated by the neo-Marxist approach, enabled the relegation of the Mizrahim to the DTs for generations to come. However, it should be stressed that Mizrahim in the DTs usually benefited economically more than non-Jewish citizens living in Palestinian towns and villages.

Based upon the principles of Zionist ideology, the making of new towns was and is a success. It has relocated a larger mass of the population than any other settlement project in Zionist history, even more than the mythical kibbutzim (cooperative villages) managed to do before Israel was declared a state and more than the endeavor to colonize the occupied territories after 1967.⁶⁰ Simultaneously, capitalists managed to generate low-priced and obedient labor for the Israeli developed industrial sector. However, its success cannot be measured in demographic, geographic, or economic terms alone. The effects of this policy on the identity formation of Mizrahim and the manner in which they were treated during the building of the DTs in the 1950s is crucial to properly evaluating this policy. The following section focuses on identity formation of the Mizrahim in DTs and aims to illuminate the “other side” of the debate on the establishment of these towns.

⁵⁹ See Kallus and Yone, "National Home / Personal Home: Public Housing and the Shaping of National Space in Israel," 765-779.

⁶⁰ In 2000, 1.1 million residents lived in 28 DTs while 450,000 Jews lived in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. See: Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook* (Jerusalem: State of Israel, Ministry of the Interior, selected years).

IDENTITY FORMATION IN DEVELOPMENT TOWNS

In 1986, sociologist Sami Smooha presented the debate between modernist-functionalists and neo-Marxists in relation to Mizrahi identity in Israel.⁶¹ Based on Ben-Rafael's work *The Emergence of Ethnicity*,⁶² Smooha argued that in the modernist-functionalist approach there is no 'Mizrahi identity'.⁶³ Ben-Rafael argued that the main attitude of Israeli society is the desire for integration into modernity, which was brought to Israel by European Jews. Indeed, there is a segment among the immigrants from the Muslim world that lacks a motivation to integrate into modernity. However, within a generation or two it is predicted they will disappear, because they do not carry political weight or cultural influence. Smooha criticized Ben-Rafael for not mentioning the existence of a sense of superiority over non-European groups, which is supported by the biased allocation of resources.

Neo-Marxism, presented by Swirski,⁶⁴ ignores the cultural baggage of the Mizrahim as well as the cultural differences between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim.⁶⁵ Class systems and ethnic division of labor in Israel lay behind the class consciousness of the Mizrahim, mainly in the development towns. This class consciousness defines the capacity of the Mizrahim to act in their own rational interests. A new development that materialized from this approach, presented by Chetrit,⁶⁶ explores the emergence of Mizrahi social and political movements like the Black Panthers, Tami, Shas and the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, each of which have successfully challenged the hegemony of Ashkenazi Zionism. This emergence corresponds to the analysis presented by Shohat, which portrays the Mizrahim as victims of the Zionist dream.

A research project conducted by Yiftachel and Tzfadia, presented below, suggests an alternative to both the modernist-functionalist and the neo-Marxist approaches. This research is based on an attitudinal survey among non-Orthodox

⁶¹ S. Smooha, "Three Approaches to the Sociology of Ethnic Relations in Israel," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 40 (1986): 31-61.

⁶² E. Ben-Rafael, *The Emergence of Ethnicity: Cultural Groups and Social Conflict in Israel* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1982).

⁶³ Smooha terms this approach as "cultural approach."

⁶⁴ Swirski, *Orientalism and Ashkenazim in Israel: The Ethnic Division of Labor* (Haifa: Machbarot Lemechar Vlebkoret, 1981) (Hebrew).

⁶⁵ Smooha terms this approach as "class approach."

⁶⁶ S.S. Chetrit, "Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 4 (2000): 51-65.

Mizrahi immigrants and their descendants in six representative peripheral development towns, three in the north-- Shlomi, Ma'alot and Beit She'an, and three in the south-- Kiryat Gat, Ofakim and Dimona. The survey consisted of 294 in-person interviews that examined the attitudes of residents regarding a range of subjects connected to feelings of place, identity, and position in Israeli society.

Data collection relied on a closed questionnaire administered in face-to-face interviews, using quantitative analytical tools. This method has some drawbacks: it is often blind to the subtleties of sentiments; it makes researchers unable to reflect the experience and 'feel' of a place; and unlike open interviews, it downplays the ability of interviewees to articulate their own emotions. However, this methodology does have the capacity to represent a wide spectrum of participants and trace broad social trends as a basis for macro-scale comparisons and generalizations. Being fully cognizant of both the advantages and disadvantages of this research method, an attitudinal questionnaire was chosen as the principal research tool.

Identity and Place

Power relations in the establishment of the DTs are conspicuous. Data shows that the 'places' known as development towns were created by 'reluctant pioneers,' who had no other residential choice at the time. According to the survey, more than half of the Mizrahi population born outside of Israel was taken to peripheral towns by the authorities straight from the ship or temporary immigrant camp (*ma'abarah*) with little or no opportunity to object.⁶⁷ The story of the forced dispatch of the Mizrahim has already been told by a collection of local narratives.⁶⁸ This data verifies the phenomenon, and further attests that the collective memory of forced settlement has become central to the identity formation of Mizrahim who live on the periphery.

While the resentment of forced settlement does not dominate the sentiments of development town residents, an ambivalent perspective is detectable in other responses. For example, most respondents (63%) claim that the establishment of the towns in the fifties was "necessary." However, at the same time, the majority (57%)

⁶⁷ A. Picard, *The Immigration and Absorption Policy for North African Jews 1951-1956* (PhD Thesis submitted to the senate of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2004) (Hebrew).

⁶⁸ A. Shelly-Newman, "Nocturnal Voyage: Meetings Between Immigrants and Their New Place," in *Between Immigrants and Veterans: Israel in the Great Aliyah 1948 - 1953*, ed. D. Ofer (Jerusalem: Yithak Ben Tzvi Memorial, 1996) 285 - 298.

also believe that the state's policy towards the towns is discriminatory, particularly in comparison to the state's treatment of nearby (mainly Ashkenazi) kibbutzim (72%). A puzzling question then arises: How were these geographically, economically, and culturally discriminatory policies instituted without arousing serious opposition? Moreover, how was it possible to gain the consent of Mizrahi residents for such policies, as partially reflected in the survey?

One answer to this puzzle refers back to the Gramscian analysis (1971) and can be derived from the prevailing hegemonic order of the settler society, which incorporates the immigrants (as inferior, but nonetheless, as members) of the nascent, settling nation, while simultaneously excluding the indigenous population. In Israel, the definition of Israel as a Jewish state and the on-going expansion into (historical, claimed, or lived) Arab space, in which the Mizrahim participated, has worked to incorporate Mizrahim into the collective identity. This identification prevented them from undermining the hegemonic order created partially at their expense.⁶⁹

As we shall see below, in Israel the hegemony of Zionism, including its settlement and security practices, is taken for granted and viewed as unavoidable and incontestable.⁷⁰ According to the survey, this is the common perception in the DTs, despite some bitterness about the past and despite some notable local variations. There is no real attempt to question either the importance of the idea of settlement in general (a central component of Zionist hegemony) or the establishment of DTs in particular.

The survey shows that local communalism as a center of identity formation has perhaps emerged in order to reconcile the tension between the esteemed value placed on settlement by Zionism and the actual deprivation of the Mizrahim. Their shared fate, daily life, common origin, and similar economic class have created a clear sense of belonging to the development town. To some extent, this is meant to counter the negative images commonly produced about the towns among the general Israeli public, images which have frequently served as an impediment to mobility and

⁶⁹ For an expanded discussion, see Yiftachel, "Social Control," 418-438; and Tzfadia, *Immigrant Dispersal*, 52-69.

⁷⁰ See Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*, 1.

success.⁷¹ For the residents, the development town is an arena for building their lives, rather than a stigmatized periphery. It is a living, social environment and a site of socialization through daily practices and interactions, which together create a sense of place and security.

Previous anthropological research has already (indirectly) considered the subject of local identity through the analysis of local symbols and sacred rituals, which are thought to create 'positive local sentiments.'⁷² The current survey aimed to explore the nature of local sentiments in development towns in greater depth. It shows that the majority of respondents believe their town is friendly, safe, and is improving. These indicators of solidarity, which can be termed 'positive local sentiments,' stem in part from a certain 'local pride' that has developed over the years in DTs. This has been reinforced by the discourse of local newspapers. In addition, the emergence of capable local leadership has managed to wrest 'control' of the development towns from external party functionaries, further increasing local pride and identification.⁷³

The inter-generational prism offers another angle for analyzing local sentiments. While members of both generations - the older generation who was born outside of Israel and the younger who was born in Israel in the DTs - feel a solid affinity with the towns and exhibit positive local sentiments, the younger generation views their town with a more critical eye.⁷⁴ The responses show a tendency among the younger generation to see the development towns as more disliked by the country (45%), as neglected (42%), and as isolated on the periphery (36%).⁷⁵ In other words, while the younger generation has a greater desire to integrate into the Israeli center and avoid the 'identity trap,' it is also more aware of the difficulties of integration and mobility.

However, it is not enough, for local residents at the periphery to construct a positive narrative about their place. Difficulties stemming from discrimination in the

⁷¹ E. Avraham, "Social-Political Environment, Journalism Practice and Coverage of Minorities: The Case of the Marginal Cities in Israel," *Media, Culture and Society* 24 (2002): 69-86.

⁷² E. Ben-Ari and Y. Bilu, "Saints' Sanctuaries in Israel Development Towns: On a Mechanism of Urban Transformation," *Urban Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (1987): 243-271.

⁷³ E. Ben-Zadok, "Oriental Jews in the Development Towns: Ethnicity, Economic Development, Budgets and Politics" in *Local Communities and the Israeli Polity*, ed. E. Ben-Zadok (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993) 91-123.

⁷⁴ This is particularly true when the status of the towns in Israeli society is examined in a series of questions, such as: "Are the development towns connected to the country or isolated on the periphery?" "Are development towns favored or neglected?" and "Are development towns liked or disliked?"

⁷⁵ The differences between the two generations are significant at [$p < 0.05$].

allocation of resources,⁷⁶ unemployment, an inferior education system, and cultural stigma are well known to local residents. In the absence of promising economic prospects, a desire to emigrate has been pervasive in the towns despite local attachment. Of the surveyed participants, a high percentage (63%) expressed a wish to leave the DTs, most of them in the direction of Israel's central regions. This phenomenon is more prevalent among the younger generation.

Identities in Places

Local group identities are never constructed in isolation; they are always embedded within their environments and are shaped through interactions with other groups, places, and forces, in a process labeled "spatial socialization" by Paasi.⁷⁷ Accordingly, relationships between residents of DTs and other Israeli groups are intimately linked to the policy strategies of "the ingathering of the exiles" and "population dispersal" and are shaped by the partial contradiction between them. These policies created spatial proximity and economic dependence between the towns and the surrounding populations,⁷⁸ especially the kibbutzim, who were considered the elite group of Israeli society, and who constituted a major cultural symbol of the new, modern, western-oriented, Zionist Israeli.⁷⁹ Throughout the years, several other communities immigrated to the towns, such as 'Russian' immigrants and ultra-orthodox Jews. The daily interactions and power relations between these groups had a major impact on identity formation in the towns.

A clear indication of the nature of these interactions is reflected in the survey, where respondents were asked to indicate their perceived closeness/distance from other groups in Israel/Palestine. The index of 'perceived distance' was built on values ranging between 1 (most close) and 7 (most distant). The distribution of responses is plotted in figure 1).

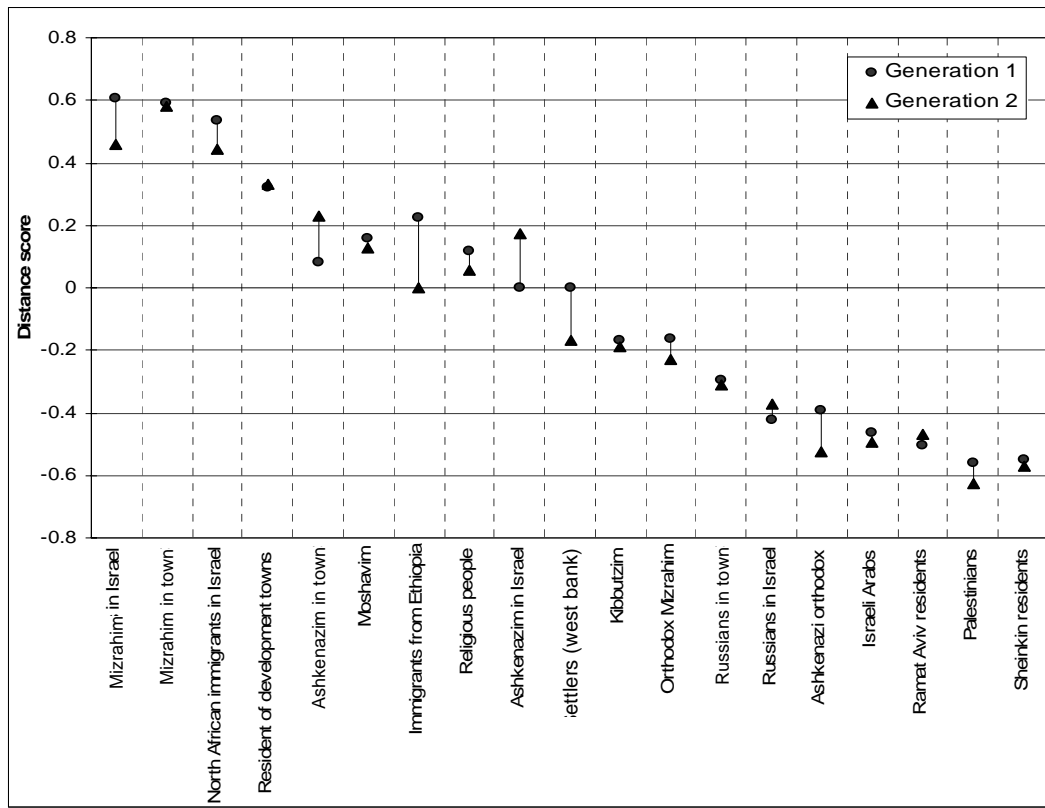
⁷⁶ State Comptroller, *Annual Report 50b* (Jerusalem: State of Israel, 2000).

⁷⁷ A. Paasi, "Nationalizing Everyday Life: Individual and Collective Identities as Practice and Discourse," *Geography Research Forum* 19 (1999): 4-21.

⁷⁸ See Razin, "Ownership Structure and Linkage Patterns of Industry in Israel's Development Towns," 19-31.

⁷⁹ Y. Zerubavel, "Revisiting the Pioneer Past: Continuity and Change in Hebrew Settlement Narratives," *Hebrew Studies: A Journal Devoted to Hebrew Language and Literature* 41 (2000): 209-224.

Figure 1 – “Describes Closeness/Distance towards the Following Groups”



The chart portrays a stark social perception, in which identification is related to ethnicity, geographical proximity, and power position, more than to the wide (and widening) economic gap. Town residents express proximity with their 'own' community (Mizrahim in the towns and in Israel) and also with other nearby groups (like Ashkenazim in the towns). Perceived distance is larger, but not extreme, towards socially distant local groups (such as the Orthodox, local Russians, and even, to a lesser degree, settlers in the Occupied Territories). The perceived distance to Israeli Arabs and the Palestinians is matched by similar sentiments of distance and remoteness from two localities symbolizing western-oriented Ashkenazi elites in Israel— residents of Ramat Aviv (an affluent Tel Aviv neighborhood) and “Scheinkin” (a bohemian area of the Tel Aviv inner city). Figure 1 is a clear expression of the social fragmentation and stereotyping rife in Israeli society as well as the ‘entrapment’ that the town residents feel, which in turn distances them from both the higher echelons of Israeli society and from neighboring Palestinian Arabs.

The sentiments of closeness/distance assist in defining collective identity by providing nuance to the process of ‘othering’ according to a range of positive and

negative group criteria. In general, development town residents feel closeness towards Mizrahim in the towns and in other parts of the country, highlighting the emergence of a ‘fractured region’ connecting isolated ‘islands’ of Mizrahim. Residents of the towns also showed relative apathy towards the West Bank settlers, other religious groups, and the kibbutzim, despite often sharing the same geographic district with the latter. The perceived distance, and even hostility, towards the icons of Israel’s Ashkenazi elites (“Ramat Aviv” and “Scheinkin”) reflect the wide ethno-class disparity that has developed between these groups. It is noteworthy that the kibbutzim, which were once themselves part of the Israeli elite, are perceived today as closer to the towns. This is partially due perhaps to their geographic proximity and to their recent decline in status.

Nation, Culture and Peripherality

The main characteristic of the social order in Israel is the Zionist hegemony. This hegemony is expressed in the taken-for-grantedness of the equivalence between the Jewish religion and nation. It is common to both the Right and to the Left, to Ashkenazim and to Mizrahim, to the poor and to the rich, to women and to men, to the religious – in their degrees and hues – as to the secular.⁸⁰

Indeed, the vast majority of respondents (95%) define themselves in the survey as “Zionists.” As noted by Gramsci in relation to hegemony, and Kimmerling above, this is manifested in a total acceptance of the inseparability of Jewishness and Israeliness, that is, between religious and national identities. The survey shows that the most common self-definition is “Israeli-Jew” (60%). This definition is stripped of communal-ethnic (*a’dati*) affiliation, which is associated with country of origin. Such self-categorization reflects a prevailing sense of belonging to a national group and not to an ethnic minority. The first choice of “Israeli-Jew” is far higher than the average in Israeli-Jewish society, which stands at only 18.5% when faced with exactly the same range of options.⁸¹ 19% of the respondents in the towns chose not to use the title “Israeli” and simply used “Jewish”. The label “Israeli” on its own received weak

⁸⁰ B. Kimmerling, “Religion, Nationalism and Democracy in Israel,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 340.

⁸¹ S. Smooha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*, Vol. 1 (Boulder: Westview, 1992) 78.

support, selected by only 8% of respondents. This number is four times smaller than the 36% of Jews throughout Israel who selected this category. Surveys among other marginal groups, such as Haredim (ultra-orthodox), Russian-speakers, or Palestinian-Arabs have also shown low support of the category “Israeli”,⁸² which enjoys its strongest support among the Ashkenazi middle-classes.⁸³ Finally, communal-ethnic categories such as “Moroccan/Tunisian-Israeli” or “Mizrahi-Israeli” were selected by only 10% of the respondents, although this is far higher than the national average, where less than 1% identified themselves as members of a “hyphenated” ethnic identity.

The reduced identification with “Israeli” marks the on-going difference between Mizrahim and mainstream Israeli society. Mizrahim place greater importance on tradition and religion, hence the popularity of the label “Israeli-Jew” versus just “Israeli”. Such an attitude is reflected by the 60% of respondents identifying themselves in another question as “traditional,”⁸⁴ which is twice the proportion as compared to the rest of the Jewish-Israeli public⁸⁵ and overlaps with the 60% who see themselves as Israeli-Jews rather than just Israelis or just Jews.

As will become clear below, these self-definitions are linked to the respondents’ cultural preferences, as well as to their perception of the future of Israeli society. Overall, these results display a strong desire on the part of Mizrahim to integrate into the mainstream of Israeli-Zionist and Jewish society. However, this desire is tempered by some critique, especially regarding past attempts by the state to erase their ethnic culture and to secularize them. Nevertheless, 77% of the respondents supported a state with a traditional-Jewish character, 12% supported a religious state, and only 8% advocated a more secular state.

Arab–Jewish Relations

Given their long-term support of right-wing Jewish parties, especially the

⁸² Lissitsa and Peres argue that 8 per cent of the Russian immigrants prefer the category “Israeli.” See: Sabina Lissitsa and Yochanan Peres, “Identity and Integration among Russian Immigrants,” *Israeli Sociology* 3, no.1 (2000) 7-30.

⁸³ See: Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness*.

⁸⁴ “*Mesorati*” – a category denoting partial observance of religious rules and a relatively favorable attitude towards religion in general.

⁸⁵ See: Y. Peres and A. Ya’ar-Tucman, *Between Consensus and Dispute: Democracy and Peace in Israeli Attitudes* (Jerusalem: Israeli Institute of Democracy, 1998).

nationalist Likud and Orthodox Jewish-nationalist Shas parties, it is not surprising that Mizrahim often hold hawkish positions on Arab-Jewish relations. Such a perception was reinforced by the elections of 2003, when right-wing voting in development towns reached 74.5% (compared with 56% state-wide and 66% among other Israeli-Jews). This pattern has been relatively stable in the towns since the early 1980s, with the main fluctuations evident internally within the rightist camp between its two main parties - Likud and Shas.⁸⁶

Several explanations for this pattern have been advanced in the mainstream literature, including: Mizrahi memory of oppression in the Arab world, a desire to turn these relations upside down,⁸⁷ as well as an alleged leaning towards authoritative, traditional, and hence 'irrational' nationalist culture.⁸⁸ Other approaches stress more 'rational' behavior, including a reaction to the discriminatory policies suffered by Mizrahim at the hands of Israel's Ashkenazi elites⁸⁹ or hostility towards the Arabs based on labor-market competition.⁹⁰

The missing link in these explanations is the dynamic of a settler society, and the ethno-class stratification typically produced by the new ethnic geographies created by the settlement process. In such a setting, the immigrant group finds itself in constant tension with both indigenous and 'founding' groups. When confronted with its inferior position *vis-à-vis* the dominant ethno-class, the immigrant group attempts to minimize the difference between the two groups. However, the immigrants' opposition to ethnic discrimination is complicated by their own ethnic prejudices towards indigenous groups. This leads to the adoption of rightist nationalist positions that attempt to position the immigrants as political partners with the founding ethno-class, and hence, 'lift' their communal and political status. For the immigrants, then, nationalism constitutes important 'political capital.' Below are respondents' attitudes towards Arab-Jewish relations.

⁸⁶ Since the mid 1990s, 'Russian' parties *Israel Ba'Aliya* (Israel on the Move) and *Israel Beitenu* (Israel Our Home) enjoy relatively massive support in the DTs among Russian immigrants.

⁸⁷ Y. Peres and S. Smooha, "Israel's Tenth Knesset Elections: Ethnic Upsurgence and Decline of Ideology," *The Middle East Journal* 35 (1981): 506-526.

⁸⁸ M. Shamir and A. Arian, "The Ethnic Vote in Israel's 1981 Elections" *Electoral Studies* 1, no. 3 (1982): 315-331; O. Selikter, "Ethnic Stratification and Foreign Policy in Israel: The Attitudes of Oriental Jews Towards the Arab and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *The Middle East Journal* 38, no. 1 (1994): 34-50.

⁸⁹ See Smooha, *Arab and Jews in Israel*.

⁹⁰ Y. Peled, "Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian Arabs: Exclusionist Attitudes in a Development Town" in *Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries: Landscapes of Development and Inequality in Israel*, ed. O. Yiftachel and A. Meir (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998) 87-111.

Table 1: “What should be Israel’s Policies towards her Arab Citizens?” A Comparison with the General Israeli-Jewish Public (in percentages)

	<i>Support in</i>	Dev. Towns	Israeli Jews
1	The Arabs will live in Israel as citizens and accept their position as a non-Jewish minority in a state belonging to the Jews	50	26
2	The Arabs will live in Israel as a national minority, recognized by the state, and enjoying proportional representation	16	23
3	The Arabs will live in Israel as a minority with equal civil rights	14	24
4	The state should make the Arabs live outside Israel	12	20
5	The Arabs will live in Israel in Arab cantons with autonomy in internal matters	7	3
6	Other	1	4

Statements 2, 3, and 5 in table 1 present variations on a ‘dovish’ orientation (advocating Arab-Jewish reconciliation and equality), while statement 4 is more hawkish (hard-line control). Statement 1 shows a more positive and close relationship to the Jewish character of the state, which Mizrahim overwhelmingly support. This statement is closest to the mainstream Zionist position and is supported by 50% of the respondents, almost twice as high as in the general Israeli public.⁹¹ A total of only 37% support conciliatory policies towards the Arab citizens (statements 2, 3, and 5) as opposed to 50% among the general public. 12% percent support the extreme right-wing option of a ‘transfer’– forcing Arab citizens to leave the state (a clear, brutal statement of anti-Arab, racist thinking - truly hardline and hawkish by the definition of the vast majority in Israel); however, Mizrahim, in comparison to the general Jewish population, are 8% less supportive of this extreme right-wing view. The strong support for statement 1 is also echoed by responses to a question about Arab and Jewish attachment to the land. The vast majority (79%) supported the perception that Israel is a Jewish homeland only, while a much smaller 21% defined it as the shared homeland of Arabs and Jews. The recent shift of general Israeli public opinion to the

⁹¹ Based on Smooha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*, 57-60.

right following the 2000–2003 Al-Aqsa Intifada has likely made this perception even more conspicuous in the towns.

Again, it should be noted that the hawkish position prevalent in the towns is also relatively moderate, as reflected by several indicators. For example, on the long-term resolution of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, most respondents expressed opinions corresponding with the centrist and moderate factions within Israeli politics. The support of more extreme right-wing options, such as Israeli control of the land from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, received only 15%, markedly lower than the 30% support it finds among the general Israeli-Jewish public. Likewise, what is perceived as a far-leftist position, namely a Palestinian state according to the 1967 borders, was supported by only 12% of the respondents, constituting only half the national average.

Hence, the position of the Mizrahim can be described as ‘moderate right’ – they support preserving the inferior status of Arab citizens and Israel’s continued control over Palestinian Territories along with some measure of Palestinian autonomy. Full Palestinian independence and full equality of Israel’s Palestinian-Arab citizens with Jewish citizens received only marginal support (14%) compared to the support of the general Jewish population – which is marginal too (24%).

TRAPPED IDENTITY AND THE COLONIZATION PROJECT

It may be useful to return for a minute to the broader immigrant-settler-society perspective and to echo Said’s insights into the pervasive stigmatization of indigenous cultures by the discourses and practices of settling groups.⁹² In order to weaken resistance to the colonizing efforts and legitimize the colonial dispossessing process in the eyes of the settlers, Zionism has systematically worked to demote and marginalize Arab-Islamic culture, which was portrayed as backward, primitive, corrupt, lazy, as well as dangerous and cruel.⁹³ This construction ‘trapped’ the Mizrahim (who themselves were products of Arab and Islamic societies) in a position of weakness and susceptibility to the overt dictates of dominant Ashkenazi-Zionist culture. Castells notes that such marginalization is often the platform for the surfacing of “resistant identities,” which are shaped in opposition to dominant frameworks of

⁹² E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁹³ See Shohat, *Forbidden Reminiscences*, 140-205.

power in order to unsettle and transform society,⁹⁴ hence correspond to the critical line in Israeli social sciences that is presented above.

However, the domination–opposition dichotomy, which moves between total acceptance of the dominant identity as suggested by modernist-functionalists to complete rejection of it as expressed in Castells’ “resistant identities,” does not provide a satisfactory account of the identity dynamics of the Mizrahim given their position as members ‘inside’ the Zionist-settling project. As already mentioned, it is a trapped identity, one that combines elements of both dominant and marginal culture. It is my contention that trapped identity, rather than any of the previously given approaches, best explains the position of the Mizrahim in Israeli society, particularly those living in development towns. Yet, as Bhabha notes, in the “third space” identity is never settled because the power dynamic, which constitutes this metaphysical and ‘real’ space, prohibits neither full integration nor total separation.⁹⁵

In this vein, the plight of Mizrahim in other locations should be mentioned. As shown by Lewin-Esptein, et al., housing location was a key factor in determining the material success of Mizrahim, favoring those residing in Israel’s main cities, especially the Tel Aviv and Haifa metropolitan regions. Benski also confirms that the combination of class and special factors created ‘three paths of the melting-pot’ in which the upper echelons are characterized by Ashkenazi networks prominent in Israel’s main urban centers, the bottom rungs are Mizrahim at the peripheries, while in the middle rung, the two groups assimilate, chiefly in Israel’s growing suburban rings.⁹⁶

Seemingly, the imposition of a new ethnic identity appears to be one of the main victories of the Zionist project. The creation of this new identity involved the de-Arabization of the Mizrahim, the near total erasure of their cultures,⁹⁷ the nationalization of their politics, and their assimilation into Israel’s economy and

⁹⁴ M. Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. II, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

⁹⁵ H. Bhabha, “The Third Space: Interview with Jonathan Rutholry” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutholry (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994) 207-221.

⁹⁶ T. Benski, “Testing Melting-Pot Theories in the Jewish Israeli Context,” *Sociological Papers* 2, no. 2 (1993): 1-46.

⁹⁷ See Shohat, *Forbidden Reminiscences*, 140-205.

expanding middle class.⁹⁸ Yet, as Shenhav demonstrates, Mizrahi identity has been preserved at the social and economic peripheries, not as a distinct cultural orientation, as a diffused sense of origin and solidarity, fueled by persisting marginality and hardship.⁹⁹

Hence, the oppressive nature of the Zionist project appears to have partially backfired on the Ashkenazi 'founders,' who *unintentionally created Mizrahi identity* by the very nature of how they went about settling the Mizrahim in these towns. The trapped identity fashioned in between the host and original cultures turned hostile towards the dominant Ashkenazi group. The Mizrahim who remain unassimilated into Israel's middle-class channel their frustration and mobilization-power into a variety of protests as well as political and cultural movements, most notably the religious-ethnic phenomenon known as Shas. Much of the energy fueling these movements is rooted in negative sentiments towards Ashkenazi elites. These sentiments are still evident at the beginning of the 21st Century and are a major factor in the inability of Israel's dominant (and mainly Ashkenazi) classes to make political and social coalitions (or partnership/associations) with the mass Mizrahi electorate at the periphery.

⁹⁸ U. Cohen, and N. Leon, "The Israeli Middle Class Mizrahim (MCM): the Collapse of the Cultural Separation Theories," a paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Israeli Anthropological Association* (Sapir College: Israel, May 2005).

⁹⁹ Y. Shenhav, *The Arab-Jews: Nationalism, Religious and Ethnicity* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2003) (Hebrew), 148.