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**Soft Religiosity: The Identity of North African Youths in
Israel in the 1950's***

INTRODUCTION

The mass immigration to Israel of 1948 through the 1950s' is perceived as the formative years of an ethnic gap between Jews originally from Muslim countries and those from Europe.¹ This added to a pre-existing religious gap between observant and non-observant Jews. The religious gap was responsible for the demise of two of Israel's

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¹ See for example Moshe Lissak, "The Demographic-Social Revolution in Israel in the 1950s: The Absorption of the Great Aliyah." *Journal of Israeli History* 22/2 (2003): 1-31. The Jews from Muslim countries are sometimes referred to as Mizrahim - Easterners, a term that developed in Israel in 1960's and 1970's and replaced another term - Edot Hamizrah - Eastern communities. In religious discourse the division is usually between Ashkenazi custom and Sephardic custom. Although all those terms are not similar, in this article the term Mizrahi will be used to describe Jews from Muslim countries in Israel. The term Sephardic will be used when referring to culture or religious customs.

first governments² in 1950 and 1951. The Sephardic leadership had already aligned itself with religious circles in the pre-state period,³ connecting these religious and ethnic gaps. During this mass immigration (1948-1951), the struggle of immigrants from Yemen to assert control over their children's education had both a religious and ethnic dimension.⁴ This bi-dimensional nature was lost in later struggles by Mizrahi protesters. The Wadi Sallib events of 1959 and the Black Panthers Movement of the early 1970's had no connection to religion. This bi-dimensionality returned to prominence in the 1990's, when the Shas Party, which initially represented a Sephardic Ultra-Orthodox electorate, began representing the greater Mizrahi population and its malaise against the establishment.⁵

This article focuses on the link between religiosity and ethnic origin and will elaborate on the difficulties in the daily life of immigrants in Youth Aliyah. This article argues that such difficulties were a result of a dichotomy between secular and religious education in Israel. Solutions to those difficulties illuminate the phenomenon that decades

² See Zvi Zameret, *The Melting Pot in Israel: The Commission of Inquiry Concerning Education in the Immigrant Camps During the Early Years of the State* (Albany: SUNY press, 2002), 105-122. See also Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser, *Israel and the Politics of Jewish Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 1-16.

³ See for example Shlomo Albuchar, *Identification, Adaptation and Reservation: The Sephardic Jews in the Eretz Israel and the Zionist movement during the British Mandate, 1918-1948* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: The Zionist library, 2002). In this case the titled used is Sephardic since the leadership of Mizrahi Jews in Palestine in the Yeshuv period was identified as descendants of Jews who were expelled from Spain - Sepharad

⁴ See Zvi Zameret, *the melting pot*, 19.

⁵ In its first years (1984-1990), Shas was more of an Ultra-Orthodox party, speaking on behalf of Sephardic Ultra-Orthodox. Only since the 1990's has Shas been identified with wide social struggle. See about Shas and its Social identity in *Shas the Challenge for Israeliness* ed. Yoav Peled (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot Akhronot, 2001); *Shas: Cultural and Ideological Perspective*, ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006). See also Avi Picard, "Voting For Shas – The Rational Answer to Emotional Distress" (Hebrew), *Democratic Culture* 11(2007), 151-201.

later will be called multiculturalism. These solutions were the first attempts at legitimizing Mizrahi heritage in Israeli schools.

THE DIFFERENT RESPONSE TO MODERNIZATION AND SECULARISM AMONG ASHKENAZI AND SEPHARDIC JEWS

European (Ashkenazi) Jewry was divided between those who embraced modern ideals of the enlightenment (and thus lived a more secular lifestyle) and the more traditional (and hence more observant).⁶ This divide was characterized by tension and struggle, which carried into politics of the Yeshuv (the organized modern pre-state Jewish community in the Land of Israel / Palestine). The outcome was a split society, especially a split in the educational system, dividing it - among other divisions - into the religious and non-religious streams. This split had not only religious implications, but political implication as well. In the highly politicized reality of the Yeshuv, religious parties such as *Ha-Mizrahi* expected all observant Jews to join their ranks, while the various leftist parties were predominantly anti-religious and saw their detachment from religion as the first step towards creating a "New Jew."⁷

The process of modernization in Muslim countries was not accompanied by religious reform and an anti-clerical struggle. The general Muslim society was still loyal

⁶ See for example Jacob Katz, *A House Divided: Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-Century Central European Jewry* (Hanover, NH: University Press, 1998).

⁷ Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The creation of a New Jew*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 18-19.

to exclusive identities rather than modern universal identities.⁸ Therefore, Jews in North Africa and the Middle East did not experience a clash between religion and modernity, and saw no conflict between them. In addition, many communities had little to no exposure to modern influence. The involvement of European Jews as agents of modernity among their co-religionists in the Muslim world contributed to the development of a separatist attitude.⁹ This attitude prevented a conflict between modernity and religiosity. There were no masses of Jews who turned to secularism, and there was no extremist attitude that developed as a backlash.¹⁰

This Sephardic “harmony” is best illustrated as a contrast to the Ashkenazi approach. The Ashkenazi-led establishment partitioned the Jewish Agency’s Diaspora education efforts into “general” and “religious” departments. This division made its emissaries’ work in Morocco irrelevant as the “general” educators were too secular, while the “religious” educators were Yeshiva teachers. Those two extremes were not

⁸ The following analysis is based on Shlomo Fisher, “Two Patterns of Modernization”, (Hebrew) *Teoria U'Bikoret* 1 (1991), 1-22. Fisher points out that the European enlightenment encouraged a universal identity. Enlightened European Jews were very much influenced by this intellectual atmosphere. Judah Leib Gordon (1831-1892), one of the poets of the Haskalah (the Jewish enlightenment movement) expressed it very well. His line, "Be a human being outside and a Jew at home" became one of the Haskalah slogans. Jews in Moslem countries, in Gordon's words, were Jews outside as well.

The idea of creating a "New Jew" did not contradict the universalistic approach of the Haskalah. For some secular Zionists, the adaptation of Jews to the world around them should be collective task, as an equal nation, and not as individuals.

⁹ As Jews, they were able to receive modern education at schools sponsored and directed by European Jews. It was their Jewish identity that got them closer to modernity, rather than integration within the surrounding society. In Europe it was the opposite case. Jews who wanted modern education had to sometimes hide their Jewish Identity (see Fisher, *ibid*).

¹⁰ On the reaction to modernization among Jews in the Muslim world see Zvi Zohar, "Sephardic Rabbinic Response to Modernity: Some Central Characteristics," in *Jews Among Muslims: Communities in the Pre-Colonial Middle East*, eds. Shlomo Deshen and W.P. Zenner (London: Macmillan and New York University Press, 1996), 64-80; Shlomo Deshen, "The Emergence of the Israeli Sephardi Ultra-Orthodox Movement." *Jewish Social Studies* 11/2 (2005), 78-87.

appropriate for the large existing Jewish school network in Morocco, Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU).¹¹

**THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL'S
ATTITUDE TOWARD JEWS FROM MUSLIM COUNTRIES –
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

As mentioned, the mass immigration years are often perceived as the formative period of the ethnic gap in Israel. It is argued that the treatment of immigrants from Islamic countries was markedly different from that of the immigrants and long-time residents who originated in Eastern and Central Europe. The social and political alienation felt by the immigrants from Islamic countries and their descendants, who would populate the lower classes of Israeli society for the next few decades, has long reverberated in the Israeli public discourse.¹² Although this article does not focus on this question and try to illuminate other angles of those relationships, it's important to frame the discussion.

The debate over this issue - waged both in the political and popular arena as well as in academic circles - can be generally divided into two opposing approaches. One regards national solidarity as the motivating force for relations among Jews from

¹¹ Zalman Shazar, head of general education department of the Jewish agency, Jewish agency minute, 30 May 1955, the Central Zionist Archives (henceforth CZA) S100/98, p. 8. See also memo of foreign affairs ministry, without date titled "Chapter Heading for Discussion on North Africa" (probably from the end of 1954), CZA S42/253.

¹² For a salient example of this, see remarks by Beit Shemesh residents, quoted in Amos Oz, *In the Land of Israel*, (Hebrew) (San Diego: Maurice Goldberg-Bartura, 1983) 27–48.

different countries and views the attitude toward Jews from Islamic countries as integrationist and egalitarian. The other sees the hierarchy between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews as the product of discrimination and explains the attitude toward Jews from Asia and Africa—essentially aloof and condescending—in terms of a Eurocentric outlook.¹³ The “solidarity” approach claims that the disparities that developed in Israel between Jews from Europe and Jews from Islamic countries were the result of external conditions. The Mizrahi Jews found themselves at the bottom of the ladder because they started off with less advantageous traits. The poor absorption conditions were not part of a plot - they were due to the young state’s economic straits. The fact that it was the immigrants from Islamic countries who suffered these poor conditions is due to the timing of their arrival.¹⁴ The “condescension” approach, by contrast, maintains that most of the inequality developed in Israel and was not the result of pre-existing disparities. There were various reasons for this inequality, such as the need for a proletariat to build an industrial economy and the desire to marginalize people from what was perceived as an inferior culture. The poor absorption conditions were meant especially for Mizrahi Jews, so as to increase their economic and political dependence on the establishment.¹⁵

¹³ For a more detailed typology see Sammy Smooha, "Three Approaches to the Sociology of Ethnic Relations in Israel" *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 40 (1986), 31-61.

¹⁴ For an example of this approach, see S. N. Eisenstadt, *Israeli Society* (London: Basic Books, 1967) 47-50; Devora Hacothen, *Immigrants in Turmoil*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University press, 2003).

¹⁵ For an example of this approach, see Deborah Bernstein and Shlomo Swirski, “The Rapid Economic Development of Israel and the Ethnic Division of Labor,” *British Journal of Sociology*, 33/1 (1982) 64-85. For a more radical view, see Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Point of View of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text*, 19–20 (1988), 1-35.

Although these are opposite approaches, an unbiased historical analysis of Israeli policy vis-à-vis the Jews from Islamic countries shows that it was affected by both factors. Alongside the concept of the equality and unity of the entire Jewish people, the hierarchy that grew out of the Eurocentric perspective also had an impact. The result was an ambivalent, complex attitude.

THE COLONIAL ORDER AND THE NATIONAL ETHOS¹⁶

In the period in which the Zionist movement developed, European colonialism in Asia and Africa was at its height. This domination by European countries was accompanied by a worldview and way of thinking that supported a legal, social, and cognitive distinction between Europeans and “natives,” as the indigenous inhabitants of non-European countries were referred to in the colonial discourse. Furthermore, there was a belief in cultural (and according to some people, even genetic) supremacy of Europeans over “natives.” According to this “colonial order,” which some may refer to as Orientalism,¹⁷ the enlightenment brought progress to the people who were exposed to it and gave them a kind of superiority.

In this process there were not only Europeans and non-Europeans but rather an entire spectrum of groups and relationships. Groups saw themselves as superior to others based on their proximity to modernity and European values. The colonial heritage was

¹⁶ This analysis is based on Yaron Tsur, “Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel,” *Journal of Israeli History*, 18/1 (1997), 73-103.

¹⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

not invented by the Zionist movement and the Ashkenazi Jews, but, as members of the Western Civilization, they could not ignore it.¹⁸

This attitude, which judged and classified groups and individuals according to their connection to European culture, was not limited to the relationship with “natives.” Groups perceived other groups as inferior. The inferior group, in an attempt to upgrade itself on the social scale, developed the same kind of superior feelings toward another group that was even more alienated from European values. In a way, the same attitude that non-Jews felt toward Jews in Germany for example, was expressed by German Jews about their East European coreligionists, and by East Europeans toward Mizrahim in Israel.¹⁹ In analyzing the attitude of Jews in Muslim countries - who were exposed to European education - toward their more “native” fellows, we see the same pattern: for example, the attitude of Moroccan Jews in big cities toward Jews living among Berber tribes.²⁰ Some argued that the attitude of Jews in Arab countries toward their Muslim neighbors (and later on, toward Palestinians in Israel) is based on the same order.²¹ The colonial order, in one way or another, was generally adopted by most people exposed to Western civilization. The debate was not over the criteria of placing groups (according to

¹⁸ This is to say that the patronizing attitude toward Mizrahi Jews is not a part of the Zionist-Arab conflict but rather a branch of Western Civilization's state of mind.

¹⁹ See Aziza Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel," *American Sociological Review* 68/4, (2003), 481-510, and in more details in Kazzoom's recent book, *Shifting Ethnic Boundaries and Inequality in Israel: Or, How the Polish Peddler Became a German Intellectual* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

²⁰ Yaron Tzur, *A Torn Community: The Jews of Morocco and Nationalism, 1943-1954*, (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved 2001), 33-36.

²¹ Kazzoom, "The Great Chain", 504-505.

proximity to European culture) but rather over the specific location of each group and individual.²²

However, the colonial order is only half of the picture.

Zionist thought was the outcome of nationalism. The national ethos regarded national identity as the primary identity, above the entire individual's other identities. Modern nationalism is based on democracy, equal access to high culture and education to all nation members.²³ This kind of nationalism, especially ethnic nationalism like Zionism, will have a hard time becoming accustomed to a structural hierarchy among the members of the same nation. National ethos, or national order, advocates solidarity among all members of the nation - irrespective of class or religious beliefs.

In Zionism, unlike other national movements, the colonial heritage and the national ethos were in conflict. The colonial heritage promoted a distinction between European and Mizrahi Jews and a feeling of superiority over the latter, whereas the national ethos promoted solidarity and an integrative attitude toward the Jews of Asia and Africa. While the colonial order emphasized the differences between different Jewish ethnic groups, the national order focused on the common ground. While the colonial order contributes to the distance between groups, the national order contributes to solidarity. The influence of the colonial order supports the argument that the relationship between Mizrahi Jews and the Israeli establishment was defined by prejudice and

²² Only in the 1970's, with the rise of post-modernism and post-colonialism, was the superiority of "Western Civilization" devalued, and the colonial order challenged by a Multicultural approach (see below, fn. 55.)

²³ See for example Ernest Gellner, *Nation and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1983), 34-37 and 62-84.

discrimination. The influence of the national ethos supports the argument that the relationship was defined by equality and solidarity.

What, in reality, influenced the attitudes of Zionism, the State of Israel and average Ashkenazi Jews toward Mizrahi Jews? Sometimes the reservation attitude predominated and sometimes the integrative attitude did. It was a patronizing solidarity. Understanding the complicity of this relationship contributes to the understanding of the different opinions and behaviors regarding the religious identity of Mizrahi new immigrants. The patronizing attitude will push to force existing identities on the newcomers. The solidarity approach will let some figures make room for the immigrants' own voice.

IMMIGRANTS' RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN TURMOIL

The large extent of immigration to Israel from Muslim countries in the early 1950's changed Israel's demographics sharply.²⁴ Israel's population had grown in numbers and varied in ethnic origin. These changes also had the potential of changing the religious identity of the young state.

Until Israel's independence, the hegemony in the Yeshuv was in the hands of the labor movement. The majority of this movement's members, Socialist Zionists, had

²⁴ Jews from Asia and Africa were less than 10% of world Jewry before the Holocaust, and no more than 15-20% after it. By 1948 they were about 20% of the Jewish population in the Yeshuv. However, among immigrants to Israel in its first years they were highly represented. By 1951 they became the majority among immigrants, and during the 1960's, they became half of Israel's Jewish population [See Moshe Sicron, *Demography* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Carmel 2004), 39; Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak *Trouble in Utopia: The Verburdened Polity of Israel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 71-73].

strong secular convictions. The Ultra-Orthodox Jews who lived in British Palestine were not part of this politically organized community - the Yeshuv. The modern-Orthodox, also known as Religious Zionists, were junior partners to the Labor Movement. In this structure, religious identity and political affiliation were connected.²⁵

The flux of immigrants from Muslim countries, with tendency to religion (but without the Orthodox zeal), was seen as a threat (or opportunity) to the existing balance of power.²⁶ From Labor's point of view, which prevailed as the norm, this "religiosity" was a component of a "Diasporic" identity that needed to be remedied. Moreover, religiosity was also seen as a characteristic of the undeveloped Middle-East, providing an additional argument to see it gone.²⁷ The religious parties (both Zionists and Ultra-Orthodox) saw the Mizrahi immigrants as potential supporters. However, they too wished to transform this group into something else: religious Jews according to the Ashkenazi / Eretz-Israel pattern.²⁸

The huge number of immigrants from Muslim countries and the potential they had to change Israel's balance of power was the background for many political conflicts. One of them concerned the education of Yemenite immigrants in the transit camps. An inquiry committee found out that these children were forced by their teachers to abandon some of

²⁵ On religious identities in Israel and in the Yeshuv see Horowitz and Lissak, 51-64.

²⁶ Charles S. Libman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Religion and Politics in Israel*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 34-36.

²⁷ See for example Nahum Levin's attitude, cited in Devora Hacoen, *Immigrants in Turmoil*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 170-171.

²⁸ See below, the attitude of the head of the religious section in Youth Aliyah, Abraham Rubinstein, (text to fn. 56. See also Moshe Lissak, *The Mass Immigration in the Fifties: The Failure of the Melting Pot Policy* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999), 68.

their religious practices.²⁹ This affair and other conflicts between Mapai (the dominant party in the labor movement and in Israeli politics) and its coalition partner, The Religious Front, led to several governmental crises and to early elections in 1951.³⁰ Less known is the tension that took place around the religious identity of immigrants' Moshavim (cooperative villages). Mapai and Ha-Poel Ha-Mizrahi (the Religious Zionists Workers party) had settlement movements identify with them. Both sought the affiliation of Moshavim populated by new immigrants from Muslim countries. Ha-Poel Ha-Mizrahi argued that since the settlers were religious, these settlements should be part of their network. Mapai activists argued that the settlers were organized by Mapai and therefore they should belong to the Mapai Moshavim network. According to Mapai, the fact that the new Mizrahi immigrants were religiously observant did not mean they should automatically become members of a religious party. To make its case stronger, Mapai created a religious section of its own "Worker Stream" school network, and a religious section in its Moshavim movement. To increase in numbers and thus political support, Mapai tried to disconnect religious identity from political affiliation. For exactly the same reason, Ha-Poel Ha-Mizrahi tried to demonstrate that religious and political identities *were* indeed connected.³¹

²⁹ See Zameret, *The Melting Pot*, 105-122. Zameret's book focuses on this inquiry committee (known as the Frumkin committee) from all its aspects. The committee was formed on January of 1950 and submitted its report by May of the same year.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ About the struggle in the Moshavim see Yitzhak Koren, *Kibutz Galuyot Behitnachluto, (Ingathering the Exiles in Its Settlement)* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1964) 265.

YOUTH ALIYAH AND ITS GOALS.

Youth Aliyah (youth immigration) was a Zionist project that started in Germany in the 1930's. Its goal was to provide Jewish teens that had no future in the Diaspora with a home and future in Israel. The young immigrants were placed in either Kibbutzim or in institutions called Youth Villages that served as full service boarding schools and agricultural training centers. These immigrants were both brought to safe haven and educated according to the Zionist vision.

Though originally aimed to save Jewish teens from Germany, Youth Aliyah became a vehicle through which Jewish youngsters from all over the world made Israel their home. With the mass immigration in the early 1950's and the establishment of transit camps (Ma`abarot) for immigrants in Israel, the role of Youth Aliyah expanded to include care for children of immigrants, and not solely those immigrating without parents. This was due to the belief held by educators that the harsh conditions and despair which existed in transit camps provided for an environment unsuitable for children.³²

While the culture shared by Jews from Muslim countries was seen as a threat to the western Israeli identity³³, few voices within the establishment called to prevent immigration from Muslim countries.³⁴ Instead, the notion of an Israeli "Melting Pot"

³² Ernest Stock, *Chosen Instrument: The Jewish Agency in the First Decade of the State of Israel*, (New York: Herzl Press; Jerusalem: Hassifriya Hazionit, 1988), 207-228. For a literary description of this aspect of Youth Aliyah, see Eli Amir, *Scapegoat: A Novel* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987).

³³ Yaron Tzur, "Carnival fears", 93-96.

³⁴ Tzur, *ibid.* For detailed analyses of the immigration policy that restricted the immigration of North African Jews see Avi Picard "The Beginning of Selective Immigration in the 1950s," (Hebrew) *Iyunim Bitekumat Israel* 9 (1999), 338-394; Avi Picard, "Emigration, Health and Social Control" *Journal of Israeli History* 22/2 (2003), 32-60; Yaron Tzur, *A Torn Community*, 320-322.

came about, by which all immigrants were to accept a newly defined (Western) Israeli identity. The adults' generation, which couldn't change and adapt as fast as the children, was seen as the "Desert Generation"; a generation like the children of Israel in the biblical book of Numbers which would leave Egypt but never arrive to the Promised Land. The 20th century parallel was a generation that arrived to Israel physically, but not mentally.³⁵ This 20th century Desert Generation would not join the Israeli melting pot. Their adaptation would take too much time. Therefore, in addition to the "humanitarian" reasons for accepting transit camp children into Youth Aliyah programs, extracting children from the sphere of influence of their families and community leaders and educating them in Kibbutzim (the bastion of Zionist ideals) was seen as a useful tool in their reeducation and incorporation into a western Israeli identity.³⁶

Youth Aliyah had both religious and secular sections, although the religious section was much smaller than the secular one. Due to the small number of religious Kibbutzim, they were unable to provide for the entire demand of religious candidates for Youth Aliyah religious education. Until the mid-1950's this additional demand was met by forming religious Youth Villages. By the mid 1950's the addition of North African

³⁵ For more on Youth Aliyah see Ernest Stock, *ibid*; Moshe Kol, *Youth Aliyah*, (Jerusalem: F.I.C.E. 1965); Shlomo Bar-Gil, *They Sought a Home and Found a Homeland*, (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Yitshak ben Tsevil, 1999).

³⁶ The Melting Pot policy was formally aimed at all immigrants. Jews coming from all over the world were asked to change and adapt themselves to the new culture. This transformation was required both of the Ashkenazi immigrants and from the Mizrahi immigrants. However, the infrastructure of the new "Sabra" (native Israeli) culture was the cultural experience of the Jews of Eastern Europe. The spiritual changes that the Ashkenazi immigrants were asked to undergo were negligible compared to the changes required of the Mizrahi immigrants (See Lissak, *The Mass Immigration in the Fifties*, 68).

immigrants into the Youth Aliyah network led to new problems regarding Youth Aliyah religious education, which will be explored in the next section.³⁷

NORTH AFRICAN YOUTHS AND ANTI-RELIGIOUS COERCION

Until 1952, North African Jews were a junior partner to Youth Aliyah as well as immigration to Israel in general. Whereas French colonial rule secured Jews' safety and political status, Jewish communities elsewhere were at greater risk. More resources were devoted towards immigration efforts from other parts of the world.

However, after the majority of Jews from communities in jeopardy were brought to Israel, North African Jews attracted the attention of Aliyah's activists. One of the Aliyah projects was Youth Aliyah. From 1951–1956, about 7,000 teenagers came from North Africa to Israel by Youth Aliyah, representing about 25% to 40% of the entire Youth Aliyah in those years.³⁸ Since its beginning, Youth Aliyah in North Africa faced problems of recruitment. Among other reasons, North African parents' disapproval of the secular nature of Youth Aliyah education further diminished their support of teens wishing to immigrate.

³⁷ By North Africa I am referring to the three countries known as the Maghreb – Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. In 1950 there were 250,000 Jews in Morocco, about 100,000 Jews in Tunisia and 130,000 in Algeria [Uziel Schmelz, "Mass Immigration from Asia and North Africa: Demographic Aspects" (Hebrew) *Pe'amim* 39 (1989), 19]. Since The Moroccan Jews were the dominant group, sometimes all North African Jews were called Moroccans.

³⁸ Avi Kadosh "Obstacle Race – the Way of Youth Aliyah in Morocco 1949-1961" (Hebrew), *Shorashim Bamizrah* [Roots in the East] 3 (1991), 129-139.

Secular coercion³⁹ in Youth Aliyah education preceded attitudes towards Mizrahi Jews and dated back to the Yeshuv period. At the height of the Holocaust in 1943, a group of some 800 children were ushered to safety in Israel from Europe via the Soviet Union and Persia. Most of these “Tehran Children” were orphans, and none of them had accompanying adults who stated their religious/secular preference. By default, they were all placed in secular Youth Aliyah institutions closely aligned with the Yeshuv’s center of power - the Labor movement. Outrage from religious leaders brought about the creation of an inquiry committee charged with studying the children’s’ family backgrounds and resulted in the replacement of half of them into religious institutions. Though the Teheran Children affair was one involving small numbers, it was perceived as an indicator of greater attitudes and helped establish mistrust and suspicion among the various factions.⁴⁰

North African Jews, even those who did not define themselves as religious, held tradition and religion in high regard. This was echoed by the largest Jewish education network in the Maghreb; Alliance Israelite Universelle. Though not seen as religious, AIU offered religion classes and emphasized the importance of tradition.

Some of the immigrants in Youth Aliyah were directed to religious institutions. However, due to the small extent of those institutions, the waiting list for religious education was long. The lack of defined religious groups in Youth Aliyah drove many families to place their children in secular institutions. The assumption of some North African parents was that secular institutions in Israel were something like AIU schools.

³⁹ This term includes the idea of preventing religious education from those who wish to have it and not enabling the practice of religious commandments and habits.

⁴⁰ Zameret, *The Melting Pot*, 7-11.

As such, it would be worthwhile to send their kids there, if it would shorten their waiting time. In some cases kids were directed to secular groups just because their parents were not aware of the fact that there were two streams of education which were different from each other.⁴¹

Israeli secular institutions' practices proved highly unacceptable to North African immigrants and included: no availability of kosher food, obligatory work on Shabbat, lack of prayer time, the availability of leavened bread during Passover⁴², no observance of Bar-Mitzvah⁴³, and co-ed dormitories.⁴⁴ By far the most offensive practice was of pig farming by some of the Kibbutzim. The head of Youth Aliyah, Moshe Kol, threatened to cease the construction of youth group housing in such Kibbutzim.⁴⁵ The fact that educational intuitions, especially in the Holy-Land, were not respecting the immigrants' tradition was the reason for many complaints.⁴⁶

In 1952 The Council of Rabbis in Morocco issued a statement criticizing Youth Aliyah's direction of children away from religious institutions. As a formal organization

⁴¹ Tzur, *A Torn Community*, 302; Meeting regarding religious sorting in Ramat Hadsah, 24 and 29 April 1957, CZA S75/7006.

⁴² See Kadosh, "Obstacle Race," 126-132; M. Kol, "Lecture at Meeting of Instructors for North African Youth" (Hebrew) *Dapim*, [pages] *Youth Aliyah Bulletin*, 50-51, (Sept. 1953); Almaliach and Elkarif to the council of Jewish communities in Morocco, 20 July 20 1959 (Hebrew). State archive, Prime minister's office, 3887/5558C.

⁴³ Yair Doar to Moshe Kol 30 July 1953, CZA L58/419.

⁴⁴ On many occasions, the Youth Aliyah executives ban these habits. The number of times that it had to be repeated shows that this restriction was not respected (see Youth Aliyah executive meeting, 20 Jun 1954 CZA S75/5690; 24 October 1954; 7 November 1954; 12 December 1954; 2 January 1955, all at CZA S75/5688.

⁴⁵ Kol to Bertha Schoolman 14 August 1956 CZA, L58/419.

⁴⁶ Tzur, *A Torn Community*, 302.

in Morocco, the council had French officials restrict Youth Aliyah activities.⁴⁷ Some religious circles even called to boycott Youth Aliyah altogether. Only after Israel Abuhatsira, an eminent Moroccan Rabbi known as the Baba Sali, visited several Youth Aliyah villages and was positively impressed by their level of religious observance were the French restrictions lifted.⁴⁸ But the conservative leaders of Moroccan Jewry did not cease convincing families to avoid enrolling their children in Youth Aliyah programs. They argued that children were forced to eat leavened bread during Passover and that phylacteries were thrown in the bathroom.⁴⁹ Though their arguments were exaggerated, they were not completely wrong. Youth Aliyah staff and leadership, specifically its head, Moshe Kol, partly agreed with them. Kol criticized the behavior and acts of some Kibbutzim that offended religious sensibilities and created a bad reputation for Youth Aliyah. Although Kol himself was not a religious person - and religiosity *per se* was not his concern - he was anxious about the influence of the anti-religious coercion on the teenagers' self image and identity. Kol mentioned the side effects that the secularization process had on the young souls: "If we want to give to the youth from the East (i.e. from Middle Eastern or North African communities A.P.) a feeling of homeliness we can't enter him to an atmosphere that completely opposed the values he brings with him."⁵⁰

The attacks against Youth Aliyah by rabbis in Morocco were restrained by members of religious parties in Israel. Although having their own conflicts with the

⁴⁷ Kol to Presko, 5 October 1952, CZA S75/5792.

⁴⁸ Kol to Margalit 16 October 1952, CZA S75/5792.

⁴⁹ See Yitzhak Rephael, Jewish Agency minutes, 9 September 1953 CZA S100/90; Almaliach and Elkarif, *ibid*; Tzur, *Torn community*, 215 and 300.

⁵⁰ M. Kol, "Lecture at Meeting of Instructors for North African Youth", *ibid*.

secular majority, they rejected the attacks on Youth Aliyah as a whole. While convincing parents in North Africa not to hesitate and to send their kids to Israel, they tried to convince the heads of Youth Aliyah to enlarge the religious section so it could meet the needs of North African immigration.⁵¹

Among those already in youth groups, many of the North-African teens applied to be moved to religious groups. Though they suffered fewer offences, the situation in religious Youth Aliyah institutions was far from perfect.

THE RELIGIOUS SECTOR AND THE NORTH AFRICANS

The absence of secular radical ideology from North African Jewish life (like in other Muslim countries) has led, as mentioned above, to a unique development of religious life and religious identities. Despite the existence of a conservative sector in North Africa - a sector sometimes identified with the religious sector in Israel - most of the Jews were spread throughout a wide spectrum of religious observance degrees. One could loosen his habits of praying or be less strict with Shabbat details and still remain a distinguished member of his congregation. Being less observant would not result in secession from the religious camp. This contradicted the Ashkenazi religious sector, in which weakening of religious habits indicated a departure from the “camp.”

⁵¹ Israel Goldstein to Goldman, 24 December 1953, Israel State Archives, Prime Minister office, c5558/3892; Yitzhak Rephael, Jewish Agency minutes, 9 September 1953 CZA S100/90.

Generally, and despite the above difference, North African youths were more comfortable in religious Youth Aliyah institutions. Kol described this as follows: “In one main issue the way of the religious instructor is easier from that of the secular instructor: in the soul of the trainee in a religious place we can find more completeness, and anyway, less crises and pang of conscience.” However, Kol indicated, there were significant differences: “The concept of religious habits in North Africa is different from the way it was in Eastern or Central Europe. Many parents in North Africa do not ask for religious education as it is defined in Israel and are satisfied with the observance of Shabbat, holidays and Kashrut.”⁵²

The differences between the Ashkenazi and North African approaches to religious observance were clear to instructors in religious institutions. Yoel Shiptan, a Youth Aliyah instructor, defined the North African youths’ religious behavior as based on sentiment. An instructor from the Giva’at Washington Youth Village said: “their religiosity is often based on superstition... their practical precepts do not include high requirements. According to their point of view, swimming in the sea, going to the cinema, participating in soccer games or riding a bicycle in Shabbat are not forbidden. All young people are doing that.” An instructor named Tzvi, from Agudat Israel Workers (the socialist fraction of the Ultra-Orthodox, which had two Kibbutzim and several educational institutions) mentioned that many of his trainees wanted to travel by car after the Shabbat service. Wearing a yarmulke, the ultimate symbol of religiosity, was

⁵² Ibid. similar things were published in his book, *Massekhet Aliyat Hano'ar (Tractate of Youth Aliyah)* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: M. Newman, 1964), 122.

perceived by the trainees as a kind of coercion. Mordekhai Hayut, an instructor from Kibbutz Yavne, defined the differences as follows: “Their Jewish background is observing Shabbat, keeping kosher, and a clear distinction between Jews and Gentiles”. Yarmulke, Tzitzit and three prayers by day, the basics routine of life in religious institutions, were not a part of their repertoire. In a way, while the Ashkenazi way of practicing religion was very well defined, the Sephardic way was flexible. This was "soft" religiosity, compared to the "tough" and defined behavior requested by religious intuitions. Shiptan indicated that when trainees from secular institutions came to visit his own trainees, he noticed that there was actually no difference between the groups: “This is the same youth and in their hearts there is the same religiosity.”⁵³ Those words indicated that the line drawn between religious and secular trainees of Youth Aliyah was thinner than what religious educators expected.

The major source of dissatisfaction among religious institutions for North African trainees was related to the Ashkenazi character of the Israeli religious education. While in the secular system the requirement of adaptation was presented as a demand for modernization, some of the changes required in religious schools (for example, the use of Yiddish in some Ultra-Orthodox institutions and especially the differences in prayer styles) could only be perceived as demands for “Ashkenaziation.” Though most trainees were Mizrahim, most religious institutions conducted Ashkenazi-style prayers. Few institutions dared to make any changes to this, and only in special events.

⁵³ "Meeting of Religious Instructors about North African Youth" (Hebrew) *Dapim*, [pages] *Youth Aliyah Bulletin*, 52-53, (Nov. 1953).

Yoel Shiptan described his attempts to have separate services for North African trainees:

“Their separate Minyan was full of excitement. Their prayers are different than ours. We pray while whispering and everyone recite separately... They pray out loud, all of them together, verse by verse and verbatim. That brings them to the eagerness and reinforces their religious emotion. We should cherish this strong and stable religious emotion, even if it make thing difficult for our institution. We must enable them their separate Minyan.”⁵⁴

Shiptan's suggestion was not to separate Mizrahi students from the Ashkenazi ones, and developed separate institutions. This was against the ideas of the integration of the exiles, and was not accepted in any Zionist school. Yeshivot that are titled as Ashkenazi or Sephardic exist only in the Ultra-Orthodox section. What Shiptan suggested was having different styles of prayer in the same institution, and that the Sephardic heritage would be appreciated and supported like the dominant Ashkenazi one. Shiptan was speaking about his own educational institution, and was suggesting similar institutions to adopt this approach. His view was an early version of a phenomenon that, decades later, would receive the term “Multicultural Approach.” This approach suggests that not only educational institutions should cherish and value the heritage of minority groups. The society and its government as a whole should do so as well.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ About Multiculturalism in general see for example Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10-33. About

Opinions such as Shiptan's were few and far between. At the time, the dominant approach was that the unity of the new Israeli society required uniformity. The head of the religious section in Youth Aliyah, Abraham Rubinstein, saw multiculturalism as a threat: "The Nusach [style of praying], is only a detail of a large picture. It is clear that we, as religious Jews, have no intention to give excuses to a varied mosaic of habits and versions of different tribes and ethnic groups. We should look for integrating the population". But while rejecting the legitimacy of North African trainees to pray according to their own tradition, Rubinstein was giving lip service to Mizrahi tradition:

"Integration does not mean the full adaptation of one side to the other side. Integration means taking the best from all sides. This is our main challenge. If we are able to find the light and the illuminating in this Jewry, in its children that are been educated among us, they will strike roots in our country and identify with our ideals."⁵⁶

According to Rubinstein, uniformity was not about forcing Ashkenazi tradition. He saw integration, the idea of the melting pot, as a model that should include the heritage of Mizrahi Jews as well. However, the language he chose ("If we are able to find the light and the illuminating in this Jewry") indicates a clear paternalistic approach.

Though religious education was more appropriate to North African teens than the secular Kibbutz education, it was far from perfect. The North African religious approach by which the main Jewish commandments were maintained without superfluous

Multiculturalism in Israel see Yossi Yonah, *In Virtue of Difference: The Multicultural Project in Israel* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2005).

⁵⁶ "Meeting of Religious Instructors about North African Youth", Ibid.

meticulousness, based on sentiment and a sense of belonging more so than on theology and rules, was unacceptable in the context of the existing religious institutions. This, combined with the introduction of a foreign prayer style, created a sense of alienation among the North African teens. The alienation from the two streams of education made room for a third educational option to develop - the Mesorati (traditional) stream.⁵⁷

THE MOTIVES FOR AND PRINCIPLES OF THE MESORATI MOVEMENT

The establishment of the Mesorati stream within the Youth Aliyah was a result of several developments. First was the need for institutions that had respect to a religious lifestyle to counterbalance the critics about Youth Aliyah that came from religious circles in North Africa. Due to the lack of religious institutions, there was a need for those institutions which did not define themselves as religious, to adopt this approach.

The second development was the growing awareness that even religious institutions did not fit the aspirations and lifestyles of the North African youth immigrants. As Moshe Kol stated:

⁵⁷ Traditionalism is an elusive term that it is difficult to define. The conservative stream in Israel called itself Traditional Judaism. However, in the Israeli public discourse, traditionalism is identified less with modern/liberal denominations but rather with more loyalty to the heritage and customs of parents and previous generations. For definitions like those on Traditional Judaism see Meir Buzaglo, *Language for the Loyalists* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: KETRE, 2009) 47-59. See also Yaacov Yadgar and Charles S. Liebman, "Beyond the Religious-Secular Dichotomy: Masortiim in Israel" in *Israel and Modernity* eds. Uri Cohen et. al. (Hebrew) (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion Institute, 2006) 337-366. The definition of traditionalism and traditional education in the context of Youth Aliyah was an institution that respects Shabbat and Kashrut and enables praying to those who are interested in it (see below and see Kol, *Youth Aliyah*, 146-150).

“Neither the religious rabbis nor the secular members of the *Kibbutzim* are attentive to the needs [of the youth]. Among both streams there is no will to find a synthetic way. On the one hand is the *kibbutz* which offers style and character—something that isn’t about to change—while on the other hand is the binding force of the rabbi, and the Shulkhan Arukh [the codification of Jewish laws].”⁵⁸

The third development was connected to the political identity of Youth Aliyah. Like every other department in the Jewish Agency, the head of the Youth Aliyah was a representative of one of the political movements, whose political orientations affected the identity and administration of his department. Moshe Kol, the head of Youth Aliyah department, was a member of *ha'oved hatzioni* (the Zionist Worker), which was one of the groups that formed the Progressive Party in the Knesset.⁵⁹ This was a non-socialist worker’s group. Although close to Mapai and always part of the labor government coalition, its attitude towards religion was moderate. Unlike the socialist movement it was not anti-religious and did not view religion as opium for the masses. As a liberal movement, its relation to “negation of the Diaspora” - a central theme in the labor movement - was minor.

Although *ha'oved hatzioni* was a settlement movement as well, only a few Kibbutzim were affiliated with it. However, they had a larger influence on Youth Aliyah due to the fact that quite a lot of Youth Villages were identified with it. This was a wide

⁵⁸ Moshe Kol, Youth Aliyah executive, 1 January 1956, CZA S75/12369.

⁵⁹ The party had between 4 and 6 seats in the Knesset from 1949 to 1959. After a short merge with the General Zionists and the creation of the Liberal party (1961 election), they were separated and the progressive created the Independent Liberals (1965-1977). This party merged into the labor party and disappeared in the 1980’s.

scope to test the Mesorati attitude. Kol's encouragement and support was an important backup to this stream's growth.⁶⁰

Kol feared that the religious polarization which had occurred among the Ashkenazim would be mimicked by the immigrants from Muslim countries.

"Do we want them to imitate that which we know is not good? Should we educate them to be heretical, only in order to later on, we will look together for faith? Those Jewish communities have values. A well known Moroccan rabbi once told us: 'the religious community in Israel is too extreme for us and is not befitting for our Judaism, while your secular community is also too extreme.'"⁶¹

Thus, through trial and error, educational institutions affiliated with *ha'oved hatzioni* started to implement a lifestyle with more focus on Judaism and its ceremonial rituals. Due to rising demand, some teachers started to teach Torah. They, like many of the non-religious in those days, grew up in religious environments. They had the required background, and the development of traditionalism revealed their lost identity. One of the instructors volunteered to teach the children how to put on phylacteries. Another teacher began teaching Torah as well, and as a result of this development, asked the children to cover their heads in Torah classes.⁶²

⁶⁰ See more on Kol's attitude towards tradition and religion in his memoirs *Maavakim Umifalim [Struggles and Enterprise]*, (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Ts'erikover, 1984), 172-174; see also Moshe Kol, *On the Struggle for Religious and Cultural Pluralism*, (Hebrew) (Tel Itzchak: The Liberal Seminary, 1979).

⁶¹ Cited in "A Meeting about Tradition Observance in the Educational Institutions of Ha-Oved Ha-Tzioni," *Dapim*, 60-61 (April 1955).

⁶² *ibid.*

In order to define the Mesorati stream, a booklet was put out.⁶³ It served as a type of Shulkhan Arukh for an educational stream that opposed religious stringency on every law written in the already existing Shulkhan Arukh. Its fundamentals included the laws pertaining to the Shabbat (such as refraining from cigarette smoking in public and public prayer), Kosher food under the supervision from the religious section of Youth Aliyah, and the celebration of holidays as religious holidays, as opposed to only agricultural ones (as was practiced in the secular *Kibbutzim*). The teachers were also requested to allow the children whose parents had given them phylacteries to put them on, but not to force this upon them. Agricultural work in the Shabbat had the same restrictions that religious Kibbutzim had. Kibbutzim who wanted to have a Mesorati group had to commit themselves not to raise pigs, to serve kosher meat in the dining room, and not to have bread during Passover.

Kol had additional recommendations to those schools who wanted to be a part of the Mesorati stream. They had to have a Shabbat atmosphere which included no sports activities, as well as having a Kiddush, reading from the Torah, and letting those who want to do so participate in the Shabbat service. For this purpose, institutions had to provide a space for a synagogue and a kosher Torah scroll. The kids choosing not to participate in Shabbat services would be allowed to read and discuss the torah portion of the week.⁶⁴

⁶³ The booklet from 15 March 1955 is mentioned in several letters in Youth Aliyah file no. CZA S75/7088. The principles from the booklet were repeated in Kol's letter to traditional institutions, 22 August 1956 CZA S75/7087.

⁶⁴ Kol at Youth Aliyah executive meeting, 1 January 1956, CZA S75/12369; Kol to traditional institutions, 22 August 1956 CZA S75/7087.

Kol emphasized the educational benefits that would come from adopting the Mesorati attitude:

“It’s time to suggest many Youth Aliyah centers that they were wrong when rejecting traditional values. Kids whose roots were cut-off will find it difficult to develop their world view. It creates a danger of having emptiness in their hearts and they start to doubt human and national values. It creates a tendency for mental disturbances. It’s the role of Kibbutzim and institutions to learn the subject. The Youth Aliyah department will encourage those who deal with traditionalism due to the needs of thousands of its trainees.”⁶⁵

With the growth in immigration from North Africa and the rising need for appropriate placement for kids from there, the Mesorati stream had to be expanded from the small circle of *ha'oved hatzioni* institutions. Throughout discussions about the subject, the educators listed the advantages and disadvantages of the new approach. One of the teachers described a student of his who trusted in him deeply. In the same institution, the Youth Village Magdiel of *ha'oved hatzioni*, it was prohibited to smoke in public on Shabbat. When one of the students came to his teacher’s house and saw him smoking on Shabbat, the teacher “saw in the student eyes that his trust in me had passed with the smoke.” Nevertheless, this incident did not cause him to criticize this method and he continued to illustrate its advantages through the following anecdote:

⁶⁵ Kol to traditional institutions, *ibid.*

“The Israeli songs and Hassidic stories didn’t penetrate the students’ hearts, they sat there sad and passive... and then a boy appeared and passionately began reading the Book of Esther in a traditional Moroccan tune. How attentive they were, what fire there was in their eyes! Afterwards there continued our dancing, Israeli folk dancing with an excitement that we had never seen before from this group. The reading of the Book of Esther in the style familiar to this ethnic group created a link between the Israeli and Moroccan cultures.”⁶⁶

Educational principles were not the only basis for the need for a Mesorati stream. Some saw it as politically advantageous. For example, Baruch Osnia, a Givat Haim kibbutz member and Mapai party member of Knesset, explained that his support of the Mesorati stream stemmed not only from its inherent importance but also from the desire to put an end to the religious parties’ monopoly over the traditional youth.⁶⁷

OPPOSITION TO THE MESORATI STREAM

Osnia’s words bear witness to the conflation between education, religion, and politics in the struggle over controlling the immigrants’ souls. The religious feared that the Mesorati stream would be politically motivated, and weaken its control over the North African immigrants.

⁶⁶ Shmuel Meiri cited in “A Meeting about Tradition Observance in the Educational Institutions of Ha-Oved Ha-Tzioni”, *Dapim*, 60-61 (April 1955).

⁶⁷ Osnia to Kol, 28 of Elul 5716 [4 September 1956], CZA S75/7087.

The religious members of Youth Aliyah were completely opposed to the Mesorati approach. Beyond their opposition to this stream's lenient observance of the laws of the Shulkhan Arukh, they saw the idea as dishonest to the North African parents. They argued that the Mesorati stream was presented as completely religious and that North African parents would turn to them instead of religious institutions. This criticism was based on the idea that the term Mesorati was being understood as "religious." When the question was presented to North African parents, many who sought religious education for their children used the term *Traditionnel*, which was the French translation of the Hebrew term *Mesorati*.⁶⁸

An additional criticism was regarding the teachers at the Mesorati stream, who according to their religious counterparts, did not act in accordance with the stream's principles in their personal lives or fully believe in its postulates. In order to moderate the opposition of the religious, Kol suggested that the Mesorati option only be presented to parents who chose to give their children a secular education. However, the religious fear of dishonesty and the 'stealing' of children that would otherwise go to religious institutions was not completely groundless, as demonstrated by the number of times Kol had to deny that fear of deceit.⁶⁹

There was a secular opposition to the Mesorati stream as well. Yehiel Harif, a teacher at one of Ha'oved Hatzioni's institutions, criticized the request to keep the laws of Kashrut: "I do not understand the issue of Kashrut. Maybe in the past it was imposed by

⁶⁸ Rabbi Munk at Youth Aliyah executive meeting, 1 January 1956, CZA S75/12369.

⁶⁹ For example see Kol at Youth Aliyah executive meeting, 1 January 1956, CZA S75/12369; Kol, *Masekhet Aliyat Hano'ar*, 149.

our forefathers to separate us from the gentiles... but why should our trainees have to respect these laws? We want to see them as citizens of the State of Israel, not as an ethnic group fighting for its existence among gentiles.” Continuing this approach, Harif negated the responsiveness to the children worldview: “integrating the exiles, as we understand it, is to modify the form of those who are coming from exile to the shape of a nation with a homogenous character. Who says that we need to adapt ourselves to the children of Morocco?” Another teacher explained that he is opposed to the *Mesorati* stream due to the teachers' self deception.⁷⁰ A teacher from the Ashdot Yaakov kibbutz claimed that it would be possible to find a solution within the institutions but it would be more difficult to do so in the Kibbutzim—it would be artificial. “It would be impossible to find a *Mesorati* hotbed within a community that is entirely secular and heretical.”⁷¹ He viewed the essence of the *Mesorati* education as a continuous pattern of internal conflicts.

The *Mesorati* stream had a limited scope. Kol tried to convince Kibbutzim that were applying to have a Youth Aliyah group, to adopt the principal of the *Mesorati* stream. Although they were willing to sacrifice a great deal for a youth group (that in many cases benefited the Kibbutz with housing funded by the Jewish Agency and serve as a reserve for future members), they were reluctant to adopt a less secular way of life. From the Kibbutzim's point of view, secular life was not only a question of comfort but a

⁷⁰ “A Meeting about Tradition Observance in the Educational Institutions of Ha'oved Hatzioni”, *Dapim*, 60-61 (April 1955).

⁷¹ Yizchak Maor to Chanoch Reinhold, 21 April 1955, CZA S75/7087.

question of ideology as well. Kol attempted to involve secular Kibbutzim in this endeavor but failed.⁷²

The Mesorati education stream did not succeed in expanding beyond several institutions of “Ha'oved Hatzioni.” In spite of the great demand, none of the existing education streams and establishments were willing to adjust themselves. As so, they couldn't serve as an appropriate framework for the special religious identity of many of the Mizrahi youth immigrants.

CONCLUSION

In the Israeli debate over religious identity, a dichotomy is presented between secular and religious people. Regarding the ethnic relationship, this dichotomy is also present between those who see only the patronizing approach and those who ignore the existence of this approach. The Mesorati stream in youth Aliyah was an attempt to avoid this dichotomy.

During the 1950's some Youth Aliyah educational institutions started to gradually introduce religious elements into their daily routine. This was a response to several developments. One was a controversy that emerged in Morocco regarding the secularization of Youth Aliyah trainees in Israel. This controversy weakened recruitment attempts of Youth Aliyah. Another factor was the insufficient number of Youth Aliyah religious institutions. Those who wanted to go to Israel had the choice of postponing their

⁷² Masekhet Aliyat Hano'ar, 140 and 148.

Aliyah until there would be an available spot in a religious place, or go to Israel in a non-religious framework. Finally, the few kids who were accepted by religious groups found themselves in a conflict with the institution. The lifestyle in a religious school in Israel was very different from the habits of North African Jews.

The two existing streams in Youth Aliyah were opposed to the Mesorati stream. The religious people argued that in religious life, a compromising attitude is impossible; the Shulkhan Arukh is mandatory and all should behave according to it. From their point of view, there was no way to go around it, especially in an educational institution. They also feared that the Mesorati stream was designed to deceive parents who were interested in religious education for their children.

On the other side, the secular Kibbutzim, although they had an interest in absorbing Youth Aliyah groups and were willing to make sacrifices to this end, opposed the changes in their character; changes that the Mesorati attitude required.

In spite of resistance from the establishment, there were those who saw in the Mesorati stream a real chance for the general Israeli society. One example could be Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, the president's wife and a public figure in her own right.⁷³

Another was Chanoch Reinhold (later Chanoch Rinot), a well-known educator who served in the 1960's as the general manager of the Ministry of Education. Reinhold was the General Manager of the Youth Aliyah in the 1950's. He hoped the Mesorati

⁷³ Yanait followed closely the development of the Mesorati stream, and was very supportive of its expansion. Kol reported to Yanait on progress in the field. See Kol to Rachel Yanait, 28 August 1956, CZA S75/7087. As the president's wife and as a public figure she had influence on the leading party - Mapai.

stream would influence the Israeli society as a whole toward the calming of the religious/secular tension. He was anxious about disputes that existed in many areas of Israeli life, and especially in places where new Mizrahi immigrants were concentrated. The fact that they immigrated to Israel without being affiliated in advance with any political movement made their villages and neighborhoods venues for competition between parties. A bitter struggle developed between the religious parties and the Labor Movement, although Mizrahi immigrants did not fit the classic image of either party. The kind of school to which each family would send their children was one of the harshest conflicts. Each party was hoping that by affiliating children with their educational stream, they would gain the support of the entire family. This support could pay off on Election Day.

According to Reinhold, the fact that among Jews in Muslim countries the religious-secular conflict had minor importance should have been adopted by the Israeli society and calmed the tension. He thought the Mesorati stream was a way out of this conflict. "Something cultural, educational and human might have been possible, if there was a different attitude to the issue from the people that dealt with it."⁷⁴ He was very disappointed with the collapse of Youth Aliyah's attempts. He saw the failure in expanding the Mesorati stream a missed opportunity. According to Reinhold, by giving the immigrants' children only two distinct choices – religious schools or secular schools - the Israeli socialization would, sooner or later, shape the Mizrahi teens into two

⁷⁴ Reinhold at Youth Aliyah executive meeting, 1 January 1956, CZA S75/12369.

extremely polarized camps, like the Ashkenazi Israelis. This socialization would prevent, in the future, the possibility that this kind of educational stream would ever emerge.

The meticulousness of religious orthodoxy and of secular 'orthodoxy' prevented, eventually, the expansion of the Mesorati stream. It survived in a few institutions of Youth Aliyah but did not succeed in creating a solution for the thousands of young people who needed it. Those immigrants were forced to fit into frameworks that did not match their religious attitude - frameworks that were overly observant or overly permissive.

The Mesorati stream saw in cultural pluralism and multiculturalism an important value, even before such terms were coined. The style of prayers, Sephardic customs, and more, were accepted in this stream while usually rejected by religious and secular streams. One of the reasons for this was that the existing streams had already formed their ideal type. The Mizrahi trainees had to adjust themselves to this model. The Mesorati stream was more open to the trainees, to their wishes and demands. The essence of traditionalism was a step in this direction.

The Mesorati stream is a case study in which the complicity of ethnic relations can be demonstrated. The Mesorati stream did not only break the existing categories of religious and secular, but also led to illuminate the discussion about ethnicity in Israel. The discourse of the patronizing approach versus solidarity approach can be illustrated in this case. Those who favor the solidarity approach emphasize that Israel's educational

goals were to help the immigrants adjust to modern Israeli society.⁷⁵ Those emphasizing the patronizing approach would focus on how the educational system relegates the Mizrahi students to low status education and ignores their culture.⁷⁶ The truth lies somewhere in-between. The attitude of the educators was that they know better than the immigrant students and better than their parents what is good for them. However, there was no organized scheme, and probably no deliberate intention, to erase the immigrants' culture and to assign them to the low levels of social stratification. Although some of the expressions and citations echo the colonial order and superiority-feeling of the establishment, this is not the whole picture. We can also see evidence of the solidarity-attitude in the feeling that educators and immigrants shared the same religion and nation: e.g., that the customs associated with the Sephardic heritage should have their place in Youth Aliyah institutions.

The attitude taken by the founder of the Mesorati stream was one that listens to the needs of Mizrahi trainees. While the main approach was to offer for Mizrahi immigrants one of the two given options – religious or secular education – educators and administrators of Youth Aliyah were willing to consider a third option. While the existing establishments were adopting a patronizing approach, those in direct contact with the North African immigrants were willing to listen and adjust their schools to the tradition

⁷⁵ An example for this approach in education see in S.N. Eisenstdt, "The Social meaning of Education in the light of Aliyah absorptions problems," (Hebrew) *Megamot*, 4 (July 1952), 330-335.

⁷⁶ For this approach see Arnold Lewis, *Power, Poverty, and Education* (Ramat Gan, Turtledove, 1979); Shlomo Swirski, *Seeds of Inequality*, (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Breirot Publications, 1995), 72–75.

and heritage of the newcomers. It was a very limited effort from the standpoint of Israeli society, but it was a direction that would gain more and more supporters in the future.