

**BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES**

**LAYERS OF IDENTITY IN ISRAELI MINORITY LITERATURE: A COMPARATIVE
READING OF ELI AMIR AND SAMI MICHAEL**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS**

**BY: BEEBA MATHEW
UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF:
DR. YAIR HURI AND
DR. CHANITA GOODBLATT**

SEPTEMBER 2011

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Abstract

Many scholars on Israeli history and literature describe the Sephardim (or the Mizrahim) as a cultural minority striving to safeguard their Arab traditions and heritage in Israel. In doing so, this Israeli community also battles preconceived socio-ethnic prejudices against Sephardi-Arab culture. Some of these preconceptions are born out of Western-European thought systems like European Zionism, which is based on many Orientalist cultural assumptions about the Eastern Other. In fact, after making *aliyah* during the founding years (early 1950s-1960s), many of the Sephardim started to write about the different problems they faced as newly-arrived immigrants in Israel, as well as similar issues experienced by other socio-religious and ethnic minority communities.

In this thesis, I will focus on Eli Amir's *Scapegoat* (1987) and Sami Michael's *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (2003) in English translation to analyze how these specific Sephardic authors have tried to attain cultural reterritorialization by focusing on certain minority issues such as: dual-identity crisis; the victimizing nature of ethnic othering; and struggling with the demands of socio-economic assimilation. Examining such matters is important in understanding the established ethnic hierarchy that governs Israeli society. Indeed, literary analysis of these particular novels helps one draw unique parallels to certain important concepts developed in and/or associated with the field of political geography. For example, the ethnic stratification that is present in both works can be fully clarified by thought systems such as ethnocracy, ethnic democracy, assimilation theory, acculturation, othering and Orientalism. For the purposes of this thesis, I will utilize Oren Yiftachel's writings on the binary traits of Israeli ethnocracy, which divides Israeli society along ethnonational (between Jewish and Arab culture) and ethnoclassic (within the dominant Jewish society) boundaries. Nevertheless, much of this work

will focus more on the socio-cultural dilemmas connected to the Israeli ethnoclassic stratification.

This thesis is therefore divided into three parts: the first chapter will offer a short theoretical introduction to secondary sourcing, while the second chapter will deal with underpinning political theories present in these specific authors' thematic focus on forced and independent assimilation — especially the ethnoclassic stratified grouping of Israeli Jews. Finally, the third chapter, which is also the conclusion, will deal with the presence of othering in the literature and its ties to ethnonationalism. The thesis ends in this manner because I think that ethnoclasses are formed by social prejudices created to separate different ethnonations.

Table of Contents

Abstract (Both Hebrew and English).....	i
Chapter I. A Methodological Introduction to Amir and Michael.....	1
Chapter II. Issues of Dual Identity and Assimilation in Sephardic Literature: Understanding Israeli Ethnocracy.....	9
Chapter III. Conclusion: Dealing with the Israeli Stigma of Ethnonational Othering....	51
Bibliography.....	75

Chapter I. A Methodological Introduction to Amir and Michael

“Our expectations of the country were great, a mixture of messianic dreams and unrealistic aspirations, but the reality was different: crisis followed crisis-economic, social, religious, and moral. The hardest of all was the search for identity, a search for the personal I and the collective; and on top of all of these came an additional blow-[the crisis] of culture.” –Eli Amir¹

Gil Z. Hochberg starts his article “‘Permanent Immigration’: Jacqueline Kahanoff, Ronit Matalon, and the Impetus of Levantinism” with a French diplomat’s warning to the newly formed state of Israel concerning the arrival of its first wave of Moroccan immigrants in 1949. This diplomat stated that “the immigration of certain human material is liable to bring the Jewish nation down, and make it into a Levantine nightmare”.² About ten years later, in 1961, the British newspaper *Manchester Guardian* accused Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion of “plunging the new nation into Levantinism”.³ In reply to this accusation, Ben-Gurion reassuringly responded that he would most certainly “prevent Levantinism from creeping into [Israel’s] national life”.⁴ These historical examples help establish the fact that Levantinism, though dealing with a specific geographic space (mainly the Middle East), is predominantly a cultural concept.⁵ As Hochberg explains, the French word *levant* is held to mean, among numerous other things, “‘rising sun’-[which] was often used by French colonizers to denote the evolutionary cultural development from East to West”.⁶ Based on this context, the related word

¹ Nancy E. Berg. *Exile from Exile: Israeli Writers from Iraq*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996. (Berg 67)

² Gil Z. Hochberg. “‘Permanent Immigration’: Jacqueline Kahanoff, Ronit Matalon, and the Impetus of Levantinism.” *boundary 2* 31 (2004): 219-243. (Hochberg 219)

³ (Hochberg 219)

⁴ (Hochberg 219)

⁵ (Hochberg 220)

⁶ (Hochberg 221)

Levantinism has been interpreted to imply “a state of cultural impurity: a failed attempt on the side of the colonized to imitate the ways of the West, resulting in poor performance of (Western) culture”.⁷ Thus, as recently as 1999, a *Levantine* is defined in the well-established Hebrew dictionary *Milon Chadash* by Avraham Even Shoshan as either an individual of “Middle Eastern descent” or “a person with superficial education who behaves according to false codes of politeness and lacks any real culture or spiritual stability”.⁸

Such heightened discrimination against people of Middle Eastern origin, both for Sephardic Jews and Arab Israelis, has been the root of many social conflicts within Israeli society from the formation of the state.⁹ This is especially evident in Israeli-Mizrahi/Sephardic minority literature focusing on the problematic issues surrounding dual identity, ethnic stratification, and othering for non-Ashkenazi and non-Jewish communities. In her article titled “Ethics and Aesthetics of Memory in Contemporary *Mizrahi* Literature,” Yael Halevi-Wise explains that the Mizrahim, “represent a cultural-albeit not a demographic-minority [in Israel and that the] *Mizrahi* cultural contributions are invigorated by a struggle to preserve and legitimize the backgrounds of Jews from Arab lands against an ideology with preconceived social, ethical, and artistic standards for *Mizrahi* conduct.”¹⁰ For the purposes of my thesis, I plan on analyzing these specific themes based on Eli Amir’s *Scapegoat* (1987), and Sami Michael’s *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (2003) in English translation.¹¹ These books will serve as the majority of my primary

⁷ (Hochberg 221)

⁸ (Hochberg 221)

⁹ In this paper, I will use Sephardi, Sephardic, Sephardim, Mizrahi Jews, Arab Jews, and Mizrahim interchangeably.

¹⁰ Yael Halevi-Wise. “Ethics and Aesthetics of Memory in Contemporary Mizrahi Literature.” *The Journal of Israeli History* 20.1 (2001): 49-66. (Halevi-Wise 49)

¹¹ Unfortunately, at this time, my Hebrew is not advanced enough for me to analyze these primary texts in the original Hebrew. Nevertheless, the English translations of these two novels are wholly

sourcing. I believe that I will gain more success in analyzing the socio-political issues mentioned above through a combination of literary and political-geographic critiques.

For instance, although these two novels were originally published in the 1980s (in Hebrew), they deal with various socio-political events and cultural phenomena that concern different generations of ethnic minorities within Israel from the mid twentieth century.¹² An example of this is evident in *Scapegoat (1987)*, in which the author describes the various problems caused by forced Westernization and the advent of cultural dilemmas faced by young Iraqi immigrants as they try to integrate into the kibbutz movement of the 1950s. In the fifth chapter of her book *Exile from Exile: Israeli Writers from Iraq (1996)*, Nancy E. Berg argues that many of the people who arrived in Israel during the mass immigration period during the late 1940s and 1950s felt this “crisis of culture”.¹³ Ideally, the state was supposed to effectively “absorb” the newly arrived masses and thus fit the melting pot model, or *misug galuyot*, which means “the merging or mixing of exiles”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, as stated in Berg’s work, “in Israel...the mixing-*misug galuyot*-apparently means simply the Ashkenization of the Sephardim”.¹⁵ This type of mixed identity or dual existence is also present in *A Trumpet in the*

dependable and well established in the literary field. In regards to the English translations, please keep in mind that the novels were originally published in Hebrew by Am Oved Publishers Ltd in Tel Aviv, Israel in the 1980s (*Scapegoat* was first published in 1983 and *A Trumpet in the Wadi* in 1987). For clarification, I will be exclusively citing the publication dates of the respective English translations for these novels for the remainder of my thesis.

¹² Shai Ginsburg. ““The Rock of Our Very Existence”: Anton Shammas’ “Arabesques” and the Rhetoric of Hebrew Literature.” *Comparative Literature* 58 (2006): 187-204. (Ginsburg 190)
With this in mind, however, I want to predominantly focus on how the Sephardim felt about the evolution of their respective identities from the early 1950s onwards. I will also, when relevant, draw parallels to similar social phenomenon in other Israeli minority communities (such as the assimilation experiences of Israeli Russian Jews and Arab Israelis).

¹³ (Berg 67)

¹⁴ (Berg 71)

¹⁵ (Berg 71)

Wadi (2003), which is mainly about a love affair between an Arab Israeli woman, Huda, and a Russian Israeli Jew named Alex that takes place in 1982 in the Arab quarter in Haifa.¹⁶ This story develops with the dawning of the first Israel-Lebanon War in its background. Both *Scapegoat* (1987) and *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (2003) emphasize the difficulties of attempted social integration faced by minorities both within and outside the ethnic majority, as well as the dual, sometimes paradoxical, identities that these experiences create. In her January 2010 interview with Sami Michael for *Perspectives*, Claudia De Martino asked the author why his “characters are always of mixed origins and ‘loyalties’”.¹⁷ Michael replied that he gives his characters mixed or dual identities because he himself is an individual of mixed heritage.¹⁸ As Michael told De Martino:

“My mother tongue is Arabic and my nationality Israeli, and my identity Jewish. I have always thought of myself as an “Arab Jew” without distinguishing at all which one of my identities was the dominant one. But it is a very complicated identity to deal with in

In “Nation-building and the Division of Space: Ashkenazi Domination in the Israeli ‘Ethnocracy’”, Oren Yiftachel explains the ethnic differences between two main Jewish ethnic groups in modern Israel: the Ashkenazi Jews (or Ashkenazim in plural) and the Mizrahi Jews (or Mizrahim in plural) (Yiftachel, “Nation”, 33). As Yiftachel states, the Ashkenazim “immigrated to Israel from Europe or America and are known as ‘Western’ or ‘European’ Jews” and the Mizrahim “immigrated from Muslim countries in Asia and Africa, and are also known as Oriental, Sepharadi (Sephardim) or Arab Jews” (Yiftachel, “Nation”, 34).

Oren Yiftachel. “Nation-building and the Division of Space: Ashkenazi Domination in the Israeli ‘Ethnocracy’”. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4 (1998): 33-58.

¹⁶ In one of her other books titled *More and More Equal: The Literary Works of Sami Michael* (2005), Berg states that Michael’s love story structurally functions as a “female bildungsroman, a novel of character development primarily symbolized through feminine sexual awakening” (Berg, *More*, 27). The “bildungsroman” tradition originated in Germany during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and usually uses a protagonist “who, after going out into the world and experiencing both defeats and triumphs, comes to a better understanding of self and to a generally affirmative view of the world” (Berg, *More*, 14-15).

Nancy E. Berg. *More and More Equal: The Literary Works of Sami Michael*. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005.

¹⁷ Sami Michael. Interview. Claudia De Martino. *Perspectives*. January 10, 2010. (De Martino 1)

¹⁸ (De Martino 1)

Israel. Back when the State was established, the Jews were willing to mark their identity as totally opposed to the Arab one. So, all the Jews had to be more Jewish to fit in with the new state and all the Arabs had to be viewed as potential enemies.”¹⁹

Michael’s self-description about his mixed identity supports Hochberg’s discussion on *Levantinism* and its resulting negative impact on individuals associated with these stigmatized communities in Israel. He especially emphasizes this point by quoting A.H. Hourani, who argues that a *Levantine* is expected to “live in two or more worlds at once, without belonging to either; to be able to go through the external forms...of a certain nationality, religion, or culture, without actually possessing it”.²⁰ Thus, one can conclude that Mizrahis, as well as other Israeli ethnic minorities, find themselves constantly in “a state of performing culture: “going through the external forms of culture without actually possessing them”.²¹

Interestingly, such writings reveal a great deal about ethnic stratification in contemporary Israeli society. In “Understanding ‘Ethnocratic’ Regimes: The Politics of Seizing Contested Territories”, Yiftachel and As’ad Ghanem distinguish between the politics of *ethno-nations* and *ethno-classes* in Israel.²² *Ethno-nations* are based on the *ethno-national* discourse, which “attempts to *unite* the various groups in the nation (as defined by the dominant group, barring ‘external’ of ‘foreign’ minorities)”.²³ This form of ethnic division is primarily evident through the act of Orientalist othering in Michael’s discussion about the differing characteristics of Jewish and Non-Jewish citizenry in *A Trumpet in the Wadi (2003)*). In contrast, the reasoning

¹⁹ (De Martino 1)

²⁰ (Hochberg 220); A.H. Hourani. *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay*. London: Oxford University Press, 1946, 70.

²¹ (Hochberg 220)

²² Oren Yiftachel and As’ad Ghanem. “Understanding ‘Ethnocratic’ Regimes: The Politics of Seizing Contested Territory.” *Political Geography* 23 (2004): 647-676. (Yiftachel and Ghanem 655)

²³ (Yiftachel and Ghanem 655)

behind ethno-classes emphasizes the fragmentation of groups “within the nations according to their socioeconomic status and/or regional locations”, such as the socioeconomic separation between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews.²⁴ Amir represents this particular division by juxtaposing the Sephardic immigrants, like Nuri, with the Ashkenazi Sabra Jews. In addition, this particular social stratification becomes even more apparent in *Trumpet in the Wadi (1987)*, especially due to Michael’s comparison of the Sephardic acculturation process to that of the Russian Jews. In his book *Ethnocracy (2006)*, Yiftachel states that this type of classification has legitimized ethnicity as “a major organizing principle” in Israeli society.²⁵ Such societal development, along with various “separate and unequal conditions”, has led to “long-term ethnic stratification”.²⁶ Yiftachel defines this process as “creeping apartheid” because of its “undeclared” nature and due to the fact that it is “amplified by a sequence of incremental decisions about practices, such as the ongoing settlement of Jews in the occupied territories and the increasingly heavy-handed policies towards Arabs and non-Jewish immigrants in Israel”.²⁷ Although many literary scholars question the relevance or potency of Mizrahi/Sephardic literature in today’s Israel, it is quite evident that such writings actually reveal a great deal about ethnic stratification in contemporary Israeli society.

Moreover, Yiftachel explains the extent to this type of ethnic stratification with Table 5.1:

²⁴ (Yiftachel and Ghanem 655)

²⁵ Oren Yiftachel. *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 126)

²⁶ (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 126)

²⁷ (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 126)

Table 5.1 Stratified Group Position under the Israeli Ethnocracy



*Mainly immigrants from the former Soviet Union who qualify for Israeli residency under the Law of Return but are not recognized as Jews by the Israeli religious establishment.²⁸

These classifying ethnic divisions serve as primary evidence for Israel's ethnocratic nature.

Yiftachel and Ghanem understand Israel as an open ethnocracy.²⁹ They first define ethnocracy as "a regime facilitating the expansion, ethnicization, and control of contested territory and state by a dominant ethnic nation".³⁰ With this said, an open ethnocracy "exercises selective openness: they possess a range of partial democratic features, most notably political competition, free

²⁸ This is an exact replication (with different graphics) of Table 5.1, as seen in the fifth chapter of *Ethnocracy (2006)*.

(Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 127)

²⁹ (Yiftachel and Ghanem 649)

³⁰ (Yiftachel and Ghanem 649)

media, and significant civil rights; although these fail to be universal or comprehensive, and are typically applied to the extent they do not interfere with the ethnicization project”.³¹ To simplify, one should apply Yiftachel’s analogy of the Tower of Pisa to the current state of Israeli “democracy”.³² Once a person enters the Tower of Pisa, it appears straight, “since its structural grid is perfectly perpendicular and parallel”.³³ Yiftachel wryly observes how this is similar to ongoing dialogue on Israel’s political system: “once inside this discourse, most Jews accept the Jewish character of the state as an unproblematic point of departure, much like the floor of the titled tower”.³⁴ For this reason, “one needs to step outside and away from the tilted building and measure its coordinates against truly vertical buildings in order to discern the distortions and inconsistencies”.³⁵ Therefore, the thematic focus in Israeli-Sephardic literature actually creates a legitimate cultural space in which academics can discuss and analyze the consequences of Jewish ethnic hierarchy, such as the formation of Israeli ethnocracy. In the words of Halevi-Wise, such writings are true works of minority literature “in Gilles Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari’s sense,....[especially since they serve as prime examples of how]“physical and cultural deterritorialization engenders reterritorialization in linguistic and artistic realms.”

³¹ (Yiftachel and Ghanem 649)

Open ethnocracy is similar to ethnic democracy. In “Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype”, Sammy Smooha defines ethnic democracy as “a system that combines the extension of civil and political rights to individuals and some collective rights to minorities, with institutionalization of majority control over the state” (Smooha 199). In this manner, the state is driven by ethnic nationalism (what Yiftachel refers to as the Judaizing process) (Smooha 199; Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 107-110). Moreover, Smooha differentiates between ethnic democracy and consociational democracy. Consociational democracy also stresses ethnic classification in the socio-political sphere but, unlike ethnic democracy and ethnocracy, it tries to grant various ethnic groups certain rights “on a proportional basis” (Smooha 199). Sammy Smooha. “Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype.” *Israel Studies* 2 (1997): 198-241.

³² (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 129)

³³ (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 129)

³⁴ (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 129)

³⁵ (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 129-130)

Chapter II. Issues of Dual Identity and Assimilation in Sephardic Literature: Understanding Israeli Ethnocracy

In this discussion on the ethnocratic nature of the Israeli state, one must first define the distinctions between liberal democracies and the illiberal nature of theocratic, fascist, and communist states. As Raphael Cohen-Almagor states in his article “Cultural Pluralism and the Israeli Nation-Building Ideology”, the primary difference between these two entities is that illiberal governments view it as an important right of the state to decide the moral character of society.³⁶ Liberal democracies, in contrast, do not promote idealistic notions about social morals and believe that citizens should enjoy the freedom to form their own conceptions about such matters.³⁷ Liberal democracies also do not justify any action, carried out by either the state or by the citizenry, which values one person’s life over another.³⁸ Moreover, since people generally believe in multiple sets of values, each person should have the right to develop his or her own idea of “good” and “evil”.³⁹ Cohen-Almagor argues that this ‘conception of the good’ is mostly a “determinate scheme of ends that the doer aspires to carry out for their own sake as well as of attachments to other individuals and loyalties to various groups and associations”.⁴⁰ This process involves a combination of philosophical, moral, religious, and ideological ideals that, along with individual values, shape a person’s understanding of a life worth living.⁴¹

Most scholars, including Yiftachel, Ghanem, Smoocha, Cohen-Almagor, and Sammy Shalom Chetrit, agree that the Israeli state displays many characteristics typically associated with liberal democracies. For example, Israel’s “political system is based on free elections and

³⁶ Raphael Cohen-Almagor. “Cultural Pluralism and the Israeli-Nation Building Ideology.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (1995): 461-484. (Cohen-Almagor 461)

³⁷ (Cohen-Almagor 461)

³⁸ (Cohen-Almagor 461)

³⁹ (Cohen-Almagor 461)

⁴⁰ (Cohen-Almagor 461)

⁴¹ (Cohen-Almagor 461)

multiparty competition[,...]it honors the basic freedoms of its citizens (speech, assembly, demonstration, religion, etc.)[,...] and refrains from resorting to arbitrary arrests”.⁴² At the same time, however, the Israeli state has been justly criticized for encouraging ethnonational divides between Jews and Arabs.⁴³ There are also hierarchy divisions within Israeli society among the various ethnoclasses within the Jewish nation, which will be focus of this chapter.

From the formation of the state, Israeli society has regarded Western, European traditions and culture as the “frame of reference within which they want Israel to be situated”.⁴⁴ Furthermore, while liberal democracies typically place the individual at the center, the early state of Israel considered the protection of individual liberties secondary to the needs of the greater Israeli-Jewish collective.⁴⁵ As a result, “some cultures were rejected during the formative years, and efforts were made to curtail their legitimacy, maybe because they were not conceived at the time [which was mostly during the 1950s] as consistent with the spirit of the Israeli-Jew”.⁴⁶ For this reason, many scholars, like Cohen-Almagor argue that Israel “does not fit the normative characterization of a liberal democracy that is assumed to take a neutral or impartial stance regarding different conceptions of the good”.⁴⁷

In fact, the bias against Eastern, namely Arab, traditions led to the development of “low self-esteem” among incoming Sephardim as they became more convinced of their ethnic inferiority to the Ashkenazi ethnoclass.⁴⁸ Cohen-Almagor supports this stance with statistical

⁴² (Cohen-Almagor 461)

⁴³ (Cohen-Almagor 462)

⁴⁴ (Cohen-Almagor 462)

⁴⁵ (Cohen-Almagor 462)

⁴⁶ (Cohen-Almagor 462)

⁴⁷ (Cohen-Almagor 462)

⁴⁸ (Cohen-Almagor 462)

evidence from a study carried out in 1959 by four development centers.⁴⁹ This study shows that in 1959, 33% of Ashkenazim, 33% of North Africans, and 37% of Jews from Middle Eastern countries disliked having North Africans in their neighborhoods.⁵⁰ Cohen-Almagor stresses the fact that such the Sephardim's own self-rejection, at the time, was "as high as rejection by others, [which] suggest[s] the existence of an implicit norm of prejudice".⁵¹ Critical analysis of thematic developments in both Amir's *Scapgoat (1987)* and Michael's *A Trumpet in the Wadi (2003)* illustrate the full effect of forced assimilation. As Cohen-Almagor emphasizes, the founding Zionist ideology of the Israeli state led to the unequal integration of non-Ashkenazi immigrants.⁵² As discussed in the Introduction, during the early period, the state openly tried to "upgrade the 'backward primitives' and to reshape their entire being and thinking in the European image".⁵³ Therefore, these 'primitives' were expected to immediately and effortlessly start a new way of living based on "a new set of values that includes socialist, modern nationalistic, and secular as well as democratic notions and norms".⁵⁴ Although many of these values were not traditionally included in the Sephardic/Arab/Middle Eastern 'conception of the good', the founding Ashkenazi ethnoclass did not see this as a major obstacle to nation-building.⁵⁵ To them, the Sephardim should "have to accommodate themselves, forget the old world, and accept the values that coincide with the nation-building ideology".⁵⁶

⁴⁹ (Cohen-Almagor 477)

⁵⁰ (Cohen-Almagor 477)

⁵¹ (Cohen-Almagor 477)

⁵² (Cohen-Almagor 464)

⁵³ (Cohen-Almagor 464)

⁵⁴ (Cohen-Almagor 464)

⁵⁵ (Cohen-Almagor 464)

⁵⁶ (Cohen-Almagor 464)

It is thus evident that the assimilation and acculturation process in Israel “left no room for preserving tradition and culture prior to the ascension to Israel”.⁵⁷ As evident in the lives of Nuri and his fellow Iraqi immigrants in Amir’s novel, this leads to many instances of dual identity crisis, especially as these characters are forced to address issues like the role of secularism versus traditionalism and the collective versus the family unit. Michael’s work also focuses on the product of this flawed acculturation. For instance, the ever evolving intimate and familial relationships between various characters in *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (2003) provides an opportunity for the reader to compare the later Russian immigration to that of the Sephardim, especially through Michael’s detailed characterization of Alex and his Russian-Jewish family and juxtaposing them to other secondary characters like Shirley and Kobe . Both of these novels, thus, support the hierarchical relationship that Yiftachel outlines in his work on the Israeli ethnocracy and really clarify the negative effects of ethnic stratification found between various ethnoclasses within the Jewish nation itself. Nevertheless, many would still question the relevancy of this topic, especially since it deals with a social crisis that occurred decades ago. Unfortunately, the troubling assimilation narrative of the Sephardim in Israel can be found in later *aliyahs* made by other non-Ashkenazi ethnic groups. For example, many of the mistakes that were made during the initial stages of the Sephardic absorption were also made during the social integration of Ethiopian Jews in the 1980s and early 1990s.⁵⁸ Cohen-Almagor contends that “the Ethiopian Jews were and are going through an acculturation process that aims to transform them into something more compatible with the Sabra image”.⁵⁹ As with Nuri, Herzl, the other Iraqis on the kibbutz, there are cases in which Israeli teachers “picked new [Israeli]

⁵⁷ (Cohen-Almagor 464)

⁵⁸ (Cohen-Almagor 479)

⁵⁹ (Cohen-Almagor 479)

Hebrew names for children of Ethiopian origin”.⁶⁰ In this manner, the Ethiopians also have been influenced to “relinquish their cultural legacy”.⁶¹ Interestingly, the Russian absorption has been carried out differently than that of the Ethiopian absorption.⁶² Again, one can argue that this phenomenon is primarily due to the existence of ethnic stratification between ethnoclasses within the Jewish nation in Israeli society.

Specific discrimination against Sephardic immigrants is apparent in various journalistic, political, and intellectual works throughout modern Israeli history. For example, in his April 22, 1949 article for the “liberal” newspaper *HaAretz* on the “mass-immigration” of Sephardim from Arab-Muslim countries, Arye Gelblum writes:

“This immigration of a race we have not yet known in the country....We are dealing with people whose primitivism is at peak, whose level of level of knowledge is one of virtually absolute ignorance, and worse who have little talent for understanding anything intellectual. Generally, they are only slightly better than the general level of Arabs, Negroes, and Berbers in the same regions. In any case, they are at an even lower level than what we knew with regard to the former Arabs of Eretz Israel....These Jews also lack roots in Judaism, as they are totally subordinated to the play of savage and primitive instincts....As with the Africans you will find card games for money, drunkenness, and prostitution. Most of them have serious eye, skin, and sexual diseases, without mentioning robberies and thefts. Chronic laziness and hatred for work, there is nothing safe about this asocial element....“Aliyat HaNoar” [the official organization dealing with young immigrants] refuses to receive Moroccan children and the Kibbutzim will not hear of their absorption among them.”⁶³

Likewise, as Ella Shohat points out in her work “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims”, in the early fifties, many celebrated academics, such as Karl Frankenstein and Yosef Gross, from Hebrew University in Jerusalem wrote on the “primitive

⁶⁰ (Cohen-Almagor 479)

⁶¹ (Cohen-Almagor 479)

⁶² (Cohen-Almagor 479)

⁶³ Ella Shohat . “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims.” *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35. (Shohat 4)

mentality” of newly arrived immigrants from Arab-Muslim countries.⁶⁴ These scholars generally concluded that “only a strong infusion of European cultural values... would rescue the Arab Jews from their ‘backwardness’”.⁶⁵ Over the years, various members of the Israeli leadership have also supported and reinforced these contemptible prejudices against the Sephardim, and Arabs in general. Even Prime Minister David Ben Gurion openly expressed his disgust with immigrants from Arab-Muslim countries:

“We do not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are duty bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant, which corrupts individuals and societies, and preserve the authentic Jewish values as they crystallized in the Diaspora”.⁶⁶

Such statements made by Ben Gurion and other leading Israeli politicians, writers, and intellectuals emphasize a hierarchical relationship between Israeli Ashkenazim and Sephardim. In fact, Amnon Dankner’s February 18, 1983 piece “I Have No Sister” for *HaAretz* frankly illustrates the Mizrahim’s enforced inferiority to the Ashkenazim in popular Israeli thought:

“This war [between Ashkenazim and Sephardim] is not going to be between brothers, not because there is not going to be war but because it won’t be between brothers. Because if I am a partner in this war, which is imposed on me, I refuse to name the other side as my “brother” [or, in other words, an equal]. These are not my brothers, these are not my sisters, leave me alone, I have no sister.... They put the sticky blanket of the love of Israel over my head, and they ask me to be considerate of the cultural deficiencies of the authentic feelings of discrimination... they put me in the same cage with a hysterical baboon, and they tell me “OK, now you are together, so begin the dialogue.” And I have no choice; the baboon is against me, and the guard is against me, and the prophets of the love of Israel stand aside and wink at me with a wise eye and tell me: “Speak to him nicely. Throw him a banana. After all, you people are brothers...”⁶⁷

Contemporary scholars of Israeli history and politics attribute this blatant discrimination against the Sephardim to various social phenomena. Shohat, for example, argue that European Zionism

⁶⁴ (Shohat 5)

⁶⁵ (Shohat 5)

⁶⁶ (Shohat 4)

⁶⁷ (Shohat 6)

is the primary reason for this rift between these two Jewish ethnic groups in Israel. Shohat believes that “European Zionism has been an immense confidence trick played on Sephardim [and] a cultural massacre of immense proportions”.⁶⁸ Even though Zionism excludes Palestinians, Arab Israelis, and Sephardim from its “master-narrative”, the Sephardim are the only ones whose story is fractured between both Arab and Jewish history and culture.⁶⁹ For this reason, “Israel has taken upon itself to “cleanse” the Sephardim of their Arab-ness and redeem them from their “primal sin” of belonging to the Orient”.⁷⁰ Hence, the paucity of Israeli historical works on the Sephardim “forms a genteel way of hiding the discomfiting presence of an Oriental “other”...subsumed under a European-Jewish “We”.⁷¹ According to Shohat, European Zionism primarily silenced Sephardic history in Israel by taking on the “[p]atriarchal role in Jewish oral tradition of Fathers passing to Sons the experiences of their people (“*vehigadeta lebincha bayom hahu*”)⁷² Consequently, narratives associated with the “Zionist Pater” took precedence over those belonging to the Sephardic fathers, whose stories thus became unavailable to their sons.⁷³ With this in mind, one can assert, as Shohat boldly does, that although immigration to Israel served as an “quasi-redemption of a culture...[for] persecuted Ashkenazi minorities”, it proved to be the “complete annihilation of a cultural heritage, a loss of

⁶⁸ (Shohat 32)

⁶⁹ (Shohat 7)

⁷⁰ (Shohat 7-8)

⁷¹ (Shohat 8)

Shohat further develops this notion in her epilogue, in which she contends that “the present regime in Israel [established firmly on European Zionism] inherited from Europe a strong aversion to respecting the right of self-determination to non-European peoples; whence the quaint vestigial, out-of-step quality of its discourse, its atavistic talk of the “civilized nations” and “the civilized world” (Shohat 1988, 33).

⁷² (Shohat 8)

⁷³ (Shohat 8)

Shohat further states that immigration to Israel for Ashkenazi immigrants from Poland and Russia was a social *aliyah* (or ascension) and a *yerida* (or a descent) for Sephardic immigrants from Iraq or Egypt (Shohat 20).

identity, and a social and economic degradation” of Sephardic immigrants.⁷⁴ However, while the social disparity between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim is unquestionable in modern Israeli history, Shohat goes too far in her conclusion that the Sephardic heritage and identity were entirely eradicated from Israel. Many Sephardim, especially the Arab Jewish writers, firmly resisted a full socio-cultural makeover. This is evident in Sami Michael’s “On being an Iraqi-Jewish Writer in Israel”, in which he adamantly states that, on arriving to Israel as a new immigrant, he was “already fully formed and had no intention of being remoulded”.⁷⁵

In fact, after their immigration to Israel in the late 1940s and 1950s, many Sephardic writers, like Amir and Michael, tried to preserve and express their former identities through poetry and other literary works, which they purposely wrote in their newly acquired Hebrew. As Gabrielle Birkner notes in her article, “More Arab Than the Arabs: Iraqi Writers Join Israel’s Literary Canon”, these immigrant writers “produced a critical mass of literature far beyond that of writers from any other country”.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, “they faced a literary establishment-composed primarily of Ashkenazic and [S]abra writers-that were resistant to Mizrahi [or Sephardic] literature”.⁷⁷ Birkner further includes a statement from Michael himself to support this particular argument:

“We wanted to write about the past...[but] it was not greeted well by the establishment, who wanted literature only by Israelis writing about the Israeli experience”.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ (Shohat 20)

⁷⁵ Sami Michael. “On Being an Iraqi Jewish Writer in Israel.” *Prooftexts* 4 (1984): 23-33. (Michael, “On Being”, 23)

⁷⁶ Gabrielle Birkner. “More Arab Than The Arabs: Iraqi Writers Join Israel’s Literary Canon,” *Forward*, August 08, 2003, accessed March 21, 2011, <http://www.forward.com/articles/7856/>. (Birkner 1)

⁷⁷ (Birkner 1)

⁷⁸ (Birkner 1)

In other words, the Israeli literary establishment of the time was only interested in the dominant European-Zionist narrative, which would reinforce the image of the “Sabra Jew” and the apparent success of Western Zionism and Judaization in the Orient.⁷⁹

On the contrary, in their respective works, both Michael and Amir attempt to critically analyze the full-effect of the damaging loss of cultural possession experienced by new immigrants and ethnic minorities in Israel through such things like the metaphoric employment of adolescence and through comparative analysis on the variations of ethnic integration during the Sephardic and subsequent Russian assimilation processes. For example, Amir’s *Scapegoat* (1987) is an example of the Hebrew literary subgenre “*sifrut hama’abarah*” (literature of the transit camp).⁸⁰ This type of literature was predominantly written by Sephardic Jews from Iraq.⁸¹ Berg contends that this particular form of early Hebrew literature “is frequently characterized by the sharp contrast between the newcomers’ expectations and the lack of welcome they received, the bleak physical conditions of the transit camps [or *ma’abarot*] in contrast to life in the country of origin, and the clash between the cultures of the newcomers and the veteran settlers”.⁸²

Scholars like Berg believe that the usage of adolescence in Sephardic fictional writings is

⁷⁹ Judaization refers to how elements of the Jewish culture and religion are mirrored and enforced in the Israeli state apparatus and legal system.

⁸⁰ (Berg 67)

⁸¹ (Berg 67)

⁸² (Berg 67)

As Berg explains, immigrants who came to the newly-established state in the mass immigration period (1948-1951) were placed in temporary transit camps called the *ma’abarot*, which is plural of *ma’abarah* (Berg 67, 69). The state’s “intention was to furnish the immigrants with their basic needs (food, shelter, clothing sanitary facilities) until they could learn the skills (including Hebrew and often job training) necessary to function independently” (Berg 69). In her 1988 article “Sephardim in Israel”, Ella Shohat makes the argument that even before Sephardi arrived in Israel, Israeli officials were functioned under the assumption that the Ashkenazim were the “salt of the earth” and thus “deserved better conditions and special privileges” (Shohat 17). With this argument, Shohat highlights the historical disparities between these two Jewish ethnic groups in Israel.

Ella Shohat . “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims.” *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35.

essential to understanding the different stages of desocialization and resocialization experienced by Arab Jewish immigrants dealing with the crisis of dual/mixed identity.⁸³ She explains that these new immigrants are forced into self-awareness just like adolescents, who start to “attain an awareness of themselves as individuals distinct from their families”.⁸⁴ Furthermore, similar to adolescents, the new immigrants “are forced into childlike dependency on the officials; their decisions are made by the officials according to the system [which, in this case, is European Zionism], and their privacy (an adult privilege) is not inviolable”.⁸⁵

One important Israeli institution which reinforces this dependent relationship between the state and new (Jewish) immigrants is the kibbutz.⁸⁶ In fact, in the days of the *ma'abarot*, the children of newly arrived immigrants were sent to various kibbutzim so that they could more effectively assimilate into Israeli culture. Amir's *Scapegoat* (1987) illustrates the demands of this process through its main character, Nuri, who is “caught in the conflict between the Iraqi and the Israeli ways of life”.⁸⁷ Nuri, a Iraqi Jew, immigrated with his family to Israel to ideally become a part of the new Jewish nation but is ultimately abandoned to the dire straits of the Sha'ar HaAliya.⁸⁸ Amir starts his novel by poignantly describing the Sha'ar HaAliya as a *ma'abara*, or an “intake camp with...hundreds of patched and stinking khaki tents enclosed behind barbed-wire fences [which] looked like an army of defeated soldiers wearily disgorged

⁸³ (Berg 73)

⁸⁴ (Berg 73)

⁸⁵ (Berg 73)

⁸⁶ Berg asserts that the kibbutz “functions as a microcosm for the Zionist nation” (Berg 81). Based on socialist Zionism, the kibbutz emphasizes the “privileging of the communal good, agricultural work, and secularism” (Berg 81). As a result, “members, potential members, and guest workers are expected to conform to the kibbutz ideals, which stand in opposition to those of their parental society” (Berg 81).

⁸⁷ (Berg 81)

⁸⁸ Eli Amir. *Scapegoat*. Trans. George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited. Great Britain: Nicholson Limited, 1987. (Amir 9)

onto the sea-shore”.⁸⁹ Dismayed by the disintegrating quality of their new circumstances, Nuri’s father decides to send him to a Youth Aliya camp, which promised better living conditions and educational possibilities.⁹⁰ As he tells Nuri’s Uncle Shaul:

“The ma’abara...will ruin the boy! Nothing but hooligans and more hooligans!”⁹¹

Soon, Nuri has to decide whether or not to permanently join Kibbutz Kiryat-Oranim (where he was sent from the Ahuza Immigrant Youth Transit Camp) and fully accept socialist Zionism (the way of life of the ‘regionals’) or return to the *ma’abarah* and support his family.⁹² Amir presents Nuri’s dilemma primarily in a cultural context. For instance, his musical appreciation is challenged (Beethoven versus the *layali*) as is “his accent, habits, and religious customs”.⁹³ This crisis of culture thus leads to doubt about his self-identity.⁹⁴ One of Amir’s earliest illustrations of this critical issue is through his portrayal of the name-changing phenomenon. Nuri himself, like a child reborn, is renamed Nimrod in the kibbutz.⁹⁵ Amir offers a great variety of reactions to this re-naming event. Nuri, for one, tries his best to hold onto to his former identity. When he first arrives at Kiryat-Oranim, Ofer, a youth leader at the kibbutz, decides to give him his new Israeli name:

“‘Nuri.’
‘Me,’ I said.
‘Nimrod,’ decreed Ofer.
‘Nuri!’ I insisted stubbornly.”⁹⁶

⁸⁹ (Amir 9)

⁹⁰ (Amir 9-10)

⁹¹ (Amir 9)

⁹² (Berg 81); (Amir 10, 35)

⁹³ (Berg 81); Berg defines the *layālī* as “songs in a vocal style specific to the Arab world” (Berg 98)

⁹⁴ (Berg 81)

⁹⁵ (Amir 44)

⁹⁶ (Amir 44)

Masul, a fellow Iraqi Jew who Nuri meets at Ahuza, the ‘Immigrant Youth Transit Camp’, is equally hostile to changing his identity.⁹⁷ Like Nuri, Masul is also upset about losing his Arab-Jewish identity and taking on the unfamiliar burden of a secular persona.⁹⁸ This is especially evident in the argument that breaks out between Masul and Reuven, another Iraqi youth from Baghdad, after the latter interrupts Masul’s ironic song in Arabic about individual sacrifice:

“Ommi ya bayya ’al warid

Oh, rose seller,

What is the price of your rose?’

‘And what’s your price, Masul?’ Reuven interrupted his song.

‘Don’t you call me Masul, you hear? I told you, my name’s Haim.’⁹⁹

Masul certainly appears resistive to paying the high price of sacrificing his original Sephardic identity in its entirety. In her work, Berg writes that “the secular nature of the new Jewish state is difficult for Nuri and his friends to understand”, especially since they are thrust into the most extreme form of secular Zionism in Israel (the kibbutz).¹⁰⁰ Throughout Amir’s work, nevertheless, these adolescents continually compromise, though reluctantly, the traditions of their Sephardic past to improve their present and future living standards. This is why Nuri denies his religious upbringing in his initial interview with representatives from Kiryat-Oranim:

“I thought the interview was over, but the man, who had said nothing up to now, asked: ‘Are you religious?’ The fact that his head was uncovered told me that he was not. ‘No...not me,’ I stammered. ‘That’s to say, just my father...’ A terrible fear took hold of me. How could I lie about such a serious matter? It was as if I had said that I didn’t believe in God, God forbid.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ (Amir 10, 21)

⁹⁸ (Amir 21)

⁹⁹ (Amir 20, 21)

¹⁰⁰ (Berg 82)

¹⁰¹ (Amir 36)

Popular opinion associates this challenging struggle over religious customs with “the confrontation of members of a traditional, religious society (the Iraqis) with a modern secular society (Israel)”.¹⁰² Berg, however, states that this argument oversimplifies the Sephardic historical narrative and ignores the fact that the Sephardic community in Iraq was rather flexible in their observance of Jewish religious traditions and more open to secular influences in general.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, she does admit that this generalization morphed out of a misunderstanding of real issues faced by new Jewish immigrants in Israel. It is, for instance, true that these immigrants had to deal with the sudden ebb towards total secularization.¹⁰⁴ Thus, as Berg concludes, “the natural stage of questioning religious and ideological beliefs at adolescence was compounded by the abrupt transition to the secular culture of Israel”.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, one can safely assume that a young immigrant who wholly accepts the consequences of dual identity views such drastic social modifications as essential and necessary. This is true for Amir’s character Herzl. Herzl, named Abdallah by his parents, grew up as a street urchin in Baghdad after his father died when he was five years old.¹⁰⁶ He starts to aimlessly wander the streets after being emotionally abandoned by his mother who forgets him, shrouded in her own misery.¹⁰⁷ In this way, Abdallah falls into the exciting world of political and religious demonstrations and it is at one of these events that he befriends an older Jewish man named Zallah Zbeyda who feeds him and teaches him Hebrew.¹⁰⁸ Zbeyda was a member of the Shura, a group associated with sending Sephardic Jews to Israel, and one day he tells

¹⁰² (Berg 83)

¹⁰³ (Berg 83)

¹⁰⁴ (Berg 83)

¹⁰⁵ (Berg 83)

¹⁰⁶ (Amir 73)

¹⁰⁷ (Amir 73)

¹⁰⁸ (Amir 74)

Abdallah about Herzl, “the King of the Jews”.¹⁰⁹ It was then that “Abdallah vowed to himself that if he ever made it the land of his fathers, his name too would be Herzl, the Father of the State”.¹¹⁰ In Baghdad, he was Abdallah the misfortunate; in Eretz-Israel, he would be given the chance to try on this empowering new identity, like “a new garment”, and improve his lot in this adopted community.¹¹¹ In this manner, ironically, Herzl is much like one of the biblical forefathers of Judaism, Jacob, in the Torah. In Genesis 32, in the passage titled “Jacob Wrestles With God”, the narrator writes:

¹⁰⁹ In *The Jewish Exodus from Iraq 1948-1951(1997)*, Moshe Gat explains that the Shura (“The Line”) was a part of the Zionist Underground in Iraq (Gat 27). As Gat explains, after the Soviet sinking of the *Struma* (which was a ship chartered to take Holocaust refugees from Axis-controlled Romania to British Palestine) in February 1942, Zionist emissaries Enzo Sereni, Shmariyahu Gutman, and Iraqi-born Ezra Kadoori arrived in Baghdad to establish a new underground organization (Gat 26). During the initial stages, the founders took into consideration the assimilation issues faced by Iraqi immigrants in Palestine due to their “lack of Jewish pioneering training” (Gat 26). Thus, they decided that their organization would have three subcategories: “one to deal with Zionist education, a second with e[m]migration[,] and a third with self-defen[se]” (Gat 26). The Shura or “The Line”, as stated previously, was the defense arm of this organization and aimed to “prepare the necessary infrastructure, of both trained manpower and equipment and weapons” (Gat 27). In “Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative”, Sami Shalom Chetrit concurs that the dominant strain of Sephardic political activity in Arab countries was formally initiated by Zionist organizations in order to recruit Jews for immigration to British Palestine and, later, to the newly established state of Israel (Chetrit 52). The activists who joined these Zionist revolutionaries “acquired status as ‘partners in the revolution’ (albeit at its periphery)...[and] primar[ily]...promote[d] Ashkenazi (i.e. ‘modern’) Zionist socialism and...expedit[ed] immigration from Arab countries through organizations such as Aliya Bet Mossad in Morocco and the Zionist Underground in Iraq” (Chetrit 52). Furthermore, “most of these activists later found employment in the Mossad and the government, some in senior positions” (Chetrit 52). Chetrit and Gat’s account of Zionism in Arab countries is wholly represented by Herzl’s friend Zbeyda, who later becomes his stepfather, in Amir’s text. Zbeyda is so heavily involved with the Shura that, at one point, he makes Herzl, who was at the time still known as Abdallah, “solemnly swear never to pronounce the forbidden words ‘Shura’ or ‘Eretz-Israel’ aloud, or even think them” while in the streets of Baghdad (Amir 75). For his devoted activism with the Shura, Zbeyda enjoys some political influence after making *aliyah* to Israel with Herzl and his mother Madeleine (Amir 75- 76). For example, the only way Herzl was even accepted into Youth Aliya was because of Zbeyda’s connections with founding members of the early Israeli state (Amir 76).

Moshe Gat. *The Jewish Exodus from Iraq 1948-1951*. New York: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1997.

Sami Shalom Chetrit. “Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29 (2000): 51-65.

¹¹⁰ (Amir 75)

¹¹¹ (Amir 44)

“That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants[,] and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’ The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Jacob,’ he answered. Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.’”¹¹²

Due to his persistence, Jacob the Second-Born, Jacob the Trickster becomes Israel the Father of the Jewish Nation. Herzl, unlike his fellow Iraqi brothers, also tries to symbolically change his own destiny by whole-heartedly embracing his new Zionist name and identity. No longer was he the fatherless miscreant but a legitimate and equal inheritor to the fruits of the new Zionist nation. For this reason, the price of the rose is more reasonable to him than it is to other young Iraqi immigrants like Masul and Nuri.

Even so, Nuri too is drawn to the promises of assimilation, even at the cost of losing a part of his original identity. His rather dissociative relationship with Western music is a prime example of this development in Amir’s narrative. Torn between these two worlds and ashamed of his changing loyalties, Nuri reflects on his new acquired taste for Western music in the following passage:

“That night on my pillow my ears were filled with a ghastly cacophony of Mozart and the musical quiz, the Classical Baghdad Players, and Masul’s lute. The next day Yishai brought me a thick volume on the lives and works of great composers, and took to the clubhouse a gramophone and records, which stood there like unturned stones. I did not dare to touch them, for fear of being accused of wanting to be like the ‘regionals’, but in my room, far from the prying eyes of my friends, I read the book until my tongue grew accustomed to pronouncing the names of the composers and the terms concerto and concertino, suite[,] and fugue. Far from the eyes of my friends[,] I visited the culture

¹¹² Zondervan NIV Topical Study Bible. Full ref. ed. Dirk R. Buursma, gen. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989. Print.
(NIV, “Jacob Wrestles With God”, Genesis 32: 22-28, 38.)

room and listened to their music stubbornly, intently, compulsively, until my head spun and my ears rang with sounds. At night, I would go to our clubhouse and listen to Masul playing the lute. Like the ball in a game of tennis[,] I bounced from court to court. The *haflas* no longer gave rise to the same enthusiasm in me as before, and the flavour of our music lost something of its sweetness. It was no longer alone in my affections, as if I had taken a mistress, and although I had not yet grown accustomed to her charms, I was already seeing my legitimate wife through different eyes.”¹¹³

Amir’s discussion of social assimilation compliments the traditional framework on this topic, especially Milton Gordon’s work on structural assimilation. In “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration”, Richard Alba and Victor Nee define Gordon’s structural assimilation as “the entry of members of an ethnic minority into primary-group relationships with the majority group”.¹¹⁴ This is predominantly done through acculturation, which is the “the minority group’s adoption of “cultural patterns” of the host society”.¹¹⁵ Gordon argues that this process goes well beyond lingual acquisition, physical and emotional expression (like making certain stylistic choices in dressing), and personal values.¹¹⁶ He further differentiated between intrinsic cultural characteristics essential to a group’s cultural heritage, such as musical interests and religious beliefs, and extrinsic traits, which “tend to be products of the historical vicissitudes

¹¹³ (Amir 131); Berg defines a *hafla* as “an Arab-style music party” (Berg 98).

¹¹⁴ Richard Alba and Victor Nee. “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration.”

International Migration Review 31 (1997): 826-874. (Alba and Nee 829)

For the purposes of their article, Alba and Nee discuss the theory of assimilation in the context of contemporary immigration to the United States (Alba and Nee 826). They start their analysis by critically assessing the canonical account on this topic. As they note, “the centrality of assimilation for the scientific understanding of immigration is more recent, traceable to the Chicago School of the early twentieth century” (Alba and Nee 827). Alba and Nee continue by commenting that, because of its locus of beginning, “the social science use of assimilation thus emerged at the highpoint of a previous era of immigration and by means of observations in a city where the first and second generations then constituted the great majority of residents” (Alba and Nee 828). For this reason, throughout their work, references are made to “Anglo-American culture”, which obviously are not applicable to the perimeters of this thesis. Nevertheless, the relationships and interactions that develop between different social classes, which are discussed and critically analyzed by the authors are significant in understanding the historical underpinnings of ethno-relations in Israeli society.

¹¹⁵ (Alba and Nee 829)

¹¹⁶ (Alba and Nee 829)

if the group's adjustment to the local environment and thus are deemed less central to group identity".¹¹⁷

In this manner, Gordon's research appears to imply that immigrant communities are more willing to sacrifice extrinsic values to more successfully assimilate with the host society.¹¹⁸

Amir seems to support this viewpoint through his portrayal of Nuri's gradual curiosity and acceptance of Western music. Yet, Alba and Nee are correct in implying that, by undervaluing the strength of immigrant ties to religious traditions, Gordon wrongfully has "no expectation that fundamental religious identities are given up as a result of acculturation".¹¹⁹ In this vein, Berg also agrees that Nuri's "introduction to "Israeli" culture (that is, Western culture) is less traumatic than his introduction to Israeli secularism".¹²⁰ This is why when the kibbutz representatives initially asked him about the state of his religiosity, Nuri falsely denies believing all together, which was immediately followed by a prickling fear of having blasphemed.¹²¹ He later elaborates on the growing-pains of forced assimilation:

"Would I always be primitive in their eyes? And there was no synagogue here either. How will I pray? And what about the Sabbath? What will I tell them at home? And why had they gone and stuck the girls at the other end of our building? Couldn't they find somewhere else for them? Was this the communal life they had spoken about in the Youth Aliya? I didn't want to go back to the *ma'abara*. But could I stay here?"¹²²

To some degree, Nuri and the other Sephardic immigrants at Kiryat-Oranim make certain concessions to strengthen their newly acquired identity as Israelis and as potential kibbutz members. They start to develop "a sense of peoplehood based exclusively on [the] host

¹¹⁷ (Alba and Nee 829)

¹¹⁸ (Alba and Nee 829)

¹¹⁹ (Alba and Nee 829)

¹²⁰ (Alba and Nee 829)

¹²¹ (Amir 36)

¹²² (Amir 48)

society”.¹²³ This is primarily evident in Amir’s female characters and the trajectory of their sexual evolution throughout the novel. Berg argues that, although these women are not protagonists, their adolescent narratives are used to “illuminate issues relating to the conflicts of a more traditional society encountering one less traditional, the changing place of women, and sexuality”.¹²⁴ Dealing with ‘coming of age’ matters, such as sex and sexuality, are central to the problematic dichotomy of dual identity. Additionally, in *Scapegoat (1987)*, the characters, both male and female, “deal with their burgeoning sexuality in a society much different than the one in which they were socialized, thus the issues become even more complex”.¹²⁵ Their adolescence, consequently, becomes even more confusing than usual.¹²⁶ Yet, due to this sexuality factor, Amir’s female characters seem to be the most successful in structurally assimilating. This can mainly be explained with Gordon’s argument on the important role primary-groups play in building accessibility to majority culture for minorities on the social periphery.¹²⁷ Social institutions, clubs, and cliques all offer competitive gateways to the “core culture” for new immigrants.¹²⁸

For Florentine, Farida, and Nilly, the kibbutz provided gradual improvements for sexual expression and gender rights. The social price however, tends to rise with greater success in female acculturation.¹²⁹ This cultural cost can be complete or temporary alienation from one’s family for committing a sexual transgression or even partially surrendering former Sephardic identities over time. Sometimes the individual is unwilling or unable to much such a difficult

¹²³ (Alba and Nee 831)

¹²⁴ (Berg 86)

¹²⁵ (Berg 86)

¹²⁶ (Berg 86)

¹²⁷ (Alba and Nee 830, 837)

¹²⁸ (Alba and Nee 829)

¹²⁹ Acculturation is the “inevitable” first step in structural assimilation and is describes by Gordon as “the minority group’s adoption of the ‘cultural patterns’ of the host society” (Alba and Nee 829).

compromise. Nuri's first recollection of such an occurrence at the kibbutz is when Florentine's mother came to visit her:

“‘What is this, a Baghdad brothel?’ said the mother when her eyes fell on Nira, a kibbutz girl, who had come into the dinning-room with her firm, burnished copper thighs bare. Nira, who realized that the mother's remark was directed at her, did not react. Florentine tried to apologize to Nira but her mother dragged her back to her room by force to pack up her belongings at once. Sonia's explanations were all in vain, and Yishai's pleas fell on deaf ears. With their bundles on their heads[,] mother and daughter marched down the palm-lined avenue to the road as the tears flowed copiously from Florentine's eyes”.¹³⁰

Florentine appears later in the story in the *ma'abara*, “a handkerchief on her head, wearing a long dress with long sleeves and supporting an old man walking heavily at her side; [h]e was her husband...the rabbi of the *ma'abara*”.¹³¹ Florentine's story supports the idea that these vast “differences...in Israeli society are not immediately accepted by the Iraqi immigrants, particularly by those who remain within their own communities in the *ma'abarot*”.¹³² Farida also goes through a similar situation but experiences a different outcome. As Nuri narrates:

“Farida's parents too wanted to take her away, on the grounds that they had arranged a marriage for her, but Farida rebelled and refused to leave the youth group [at the kibbutz]. One day her whole family turned up at the kibbutz, a great tribe. Silent and threatening they stood at the dormitory door. Farida's fiancé was there too, a man she had never met before, with a *keffiyeh* on his head. His beard was grey. From behind the thick lenses of his spectacles he sent covetous looks in her direction. He must have been fifty if he was a day. Farida fled to the wood with the whole tribe at her heels and us bringing up the rear.

‘*Ya binti*, my daughter, it's all decided. Your father promised you to him when we were still in the old country. His word of honour!’ the mother pleaded. The tribe tried to surround Farida, but at the last moment the girl broke through them and disappeared into the trees.”¹³³

¹³⁰ (Amir 60)

¹³¹ (Amir 151)

¹³² (Berg 89), *Ma'abarot* is plural for *ma'abara* in Hebrew.

¹³³ (Amir 60-61)

In both Florentine and Farida's respective cases, "the question of sexuality is presented as a class between two cultures".¹³⁴ The main problem that arises for both the adolescents in Amir's novel and for their parents is the sudden lack of separation between the genders in Israel.¹³⁵ As Berg states, "in Iraq, boys and girls were separated after elementary school and girls were expected to dress and behave modestly".¹³⁶ Nuri gives a believable account of the cultural differences between Iraqi and Israel societies:

"Back there I had seen women only with their faces veiled, and once when an Englishwoman in long trousers walked past the shop windows in the main street, she has been pursued by all of Baghdad. Whereas here there was a riot of bare thighs, provocative breasts[,] and cascading hair. God in heaven, was this the new world that everyone talked about".¹³⁷

After Farida's rebellion, however, the Iraqi immigrants started to reconcile with their new home.¹³⁸ This is mainly due to the fact that both sexes at Kiryat-Oranim, immigrant and kibbutznik alike, physically defended Farida from her family.¹³⁹ Encouraged by these developments, Nilly, or "Nilly Knickers" as the Sephardic immigrants mockingly nickname her, abandons her Iraqi identity entirely.¹⁴⁰ The primary reason for her rapid assimilation into Israeli society is to take advantage of her new environment and completely reinvent herself in order to better her social position. Nuri paints a rather unflattering picture of her previous life:

"She came from a remote village in the north of Iraq, and the Arabic dialect she spoke was greeted with gales of laughter and mockery. Her transition to Hebrew was abrupt, and from the evening she danced with the 'regional' she had been straining herself to the

¹³⁴ (Berg 89)

¹³⁵ (Berg 89)

¹³⁶ (Berg 89)

¹³⁷ (Amir 192-193)

¹³⁸ (Amir 61)

¹³⁹ Kibbutznikim are original members of the kibbutzim (plural for kibbutz). It is also important to note that social price Farida pays for her decision to stay at the kibbutz is the loss of her real family (Amir 61). Amir ends this tale with Farida writing to her parents and inviting them to visit her; however, he does not continue with their reply or acceptance (Amir 61).

¹⁴⁰ (Berg 90); (Amir 107)

utmost to imitate his sabra accent too, although her Hebrew was still poor and halting, and her heavy Iraqi accent went on clinging to her stubbornly despite all her efforts to be rid of it.”¹⁴¹

Thus, Nilly, like Herzl, is another “case of the successful integration of a once-marginalized person into the mainstream”.¹⁴² While Herzl accomplishes this by embracing Zionism, Nilly wins her social freedom through her sexuality. After meeting Zvika, the ‘regional’, at one of the Western musical quizzes, Nilly began to “cut and shorten her pants until they were the merest strip of cloth barely covering her groin; and as if that weren’t enough[,] she would [also] tighten her blouse and pull it down as far as it would go, making her breasts stick out”.¹⁴³ Yet, by misinterpreting the moral code (“I thought that all the ‘regional’ girls did it”), she encounters social disaster with her extramarital pregnancy.¹⁴⁴ Nilly is only able to avoid a future cloaked in shame after having both Nuri and Sonia, the kibbutz counselor, come to her defense.¹⁴⁵ Berg argues that as a “doubly marginal person (a woman in a male-oriented society and an Iraqi among Israelis), [Nilly] requires the efforts of both an Israeli and a male”.¹⁴⁶ Hence, Sonia, the kibbutz representative, and Nuri, a leading member of the “new generation”, approach her extremely religious, traditional parents to work out a compromise.¹⁴⁷ Nilly’s father, a Cantor, initially threatens to sit *shiva* for his wayward daughter as if she was literally dead.¹⁴⁸ Ironically, it is tradition that saves Nilly in the end. A reconciliation is only made when Zvika

¹⁴¹ (Amir 138-139)

¹⁴² (Berg 96)

¹⁴³ (Amir 134, 138)

¹⁴⁴ (Amir 151)

¹⁴⁵ Sonia, who is of European descent, is one of the leaders on the kibbutz.

¹⁴⁶ (Berg 90)

¹⁴⁷ (Berg 90)

¹⁴⁸ (Amir 155)

agrees to her father's one request: "that his grandson would have two names[,] Omer Avraham, after his own dead father".¹⁴⁹

The trajectory of Nilly's predicament supports Alba and Nee's primary critique of Gordon's work on structural assimilation. In their article, they state that Gordon's concept was "static and overly homogenous", especially since he "assumed that acculturation involved change on the part of an ethnic group in the direction of [the] middle-class Anglo-American culture, which itself remained largely unaffected, except possibly for 'minor modifications'".¹⁵⁰ One glaring problem with this reasoning is that American culture, like Israeli culture, greatly differs by local and socio-economic class.¹⁵¹ Hence, it would be erroneous to assume that acculturation occurs in the midst of a seamlessly united middle-class culture.¹⁵² Gordon, therefore, lacks "a more differentiated and syncretic conception of culture and [does not recognize] that American culture was and is more mixed, much more an amalgam of diverse influences, and that it continues to evolve".¹⁵³ Instead, it is more constructive to describe structural assimilation, especially when it is expressed through acculturation, as essentially the reduction of a distinct racial or ethnic trait and its accompanying socio-cultural differences.¹⁵⁴ Such processes are created when changes in one group make it more similar to another.¹⁵⁵ This type of fluctuation can also be caused by group convergence.¹⁵⁶ Alba and Nee assert that group

¹⁴⁹ (Amir 156)

¹⁵⁰ (Alba and Nee 833)

¹⁵¹ (Alba and Nee 833)

¹⁵² (Alba and Nee 833-834)

¹⁵³ (Alba and Nee 834)

¹⁵⁴ (Alba and Nee 834)

¹⁵⁵ (Alba and Nee 834)

¹⁵⁶ (Alba and Nee 834)

convergence takes place when two or more groups experience such a great amount of identity modification that they “shrink the difference and distance between them”.¹⁵⁷

In *Scapegoat* (1987), Amir highlights the role group convergence plays in the overall socialization process of Sephardic immigrants. Nilly and Zvika’s union, for example, is a hybrid cultural fusion dually influenced by both the minority Sephardic culture (the naming of their firstborn) and also by mainstream Israeli elements (Nilly fully embracing the ‘regional’ lifestyle to win Zvika’s heart). The success of the Iraq *haflas* is another example of group convergence in this novel. Ironically, these Iraqi music parties are born out of social conflict.¹⁵⁸ The Sephardic immigrants were pressured by the kibbutz leaders to participate in a Hasidic play but “the contrast between the Iraqi performers and the Hasidic characters they attempt[ed] to portray strik[ed] the [mostly Ashkenazi ‘regional’] audience as ludicrous”.¹⁵⁹ Shamed by “uproarious laughter”, the Iraqis leave the play mid-performance in protest.¹⁶⁰ They then decide to host a *hafla* for the kibbutz and even bring traditional Iraqi instruments, like the lute, to play *taqāsīm* (the “improvisations based on scales”) and sing *layālī*.¹⁶¹ Berg writes that Nuri and his friends “use their music as a collective assertion of self-worth and identity”.¹⁶² Happy with their results, Nuri notes:

“The party was a great success and redeemed us from our disgrace, if not in the eyes of the others, then at least in our own eyes. And that meant a lot.”¹⁶³

Such examples show some support for Alba and Nee’s conjecture that “cultural trait[s] gradually lose its association with an ethnic group”.¹⁶⁴ This is mostly due to “nongroup

¹⁵⁷ (Alba and Nee 834)

¹⁵⁸ (Berg 98)

¹⁵⁹ (Berg 98)

¹⁶⁰ (Berg 98); (Amir 110-111)

¹⁶¹ (Berg 98); (Amir 113-115)

¹⁶² (Berg 98)

¹⁶³ (Amir 115)

members” adopting these customs, “so that the empirical correlation between the trait and group membership is weakened”.¹⁶⁵ For instance, Nilly, a nonmember of the majority Ashkenazi/‘regional’ culture, accepts Western music and encourages other Iraqis to do the same, especially by bringing “newly learned Hebrew songs to the *haflas*”.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, over the span of several generations, the ethnic roots of a particular cultural practice or trait may be forgotten as it becomes accepted as a part of mainstream society.¹⁶⁷ In “Mizrahi and Russian Challenges to Israel’s Dominant Culture: Divergences and Convergences”, Eliezer Ben-Rafael state that first generation Mizrahim, which is another term used for Sephardic Jews in Israeli society, seem “equally divided among those who define their first allegiance as Jewishness or as Israeliness[;] second-generation Mizrahim, however, tend more clearly to rank Israeliness in first place”.¹⁶⁸ This, arguably, appears to be a characteristic of assimilating immigrant culture because the Ashkenazim, for both the first and second generations, “exhibit their Israeliness first”.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, Ben-Rafael argues that, over time, ethnicity becomes less of an identity marker for Ashkenazim than for Sephardic Jews.¹⁷⁰

This phenomenon greatly explains why adolescent rebellion is encouraged in new immigrants by the kibbutznikim of Kiryat-Oranim. At one point, Nuri explains:

“[Sonia] wanted to change us: forbade us to speak Arabic, concealed her revulsion of Masul’s *haflas* with difficulty, and sent us home on vacation, unwillingly: ‘The *ma’abara* unsettles you, undermines your progress.’ She thought we were like her, committed

¹⁶⁴ (Alba and Nee 834)

¹⁶⁵ (Alba and Nee 834)

¹⁶⁶ (Berg 98)

¹⁶⁷ (Alba and Nee 834)

¹⁶⁸ Eliezer Ben-Rafael. “Mizrahi and Russian Challenge to Israel’s Dominant Culture.” *Israel Studies* 12 (2007) 68-91. (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 76)

¹⁶⁹ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 76); Ashkenazim is plural for Ashkenazi, just like Mizrahim is the plural for Mizrahi.

¹⁷⁰ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 76)

pioneers, in her form and image, and that if we would only burn our bridges behind us, as she herself had done, we would march in her footsteps and realize her collective dream for us. She wanted to remake us....She refused to listen to the argument that we had come from a different world and that we were different....She insisted on calling me Nimrod, which means in Hebrew, 'We will rebel', and she wanted us to rebel and break our chains, even at the cost of tearing our families apart, and begin everything from the beginning, just as she had done."¹⁷¹

Nuri thus realizes that this suggests rebellion against the way of life in the Diaspora is very limited in scope and, in reality, "based on conformity to a Eurocentric ideal and life experience".¹⁷² Through Nuri's description of Sonia, Amir critically conveys the idea that the kibbutz experiment failed this first wave of Sephardic immigrants.¹⁷³ By encouraging immediate Hebrew-Israeli name changes, discouraging the practice of Iraqi (Arab) customs, and by culturally recoiling from the sounds of Arabic on the kibbutz, the kibbutznikim "fail to offer true hospitality to the Iraqis [and also fall short of truly] integrat[ing] them into the values of Israeli society".¹⁷⁴ The kibbutznikim, however, are indifferent to the detrimental effects of their one-dimensional stubbornness. Sonia's reprimanding lecture to the Iraqis after they start hosting their *haflas* on the kibbutz frankly expresses their real sentiments about assimilation:

"There's simply no room in our lives here for Baghdad or for the way life in the Jewish *shtetl* of Eastern Europe either. We came to this country because we rebelled against that way of life. Zionism is a revolt, a revolution, and every revolution has a price. Perhaps Zalman was wrong when he encouraged you to put on a play about the Eastern European *shtetl*....Do you think we didn't suffer the infantile diseases of cultural adjustment ourselves?....We didn't bring Poland here with us, and you're not going to bring Iraq with you either. We cast the yoke of the past off our necks for the sake of the future, and that is your mission too."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ (Amir 204-205)

¹⁷² (Berg 85)

¹⁷³ (Berg 102)

¹⁷⁴ (Berg 102)

¹⁷⁵ (Amir 121)

The real irony of this statement is that Sonia does half-heartedly acknowledge the prevailing presence of a double standard favoring Western culture over Eastern culture on the kibbutz. She admits to wrongfully letting Zalman, the teacher from the ‘regional’ school, put on a Hasidic play with the Iraqis even as she and Yishai, another kibbutz counselor, voiced disapproval over their *haflas*.¹⁷⁶ The play and other such events at the kibbutz, therefore, goes against the “bastion of Zionist principles[:] equality and communism”.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, even when some progress is made towards structural assimilation and acculturation, it is always begot by social conflict. This is apparent in the ‘coming of age’ stories of Herzl, Farida, Nilly, and even Nuri himself. Consequently, despite the constant bombardment of Western music quizzes and plays, the *haflas*, and the rather important presence of interethnic relationships/marriages in Amir’s novel, the ‘regionals’ are unsuccessful in convincing the Iraqis to join the kibbutz and become members.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, for the Sephardic youth from the *ma’abarah*, this rebellion is “from the outside, rather than motivated from within”.¹⁷⁹ This is why Nuri finally finds the courage to tell Sonia about the fundamental differences between him and her:

“The difference is that I didn’t come here on my own, like you, like Dolek, and Faivush [other leading kibbutznikim who are of Western origin]. I came with my family and relations and friends, all of Jewish Baghdad moved out here, and now it’s in the *ma’abarot*. Which makes it much harder to burn our bridges. You’ve built a society founded on individuals, because you came here alone. I belong to a clan.”¹⁸⁰

Interestingly, in his article “One Being an Iraqi-Jewish Writer in Israel”, Michael dryly states that Israeli society, unlike Iraqi culture, is characterized by the need to preserve childhood

¹⁷⁶ (Amir 109, 121)

¹⁷⁷ (Berg 102)

¹⁷⁸ (Berg 102)

¹⁷⁹ (Berg 85)

¹⁸⁰ (Amir 199)

and the lack of interest in all things adult.¹⁸¹ This, he writes, creates “an aristocratic class...which is certainly worth joining or at least imitating”.¹⁸² As a result, “the child refuses to grow up for fear of losing the super-abundance of his rights”, ironically, with the full support of his family and Israeli society as a whole.¹⁸³ Nevertheless, Michael cannot seem to agree with this approach to living: “To this day I cannot rid myself of what was laid down firmly in Iraq: to be called childish is not a compliment”.¹⁸⁴

Many literary scholars, nonetheless, argue that immigrant Sephardic writers have entirely abandoned their original identities and have completely taken on the traditional Israeli, Zionist persona. This is evident in Reuven Snir’s “‘Till Spring Comes’: Arabic and Hebrew Literary Debates Among Iraqi-Jews in Israel (1950-2000)”. In this article, Snir asserts that most Sephardic immigrant writers “who succeeded in adapting to writing in Hebrew adopted the Zionist master narrative”.¹⁸⁵ Snir even uses Michael’s work as evidence proving the validity of his argument. Snir claims that, “in his efforts to be a mainstream Hebrew writer”, Michael marginalizes his own “Arab cultural roots, concentrating instead on various non-controversial aspects appealing to Israeli mainstream readers”.¹⁸⁶ He is also equally dismissive of Amir’s contribution to minority literature in Israel. Snir writes that, in *Scapegoat* (1987), Nuri’s “fate is dictated by Ashkenazi Western values”.¹⁸⁷ For this reason, he contends that, like Michael, Amir also “adopt[s] the Zionist master narrative”.¹⁸⁸ Snir even shows surprise at the fact that

¹⁸¹ (Michael, “On Being”, 26-28)

¹⁸² (Michael, “On Being”, 27)

¹⁸³ (Michael, “On Being”, 27)

¹⁸⁴ (Michael, “On Being”, 28)

¹⁸⁵ Reuven Snir. “‘Till Spring Comes’: Arabic and Hebrew Literary Debates among Iraqi-Jews in Israel (1950-2000).” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 24 (2006): 92-123. (Snir 110)

¹⁸⁶ (Snir 110)

¹⁸⁷ (Snir 111)

¹⁸⁸ (Snir 110)

“immigrants from Ethiopia and Russia found [in *Scapegoat (1987)*] an expression of their own agonies of uprooting and immigration”.¹⁸⁹

In this manner, Snir, and other scholars like him, interprets Sephardic literature rather narrowly and therefore is quite dismissive of its unique contribution to Israeli society. For example, Berg points out that, by naming his novel “Scapegoat”, Amir greatly emphasizes Nuri’s inner turmoil with his own “self-recrimination”, especially as he realizes “the enormity of the gap between his life on [the] kibbutz and his life with his family” in the *ma’abarah*.¹⁹⁰ As Nuri wonders in Amir’s final chapter:

“How could I have brought a [unkosher] headless chicken home to the *ma’abarah*? Who ever gave a thought about ritual slaughtering on the kibbutz?...Ever since the big fight about God in the youth group everyone had stopped thinking about him...Night after night I was afraid to fall asleep: they had killed God.”¹⁹¹

Berg writes that this incident provides Amir’s novel with its title.¹⁹² In Hebrew, “scapegoat”, or “*tarnegol kaparot*” is a literal reference to the actual bird used as “a substitution for a sacrifice on the eve of the Day of Atonement”.¹⁹³ First the bird (most of the time, a rooster is traditionally used) “is whirled in a circle overhead while the following is recited:

“This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This rooster will go to its death while I will enter and go to a good, long life, and to peace.”¹⁹⁴

Likewise, Nuri himself is “caught between two incompatible cultures [and] must choose what he is to sacrifice from either in order not to become a sacrifice himself”.¹⁹⁵ This sacrifice, according to Amir, is the essence of the crisis of dual identity of Sephardic immigrants in Israel.

¹⁸⁹ (Snir 111)

¹⁹⁰ (Berg 84)

¹⁹¹ (Amir 215)

¹⁹² (Berg 84)

¹⁹³ (Berg 84)

¹⁹⁴ (Berg 84)

Concomitantly, making such great social compromises keeps Sephardic immigrants from being fully assimilated into Israeli society. Despite acculturating, as discussed by Alba and Nee, the ethnocratic nature of the Israeli state limits immigrants from fully synching with the core culture by creating a third space marked by socially inferior hybrid identities, a fact which is even evident in the lives of Amir's fictional Iraqi characters.¹⁹⁶ In *Ethnocracy (2006)*, Yiftachel clarifies that this social inequality is due to “the settlement-immigration process [which] functions as a mechanism for turning new immigrants into relatively weak and assimilating communities [Sephardic immigrants], sandwiched between a powerful founding or charter group [the Ashkenazi ‘regionals’ or Sabra Jews], an excluded and dispossessed indigenous population [the Palestinians], and, more recently, groups of aliens or foreign workers [African refugees and migrant workers from Asia, for example]”.¹⁹⁷

It is important to note that these first two categories are part of the “Upper Echelon” of Israeli Society, as outlined in Table 5. In tandem, the social boundaries between the founding Ashkenazim and the peripheral ethnoclasses, such as the Sephardim and later Russian immigrants, are porous in nature. Other social members like the Bedouins, Arab Israelis, and Palestinians belong to lower echelons in this hierarchical structure and are thus restricted from cultural benefits of the Upper Echelon. These cultural benefits are, however, stratified because of the prevalence of this “metaphorical and physical third space, [which] is molded by uneven power relations, thereby reflecting the infusion and impact of hegemonic values and practices”.¹⁹⁸ The relationship, nevertheless, between the dominant, founding group and the

¹⁹⁵ (Berg 84)

¹⁹⁶ (Yiftachel 212)

¹⁹⁷ (Yiftachel 212)

¹⁹⁸ (Yiftachel 212)

immigrant group within the Upper Echelon is never entirely dominated by the former.¹⁹⁹ The existence of the third space is one of the reasons why the Iraqis at Kiryat-Oranim do express some Arab cultural elements during the progression of the novel.

Like Amir, Michael also presents a similar argument about the demands of the third space through his secondary character Kobi, a Moroccan second-generation Israeli, and the relationship he has with Huda's co-worker Shirley.²⁰⁰ In Michael's novel, the hierarchy between the Upper and Middle Echelons is clearly illustrated with Shirley and her parents' view of Kobi and his own understanding of Alex. This is quite obvious, for example, in Huda's unfavorable introduction of these characters:

“Shirley was chanting in her little voice, ‘What a fucked-up world...’

I nodded to her. She seems a pleasant, quiet girl, but there's something ruthless about her rebelliousness. Her father is a well-known gynecologist, and she really doesn't need to work at the travel agency for her living. When her parents objected to the Moroccan man she was dating, she left the university and her home in order to help him finish his studies. But in the meantime[,] she fell out of love with him, or maybe she never was really in love. She's good-looking and the phone calls she receives are not all from customers but also from admirers, and she doesn't put them all off. She talks about “her Moroccan” like a breeder of thoroughbred horses who's raising a racehorse. ‘He'll go far. He'll get his Ph.D. with honors. He's got brains, not like my dummies.’ Her dummies, namely her parents, bought her a car, pay her rent, stuff her fridge with delicacies, and don't seem to mind that their daughter is financing the Moroccan's studies. They're waiting patiently for her to come to her senses, and in the meantime make sure doesn't suffer for her folly.”²⁰¹

Shirley and her show of social arrogance bolsters Shohat's article, which, at one point, states that in “many European-Jewish conversations, [the] Sephardim are sometimes referred to [or seen] as ‘*schwartz-chai*s’ or ‘black animals’”.²⁰² Michael further strengthens his portrayal of the social

¹⁹⁹ (Yiftachel 212)

²⁰⁰ Sami Michael. *A Trumpet in the Wadi*. Trans. Yael Lotan. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. (Michael 33)

²⁰¹ (Michael 33)

²⁰² (Shohat 6)

inequalities faced by Israeli minorities in the subsequent passage. After witnessing Shirley “cooing” on the telephone with an admirer, Huda questions her about the state of her relationship and her feelings for Kobi:

“I stiffened my nerve and asked her about the Moroccan.
 ‘Is he still living in your place?’
 ‘Why not? His room’s got a door and my room’s got a door. You hear what you want to hear and you don’t see what you’d rather not.’
 ‘All the same...’
 ‘You mean his pride? They were nine children at home in a crummy village near Kiryat Shemoneh, with a paralyzed father who never even sniffed the earth. The only walk he ever took with his mother was to the social services. Over there you learn a lot about that shit you call pride.’
 ‘An Arab man wouldn’t do it.’
 ‘Your Arabs have a screw loose,’ she said dismissively, the way her parents talked about her Moroccan.”²⁰³

Shirley’s indifferent, dismissive attitude towards Sephardim and Arabs in general reflect the mind-set of the core culture which she symbolizes. Ironically, she ridicules Kobi for having the very same humble upbringing that the dominant Israeli culture is responsible for creating. Yiftachel especially highlights this point by stating that “the dominant group represses potentially challenging identities by applying discriminatory spatial and economic policies and by generating derogatory discourses in key public arenas, such as education, the media, the arts, and politics”.²⁰⁴ “Challenging identities” in this context stand for those in the third space, the Jewish, non-Ashkenazi immigrants who form the second tier of the Upper Echelon, as well as members of the Middle and Lower Echelons, such as Arab-Israelis (like Huda and her family), Palestinians, and migrant workers. In addition, these discriminatory “spatial and economic policies” that Yiftachel refers to led to historical entrapment.²⁰⁵ He defines entrapment as the settlement of the Sephardim in peripheral or development towns, which, in turn, brought about

²⁰³ (Michael 34)

²⁰⁴ (Yiftachel 213)

²⁰⁵ (Yiftachel 212-213)

the creation of a trapped existence in the new Israeli state.²⁰⁶ Entrapment is another problematic feature of dual identity found in the third space. Yiftachel goes on to argue that “entrapment of a marginal group inhibits the development of alternative spaces for identity formation”.²⁰⁷ As a result, Sephardic immigrants in development towns become so entangled in this entrapped existence that they “subsequently develop an identity that is smothered, fragmented, and confused”.²⁰⁸

Interestingly, Kobi’s hometown of Kiryat Shemoneh is one of twenty-seven development towns which were established during the 1950s and 1960s in the utmost peripheral northern and southern parts of Israel.²⁰⁹ Kiryat Shemoneh, for instance, is a town of less than 20,000 people close to the Lebanese border.²¹⁰ These towns were intended to be regional centers of socio-economic growth, aiming to provide a variety of services to nearby residents that would help them meet housing, health, and educational needs.²¹¹ Ideally, by creating such opportunities for cultural integration and social assimilation, the state would reduce the occurrence of out-migration.²¹² This was, unfortunately, not achieved due to the lack of coordination in regards to community-planning, social services, and employment as well as impediments to the flow of capital and the logistics of national politics.²¹³ Consequently, these peripheral towns “became nodes of neglect and marginality[, as] they turned into low-demand, low-prestige localities, drawing low-income immigrants and other marginalized groups”.²¹⁴ The “low-income

²⁰⁶ (Yiftachel 212)

²⁰⁷ (Yiftachel 213)

²⁰⁸ (Yiftachel 213)

²⁰⁹ (Yiftachel 214)

²¹⁰ This figure is based on a 2003 anthropological calculation presented in Figure 9.1 “Israeli Development Towns, 2003” of Yiftachel’s *Ethnocracy* (2006). (Yiftachel 215)

²¹¹ (Yiftachel 214)

²¹² (Yiftachel 214)

²¹³ (Yiftachel 214)

²¹⁴ (Yiftachel 214)

immigrants” who were settled in these development towns were Jewish immigrants who were sent there because of the Sharon Plan, which invested in the advent of Judaizing state territory through nation building.²¹⁵ Yiftachel further contends that this was an act of *creeping apartheid* against the indigenous Arab population, “which remained the target of control and containment”.²¹⁶ By the mid-1960s, more than 200,000 immigrants were moved into these places, the great majority of them being Sephardim.²¹⁷

This is a prime case of “planning from above”, since “most residents were brought to the towns from [the]... *ma’abarot* or directly from Israel’s ports and were lured by the supply of inexpensive public housing”.²¹⁸ In fact, a 1998 survey consisting of 294 in-person interviews with North African immigrants from six representative development towns shows that more than fifty percent of first generation Sephardim was transferred to these localities from the *ma’abarah* or straight from a ship.²¹⁹ Still, these largely Sephardic populations remain greatly segregated from more well-established Israeli communities and towns (for instance, growing urban centers like Tel Aviv and even rural kibbutzim run by settling Ashkenazim) as well as from the local Arab population.²²⁰ The dominant ethnoclass sometimes encourages this cultural chasm, as evident in Shirley’s apathetic excuse for cheating on Moroccan Kobi: “They were nine

²¹⁵ The Sharon Plan is a policy named after Arie Sharon, the director of the Planning Authority in the Prime Minister’s office from 1948-1952 (Yiftachel 214). Sharon was faced with the pressing dilemma of creating a sufficient urban-panning strategy that would efficiently absorb an estimated 2.5 million immigrants (Yiftachel 214). Primarily made up of five hierarchical categories of settlement, this plan initially lacked a grouping for towns and urban centers meant for populations between 6,000 and 60,000 people (Yiftachel 214). These places became known later as development towns (Yiftachel 214).

²¹⁶ (Yiftachel 216)

²¹⁷ (Yiftachel 214)

²¹⁸ (Yiftachel 214)

²¹⁹ This percentage is based on a field survey presented in Figure 9.2 “Locational Choices: What is the Most Important Reason for Your Living in the Town” (Yiftachel 218). They surveyed three towns in the north: Shlomi, Ma’a lot, and Bet Shean and three in the south: Kiryat Gat, Ofakim, and Dimona (Yiftachel 213).

²²⁰ (Yiftachel 216)

children...in a crummy village near Kiryat Shemoneh...[t]he only walk he ever took...was to social services...[o]ver there you learn a lot about that shit you call pride”.²²¹ Shirley, however, is even more dismissive of Arab men and their cultural values (“Arabs have a screw loose”), thereby reinforcing this hierarchy between the ethnoclasses within the Upper Echelon as well as with the members of the Middle and Lower Echelons.²²² Yiftachel argues that these “interethnic gaps” between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim, subsequently “legitimiz[ed] patterns of segregation and inequality”.²²³ As illustrated in the following table, this formed a distinctive ‘ethnic geography of inequality’.²²⁴

Table 9.1 Selected Socioeconomic Criteria of Development Towns²²⁵

Indicator	Development Towns	Israel
•North African and Asian origin (1983) ^a	•81%	•44%
•Percentage of immigrants (2000)	•64%	•39%
•Mean salaried income (monthly) ^b	•5, 520 NIS	•6, 494 NIS
•Ownership dwelling (percentage of households) ^c	•66%	•73%
•Percentage of labor force unemployed ^d	•11.2%	•6.9%
•Percentage of population receiving a disability allowance ^e	•10.2%	•4.2%
•Percentage of households with cars	•45%	•56%
•Percentage of employed persons in manufacturing ^f	•30.1%	•19.5%

²²¹ (Michael 34)

²²² Additionally, as Michael clarifies through Huda, many Ashkenazi youth, even as late as the 1980s, had trouble seeing their Sephardic peers as true cultural equals and viewed non-Jewish citizens as even socially comparable because of their non-Western origins. One can therefore argue that Shirley’s prejudiced outlook is inherited but still generationally unique (dismissive but not entirely hateful) because she talked of Arabs the same way her parents spoke of Kobi (Michael 34).

²²³ (Yiftachel 216)

²²⁴ (Yiftachel 216)

²²⁵ This is a replication (with different graphics) of Table 9.1, as seen in the ninth chapter of *Ethnocracy* (2006). CBS stands for Central Bureau of Statistics.

Despite the alarming nature of this historical reality, the Sephardim as a group still is able to attain higher socio-political success since they are a part of the Upper Echelon of Israeli society and thus closer to the center of the Judaization project.²²⁶ This is why Kobi is able to competitively study in university and become incorporated into the expanding Israeli middle class.²²⁷ Such ethnic stratification creates tensions for Sephardim with the dominant ethnoclass, other minority immigrants, and indigenous groups.²²⁸ Due to its “inferior position vis-à-vis the dominant ethnoclass, the immigrant group attempts to minimize the difference between the two groups”.²²⁹ Still, the immigrant group’s stance against ethnic discrimination is complicated by the reality of its own ethnic prejudice against minorities who come lower on the hierarchical structure.²³⁰ Kobi’s perception and reaction to Alex during an outing at the beach serves as a prime example of this argument. When Huda worries that Alex has drowned during a swim in the sea, Kobi is quick to show his apathy:

“‘These Russians are all quite mad,’ said Kobi. ‘They can all go right back where they came from, as far as I’m concerned.’
Shirley’s fist landed on his chest. He sat up and looked at her, to see if it was meant affectionately or in anger. But Shirley was looking at Alex, who was drawing nearer. [Huda’s] knees gave under [her] and [she] sat down. ‘Such trash,’ said Kobi. ‘I wouldn’t invite him to my grandmother’s wedding. What do you need him for?’

Table 9.1 Graphic Legend (corresponding letters are in superscript in the chart above):

- a. CBS-a, 1983 Statistics 1983.
 - b. Israel Social Security 2000 (<http://www.btl.gov.il>).
 - c. CBS-a 1995.
 - d. CBS-a 1998.
- (Yiftachel 217)

Please keep in mind that the first column in this chart directly correlates with columns two and three. In other words, columns two and three contain the respective percentages for the eight different indicators listed in column one.

²²⁶ (Yiftachel 102)

²²⁷ (Yiftachel 234)

²²⁸ (Yiftachel 228)

²²⁹ (Yiftachel 228)

²³⁰ (Yiftachel 28)

Alex emerged from the sea with a childish smile on his face. We stared at him in silence. Kobi lay down again, pointedly indifferent.”²³¹
 Yiftachel contends that this type of ethnic discrimination is born out of misplaced, extremely rightist nationalism, which is encouraged in the third space of immigrant assimilation to legitimize the strength of the dominant ethnoclass, bolster the Jewish nature of the Israeli state, and to potentially raise immigrant “communal and political status”.²³² This, again, reinforces the pyramid of stratified ethnic echelons within Israeli society, as Huda astutely observes:

“I was anxious about [Alex’s] encounter with Shirley and Kobi. They represented two ends of Jewish society in which I had no foothold: Ashkenazi Shirley, born on top of the Carmel, who seemed to believe that the Jewish State had been created just to serve her, and Moroccan Kobi, who cultivated the chip on his shoulder and expected everyone to kneel before him and apologize and lavish on him whatever the State denied him in his deprived childhood. Both of them were predatory-Shirley in her sweet way, Kobi in his aggressiveness.”²³³

Regardless of his inferior position to Ashkenazi Shirley and even to Sephardic Kobi, a potential addition to the Israeli middle class, Alex is still favored over Kobi in Michael’s work. Even though Alex lacks Kobi’s religious, cultural, and lingual ties to Israel, he isn’t placed at a huge disadvantage because of his dour circumstances as a new immigrant. This is symbolized in Huda’s description of a competitive game of volleyball between Kobi and Alex at the beach:

“Mary and Shirley watched the stiff competition between the two males with almost erotic excitement. Kobi was like a frenzied tiger club. Alex seemed a little heavy compared to him, but his smile held a trace of disdain which at that moment seemed unwarranted.

After a little while I saw the reason for his smile. Language gives no advantage in a ball game.

Limber Kobi took in Alex’s provoking smile and positioned himself close to his opponent, as though out of consideration. Alex declined the favor, sent the ball in a high arc over Kobi’s head and sprang back. Kobi had to jump to get at the ball and return it without pretending to show consideration for the little man. Dark skinny Kobi pirouetted on the sand, strutting his attractive tall manhood. By contrast, Alex was careful and meticulous, as if taking some disability into account, prepared for failure as part of his life, but unwilling to regard it as defeat. He ran to the ball which Kobi had sent high and

²³¹ (Michael 110)

²³² (Yiftachel 228)

²³³ (Michael 105)

sideways, moved a few steps further back and returned it with calculated force. The ball whistled through the air as it crossed the great distance between them.

‘Your little friend wants everything on the big side,’ said Shirley.

Mary defended him. ‘He came from Russia.’

Kobi served and the ball fell powerless some four paces before Alex’s feet. ‘Higher, more power,’ said Alex, picking up the ball.

Kobi laughed like a spoilt child. After ten minutes of fierce, silent serves, which looked like an exchange of blows, Kobi leapt in the air and caught the ball in his hand. ‘Enough, enough. I’m beat.’”²³⁴

In this passage, Michael elevates European Alex over the Sephardi Kobi, even though Kobi is more immersed in Israeliness than Alex. One can argue that the author consciously chose to portray Kobi as a childish antagonist to reflect the discriminatory nature of the socio-cultural reality for Sephardic immigrants in the third space. Between 911,000 and 1,100,000 Russian Jews have immigrated to Israel, mainly from 1989 to the early 2000s.²³⁵ In the tenth chapter of *Ethnocracy* (2006), Yiftachel makes the argument that “the will of the Israeli elites to absorb such a large mass of immigrants is related to their (Zionist) desire to maintain Jewish majority over the Palestinians, to their aspiration to preserve a secular majority over a growing ultra-Orthodox population, and to their wish to reinforce the country’s European culture”.²³⁶ For these reasons, “the arrival of the Russian immigrants served primarily the interests of the secular Ashkenazim”.²³⁷

In his article, Ben-Rafael provides an historical account of the secularization of Russian Jews. For instance, he states that many Russian Jews (or RSJs) “decided to immigrate to Israel because of the importance they attached to their Jewish identification and their aspiration to reach their ‘genuine’ homeland”.²³⁸ As he explains, before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917,

²³⁴ (Michael 111)

²³⁵ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 80); (Yiftachel 245)

²³⁶ (Yiftachel 245)

²³⁷ (Yiftachel 245)

²³⁸ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 80)

RSJs were known to be one of the largest and most active Jewish communities in the world.²³⁹ Under Communist rule, however, “three generations of Russian Jews experienced harsh repression of Jewishness that dispossessed them of their culture and left them with only vague notions of Judaism”.²⁴⁰ The persecution of RSJs was similar to that of the Sephardim in Iraq but relatively worse, especially because of the prolonged nature of their suffering and the harsh tactics used by the Communists against them. Due to these political and cultural developments, an estimated one-fourth of the RSJs who immigrated to Israel do not meet the religious requirements of Jewishness, which are “Jewish matrilineal descent or religious conversion to Judaism”.²⁴¹ Still, many RSJs have Jewish relatives or have been assimilated into Jewish culture.²⁴² Once in Israel, less than 7% of RSJs solely choose to be entirely secular and revert back to their non-Jewish identities.²⁴³

It can be argued that Alex and his family are part of this small minority of RSJs.

Evidence of this appears in Michael’s narration of Alex’s personal history:

“Alex did not come to Israel because he was a Zionist. His mother, who today loathes Israel and would flee from it as from a leper colony, is considered a Zionist and enjoys the privileges of a ‘Prisoner of Zion’. She was the one who maneuvered everything and brought him and his father against their will.”²⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Alex, unlike many RSJs, does meet the criteria for being Jewish, since his father was originally an Orthodox yeshiva scholar and his mother was a rabbi’s daughter.²⁴⁵ His parents had no loyalty to the religious traditions of their youth and are, at best, social and economic opportunists. His father even caused a young Jewish girl to be sent to Serbia after

²³⁹ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 80)

²⁴⁰ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 80)

²⁴¹ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 80-81)

²⁴² (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 81)

²⁴³ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 81)

²⁴⁴ (Michael 146)

²⁴⁵ (Michael 146)

hearing her tell “a slightly anti-Communist joke”.²⁴⁶ Likewise, when his mother is asked to officially denounce her husband’s treasonous activities against the Communist state, she half-heartedly refuses but not out of love:

“If [the Communist officer had] said her husband was no longer alive she would have signed without a moment’s hesitation. She was a Jewish woman who had reached a high position in a strange city, and made a good few enemies. The dead can’t be helped, but there was a new life starting in her womb, for whose sake she would have been willing to publically denounce her husband’s name and memory, and satisfy the powers that be. The fact that he was still alive cheered her somewhat, but when she considered her situation and his, she thought it might have been more convenient if he were dead. She refused to sign.”²⁴⁷

This narrative really illustrates the hardships faced by most RSJs under Communism and the personal sacrifices that honed some of them into impenitent survivors. In fact, when conditions worsened and became unbearable for Alex’s family, his mother arranged for them to come to Israel.²⁴⁸ Unfortunately, her plans did not work out as she hoped and soon she yearned to escape the grasp of Israel as well:

“A few months after their arrival in Israel his mother woke up from her dream. His father was broken. Their flat in Nazareth was burdened with debts. At first Alex and his father worked in the same plant, Alex on the production side and the father as night watchman. After a week the people in charge came to think that the father himself needed watching. Equipment was stolen and they suspected he had a hand in the theft. His mother was stricken by violent asthma attacks. She struggled to breathe the air of the Holy Land only to lash it with her filthy tongue”²⁴⁹

Even though Michael’s characterization of the early hardships faced by RSJs during the assimilation process aligns with historical reality, RSJs still encountered a drastically “different Israeli society than the one [Sephardim] faced” during their first wave of immigration.²⁵⁰ Both Ben-Rafael and Yiftachel adamantly contend that the Israeli state’s acculturation proves proved

²⁴⁶ (Michael 147, 149)

²⁴⁷ (Michael 150)

²⁴⁸ (Michael 146)

²⁴⁹ (Michael 155)

²⁵⁰ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 81)

less aggressive towards RSJs than towards the Sephardim in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁵¹ This is mainly due to the fact that “the ascendancy of [Sephardic] political strength opened the way for RSJs to express their own particular ethnocultural orientation”.²⁵² Unlike the Iraq characters in Amir’s novel, RSJ immigrants could “work, without castigation of creating Russian communal, cultural, social, and political frameworks”.²⁵³ On the contrary, the Sephardim who immigrated during 1950s and 1960s were expected to “be like everyone else”.²⁵⁴

In fact, as shown in a survey administered by Ben-Rafael and Yochanan Peres, unlike the Sephardim in Israel, only a small percentage of RSJs chose Israeli identity as their primary selection.²⁵⁵ While 42% of the RSJ population consider Israeliness an important part of their individual identities only 11% selected it as their first identity.²⁵⁶ In contrast, over 60% of RSJs chose “Russian Jewishness” as their primary identifier.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, although “an overwhelming majority” of Sephardim want their children to remain in Israel, only a “small majority” of RSJs, especially when compared to surveyed non-immigrants, expressed the same desire.²⁵⁸ In the conclusion to his article “Mizrahi and Russian Challenges”, Ben-Rafael uses Table I to further outline the various convergences and divergences between the Sephardim and RSJs during their respective assimilation cycles:

²⁵¹ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 81); (Yiftachel 245)

²⁵² (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 81)

²⁵³ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 81)

²⁵⁴ Sami Shalom Chetrit. “Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29 (2000): 51-65. (Chetrit 62)

²⁵⁵ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 77,82)

²⁵⁶ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 82)

²⁵⁷ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 82)

²⁵⁸ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 77,82)

Table 1**The Dominant Culture and Prevailing Mizrahi and RSJ Views Compared²⁵⁹**

Aspects	Dominant Culture	Mizrahi Constituency	RSJ Constituency
<i>I. Identity Facets</i>			
Collective Commitment	The Jewish Israeli nation first and the Jewish world second	The Jewish people and Israeli nation, then the specific “Eda” and “Edot Hamizrakh”	RSJs in Israel, RSJs in the world, Israeli Jews, and Jewish world
Perceptions of Singularity	Hebrew language and culture in the context of the secularization and the nationalization of traditional markers	Markers of Jewish particularisms and Mizrahiness	Markers of non-Jewish secular Russianness: Russian language and culture
Self-positioning vis-à-vis “others”	Israel as the Land of the Jew among Jews as a nation among nations	Israeli nationalism embedded in traditionalistic definitions	Russian ethnicity as a component of Israeli and all-Jewish collectives
<i>II. Convergences and Divergences</i>			
Divergences	Unifying secular perspective on the social order gradually compromising with claims to multiculturalism	Ultra-Orthodox leadership moved by a religious project, enlisting support by championing the cause of the deprived Mizrahi	Leadership aspiring to be part of the national leadership on the basis of an ethnic constituency where secularism mixes with “hawkish realism” in national security policies
Convergences of Mizrahi and RSJs vis-à-vis Dominant Culture	Reluctance for ethnic politics	Political determination to assert presence and to favor multiculturalization of the society	
Convergence of Dominant Culture and Mizrahim vis-à-vis RSJs	Cultural references and markers drawn from Jewish legacies		Emphasis on Jewish identification more than Jewish contents
Convergences of Dominant Culture and RSJs vis-à-vis Mizrahim	Dominant Culture and RSJs emphasize secular culture Many Mizrahim exhibit traditionalism; leaders religiosity		
General Convergence	Nationhood grounded in a national language and culture, and reference to history and legacies		

²⁵⁹ This chart is a replication of Table I in Ben-Rafael’s “Mizrahi and Russian Challenges” article. (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and”, 86)

The information in Table 1 proves that RSJs in Israeli society count themselves a part of the “non-ethnic middle class”, even though they contribute considerably to the ethnocratic nature of the state’s cultural landscape.²⁶⁰ Their evident secularism plays a significant role in the ease of their cultural integration in Israel. The first generation of Sephardic immigrants, however, were stripped of real political power and fought to survive in a predominantly Western socio-economic system, especially since “the collective (i.e., the Zionist movement) sought [primarily] to maintain European, and specifically Ashkenazi, dominance and cultural hegemony”.²⁶¹ Consequently, the early Sephardim were subjected to a form of hierarchical socialization within their own Jewish ethnonation, which essentially tried to erase the basic imprint of their Arab cultural identity.²⁶² Thus, while expunging the Arabness of the incoming Sephardim, “the Arab was marked out as [the state’s] new enemy both on the battlefield and in the quest to create a new Israeli Jew”.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ (Ben-Rafael, “Mizrahi and,” 82)

²⁶¹ (Chetrit 62)

²⁶² (Chetrit 62)

²⁶³ (Chetrit 62)

Chapter III. Conclusion: Dealing with the Israeli Stigma of Ethnonational Othering

*“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
 When we remembered Zion
 There on the poplars
 We hung our harps,
 For there our captors asked us for songs
 Our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
 They said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
 How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?
 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
 May my right hand forget its skill.
 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
 If I do not remember you,
 If I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.
 Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did
 On the day Jerusalem fell.
 “Tear it down,” they cried.
 “Tear it down to its foundations!”
 O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction,
 Happy is he who repays you
 For what you have done to us—
 He who seizes your infants
 And dashes them against the rocks.”²⁶⁴*

One of the most interesting literary elements in Psalms 137, the timeless ode of Hebrew exile, is the presence of the Other. The Psalmist pleads with God for retribution on the enemies of Israel, namely Edom and Babylon, while concurrently establishing divine claim to the celestial city, Jerusalem. Different nations certainly have touted relevant religious passages in self-sanctioning the validity of their mythological ties to specific territory. This also holds true in the modern context. In the third chapter of *Ethnocracy* (2006), Yiftachel presents two different nationalistic songs which were written and composed after the formation of the Israeli state, one Zionist and the other Palestinian. Both of these lyrical poems, echoing the sentiment of the

²⁶⁴ (NIV, Psalms 137: 1-9, 668)

ancient Psalmist, focus on the centrality and socio-cultural importance of Jerusalem (or al-Quds, a specific Arabic name for East Jerusalem):

Jerusalem of Gold
 Mountain air, clear as wine,
 And the fragrance of pines
 Stand in twilight breeze
 With the sound of bells
 In the sleep of oak and stone.
 Captured in her dream
 The City waits desolate
 With a wall in her heart.

Jerusalem of gold,
 Of copper and light,
 I shall be a violin to all your poems.

How the walls have dried.
 The market square stands empty.
 No one attends the Temple Mount
 Inside the Old City.

And in the rocky caves
 The winds are wailing.
 No one descends to the Dead Sea
 On the Jericho road.

For your name burns the lips
 Like a resinous kiss,
 If I forget Thee O Jerusalem,
 All of gold.

We've returned to the wells,
 The market, and the square.
 The shofar calls on Temple Mount
 And in the rocky caves
 A thousand suns are shining.
 We shall descend again to the Dead Sea
 On the Jericho road.

Jerusalem of gold,
 Of copper and light,
 I shall be a violin to all your poems.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ (Shemer 1967); (Yiftachel 66, 68)

The Flower of All Cities
 For you, the city of prayers, I shall pray,
 For you, the city of beautiful homes, you
 The flower of all cities.
 O al-Quds, O al-Quds, the city of
 prayers, I shall pray.

Our eyes will follow you every day
 Searching for the places of prayer,
 Embracing the old churches,
 Erasing the sorrow of mosques.
 O night of Israa the path passed to the
 heavens.
 Our eyes will follow you every day and I shall pray.

The face of the child in the cave.
 And his mother Maria are crying
 For the homeless and the abandoned...
 For the defenders who died in the city
 gates,
 The martyrs of peace in the homeland
 of peace,
 And justice ceased in the gates
 When the city of al-Quds fell.
 Love retreated and the hearts of the
 world settled on war.

The shining rage has come and I am
 faithful,
 The bitter rage has come and I shall
 pass my sorrows.
 Through all paths, they will come,
 The horses of Godly fear, they will come
 Like the face of the almighty God, they
 will come.

The gate to our city will not remain
 locked
 and I am walking to pray.
 I shall knock and open the gates.
 I shall cleanse, O Jordan River, in holy
 waters
 And shall erase, O Jordan River
 the traces of the savage foot.

The shining rage, O Jordan River, will
 come
 with the horses of godly fear,
 Will crush the face of power.
 The house is ours, al-Quds is ours
 With our hands, we shall return al-Quds,
 With our hands, al-Quds, peace is
 coming.²⁶⁶

As Wolfgang Saxon writes in his June 29, 2004 obituary for Naomi Shemer in the *New York Times*, “Jerusalem of Gold” was written by Shemer immediately before the Six-Day War.²⁶⁷ This “ballad made her famous as it gained the status of an informal second national anthem once Israel had ‘reunited’ the ancient city” after the War, thus becoming a significant cultural emblem of the Jewish state.²⁶⁸ The Judaization of al-Quds, or East Jerusalem, was always a major goal of the Israeli government. Yiftachel explains that following the 1967 war, “Israel incorporated some 170 square kilometers of surrounding lands (including some urban, rural, and vacant areas)” to the Old City in Jerusalem, which originally extended a little over one square kilometer.²⁶⁹ They renamed this newly restructured entity “united Jerusalem”.²⁷⁰ This gain in Jewish territory, which strongly invoked the religious image of Jerusalem existing as a “city whole”, led to the marginalization of the city’s Arab population.²⁷¹ Fairuz’s “The Flower of All Cities”, which was first performed at a music festival in northern Lebanon two months after the 1967 war, decried the aftermath of the war and immediately gained popularity via radio

²⁶⁶ (Fairuz 1968); (Yiftachel 66, 68)

²⁶⁷ Wolfgang Saxon. “Naomi Shemer, 74, Poet and Composer, Dies.” *New York Times*. June 29, 2004, accessed July 18, 2011, < <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/29/arts/naomi-shemer-74-poet-and-composer-dies.html?scp=1&sq=Naomi+SHEMER&st=nyt>>. (Saxon 1)

²⁶⁸ (Saxon 1)

²⁶⁹ (Yiftachel 66)

²⁷⁰ (Yiftachel 66)

²⁷¹ (Saxon 1); (Yiftachel 66)

and cinema throughout the region for its equally stirring nationalistic message.²⁷² This is particularly evident in the third stanza which describes the Christ child and his mother, Mary, crying for “the homeless and the abandoned.../[and] [f]or the defenders who died [within] the city gates/...[w]hen...al-Quds fell”.²⁷³ Even now, Fairuz, who was born Nouhad Haddad, is revered as being part of the vanguard of Palestinian nationalism.²⁷⁴ Katherine Zoepf hints at Fairuz’s “majestic” celebrity in her December 3, 2006 article for the Art section in the *New York Times* when she quotes a young Arab Israeli man from Haifa named Said who tells her that:

“[Fairuz] is the music of our lives....She plays from dawn till midnight, every day, everywhere we go. She is the symbol of Lebanon and Palestine. We all love her.”²⁷⁵

It is therefore apparent that both the Palestinian and Zionist cultures have “sanctified and glorified” territory through religious and literary works.²⁷⁶ Shemer and Fairuz, for instance, emphasize the eminent status of Jerusalem/al-Quds by frequently referring to certain sacred writings and idealized heroic narratives central in their respective socio-religious communities.²⁷⁷ Indeed, Shemer’s song offers strong textual parallels to Psalms 137 itself, especially in the fifth stanza:

“For your name burns the lips
Like a resinous kiss,
If I forget Thee O Jerusalem,

²⁷² Christopher Stone. “‘Our Eyes Travel to You Everyday’-The Place of Jerusalem in the Works of Fairouz and the Rahbani Brothers.” *ArteEast Quarterly* (Fall 2007), accessed July 18, 2011, <<http://www.arteeast.org/pages/artenews/nostalgias/132/>>. (Stone 1)

²⁷³ (Yiftachel 68)

²⁷⁴ Katherine Zoepf. “A Diva Brightens a Dark Time in Beirut.” *New York Times*. December 3, 2006, accessed July 18, 2011, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/03/world/middleeast/03beirut.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1313204614-HaQ51Bu0/3j8yV1IZJdNOW>>.

(Zoepf 1)

²⁷⁵ (Zoepf 1)

²⁷⁶ (Yiftachel 67)

²⁷⁷ (Yiftachel 67)

All of gold.”²⁷⁸

These lines overtly mirror Psalms 137:5-6, which proclaim:

“If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
 May my right hand forget its skill.
 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
 If I do not remember you,
 If I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.”²⁷⁹

Nonetheless, both of these poems actively reject and deny the Other, whether it is the Jewish Jerusalem or the Arab al-Quds.²⁸⁰ Bowing to literary tradition, the Other in these patriotic songs become “a present absentee, casting a shadow over the city, but is never allowed a voice, a name, or a rightful place in this binational, multicomunal city”.²⁸¹ This is why the role and goal of minority literature is so relevant and important in modern Israeli society. Certain Jewish and Arab writers have strongly condemned the act of ethnic othering, mainly by initiating and actively participating in academic discussions about dual identity struggles in immigrant and internally colonized communities. In *More and More Equal* (2005), Berg frankly asserts that “the Israeli literary scene is opening up....[and that] more and more new voices are being welcomed, and the margins shifting”.²⁸² She clarifies that this tonal change in the discourse “is not just a fascination of the Other-for in fact sometimes it is Us-but a celebration of the individual, a recovery of personal roots, a replacement of the hegemonic master narrative with many different narrative strands”.²⁸³ Berg attributes this particular academic and social

²⁷⁸ (Yiftachel 68)

²⁷⁹ (NIV, Psalms 137: 5-6, 668)

²⁸⁰ (Yiftachel 67)

²⁸¹ (Yiftachel 67)

²⁸² Nancy E. Berg. *More and More Equal: The Literary Works of Sami Michael*. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005. (Berg, *More*, 190)

²⁸³ (Berg, *More*, 190)

gateway to various “radical changes effected by the decline of Zionist ideology as a unifying force in Israeli society”.²⁸⁴

Again, this became a cultural reality because Israeli minority writers gave voice to the socially voiceless, the Othered members in society, through the thematic focus of their works and with their multi-dimensional characters. In *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (2002), for example, the structural doubling “of plots, repetition of and within events, complements and contrasts-reinforce[s] the issue of Huda’s bicultural life and thematicize[s] the question of coexistence of two peoples”.²⁸⁵ In truth, the very first paragraph of chapter one supports the existence of such duality in Michael’s characterization:

“Grandpa Elias, smiling his Egyptian smile, remarked that small troubles are heaven’s gift to the unfortunate. Mother sank into a chair and pointed with a stubborn chin at the door.

‘Allah’s a humorist like you if he gives such presents,’ she said, looking as though she expected the door to break open and rough feet to barge in, violating the brightness of the living room floor. This mother, who married, bore me and Mary, and was widowed, was still virginally house-proud. Perhaps because she married late, or because Father hurriedly begot us and left this world without delay. From the little I heard about him, I knew that he did not have the sense of humor of his father, Grandpa Elias. Maybe I’m like him. We’ve been living in the wadi for many years, but I have no Arab friends, male or female. I’m trying to be more Israeli than the Jews themselves. Like a fisherman whose nets keep coming up empty, I wandered from one fishing ground to the next, and now Yehuda Amichai is nearer to my heart than any Arab poet. Mary makes no effort. She’s the most Israeli offshoot of this family. Two years younger than I, she’s bold and reckless. She gambles on her own life with a fetching smile. I don’t preach at her. That’s the main difference between us, that I fantasize and she tries, I dream and she tastes.”²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ (Berg, *More*, 190)

²⁸⁵ (Berg, *More*, 27)

²⁸⁶ (Michael 1); Yehudah Amichai, as Berg explains, is the best at creating ‘crossover’ poetry (Berg, *More*, 126). Amichai’s “poetry often expresses a commonsensical if not liberal approach to the issue of co-existence” (Berg, *More*, 126). For this reason, other writers of Israeli minority literature have also included Amichai’s poems in their works. In fact, Shammaas uses an excerpt from one as the epigraph for his second section:

“Dresses of beautiful women, in blue and white.
And everything in three languages:
Hebrew, Arabic, and Death” (Shammaas 76; Berg, *More*, 126)

As evident in this excerpt, Michael starts his novel by virtually creating a pastoral image of Huda's family.²⁸⁷ In this domestic scene, he introduces each participating member to the reader by highlighting individual personality traits and the developing interrelationships.²⁸⁸ Likewise, in Amir's book, the binary nature of dual identity is stressed with the metaphoric usage of adolescence (which is discussed thoroughly in the previous chapter), which helps Amir explore the social benefits and boundaries of cultural assimilation. He does this primarily by focusing on the Israeli integration of non-European immigrants on the kibbutz, a largely European-Zionist entity, during the formative years.

It is important, however, to note that Berg somewhat disagrees with the underlining argument of this thesis when it comes to determining the degree to which Amir and Michael criticize the destructive role Zionism plays in Israeli history. In *More and More Equal* (2005), Berg theorizes that for Amir's "protagonists and narrators[,] Zionism-despite the hardships of acclimation and the great contrast between former prosperity and present status-is the answer".²⁸⁹ She continues that, contrarily, for Michael, "although Israel became a refuge (*hasut*) for Iraqi Jewry, Zionism, per se, is not the sole answer".²⁹⁰ I think her conclusions about Amir's writings are too generalized and do not apply to *Scapegoat* (1987). It is true that throughout Amir's novel, various kibbutznikim try to convince Nuri about the superiority of the Kibbutz Movement. Sonia, for instance, pressures him to officially join Kiryat-Oranim with the following speech:

"The great question is what kind of world your children will live in-in Kiryat-Oranim or in the *ma'abarot* and the slums of corrupt cities. In unending envy and a capitalistic rat-race, or in an egalitarian and revolutionary society. You've reached the crossroads, Nimrod, this is the moment of truth for all of you. I'm not religious, as you know, but I

²⁸⁷ (Berg, *More*, 27)

²⁸⁸ (Berg, *More*, 27)

²⁸⁹ (Berg, *More*, 151)

²⁹⁰ (Berg, *More*, 151-152)

have my own interpretation of the concept of the chosen people. We are people who always have to choose which way to go. This is your moment of choice.”²⁹¹

Nevertheless, Nuri chooses his original identity and his family in the *ma'abarah* over advancing within the rankings of the kibbutz:

“At this moment, I, Nuri, the son of Fahima from Iraq, knew that my parents, who were waiting for me to come home to help support the family, would never in a million years understand the ideal of ‘self-realization’ and that they would never forgive me if I abandoned them to their fate....Sonia knew nothing of my feelings of guilt towards my family because I was living on this paradise on earth while they were stuck in the *ma'abara*. She refused to believe that I wasn’t a pioneer, an idealist and a revolutionary like her, that I still cherished my dream of that distant signing saying: ‘Dr. Nuri, Specialist in Children’s Diseases’. What the hell did she want of me? Couldn’t she see that none of our group was going to join the kibbutz movement? That we were all going to go back to the *ma'abara*? Masul wanted to be a lawyer, Herzl wanted to eat shashlik and kebab, and Buzaglo was looking for his lost God. Was she too blind to see that I would estrange and alienate myself from my friends, that none of them would follow me if I pledged myself to establishing an Iraqi kibbutz in the Negev? They would not even join Kiryat-Oranim, for the simple reason-and this too Sonia refused to accept-that our peers on the kibbutz, the group we aspired to emulate and join, were the ‘regionals’. Not Sonia, nor Dolek, nor Faivush, but Nahche, Nitza, and Hanan. And they would never accept us and we would always feel alienated in their company.”²⁹²

In the passage above, Nuri frankly addresses the ethnoclassic othering within Jewish society that originated primarily from the European ethnonationalism, mainly expressed through the form of Orientalism. For this reason, as both Amir and Michael emphasize in their respective stories, the West plays a major influential role in the ethnic subordinating of Sephardic Jews and Israeli Arabs. This is mainly due to its Orientalist agenda in dealing with the East, which, as Shohat shows in her article, penetrated the foundational ideals of European Zionism. In his ground-breaking work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward W. Said defines Orientalism as the

²⁹¹ (Amir 200)

²⁹² (Amir 206-207); Sonia explains ‘self-realization’ as:

“Breaking new ground, starting on a different road to a new revolutionary world....[It] means accepting the burden of physical labour like a religion, like a prayer, like a daily creed. Self-realization means tying your lives and futures to the land, and committing yourselves utterly to our [kibbutz] way of life, our principles and beliefs” (Amir 206).

“distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts [and as] an elaboration... of a basic geographical distinction [dividing] the world...[into] two unequal halves, Orient and Occident”.²⁹³ The Orient or the Oriental, as Said later explains, “designated Asia or the East, geographically, morally, culturally”.²⁹⁴ In this fashion, the West started to view the non-European predominantly as “an atom in a vast collectivity designated in ordinary or cultivated discourse as an undifferentiated type called Oriental, African, yellow, brown, or Muslim”.²⁹⁵ Through such cultural generalization, the West transforms “instances of civilization” into stereotypical emblems of Eastern ideals, beliefs, and values.²⁹⁶

Orientalism thus distorts the individuality of the Easterner and simultaneously denies him the right to identity expression, expansion, and exploration. This is most clearly evident in Nuri’s dealings with Kuba, Sonia’s husband. Nuri describes him as “a high-ranking officer in the army, a tall, slender man, handsome and full of charm”.²⁹⁷ During the days of the British mandate in Palestine, Kuba acted as the *mukhtar* of the kibbutz (or the leading representative) and became very favorably known among the Arabs in the area, especially for his “excellent Arabic”.²⁹⁸ In fact, Nuri relates that many “Arab sheiks...still came on pilgrimages to see him [and] called him ‘Hawaja Salim’, a name with which he was clearly delighted”.²⁹⁹ Nuri, nonetheless, seems peeved by his constant “showing off” regarding his knowledge of Arabic in their conversations, especially since Kuba often became “overjoyed whenever he managed to

²⁹³ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. (Said 12)

²⁹⁴ (Said 31)

²⁹⁵ (Said 252)

²⁹⁶ (Said 252)

²⁹⁷ (Amir 158)

²⁹⁸ (Amir 158)

²⁹⁹ (Amir 158)

score a point off...a boy whose mother tongue was Arabic”.³⁰⁰ Kuba’s assumptive, generalizing notions about Nuri’s cultural likes and practices are misleading, as Nuri himself reveals in his narration:

“‘Look at this *shabriya*,’ he said to me that evening. ‘It’s a present from Sheik Saliman of the Negev. I received it today.’ He stroked the dagger and embarked on a long and boring story about its history. I nodded my head at the Polish *effendi*, as if I was an expert on Arab daggers, and mumbled, ‘*Aai, na’am*. [Oh, yes.]’”³⁰¹

This is also evident in Kuba’s rather forceful offering of Arabic coffee:

“‘*Beddak ahwat arab ma’a hel?* [Do you want Arab coffee with cardamom?]
‘*Akun mamnun*. [I would be grateful.]’

Kuba would retire to the kitchen to prepare fragrant coffee for the lad from the Iraqi youth group, while I wondered where he procured the cardamom seeds. He would return with a heavy silver tray holding a *finjan* of boiling coffee and tiny coffee cups. He would lift the *finjan* high in the air and pour the coffee into the cups in a big arc, according to the Arab custom. Finally, he would take a sip, smack his lips in enjoyment, and before I had time to taste the steaming coffee he would ask: ‘*Kif elahwa* [how’s the coffee] *ya hawaja Nuri?*’

‘God bless you for this coffee,’ I would reply, even though I didn’t like coffee or know anything about how it should taste. I would have liked to ask for something else to drink but I didn’t dare-I was *ibn Arab*, a son of Arabia, wasn’t I?”³⁰²

In *Exile from Exile* (1996), Berg notes that Kuba, though well-intentioned, sees Nuri solely as an exotic Iraqi.³⁰³ In turn, “Nuri has no more an idea of how to react to the enthusiastic Orientalist than he does to the bigots”.³⁰⁴ As apparent in the last several lines of the passage above (I was *ibn Arab*, a son of Arabia, wasn’t I?), Nuri’s own identity crisis concerning his existence as “an

³⁰⁰ (Amir 158)

³⁰¹ (Amir 159)

³⁰² (Amir 159); A *finjan* is a uniquely shaped, small coffee pot with a long handle, which is traditionally used during the serving of Arabic coffee.

³⁰³ (Berg 97)

³⁰⁴ (Berg 97)

Iraqi-Jewish-immigrant-to-Israel-on-the-kibbutz” somehow mislead him into partially accepting, at least momentarily, Kuba’ Orientalist stereotype of “the exotic Arab Jew”.³⁰⁵

Due to this bifurcating inequality, Orientalism quite constantly strategically “depends...on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand”.³⁰⁶ Said clarifies that this great cultural imbalance between West and East came into existence because of shifting historical patterns.³⁰⁷ Islam enjoyed global sovereignty during the military and political zenith of its influence from the eighth to the sixteenth century.³⁰⁸ Although the power center then shifted to the West, Said comments that it now “seems to be directing itself back towards the East again”.³⁰⁹ As a result, in the modern context, the evil Semite has taken on a different meaning.³¹⁰ After the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the West began to portray Arabs in a more menacing manner.³¹¹ Their clearly ‘Semitic’ features, such as “their sharply hooked noses [and] the evil mustachioed leer on their faces, were obvious reminders (to a largely non-Semitic population) that ‘Semites’ were at the bottom of all ‘our’ troubles”, which, at least in the early 1970s, was a shortage of gasoline.³¹² Thus, “the transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish one to an Arab target was made smoothly, since the figure was essentially the same”.³¹³ The Arab thus became the prime disputer of Western existence and European Zionism’s regional influence.³¹⁴ Said frankly hypothesizes that the Arab usurper image came

³⁰⁵ (Berg 97)

³⁰⁶ (Said 7)

³⁰⁷ (Said 205)

³⁰⁸ (Said 205)

³⁰⁹ (Said 205)

³¹⁰ (Said 286)

³¹¹ (Said 285)

³¹² (Said 286)

³¹³ (Said 286)

³¹⁴ (Said 286)

into being because of the bifurcation of the European Jew in the modern era.³¹⁵ This was the product of the Western reconstruction of the European Zionist as a “Jewish hero”, in the tradition of “the adventurer-pioneer Orientalist[s]” like Sir Richard Burton, Edward William Lane, and Ernest Renan.³¹⁶

For their part, many early Zionists emulated Orientalist ideals in their understanding of land acquisition in Palestine.³¹⁷ To them, Palestine was “an empty desert waiting to burst into bloom”.³¹⁸ Its inhabitants were seen as “inconsequential nomads possessing no real claim on the land and therefore no cultural or national reality”.³¹⁹ Furthermore, much emphasis is put on Semitic simplicity in modern Zionist-Orientalism. This is evident in Chaim Weizmann’s remarks to Arthur Balfour on May 30, 1918:

“The Arabs, who are superficially clever and quick witted, worship one thing, and one thing only—power and success....The British authorities...knowing as they do the treacherous nature of the Arabs...have to watch carefully and constantly....The fairer the English regime tries to be, the more arrogant the Arab becomes....The present state of affairs would necessarily tend toward the creation of an Arab Palestine, if there were an Arab people in Palestine. It will not in fact produce that result because the fellah is at least four centuries behind the times, and the effendi...is dishonest, uneducated, greedy, and as unpatriotic as he is inefficient.”³²⁰

The primary similarity between Weizmann’s statement and the traditional European anti-Semite is the Orientalist nature of his belief that all Semites, as well as associated subdivisions thereof [like the Sephardim, for example], lacked the superior social qualities of Westerners.³²¹ As discussed in chapter two, this prejudiced notion fueled the emergence of the ethnic stratification

³¹⁵ (Said 286)

³¹⁶ (Said 286)

³¹⁷ (Said 286)

³¹⁸ (Said 286)

³¹⁹ (Said 286)

³²⁰ (Said 306)

³²¹ (Said 306)

in Israeli society, which subordinated ‘Oriental’ peoples and cultures, including those within the Jewish ethnoclass, to European-Western traditions.

Nonetheless, this tension between different ethnic communities within Jewish-Israeli society originates from ethnonational discrimination, which is the cornerstone of Orientalist thought. Yiftachel argues that this form of social stratification is based on ethnic political reasoning and legitimacy.³²² Such elements are, in turn, produced by ethnonational conflict, which diffuses its way through both minority and majority communities.³²³ This then leads to the materialization of different kinds of ethnoclassic divisions.³²⁴ It follows that ethnocracies like the modern Israeli state “not only denote the dominance of a specific ethnonation but also the dominance of ethnicity as political and economic criteria”.³²⁵ Consequently, the undemocratic use of ethnicity is actively legitimized and openly recognized “as a determinant of resource allocation” within the ethnocratic society.³²⁶ These ethnonational powers, therefore, “possess an assimilating-uniting trajectory”, as shown in the graphic below:

³²² (Yiftachel 18)

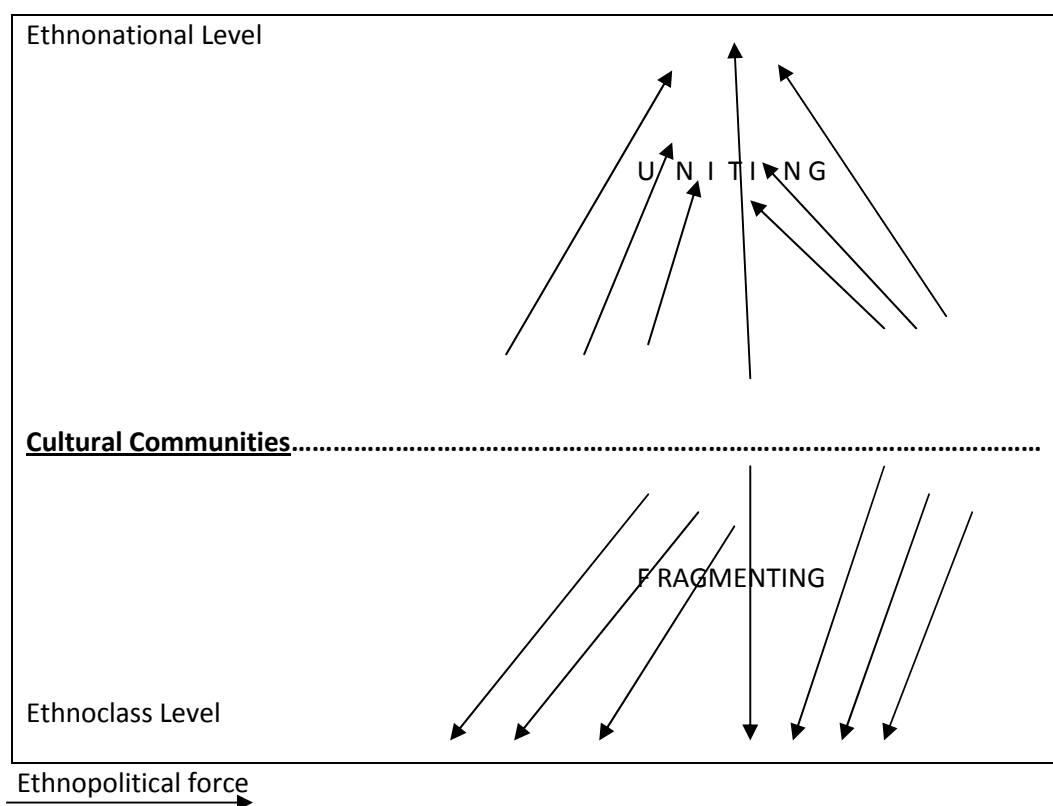
³²³ (Yiftachel 18)

³²⁴ (Yiftachel 18)

³²⁵ (Yiftachel 18)

³²⁶ (Yiftachel 18)

Figure 2.1 Two Levels of Political Ethnicity in (Settling) Ethnocratic Societies³²⁷



The dissimilarity between Figure 2.1's ethnonations and ethnoclasses is based on two elements: (1) the emphasis on the role of social classes and its connection to the material difficulties that arise from ethnic hierarchy, especially in certain intranational spheres, and (2) its illumination of the underlying conflict between the two main goals that ethnocracies always pursue in tandem—the ethnically driven concept of nation-building and the civically minded project of state-building.³²⁸ For these reasons, the nation-building that occurs in ethnocratic regimes fully reveals the conscious utilization of civil and ethnic social categories.³²⁹ This is due to the fact that these categories “entail an active exclusion of groups of citizens or residents

³²⁷ This replica is based on Yiftachel's Figure 2.1, which appears in chapter two of *Ethnocracy* (2006). (Yiftachel 18)

³²⁸ (Yiftachel 19)

³²⁹ (Yiftachel 19)

represented as external by the prevailing discourse of the dominant nation”.³³⁰ The act of exclusion is supported by the enforcement of various public and political practices, socio-cultural norms, and legal restrictions on the excluded masses, which are typically “indigenous peoples or ethnically peripheral minorities.”³³¹ Additionally, certain groups portrayed as enemies of the state are also targeted (like the Arabs in the Israeli case).³³² Ironically, however, these collectivities are forcibly incorporated into the regime’s state-building mission.³³³ Yiftachel defines this process as “incorporation without legitimization”, which directly correlates to the “chronic instability” present in ethnocracies.³³⁴

Michael attempts to highlight these social tensions between different ethnonations in the Israeli ethnocracy through the relationship he creates between Huda and Alex. In chapter twenty-six of *A Trumpet in the Wadi (2003)*, Huda visits Alex’s grave after he is killed in the First Lebanon War. Speaking of their unborn child, she tells his grave:

“So you see, Alex...this will probably decide the issue. I mean the child’s future. If I bring him in the Arab society, will I have to tell him, before he hears it from others, that he was fathered out of wedlock by a Jew? Or should I raise him in Jewish society? In another eighteen years I will not be attractive and strong like Adina, sustained with warm care by parents and lover. Your mother even snatched away your trumpet before she returned the room to Abu-Nakhla. You can imagine what my position will be when the time comes to send your son to another war. He will want to join an elite unit. All his life he will try to prove himself, because his mother is Arab, and he will be a stranger among both Arabs and Jews.”³³⁵

³³⁰ (Yiftachel 19)

³³¹ (Yiftachel 19)

³³² (Yiftachel 19)

³³³ (Yiftachel 19)

³³⁴ (Yiftachel 19)

³³⁵ (Michael 243-244)

Adina is one of Huda’s coworkers at the travel agency. Her life is shaped by the death of her husband during wartime and the anxieties of losing her only son in the same manner. (Michael 17-20)

In this passage, Michal, through Huda, tries to show how religious and ethnic othering acts as the byproduct of the crisis of dual identity and forced assimilation in Israeli society. While Amir believes dual identity results in individual socio-cultural compromises, Michael highlights the strict limitations which restrict full assimilation with the dominant culture.³³⁶

The difficulty of social assimilation between Israeli Arabs and Jews is a major issue in Michael's work. This is evident in Jamilla's concern over Alex and Huda's problematic marriage:

"She turned to [Alex]. "If you and Huda should need a lawyer, my nephew will help you for free."

[Alex:] "Thank you, thank you very much."

Mother was alarmed. "God forbid! Why should they need a lawyer?"

Jamilla said, "He's a Jew and she's an Arab. The rabbis won't even look at her, and no priest will dare to give his blessing. You heard of civil marriage? No?

Where are you living?....When there is nothing doing with either rabbis or priests, you go to a lawyer."³³⁷

Here, Michael alludes to the reality of ethnic divisions between Israeli Arabs and Jews. For instance, as evident in Oren Yiftachel's *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine (2006)*, the Israeli state has made several religious restrictions to the civil law, such as the prohibition of civil marriage.³³⁸ This has, in turn, "deepened the chasm between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens".³³⁹ Nonetheless, the situation is not completely bleak in the present era. Yiftachel comments how, since the 1990s, "with the advent of judicial activism, the

³³⁶ Interestingly, Berg ties othering to the metaphoric use of adolescence in Sephardic immigrant literature. She states that "the notion of the "other" is central to the understanding of the development of adolescents" (Berg 91). She further writes that during "the normal course of development, young children become aware of the other as they develop their understanding of self" (Berg 91). So, during this period of time, teens "move away from [identifying with their] famil[ies] and grant the "other" outside greater significance" (Berg 91).

³³⁷ (Michael 165) Jamilla is Huda's elderly Arab neighbor in the Arab Quarter in Haifa.

³³⁸ (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 106)

³³⁹ (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 106)

system has increased its independence and protection of civil rights, presenting a growing (though partial) challenge to the state's overall Judaization".³⁴⁰

Michael is also cautiously optimistic. This is why the human factor plays such a strong thematic role in his work. For instance, after Alex is sent to war, Huda's mother marvels at how she could grow to love and even weep over a Jew who was "sent to kill [Arab] children".³⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Jewish othering of Arabs is a persistent theme in Michael's novel. Huda's relationship with Alex's Russian Jewish mother serves as a potent example of this phenomenon. For instance, after Alex's mother falls seriously ill during her stay at his apartment, she tells a terrified Huda:

"You are happy now.'
A first I [Huda] didn't catch the words, only the hatred in her voice.
'You are very happy now,' she reiterated. 'Arab whore, kills mother and takes son.'"³⁴²

Even more potently, in *More and More Equal* (2005), Berg theorizes that the true tragedy in Michael's novel is Huda's "calculating and realistic" decision against carrying her pregnancy to full term.³⁴³ For Berg, Huda's choice symbolizes the awakening "realization of the impossibility of [full] Jewish-Arab co-existence in the narrative present or its near future".³⁴⁴

Berg, however, is still carefully mindful of the social parallels Michael draws between the Arab and Jewish ethnations, especially in regards to the difficulties of social assimilation. For example, Michael gives Alex a narrative that develops separately from Huda's at certain

³⁴⁰ (Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 106)

³⁴¹ (Michael 235)

³⁴² (Michael 229)

³⁴³ (Berg 29-30); Huda's abortion isn't directly revealed:

"I am mad too, I've come, in full awareness of my insanity, to explain to Alex and apologize to him. Adina said nothing, the gynecologist was shocked, being himself a bereaved father. Mother wept, Grandpa's green eyes flashed when he said, 'I do hope for a grandson from you.' He must be crazy too, since he understood at once." (Michael 243)

³⁴⁴ (Berg, *More*, 30)

points.³⁴⁵ Despite dealing with the many problems of language acquisition, Alex is still successful in expressing the extent of his alienation, even as a Hebrew novice:

“Sometimes I ask myself, what I am doing here. Sometimes it is like walking into a cemetery at night. Sometimes I think nobody can understand me or hear me. There are days when I think that everything I can remember and is important to me will never be here. One day I felt so strange here, I almost wanted to finish. Because of you I want to live again.”³⁴⁶

Interestingly, Michael then ironically “establish[es] a rather lovely if unexpected link between...Alex and the grandfather”.³⁴⁷ This is most evident in the following passage:

“‘Yes, yes, thank you. Longing,’ [Alex] said, looking at [Huda]. ‘It is very sad to stand on roof and think about something far...’
 ‘You’re telling me,’ Grandpa said.
 ‘You are not new immigrant.’
 ‘Everyone has a long story of his own. I wasn’t born here either.’”³⁴⁸

As Berg points out, Grandfather Elias and Alex’s personal stories, which both prove to be significant and similar component to the structure of Michael’s narrative, helps the reader focus on their human parallelism, despite their differing ethnic backgrounds and cultures.³⁴⁹ Both of these characters spent most of their respective childhoods as orphans, both unwillingly emigrated to a new country, both had to learn Hebrew, and, most importantly, both are survivors of

³⁴⁵ (Berg, *More*, 30)

³⁴⁶ (Michael 155)

³⁴⁷ (Berg, *More*, 30)

³⁴⁸ (Michael 56)

³⁴⁹ (Berg, *More*, 30-31); Grandfather Elias and Alex’s stories are structurally similar because “in neither case are they fully integrated into the [main] narrative; each one is truer in style to its own substance than that of the larger framing narrative. This could partly be due to the fact that Michael’s 1987 published book is based on an earlier version from 1983 named “Pahadim”, which primarily focuses on Alex, called Rotem in this edition, and his Soviet background (Berg, *More*, 31-32). In addition, Grandfather Elias was meant to be the “original protagonist of the novel” (Berg, *More*, 118). Berg states that, due to issues with delayed publication, Michael was able to extensively rewrite much of this novel and rework many of his characters (Berg, *More*, 32).

hierarchical social structuring and assimilation.³⁵⁰ Berg writes that these commonalities “explain the sympathy between them”.³⁵¹ One important example of their mutual acceptance and friendship is Grandfather Elias’s welcoming nature towards Alex and his blatant disregard for categorical divisions between Jews and Arabs.³⁵²

With this in mind, it is arguable that Michael’s close engagement with these two specific characters stems from his own relatable experience as an immigrant to Israel, especially in regards to the difficulties of Hebrew language acquisition and dual identity. Michael again speaks through Alex to express such feelings:

“You don’t know what it is like to be new immigrant. Suddenly you are like child. You want to speak but it comes out like mud. I am same man, thinking thoughts of grownup, but when I open my mouth I think people are laughing. Like when I got the horrible specs. I speak Hebrew like child, so people think I think like child. In Russia, I talked like I think, quick and natural. Today I speak like...nu...like that animal with...yob-tvoimat! You see, I can’t explain simple things. What do I need this for?”³⁵³

Outside the world of fiction, Michael himself expresses similar views about the significant role language plays in the process of immigrant assimilation in Israel, which Berg carefully transcribes in *More and More Equal* (2005):

“I live in the Israeli reality that language is an integral part of it. People speak, think, and dream in Hebrew. There are writers from Iraq who continue to write in Arabic until today. It has a special quality when they write about Arabs in Iraq. [But] the moment that they write about the Israeli reality, one can sense the superficiality and the artificiality. That is to write as an exile in one’s own land....It was hard for me with

³⁵⁰ Michael also solidifies the social ties between his Arab characters and greater Israeli Jewish society by granting Grandfather Elias access to the Jewish religious mythology. In fact, his own mystical personal history reflects the legendary Biblical narrative of Moses in Egypt. Like Moses, Grandfather Elias also experienced “growing up without a family, being “forced” to kill a man, subsequently having to flee, and being saved by the Nile” (Berg, *More*, 31; Michael 120-125; NIV, “The Birth of Moses”/“Moses Flees to Midian”, Exodus 2: 1-25, 62-63). In this manner, Grandfather Elias’ story “establishes [his] status as an outsider, as well as underscores the [equal] transposition of Jews and Arabs” throughout time and space (Berg, *More*, 31). This is also a point that Said emphasizes in his work on Orientalism and its anti-Semitic gaze on both Jews and Arabs (Said 286).

³⁵¹ (Berg, *More*, 31)

³⁵² (Berg, *More*, 118)

³⁵³ (Michael 118-119)

Hebrew; it's not my mother tongue. I want a word, and it comes to me in Arabic or in English. In Hebrew I have to think. It takes time, like a stutterer who parachutes and by the time he counts to three he has already crashed to the ground.”³⁵⁴

Berg clarifies that Sephardic writers like Michael and Amir who chose to write in Hebrew (instead of Arabic) after immigrating to Israel from Arab countries did so out of their “desire to be part of the mainstream”, or, as Alba and Nee would argue, to successfully acculturate.³⁵⁵

These writers understood that they could only rightfully comment on contemporary social and political issues within Israeli society by establishing a strong personal relationship with

Hebrew.³⁵⁶ Nevertheless, as Michael illustrates in the excerpt above, these Sephardi writers who

³⁵⁴ (Berg, *More*, 47-48)

Originally from: Dalia Karpel. “Ohavim MeRehok VeHorgim MeRahok.” *Ha'ir* April 24, 1987.

³⁵⁵ (Berg, *More*, 46; Alba and Nee 829) In *Exile from Exile* (1996), Berg specifies that Amir has only written in Hebrew throughout his literary career (Berg 50).

³⁵⁶ (Berg, *More*, 46)

It is important to note that other members of Israeli minority literature, specifically Arab writers, have also chosen to write in Hebrew. As Reuven Snir explains in “‘Hebrew As Language of Grace’: Arab-Palestinian Writers in Hebrew’, several Arab-Israeli writers, like Anton Shammas, have actively decided to produce works in Hebrew (Snir, “Hebrew”, 163). This is especially interesting given the Israeli-Jewish ethnocracy’s attempts at absorbing ethnic and religious minorities “into a larger, collective, Hebrew-based culture” (Snir, “Hebrew”, 163). In “‘Hidden Transcripts’ Made Public: Israeli Arab Fiction and Its Reception”, Rachel Feldhay Brenner reveals the presence of such thinking within the contemporary Israeli literary movement itself. She uses A.B. Yehoshua, another prominent Israeli-Jewish novelist, as a prime example and shows how he incongruously spoke out against creating absolute peace between Israeli Jews and the Arab population because of its potential trigger for “Jewish internal discord” (Brenner, “Hidden Transcripts”, 85). He believes that the active use of Hebrew is chiefly related to the “preserv[ation] of Jewish identity” (Brenner, “Hidden Transcripts”, 85). Continuing in this greatly nationalistic vein, he even suggests that knowledge of Hebrew should become the primary criterion for Jews who want to qualify for Israeli citizenship, especially with the potential repeal of the Law of Return (Brenner, “Hidden Transcripts”, 86). The Law of Return was passed into law by the Knesset in 1950 and aims to give Jews immediate Israeli citizenship after making *aliyah* (Brenner, “Hidden Transcripts”, 86). Even though the Law of Return is seen as one of the core legal principles of the Israeli state, it is also understood by many scholars to be “the most fundamental in determining the discriminatory nature of rights distribution within Israel” (Brenner, “Hidden Transcripts”, 86).

Moreover, unlike Yehoshua, other minority authors bring forth more hopeful and compromising perspectives on Israeli ethnonational relations. For instance, the famous Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish rationalizes:

“The Israelis have changed the Palestinians and vice versa...Each dwells inside the other...The other is a responsibility and a test...”(Brenner, “Hidden Transcripts”, 86).

used Hebrew as a tool for social assimilation faced many difficulties: “it took time to achieve fluency, ingenuity to compensate for the comparatively limited vocabulary, and determination to prevent any intrusions on the part of the mother tongue”.³⁵⁷

With this statement, Darwish “contradicts Yehoshua’s exclusionary perception of Israeli identity” and passionately lays the groundwork for a possible hybridized third space of identity, which would familiarize the ‘Other’ in Israeli society (Brenner, “Hidden Transcripts”, 86). In “The Search for Identity in Israeli Arab Fiction: Atallah Mansour, Emile Habiby, and Anton Shammas”, Brenner adamantly writes that this third space of identity “is inextricably connected with the Hebrew language, which Arabs and Jews share” (Brenner, “The Search”, 91). She uses another quote from Darwish to bolster her argument:

“In [Hebrew]...I spoke with the stranger, with the policeman, with the military governor, with the teacher, with the jailer, and with my lover. [Hebrew] does not signify for me the language of the occupier, because it was the language of love and friendship....It opened for me the door to European literature....It is the language of my childhood memories. When I read in Hebrew, I remember the land; Hebrew brings back the landscape.” (Brenner, “The Search”, 91-92)

Shammas, however, goes beyond language intimacy and bluntly argues that Hebrew is no longer “the language of Zionism, the liberation movement of the Jewish people” (Snir, “Hebrew”, 164). Instead, he states, it has become the *lingua franca* of all sectors of Israeli society, penetrating ethnonational divisions (Snir, “Hebrew”, 164-165). Therefore, much like Amir, Michael, and other writers of Israeli minority literature, Shammas also shows interest in the connection between Hebrew and the process of ethnic deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Snir, “Hebrew”, 165). As Shammas explicitly explains:

“What I’m trying to do-mulishly, it seems-is to un-Jew the Hebrew language...to make it more Israeli and less Jewish, thus bringing it back to its [S]emitic origins, to its place. This is parallel to what I believe that state should be. As English is the language of those who speak it, so is Hebrew; and so the state should be the state of those who live in it.” (Snir, “Hebrew”, 165)

It is evident in the passage above that, like Amir and Michael, Shammas also is greatly concerned with issues of dual identity crisis and social assimilation. Indeed, he is attempting to “subordinate the Jewish values of the state to absolute democratic norms and present a utopian solution for the contradiction between the democratic ideal of a state that respects identities and rights of all its citizens, and the normative Israeli-Jewish cultural identity” (Snir, “Hebrew”, 165). Nonetheless, this “utopian solution” is highly unlikely because of the mostly unyielding nature of Israeli ethnocracy. This, however, does not mean that the future of Israeli ethnic relations is entirely hopeless. Michael, Darwish, and Shammas all demonstrate how possession of Hebrew language has lost its exclusive “coat of many colors” and has become more accessible to both Jew and Arab alike. As Grandfather Elias wittingly comments about Huda’s tutoring sessions with Alex:

“An Arab woman teaching a Jew Hebrew. Not bad.” (Michael 117)

Rachel Feldhay Brenner. ““Hidden Transcripts’ Made Public: Israeli Arab Fiction and its Reception.” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (1999): 85-108.

---.“The Search for Identity in Israeli Arab Fiction: Atallah Mansour, Emile Habiby, and Anton Shammas.” *Israel Studies* 6 (2001): 91-112.

Reuven Snir. ““Hebrew as the Language of Grace”: Arab-Palestinian Writers in Hebrew.” *Prooftexts* 15 (1995): 163-183.

³⁵⁷ (Berg 50)

Nevertheless, their persistence has shaped the increasingly more progressive, growingly inclusive outlook of Israeli youth, from both the majority and minority cultures. One prime example of this phenomenon is the response of many Mizrahi youth to the recent Arab Spring events of this past year. In a letter titled “Ruh Jedida: A New Spirit for 2011”, a group of young Mizrahim write words of encouragement and empathy to their peers in the surrounding Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa:

“We, as the descendents of the Jewish communities of the Arab and Muslim world, the Middle East and the Maghreb, and as the second and third generation of Mizrahi Jews in Israel, are watching with great excitement and curiosity the major role that the men and women of our generation are playing so courageously in the demonstrations for freedom and change across the Arab world. We identify with you and are extremely hopeful for the future of the revolutions that have already succeeded in Tunisia and Egypt. We are equally pained and worried at the great loss of life in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and many other places in the region.

Our generation’s protest against repression and oppressive and abusive regimes, and its call for change, freedom, and the establishment of democratic governments that foster citizen participation in the political process, marks a dramatic moment in the history of the Middle East and North Africa, a region which has for generations been torn between various forces, internal and external, and whose leaders have often trampled the political, economic, and cultural rights of its citizens.

We are Israelis, the children and grandchildren of Jews who lived in the Middle East and North Africa for hundreds and thousands of years. Our forefathers and mothers contributed to the development of this region’s culture, and were part and parcel of it. Thus the culture of the Islamic world and the multigenerational connection and identification with this region is an inseparable part of our own identity.”³⁵⁸

With this in mind, the research presented in this thesis (as well as the expression of ethnically empathetic thinking evident in the excerpt) demonstrates Halevi-Wise’s argument that “at this stage, it is impossible to isolate *Mizrahi* [as well as other Israeli minority] literature’s emerging

Michael himself rather colorfully declares that learning a new language is “more difficult than changing one’s sex” (Berg, *More*, 47).

³⁵⁸ Chana Morgenstern, trans. “Young Mizrahi Israelis Open Letters to Arab Peers.” *+972magazine*, April 24, 2011. Accessed July 15, 2011. <<http://972mag.com/young-mizrahi-israelis-open-letter-to-arab-peers/>>.

aesthetic achievements from the ethical, political, and historical implications...in response to shifting Middle Eastern configurations".³⁵⁹ It follows, therefore, that minority writers like Amir and Michael have, to varying degrees, lessened the blow of ethnocentric elements within Israeli society by offering working alternatives to ethnic othering both within Israeli ethnoclasses and between ethnonations.

³⁵⁹ (Halevi-Wise 63)

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תוכן עניינים

i.....תקציר (עברית ואנגלית).....

1.....פרק I. מבוא מתודולוגי לאמיר ומיכאל.....

פרק II. סוגיות של זהות חצויה ואסימילציה בספרות שנכתבת על ידי בני העדה הספרדית :

9.....הבנת האתנוקרטיה הישראלית.....

51.....פרק III. סיכום : התמודדות עם הסטיגמה הישראלית של יצירת בידול אתני-לאומי.....

75ביבליוגרפיה.....

תקציר

מומחים רבים להיסטוריה ישראלית וספרות ישראלית מתארים את העדה הספרדית (או העדה המזרחית) כמיעוט תרבותי ששואף להגן על המסורת והמורשת הערביות שלהם בישראל. בעשותה כך, העדה הישראלית הזו נאבקת גם נגד דעות קדומות חברתיות-אתניות על תרבות ספרדית-ערבית. חלק מאותן דעות קדומות נובעות מתפיסות עולם מערב-אירופאיות, כמו הציונות האירופאית, שמבוססות על הנחות תרבותיות מזרחניות רבות שיוצרות זרות של עדות המזרח. למעשה, לאחר עשיית עלייה במהלך השנים המכוננות (שנות ה-50'-60' המוקדמות של המאה ה-20), רבים מבני העדה הספרדית החלו לכתוב על הבעיות השונות שעמדו מולם כעולים חדשים בישראל, וכן גם על הסוגיות הדומות שחוו מיעוטים סוציו-דתיים ואתניים אחרים.

בעבודת תזה זו אתמקד בספרו של אלי אמיר "תרנגול כפרות" (1987) וספרו של סמי מיכאל "חצוצרה בואדי" (2003) בתרגומים לאנגלית, במטרה לבחון איך שני סופרים אלו, בני העדה הספרדית, ניסו להשיג לגיטימציה תרבותית לקשר שלהם לארץ ישראל באמצעות התמקדות בסוגיות ספציפיות של מיעוטים, כגון: משבר של זהות חצויה, האופי המפלה של יצירת זרות אתנית, והמאבק עם הדרישה לאסימילציה חברתית-כלכלית. בחינה של נושאים כאלו חשובה להבנת התפתחות ההיררכיה האתנית הרווחת בחברה הישראלית. למעשה, ניתוח ספרותי של שתי יצירות אלו מאפשר ליצור הקבלות ייחודיות לתפיסות ספציפיות חשובות שפותחו ו/או קשורות לתחום הגיאוגרפי-פוליטי. למשל, הריבוד האתני שנוכח בשתי היצירות יכול להיות מוסבר במלואו באמצעות עולם מושגים כדוגמת אתנוקרטיה, דמוקרטיה אתנית, תאוריית "כור ההיתוך", חילופי תרבויות, יצירת זרות ומזרחנות. לצורך עבודת תזה זו, אשתמש בכתביו של אורן יפתחאל על המאפיין הבינארי של האתנוקרטיה הישראלית, שמחלקת את החברה הישראלית לפי קווים אתניים-לאומיים (בין תרבות ישראלית לערבית) וסיווג אתני (בתוך החברה היהודית שהיא הדומיננטית). עם זאת, חלק גדול מעבודה זו יעסוק יותר בדילמות החברתיות-תרבותיות הקשורות לסיווג האתני הישראלי.

בהתאם לכך עבודת תזה זו מחולקת לשלושה חלקים: הפרק הראשון יספק מבוא תאורטי קצר וסקר ספרותי, בעוד שהפרק השני יספק בסיס לתאוריות פוליטיות שמופיעות במוקד תחום העיסוק של שני הסופרים, שהוא האסימילציה בכפייה והאסימילציה העצמאית – במיוחד הריבוד האתני של הישראלים היהודים. לבסוף, הפרק השלישי, שמהווה גם את פרק הסיכום, יעסוק בשימוש ביצירת זרות בספרות והקשרים שלו לאתניות-לאומיות. עבודת התזה מסתיימת באופן זה, מכיוון שלדעתי שיוך אתני נוצר על ידי דעות קדומות חברתיות שנוצרו על מנת ליצור הפרדה בין קבוצות אתניות-לאומיות שונות.

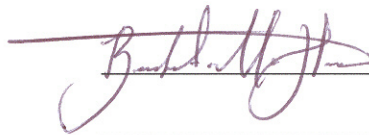
אוניברסיטת בן - גוריון בנגב
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המחלקה ללימודי המזרח התיכון

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אלי אמיר וסמי מיכאל

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(M.A.)

מאת: ביבה מת'יו
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פרופ' חניטה גוטבלאט

תאריך: 09/14/2011



חתימת הסטודנט:

תאריך: _____

חתימת המנחה: _____

תאריך: _____

חתימת המנחה: _____

תאריך: _____

חתימת יו"ר הועדה המחלקתית: _____

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