# Multicultural Realities

**by: Guy Ben-Porat**
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## Introduction

In their seminal book, *Trouble in Utopia* (1989), Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, two of Israel's leading sociologists, described Israel as an "overburdened polity." Growing tensions – ideological, national, ethnic, religious and economic – have made governance all but impossible. The cleavages of Israeli state and society have widened and deepened in the past two decades. Significant changes have transformed Israel demographically, economically and politically; raising significant debates and existential questions of identity, belonging and rights. In practice, even if not officially recognized, the fact that Israel has become a multicultural and multi-ethnic state is something with which the political system has been either unwilling or uninterested to contend.

These dilemmas are far from new and have been part and parcel of state and nation building, some since early Zionism. The role of religion in public life, economic ideologies, rights of non-Jewish citizens and frustrations of non-Ashkenazi immigrants demanding equality were constantly debated and contested. The economic and demographic changes, however, have not only produced new tensions but have also had implications for older ones. All objections had previously been successfully managed by the state through various methods of assimilation, co-optation and coercion. Now, however, the gaps appear beyond the state's control and threaten its ability to govern effectively. Thus, Israel, like many other states, faces dilemmas that stem from a multinational and multicultural reality in which cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities struggle for and against distinctive forms of recognition and accommodation and, consequently, create new challenges for the democratic regime.

Reports of the 2009 Independence Day events attest to some of the ongoing changes. While the majority of Israelis shared in the celebration, the religious extremists of Neturei Karta burned Israeli flags and declared it a day of mourning. A settler who was evacuated from the Gaza Strip four years earlier explained that he would not hang a flag on his house and Arab citizens commemorated the *Nakba* (catastrophe), the destructive events of 1948 (all reported on Y-NET, 29.4.2009). While the vast majority of Jewish Israelis do celebrate Independence Day, schisms, debates and struggles are parts of everyday life as they pertain to fundamental questions of identity, belonging and the public good.

# A Multicultural Reality

Contemporary democracies are engaging in a multicultural reality that challenges the existing order. This reality calls into question conventional understandings of national sovereignty, group identity, social justice and both group and individual rights (Tully, 2002). Cultural diversity and ethno-national politics are common to most contemporary states who, contrary to their image of homogeneity, must contend with a multicultural and at times multinational reality (Connor, 1994; Tully, 2002 ). The growing reality of multinational and multicultural creates new challenges for the democratic regime (Tully, 2000). Some states have shifted toward a more accommodating approach to diversity and have adopted "multicultural policies" that go beyond the protection of basic civil and political rights guaranteed to all individuals in a liberal democratic state (Banting and Kymlicka, 2003). Other states are still debating how to address the challenges of diversity and the multicultural reality.

The struggles associated with a multicultural reality and their outcomes depend not only upon what ethnic or religious groups want, but also upon which opportunities are offered by the state and what effects official policies and institutions have on ethnic identity and its political mobilization (Brass, 1985; Rothschild, 1981: 2). Focusing on the characteristics, attitudes and behavior of individuals and groups as causes of conflict often miss the crucial elements of the "playing field" that institutional theory stresses (Thalen and Steinmo, 2000). The institutions – which act as "rules of the game" - of both state and civic society are crucial in creating or cementing cultural or identity politics (Crawford, 1998) and consequently can be either a part of the problem or the solution. "Rules of the game", it must be stressed, often allow stability at the expense of justice. Thus, minority groups could chose, under the right circumstances, to challenge the rules and to sacrifice stability for what they may perceive as justice. Complexity is greater when different groups' struggles involve conflicting demands and competition between groups over the state material and symbolic resources.

Israel's Declaration of Independence (May 1948) proclaimed Israel a Jewish state but at the same time called upon the "Arab inhabitants" of the state to become full and

equal citizens. These two principles embedded in the declaration of independence –
a Jewish state and a democracy –entailed a differential set of policies for different
groups adopted in the early state period. Jewish immigrants were to assimilate into
Israeli culture and society by both shedding their diaspora identities and
modernizing. The Arab minority had not assimilated and various measures of control
and autonomy were employed to prevent it from asserting its demands. Finally,
religious struggles were settled by a series of agreements known as the "status quo"
which, on the one hand, provided autonomy for religious groups and, on the other
hand, granted them a monopoly on significant issues in public life.

 The ability of formulate and implement the "rules of the game" – religious, ethnic
and national – in early statehood is attributed to the hegemony of the [Labor
Party] (Mapai), and its control of the political system.  The Labor Party, who came to
dominate the Zionist movement, embodied the pioneering spirit of Zionism and the
redemptive activities of physical labor, agricultural settlement and military defense
(Horowitz and Lissak, 1978: 109). This hegemony has translated into political power
and the control of resources that re-enforced its position and enabled the creation of
a "political center" around which politics revolved. This powerful position, on the one
hand, and (with some additions and modifications in the first three decades of the
need (especially in the pre-state period) to ensure political support of all partners to
the Zionist project, underscored a series of arrangements and compromises between
the Jewish parties. These arrangements that secured the dominance of the Labor
Party as the center of politics continued statehood during which the Labor Party has
won all elections and was able to form the governing coalition.

In the 1970's the center began to implode under the pressure of various groups and
wider socio-economic changes that led not only to the defeat of the Labor Party but
also to the erosion of the "rules of the game" Associated with it. Consequently,
governments in the past two decades were unable to enforce the old rules of the
game, formal or informal, or to structure new ones. This inability could explain the
declining trust of Israelis in government institutions and the strengthening of the
major schisms. On the other hand, the structural changes of Israeli society suggest a
rethinking of its problems in the context of a multinational, ethnic and cultural
setting.

## Implosion of the Center

As a national movement, Zionism and the leading force within it, the Labor Party, sought to unite all Jews under the umbrella of national building projects. The Labor Party combined a socialist rhetoric, a collectivist ethos, a secular interpretation of Zionism and largely pragmatic attitude toward settlement and foreign policy. Its ideological dominance and control over resources in pre-statehood enabled it to foster pragmatic relations with most parties. The early period of statehood was still dominated by the collectivist ethos that overshadowed the existing and evolving cleavages. In practice, the Labor Party controlled the axis of the political system so that it was impossible to establish a government without it. Labor was always the primary ruling party in a coalition structure in which the junior partners could be replaced (Naor, 2008).

Since the early 1970s, the divisions in Israeli society began to display saliency. The waning of the Labor Party's dominance in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the growing discontent of groups previously marginalized in Israeli society and politics. The change was reflected first and foremost in voting patterns. In the 1977 elections the Labor Party was ousted after 29 years in power. The winning party, Likud under Menachem Begin, placed the idea of *"Eretz Yisrael ha'Shlema"* ("greater Israel") at the top of its platform and after the election announced its intention to increase Jewish settlements in the territories captured in the 1967 War. Indeed, the debate over the future of the territories unfolded into the central divide of Israeli politics; but not the only one. Other divisions include a growing resentment among Arab citizens, religious and secular tensions and various ethnic and class struggles. These divisions, previously managed by the state and the political center held by the Labor Party, have become deeper and presented great challenges for the new ruling coalitions, largely unable to replicate the dominance of the Labor Party.

## The Jewish State and the National Minority

The tensions between Arab citizens and the state reached their peak after the collapse of the Camp David summit in 2000. A series of demonstrations in Israel that followed violent events in the West Bank and Gaza escalated to open violence and

resulted in the deaths of thirteen demonstrators – Arab citizens, killed by the Israeli police. An inquiry commission established after the events found fault in the police actions and, more important, deeper structural issues:

The events, their exceptional character and their adverse consequences were the result of structural factors that caused an explosive situation among the Arab public in Israel. The state and the elected governments consistently failed to seriously engage with the difficult problems of a large Arab minority within a Jewish state. The government's treatment of the Arab sector was generally of neglect and discrimination. At the same time, not enough was done to enforce the law in the Arab sector. As a result of this and of other causes, the Arab sector suffered deep distress evident, among other things, in high levels of poverty, unemployment, shortage of land, problems in the education system and serious deficiencies in infrastructure. All those created ongoing discontent, heightened towards October 2000.

The Jewish-Arab cleavage is considered the deepest schism in Israeli society. Arab citizens are an un-assimilating working class minority and are considered by the Jewish majority as dissident and associated with the enemy (Smooha, 1989, 218). Non-Jews in Israel constitute close to 20 percent of the population or about 1 million people. They belong to three religious communities: Muslim (81%), Christian (9%) and Druze (10%). The Palestinian Arabs see themselves as having been placed under "extreme structural discrimination policies, national oppression, military rule that lasted until 1966, land confiscation policy, unequal budget allocation, rights discrimination and threats of transfer" (Future Vision, 2006). Their demands for equality and representation challenge some of the basic foundations of the state and encounter wide resistance by the majority committed to the idea of the Jewish character of Israel.

The definition of Israel as a "Jewish State," on the one hand, and its conflict with the Palestinians of the territories and the wider Arab world on the other, have significant ramifications for the status of the Palestinian Arabs within Israel. The Jewish character of the state, almost a consensus among the Jewish majority, implies that Palestinian Arabs are citizens of a state in which its symbols reflect the Jewish

majority's culture and are exclusive in nature. Beyond symbolic issues, the preference for Jews over non-Jews is anchored in laws that deal with immigration, use of state land and semi-governmental institutions (Rouhana, 1998). The exclusion of Arabs is justified by an "ethno-republican discourse of citizenship" (Peled, 1992) in which Jewish ethnicity is mandatory to be part of the community and one's contribution to the common good determines one's status in that community. Arab citizens are exempt from military service, which is considered the most significant contribution to the state and therefore cannot count as "good citizens." While the army status has declined in recent years social status and many social rights are still tied to the performance of military service, so that the lower status of Arabs can be excused by their non-contribution.

The exemption of Arab citizens from military service is a result of the wider conflict and the perception of the state of the Palestinian Arabs as a "fifth column." From the end of the war in 1948 until 1966, in spite of their formal citizenship, Arabs were placed under a military rule that limited their movement. The gradual relaxation of Israeli policies towards Arab citizens has not diminished the social gaps between them and the Jewish majority's economic, social and political marginalization (Gavison and Abu-Ria, 1999; Lustik, 1985; Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1993).

The politicization of Arab citizens was translated to various struggles designed to achieve individual equality and struggles for collective recognition. While individual equality can be achieved within the Jewish definition of the state according to some analysts (e.g., Smooha, 1992), collective claims of recognition (described as "Palestinization") challenge the foundations of the state. The demands, however, seem to interact as the failure to achieve individual equality could be a contributor to the consolidation of a Palestinian identity and collective claims, especially among the younger generation. The solidarity of Arab citizens with the Palestinians in the occupied territories was almost always within the confines of the law. They consistently advocated a solution of "two states" in which they remain citizens of Israel but demand wide reforms, namely annulling its Jewish character that would allow them to integrate or, at the very least, would provide them with some form of cultural autonomy (Ghanem, 2000).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on the one hand, underscored the largely negative and suspicious attitudes of Jewish Israelis toward Palestinian citizens and, on the other, presented a dilemma for Palestinian citizens between their interests as a minority within a Jewish state seeking integration and their commitment to their brethren's plight; a commitment that makes integration difficult. Integration, in other words, is withheld not only by the Jewish majority's exclusion but also by the Palestinian minority's difficulty to integrate in the state that holds Palestinians in the occupied territories under military rule. Accordingly, peace between Israel and the Palestinians, it was believed, could relax Israel's security dilemma and consequently, provide greater acceptance for Arab integration. In addition, it could also solve the Arab citizen's moral dilemma. Indeed, a research finding in the mid-1990s when Rabin's government made important strides toward equality for the Arab population, revealed "growing integration into Israeli society and politics on the one hand, and a growing distance from Palestinian identity and politics on the other" (Smooha, 1998).

Personal economic advancement has also failed to meet the expectations of the Palestinian minority. Education not only offered limited personal advancement but also created higher expectations and exposed the Arabs to their inferior status and the glass ceiling of the Jewish state. As a result, Arabs lag behind Jews in standard of living, public services and educational achievements. They suffer from higher poverty levels and unemployment, are concentrated in lower-skill and lower-pay jobs and are underrepresented in high-skill, bureaucratic and higher-status employment. While Jews are able to translate their educational achievements to higher status occupation, Arabs find it difficult to do so because of a lack of employment opportunities in Arab towns and villages as well as discrimination in the job market. Affirmative action initiatives in public services have so far had little influence on the representation of Arabs.

The demand for equality within Israel and growing Arab identification with the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza led to new modes of political expression. First, a growing tendency developed among Israeli Arabs, especially the younger generation, to define themselves as "Palestinians." Second, religious identity has strengthened and has become a new source of political expression in the Israeli-

Palestinian axis. Finally, a generational change has also occurred as younger Arabs feel confident enough to demand their rights as citizens of the state while also speaking openly of their relation to the Palestinians in the occupied territories and the Arab world in general. The gradual change has manifested not only in new Arab political parties but also in non-governmental organizations and academia. New political expressions include protests based on human rights discourse, attempts to use the courts in equality struggles and a critical examination of Israel's democratic regime.

Between December 2006 and May 2007 several "future vision documents" composed by Arab intellectuals and public figures were published, demanding, what they described as the transformation of Israel from an ethnic to a democratic state (Jamal, 2008). The documents provide a harsh critique of the Zionist Movement and the State of Israel in relation to the Palestinian nation, citizens of Israel and Palestinians in the territories, and call upon the State of Israel to adopt principles of corrective and distributive justice vis-à-vis the Palestinian minority (Jamal, 2008).  It is of special significance that the writers of the documents chose to refer to themselves as "Palestinian Citizens of Israel." Consequently, what the documents raise, among other things, are demands by a minority defined not only in terms of individual equality but also in terms of collective rights and recognition.

## Between Religious and Secular

The role of religion in public life is the second major debate among Israeli citizens as old agreements, formal and informal, no longer hold. Among Jewish Israelis there is a wide consensus that Israel should be a Jewish state; however, this means different things to secular and Orthodox Israelis. The former identify the "Jewish State" in terms of culture and nationality while the latter conception is of a theocracy. The disagreements translate into different questions over the role of *Halacha*, Jewish religious law, on the conduct of everyday life. These questions include, among others, the observance of Sabbath, the import and sale of non-kosher foods, the right of civil marriage and burial, the funding of Orthodox schools and the conscription of ultra-Orthodox Jews to the army. Social, economic, political and demographic changes since the late 1980's – the globalization of Israel's economy and society and the immigration from the Former Soviet Union - have made these

questions more acute. The deepening divide between religious and secular Jews, according to some scholars, poses a threat to Israel's social fabric (Etzioni-Halevy, 2002, 1).

Since the early period of Zionism, the controversy over the status of religion threatened the unity of the Jewish community and the development of state institutions. Secular and religious leaders agreed to a series of concessions, and the deferral of the most controversial issues (Cohen and Susser, 2000). Following independence, the new political leadership agreed to accept these earlier understandings. By freezing the "status quo," it was possible to avoid a split between secular and religious Zionists. Practically, this meant that in the new state *kashrut* (Jewish dietary rules) would be observed in public institutions, the Sabbath would be respected, ultra-orthodox men and women would be exempt from army service and the religious establishment would be the deciding voice for issues like marriage arrangements, conversion to Judaism and burial. Church and state, therefore, were not separated in Israel so that all citizens, regardless of personal belief, are under rabbinical jurisdiction in significant matters of their personal life. What was not resolved by the status quo was left to the political pragmatism of the leading secular and religious elites. Essentially, divisive issues were de-politicized either by transferring them to the local-municipal or judicial level, or by simply avoiding decisions (Don-Yehia, 1996; Cohen and Susser, 2000).

The majority of Israeli Jews do not define themselves as "religious" or "secular" but rather choose less encompassing categories such as "traditional" or "non-religious." The practice of religion, consequently, has had a large variation which has been motivated by personal history, folklore and ethnicity rather than by a commitment to religious law (Cohen, 2000: 30-31). Secular Jews, for whom Jewishness is an ethno-cultural identity, share a great deal in common with religious Jews in terms of both practices and collective commitments to Jewish continuity and often participate in religious rituals. This is even truer for Jews who do not follow many the rules of the Halacha but remain attached to tradition (Liebman and Susser, 1997, Levy et al 2000). Thus, people who shop on the Sabbath, and in so doing defy a religious commandment, often obey other commandments and perform religious rituals. They often fast on Yom Kippur, avoid eating non-kosher food and even attend synagogue

occasionally (Ben-Porat and Feniger, 2009).

The religious-secular status quo has crumbled in the past years under new pressures, despite the large number of Israelis who do not belong to either side of the continuum. In the Israeli parliament a steady growth can be observed in the power of the *Haredim* (Jewish ultra-Orthodox parties) and an opposing ideologically militant secular camp. Political debates over the questions of army conscription of religious Jews, gay rights, the sale of non-kosher food and commercial activity on Saturday are all part of a growing religious-secular struggle that seems to defy any attempt to find new compromises. One study described secular-religious relations in Israel as relations that "have gone from compromise to crises, from mitigating arrangements to aggravated strife, from bad to worse" (Cohen and Susser, 2000, xii). In a survey conducted in 1999 (before the outbreak of the Second Intifada), a clear majority of Israelis saw a greater danger in internal divisions than in the conflict with the Palestinians (60% compared to 30%), and 62% of the respondents indicated that the schism between Orthodoxy and secularism overshadowed all others (Peace Index, 2000). While in the past decade security concerns and the Jewish-Arab schism dominate the political debate, the major religious-secular debates have not been resolved.

The status quo is challenged by four interrelated changes. The first is a liberal secularism aimed at church-state separation and protection and creation of civic rights. A growing number of Israelis, especially of the younger generation, reject the limitations of the status quo and demand that the state provide for civil marriage, civil burial and recognize Reform and [Conservative](#) Judaism. In addition, new trends of "secular Judaism" seek to reinterpret the meaning of being Jewish. This struggle has recently shifted away from the formal political arena towards private decisions of consumption, leisure or, in case of marriage, to marry outside of Israel or to raise a family without getting married (Ben-Porat, forthcoming).

The second challenge comes from the mass immigration from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) since the early 1990's. The fact that many of the immigrants are not considered Jewish by Orthodox definition and that a vast majority maintain a secular lifestyle has only added to the growing trend of secularization. A large number of

immigrants and their children who are not halakhically Jewish cannot marry in Israel unless they go through an Orthodox conversion. The immigrants' demand for non-Kosher food has led to the establishment of supermarkets and delicatessens that cater to the tastes of immigrants, much to the dismay of many religious citizens. These commercial institutions also satisfy the demands of many secular Israelis whose leisure and consumption patterns no longer conform to the status quo (Ben-Porat, forthcoming).

The third significant challenge to the status quo is the development of a consumer society whose practices undermine that status quo. In the early years of statehood, limitations on commercial activity were easier for the secular public to accept because its lifestyle and means were more modest. Globalization and the development of a western-type consumer society in the 1990s created new incentives for both secular and traditional Jews that challenged the status quo. Thus, while for observant Jews the Sabbath is a day of worship and prayer that includes a prohibition on business, commercial activities and travel, for secular Jews it is a day whose meaning is in the hands of individuals. As a result, more and more commercial establishments are operating on the Sabbath. Shop owners have found different ways to circumvent the prohibition of operating on the Sabbath. While government inspector's fines stores that operate on the Sabbath, for violating laws that prohibit employment of Jews on Sabbath, store owners were initially not deterred by the relatively low fines and, when fines were raised, began to employ non-Jewish workers as salespersons.

The fourth challenge to the status quo is the link that developed between the religious-secular divide and the territorial question. The religious national party cooperated until the middle of the 1970s with the Labor Party, a cooperation based on the religious-secular status quo and the relatively moderate positions of both parties on questions of national security and foreign policy. After 1967, the two parties drifted apart as a younger national religious population took the lead in the settlement of the occupied territories. This movement was led by an extra-parliamentary movement called *Gush Emunim*. Its opposition, the leftist-dovish parties and extra-parliamentary movements were dominated by secularists. Thus, the religious-secular divide was overlapped by an ideological difference that

increased the rift between the sides and made compromise and cooperation all the more difficult.

In the political arena, religious-secular conflicts became more intense and deadlocked. In the 1980s, ultra-orthodox (Haredi) parties which had maintained some distance from the ideological debate found themselves in a new position as coalition bargaining enabled them, among other things, to receive state funding for their educational institutions. The rise of *Shas*, an ultra-Orthodox Sephardic (or "Mizrahi") party that originally gained its power from the lower-class Sephardi's added to the tensions. Unlike the other ultra-Orthodox parties that refrained from taking ministerial position that would put them in charge of "secular" affairs, *Shas* has chosen to hold offices. This has set them against, first and foremost, an emerging party of the immigrants from the FSU in a fight over the control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the late 1990s, a secular-liberal party, "Shinuy" (change), was formed so as to "liberate Israel from religious control. The religious-secular debate has subsequently turned even more heated with demands to separate church and state, allow a secular marriage ceremony and cancel or significantly limit the exemptions from army service given to ultra-Orthodox men. The Shinuy party success was short termed and it disappeared from the political map in the 2006 elections but the religious-secular debates continued in the parliament and elsewhere.

Socio-demographic and economic changes that contributed to secularization were matched, therefore, by the formal status and political power of religious groups. In the official political sphere this resulted in a deadlock as the secular population could ignore much of the limitations imposed by the status quo – marriage, food consumption and the Sabbath – but were unable to change its rules. In addition, questions regarding drafting the ultra-orthodox to the army and resource allocation to religious institutions continued to be a source of frustration. The Orthodox parties retained their formal monopoly over major issues such as marriage and divorce, but were frustrated themselves by the lack of enforcement. The religious parties also saw their communities endangered by the expanding sale of non-Kosher meat and the conducting of commerce on Saturday.

The status quo, therefore, has eroded in the past two decades and no longer provides the guideline for the rules of the game for either side. Consequently, "[r]ather than an accommodation of each other's needs in the interest of preserving national unity, a majoritarian, winner-take-all style has grown more and more dominant" (Cohen and Susser, 2000: xii). The erosion of the status quo, therefore, not only makes the enforcement of existing rules difficult but also undermines the possibility of establishing newly agreed upon rules.

## Ethnicity

Ethnicity in Israel is usually refers to the division between *Ashkenazim* (Jews of European descent) and *Mizrachim* (Middle Eastern and North African Jews, sometimes referred to as *Sepharadim* or Oriental). This division, emerging shortly after statehood with the mass immigration of Jews from Arab countries, is reflected in voting patterns and political orientations and is related to religious and political schisms described above. Israel's nation and state-building ethos negated ethnicity in favor of a common Jewish-Israeli identity that was to override all other identities and affiliations. Gradually, however, ethnicity came to the fore through various political expressions, some indirect and interlinked with other divisions (religion, class and voting patterns) and some, in later years, in direct political and social initiatives that challenged the existing order. Another more recent ethnic division has occurred between veteran Israelis and the newcomers from the FSU who also display the characteristics of an ethnic community.

The vast majority of *Mizrahim* immigrated to Israel after its independence in 1948. The new immigrants who had few connections in the new land also suffered discrimination from the veteran Ashkenazi population who viewed Mizrahi culture with disdain. The veteran elite saw itself as a leader of a pioneering enterprise that included physical labor, agricultural settlement and military self-defense. The newcomers after the establishment of the state were to become part of this pioneering ethos in which the veterans already held leading positions. The state and institutions embarked on a project of assimilation that sought to transform the cultural identity of new immigrants but, at the same time, socially marginalized the newcomers as many of the Mizrahi immigrants were either sent to settle the periphery or to become manual laborers of the developing economies. In the early

years of statehood an "ethnic gap" was formed
between *Mizrahim* and *Ashkenazim* that was reflected in patterns of residency, educational attainment, occupational status and income distribution.

In the early years of statehood, beside largely failed attempts to form Mizrahi parties and social movements, the majority of *Mizrahim* voted for the dominant Labor Party. After 1973, however, the majority of *Mizrahim* voted for the Likud. As an opposition party with a stronger nationalist agenda the Likud was able to appeal to the *Mizrahim* who were frustrated with their secondary status in Israeli society. It was the Likud's ability to present itself as a representative of the disadvantaged *Mizrahim* (in spite of its liberal economic orientation) against the hegemony of [Mapai](#) that enabled it to win the 1977 elections and remain in office for another 15 years. The disappointment with the economic policy of the Likud Party, and the growing economic gaps, led to the formation of Shas, a Mizrahi orthodox religious political movement, mentioned above. In addition, NGOs, largely secular and often dovish in their political orientation have been organized to promote social, economic and cultural justice for *Mizrahim*. In a high profile campaign, the *Mizrahi Rainbow Democratic Coalition* (Hakahet) successfully challenged in the Supreme Court policies of land allocation that favored descendants of the veteran elite.

Unlike the Mizrahi groups, immigrants from the former USSR that arrived in the 1990s were quick to organize politically and socially and to use their human capital and the relaxation of the state's assimilationist perception to protect their cultural identity. Thus, a "Russian" political party was formed shortly after the mass immigration of approximately one million Soviet Jews began to arrive. In addition, cultural and commercial institutions were formed to satisfy various needs and demands of the immigrants. Because of a strong feeling of cultural superiority, the immigrants demanded to preserve their Russian cultural heritage and to dictate their terms of integration into Israeli society. From the majority perspective, the Russian immigrants were at times perceived not only as competitors in the labor market but also as a threat to "cultural-religious space" (Horowitz and Leshem, 1998; Remennick, 2007). Overall, Russian Jews hold hawkish, economic liberal and secularist opinions together with an ethnic identity that keep them connected yet separated from the veteran society (Philipov, 2007).

Ethnicity, politicized and organized, has both material and symbolic aspects. Both *Mizrachim* and Russians highlight past injustices and contemporary statistics to demand equality and fair distribution of resources. Ethnic groups are also concerned with cultural-symbolic issues of representation. Thus, in recent years Mizrahi activists have raised demands related to school curriculum and the teaching of history, demanding to recognize Mizrahi culture in public life. While some of these demands were framed in religious terms through the Shas Party, others were made by secular activists who outlined their demands in terms of multicultural recognition and justice. Russian immigrants have placed fewer demands upon the state for recognition and have instead formed their own schools, media, and cultural outlets that maintain their cultural distinction.

## Conclusions

Nationalism, religion and ethnicity are the central fault lines in Israeli society, but are often overshadowed by the "territorial debate" between hawks and doves. The fault lines also overlap. Religious Jews tend to be more hawkish than secular Jews. *Ashkenazim* tend to be more secular and dovish than *Mizrachim*. Russian immigrants are secular, but also more hawkish than the veteran Ashkenazi group. Class is also a factor in these divisions; the Arab minority and the ultra-Orthodox are the poorest groups in Israeli society, while *Ashkenazim* are more represented in the upper economic circles than the *Mizrahim* and the Russian immigrants. Class identity, however, is rarely, if ever, universal in Israel and is separated along ethnic and national lines of identity.

While the cleavages described above – national, religious and ethnic – are interrelated and overshadowed by the territorial debate, each division also has a life of its own, translated into demands, struggles and initiatives. Overall, as argued above, previous arrangements are no longer sufficient for the various groups. Accordingly, the demands raised by Arab citizens, religious and secular Israelis and ethnic groups underscore the perception of the "overburdened polity." These cleavages contain both material and symbolic aspects as they relate to struggles over resource allocation and recognition and to attempts of groups to shape public life or to protect their own way of life.

Engagement with its old-new multicultural reality will be a major challenge for the Israeli state and society. The outcomes of these struggles, no longer contained by a dominant center, will depend not only on the demands of ethnic, national or religious groups, but also on the opportunities offered by the state and the ability of Israel's democratic regime to accommodate the challenges. Institutionally, new forms of representation will have to be created and new spaces will need to be devised in order for groups to maintain their identity and for the political system to re-assert its legitimacy and enhance its capacity to govern. This will include reforms of the institutions related to everyday life: Education, health and security as well as that of the "rules of the game" of the political system itself. These changes are likely to be crucial to the shape and form the struggles take in the next years and for the future of state and society in Israel.

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