

Migration To Israel: The Mythology of “Uniqueness”

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the widespread assumption that immigration to Israel is a unique phenomenon which differs structurally from migration to other places. This assumption stems from the view that migrants to other destinations generally leave a place they consider home to find a new home. In terms of the Israeli construction, Jews have been “strangers” in their countries of origin and seek to find a new home by means of migration.

The Law of Return (1950), which established an open-door policy for Jews and extensive support benefits for immigrants in a context of presumed social consensus, has generally been thought to be *sui generis*. The article considers evidence that shows that in the 1980s and 1990s, Israel is becoming more like other Western countries which admit large numbers of refugees, asylum seekers, foreign workers, persons seeking family unification and diaspora migrants.

As in other migration societies, multi-ethnicity poses problems of cultural integration and some groups seek actively to retain major elements of their earlier cultural heritage.

Immigrants have become an identifiable political force to be reckoned with. There is more overt questioning within the society of the open-door policy for Jewish immigrants than in previous years. Nevertheless, the tradition of “uniqueness” remains strong in the sociology of migration in Israel. Consideration of the empirical reality at the end of the 1990s suggests that the sociology of migration in the Israel context has many important parallels in other societies and is best understood in a global context of theory and practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration has been a major social issue in Israel for well over 50 years. Indeed, its centrality in the value context of the society goes back to well before the establishment of the state in 1948 (Leshem and Shuval (Eds), 1998). From its earliest stages, the notion of migration to Israel has been socially constructed as a unique phenomenon. Migrants to other destinations generally leave the place they consider home to find a new home; in the Israeli case, Jews were viewed as “strangers” in their countries of origin and sought to find a new home by means of migration (Benski, 1994; Markowitz, 1993). This view is reflected in the Law of Return enacted in 1950, which established an open-door policy for Jews and extensive support benefits for immigrants in a context of presumed social consensus surrounding the topic which has generally been thought to be *sui generis*. The notion that Israel is unique in the field of migration is not limited to Israeli sociologists. Many non-Israeli scholars in the field of migration believe that Israel does not face most of the issues that typify other societies characterized by large-scale immigration (discussion during the International Workshop on Immigrant Absorption: The Interface between Research and Policy Making, Technion, Haifa, May 30-June 2, 1993).

As a subject of research in Israel, immigration has not escaped the strong value connotations associated with it in the broader social and political context of the society. One of the central goals of the society since its inception has been to encourage and facilitate immigration of Jews and make possible their full integration into the society. The Law of Return expressed this by stating that Jews have a “natural right” to return to their historic homeland; thus every Jew has the right to settle in Israel and automatically acquires Israeli citizenship upon arrival. *Ius Sanguinis* – law of the blood – (Castles and Miller, 1993) determines eligibility for citizenship by means of an ascriptive, ethnic-religious criterion based on identification which includes Jews, children and grandchildren of Jews and their nuclear families, even if the latter are not Jewish. These criteria are established by means of written, documentary evidence or legal testimony (DellaPergola, 1998).

In the context of the culture, “immigration” is an ideologically charged concept which is expressed in the ongoing rhetoric: immigration is *aliya* (going up) while emigration is *yerida* (going down). The former is socially defined as a positive act worthy of support and approbation, while the latter was viewed for many years with derision or even outright hostility. Discourse on this topic has systematically utilized the value-laden terminology and has avoided the more neutral term “migration” (*hagira*) which appears only rarely in the widespread discourse on this subject in both public and private spheres. Such rhetoric has reinforced a sense of difference between processes of migration to Israel and migration to other destinations. This ideology and its supportive rhetoric have their roots in the pre-state period and have created a supportive mythology

which has persisted to the present, although *yerida* is presently accompanied by less derision than in the past.

Since the 1980s, the notion of Israel's uniqueness with regard to immigration has seemed less and less appropriate. Increasingly the society is characterized by the same attributes that typify other Western countries which admit large numbers of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, foreign workers and persons seeking family unification, such as the US, UK, France, Canada, Australia and Germany. There are growing parallels with other societies in which migration is a dominant social process. It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that the “uniqueness” of Israel in the migration context is largely a myth and that contemporary theories of migration in post-industrial societies are more relevant than many have realized in understanding processes occurring in Israel. Indeed, pervasive mythology has obscured the fact that many of the processes that have become more visible in recent years were also present in the past, but were widely perceived as temporary or marginal to the socially-constructed reality.

MIGRATION IN POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES

Until the 1980s and 1990s, migration theory was based on the widespread “individual relocation” approach which emphasized push-pull factors and focused separately on rational decision-making, transitions and adaptation processes. These early theories were largely ahistorical and referred to tendencies to move from densely to sparsely populated areas, from low to high-income areas or in response to fluctuations in the business cycle. Political and religious threats or overt persecution generated populations of “refugees” which were distinguished from the category “migrant”. Early migration theory emphasized economic factors, social order and equilibrium and focused on the inability of countries of origin to fulfil expectations. In considering the consequences of migration, they tended to concentrate almost entirely on the countries of destination and assumed unilinear processes of acculturation and assimilation. Conflict was seen as a temporary expression of dislocation in the normal ordered state of host societies (Castles and Miller, 1993; Heisler, 1992; Zolberg, 1989).

As structural changes have occurred in contemporary societies, recent theoretical approaches to migration have taken the view that, in its broadest context, migration in the 1980s and 1990s can be viewed as a stable, international phenomenon with a structure over space and time. It is widely believed that the massive dimensions of migration in the late 1990s will continue in future years, although the origins and destinations of the streams may change in accordance with shifts in economic and social conditions. Population pressures, environmental deterioration, poverty and human rights abuses are among the ongoing

causes of population movement. The continued disadvantages of the Third World, and the end of the Cold War which opened the boundaries of East European countries, have exacerbated ethnic and national conflicts. These have combined to generate vast numbers of refugees and immense populations seeking to move. In 1995, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that 14.4 million persons are considered refugees, which means that they are outside their country of citizenship and are unable to return for fear of political persecution; another 36 million, who are not formally defined as refugees, have been displaced from their homes but remain within the boundaries of their countries. Thus it is clear that streams of international migration are ongoing and respond to political, social and economic changes in an expanding global economy (Massey et al., 1993; *Migration News*, December, 1995).

Recent thinking has referred to “international migration systems” theory, which proposes a dynamic, historically-based, globalist view in which many states are interdependent in the migration process (Massey et al., 1993; Zolberg, 1989). Migration is driven by structural characteristics of societies and tends to generate its own dynamics. The principal structural issues that drive migration in the 1990s are global inequality, the refugee crisis in many parts of the world, use of cheap foreign labour and liberalization of exit from Eastern European countries. The nation state is a prime actor in contemporary migration theory, especially with regard to its role in policy formation and control of the flow (O’Brien, 1992).

Migration theories can be categorized into two groups: those that refer to the *initial* motivation for migration and those that refer to the *ongoing* nature of the migration process (Heisler, 1992). In the former there is an emphasis on globalization processes which are seen in the political and economic context of an expanding global economy. Migration is viewed as a response to the flow of capital, technology, institutional forms and cultural innovations in an interactive process across the globe. In the second category theories refer to the linkage of countries by flows and counter-flows of people in sets of networks which are both interdependent and independent of each other. These processes reflect the historical context of links between origins and destinations which are based on earlier colonization, political influence, trade, investment or cultural ties – as well as the present economic, social and political contexts. The inherent social – rather than predominantly economic – quality of the process is emphasized by a focus on networks which are micro-structures viewed by some theorists as the core of the process because of their role in providing assistance at the destination in job location, financial support, practical information and a base for the migration of additional dependants. The ongoing nature of the process is seen in the fact that the larger the number of people who migrate, the thicker the social networks at destinations and the consequent amount of available help; this tends to decrease the costs and risks of migration

for others from the same origin. Policies of "family reunification" reinforce these networks. The "culture of migration" has made the process increasingly acceptable and cumulative in many parts of the world where the notion of migration is more and more of a community value (Castles and Miller, 1993; Fawcett, 1989; Hammar, 1989; Heisler, 1992; Kritz and Zlotnik, 1992; Massey et al., 1993; O'Brien, 1992; Portes, 1989; Salt, 1992; Teitelbaum and Weiner (Eds), 1995).

Migration in post-industrial societies is distinguished by its extreme diversification in terms of the many *types* of contemporary immigrants. These include a wide variety of cross-cutting categories and people may shift over time from one type to another. Some of the most prominent categories of migrants are: permanent settlers, temporary workers and seasonal workers; refugees and asylum seekers; legal and illegal immigrants; persons who come for purposes of family reunion; skilled and unskilled persons of varying social class backgrounds; professionals and managerial workers; persons of urban and rural origins; wage earners and entrepreneurs; many varieties of ethnic groups. In addition to the above types, there has been reference to immigrants from diasporas seeking to return to their homelands (Carmon, 1996; Kubat, 1983; Portes, 1989).

With minor exceptions, migrants are admitted selectively in terms of policies that consider unemployment rates, labour shortages or surpluses in specific sectors of the economy, potential social conflict, security issues and family reunion. However, despite the fact that no country is obligated to accept refugees or migrants, many developed countries have recognized a moral, humanitarian obligation to do so within the limits of their self-interest.

Within this context, extensive illegal immigration characterizes many of the receiving societies. This phenomenon poses a major threat to the authority and power of the state since it represents a loss of control in the flow of people and goods over borders. The permeability of borders has become a major political issue in Germany, France, the US and Israel and is expressed in heated political debate, discussions in the media and less-than-successful efforts at control by governments (Baldwin-Edwards and Schain, 1994; Carmon, 1996; Center for Immigration Statistics, 1995; *Migration News*, November 1995).

Illegals generally take the least desired jobs on the market, make their living in the "informal" sector and satisfy employers' demands for cheap labour. In Western Europe, where there has been high unemployment during the 1980s and 1990s, there is fear that immigrants pose a job threat; there is also concern with rising Islamic fundamentalism and increasing crime rates which have been attributed to migrant populations. Humanitarian concerns have been compromised for security considerations by seeking to impose tighter controls on the entry of illegal immigrants while at the same time seeking measures to

encourage policies in the countries of origin that will curtail the initial causes of the flow. In the US, the public is frequently unable to distinguish legal entrants, illegals and asylum seekers. It is widely believed that illegal immigrants are a source of narcotics trafficking, terrorism and crime; many see them as a burden on the economy and the welfare system. Fearing cultural differences, job competition at low wages, rapidly increasing costs for schools, welfare, health, and police, large segments of the public have expressed increasing hostility and reluctance to admit all forms of migrants (Teitelbaum and Weiner (Ed.), 1995; Zolberg, 1989).

Efforts to control massive illegal immigration, and to make it harder for asylum seekers to settle permanently, differ from country to country. Measures used include limitations on such benefits as welfare payments, tax and housing assistance, family support, student loans and medical treatment, as well as penalties on employers who provide jobs for illegals. But as long as there is widespread deprivation and unemployment in the sending countries, and the demand for cheap labour continues in the formal and informal markets of the receiving countries, it will be extremely difficult to contain or control illegal immigration (Carmon, 1996).

Teitelbaum and Weiner (1995) note that in the long run a high proportion of temporary migrants become permanent settlers. Despite a system of fines on airline companies which bring persons without entry visas to European points of entry, once a person manages to reach Europe, he can be fairly confident that, with legal advocacy and civil rights protection, the sluggish process of asylum adjudication in democratic countries can last almost indefinitely (Massey et al., 1993; Teitelbaum and Weiner (Eds), 1995).

When there are barriers to entry but large numbers of people seek to migrate, a lucrative niche is created for the establishment of special institutions relating to migration. These include private entrepreneurs who provide a variety of services and supports for legal and illegal migrants. They encompass business enterprises and humanitarian organizations but also an array of black market enterprises. These offer a variety of counselling, legal advice, social services and protection to immigrants; such bodies provide labour contracts between employers and migrants, counterfeit documents and visas, arranged marriages, housing and credit for legal and illegal immigrants. The result is that governments are increasingly at a loss to control the entry of immigrants or their continued stay within their borders (O'Brien, 1992).

Large numbers of immigrants may themselves constitute a political power in the host country. Their interests may dictate that they lobby for the admission of groups from specific countries of origin or for limitations in the numbers of immigrants. Large numbers make for influence and power on other public issues as well.

IS MIGRATION TO ISRAEL “UNIQUE”?

While Israeli demographers have sought to place migration to Israel in the context of more general historical processes of Jewish migration to a variety of destinations (DellaPergola, 1998), the sociological community in Israel has focused almost exclusively on the local context, generally emphasizing its uniqueness and only infrequently challenging the mythology surrounding this notion (Shuval and Leshem, 1998). The following analysis considers migration to Israel in a broader, global context.

Diaspora migration

Germany provides an interesting comparison with Israel in the area of immigration. Martin (1994: 189) states that Germany’s leaders have declared that “the Federal Republic of Germany is not, nor shall it become, a country of immigration”. Nevertheless, the facts are that during the period 1960 to 1989 West Germany admitted a higher ratio of immigrants per thousand of its population than did Israel. Between 1965 and 1994 (which includes the period of reunification of Germany as well as the immigration to Israel of over 600,000 persons from the former Soviet Union), the mean of the yearly rate of immigrants per thousand population was only slightly higher to Israel than to Germany (11.9 and 11.2 per thousand population, respectively). Judged by this criterion, both countries are among the world’s highest in their rates of immigration (DellaPergola, 1998) (Table 1, page 24).

The German parallel is especially interesting with regard to the concept of diaspora immigration, one of the many types of immigration that typify post-industrial societies (Carmon, 1996; Portes, 1989). The notion of diaspora, which in the past was generally exemplified by Armenians, Greeks and Jews, has been expanded in recent years to include many other groups of immigrants, expatriates, refugees, displaced persons, guest workers, exiles and overseas communities. Thus there is a Black diaspora and a Russian diaspora, the latter resulting from the collapse of the unitary Soviet state which has transformed 25 million Russians living in the non-Russian sector (Latvia, Ukraine, Georgia, Kasakstan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia) into minorities with a profound identity crisis (Kolsto, 1996). The construct “diaspora”, which is based on a feeling of connectedness to a prior home, frequently carries political overtones referring to alleged wrongs and consequent entitlements, and in some cases is “invented” to achieve specific goals (Clifford, 1994).

While diaspora migration is extremely prominent in Israel, it is not unique to that society and there are other countries in which this type of migration occurs. In Israeli rhetoric, the concept “immigrants” is defined as persons returning to their historic homeland and “fatherland” where their identity is tied to a

territorially bounded collective entity through an ascriptive, legitimate connectedness (Pilkington, 1996). In the context of contemporary migration theory, Israel meets the full set of criteria for diaspora migration proposed by Chaliand and Rageau (1991): forced dispersion, retention of a collective historical and cultural memory of the dispersion, the will to transmit a heritage, and the ability of the group to survive over time. Some migrant communities seek to sustain and transmit a narrative of exile with sufficient appeal and durability that even individuals who migrate for economic or personal reasons are drawn into a “culture of the diaspora”. Although at any one time the above criteria are not necessarily accepted by *both* migrants and hosts, they undoubtedly represent the ideology, practice and social construction of reality of the policy-making establishment in Israel which defines Jews as exiles in their countries of origin who feel a sense of homecoming upon immigration to Israel. It is this social construction that legitimizes the unconditional acceptance of immigrants into full membership in the society upon arrival (Ben-Rafael, Olshtain and Gejst, 1995).

The return of *Aussiedler* to Germany after World War II provides an additional example of diaspora migration. Given the history of the Holocaust, it is paradoxical that the notion of diaspora migration is most applicable to Ethnic Germans, or *Aussiedler*, persons whose parents or grandparents were admitted to the German Reich as refugees or expellees of German stock by 31 December, 1937. According to German law, persons who are of German ethnicity without having German citizenship are considered German. Such identity is confirmed by lines of descent, language, education and culture. Article 116, paragraph 1 of the German Basic Law provides that they and their children remained German citizens even though they may have become Polish, Romanian or Soviet citizens as a result of exile or the occupation of German territories by these countries. In addition, *Ubersiedler*, persons from the German Democratic Republic, were defined as citizens when they managed to enter West Germany before unification of the two Germanys in 1990 (Halfmann, 1997). By the ascriptive criterion of *ius sanguinis*, these persons have the right to enter Germany and attain immediate citizenship, voting rights, unemployment payments, and other benefits including special language courses. On the formal level, they are not viewed as foreigners or as immigrants but as returnees to their rightful homeland. They do not require a work permit to obtain employment. Indeed, since they are full-fledged citizens, they are not categorized as a separate entity in the official records and there is a paucity of statistics regarding their ongoing integration (Mehrlander, 1994).

Four million such persons remained outside Germany in 1950. In 1988, 200,000 ethnic Germans resettled in Germany and in 1989 and 1990 close to 400,000 entered Germany each year. They came from Poland, the former Soviet Union and Romania (Martin 1994; Mehrlander, 1994).

The structural parallels between Israel and Germany in their open door policies regarding the admission of diaspora immigrants are striking in terms of social construction of the situations and the consequent definition of criteria for admission. The resettlement of ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union started under Adenauer but became fully effective after Gorbachev took power in 1985. Until 1992 there was no limit on the number of *Aussiedler* that could settle in Germany but in that year fully half the entrants were registered as unemployed (Mehrlander, 1994: 21-23). In 1993, the number of entrants was limited to 225,000 a year (Castles and Miller, 1993; Martin, 1994). In 1997, it was estimated that 3 million ethnic Germans remained in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Halfmann, 1997).

The “open door” policies based on ascriptive criteria in the two societies have been accompanied by some interesting differences and similarities in their consequences. In terms of sheer size, there are important differences in the proportion of diaspora immigrants relative to host populations in the two societies. At its establishment in 1948, the Jewish population of Israel numbered 716,700. During the first three years after independence, the population more than doubled as a result of the entry of over 700,000 immigrants. In more recent years – between 1989 and 1995 – 750,000 immigrants arrived, largely from the former Soviet Union, increasing the population of 5 million by approximately 15 per cent (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996). In Israel, *all* Jewish immigrants are defined formally as diaspora immigrants. Although Germany in recent years may be viewed as a country characterized by rates of immigration which at times have exceeded even those of Israel, ethnic Germans are a relatively small proportion of the total who enter that country as asylum seekers, foreign workers and under the category of family unification. Between 1989 and 1996, about 2 million ethnic Germans settled in Germany, comprising about 2.5 per cent of the population of 81 million (*Migration News*, March, 1996: 18). The *Aussiedler* are characterized by relatively high levels of education and occupational skills – principally as mechanics and engineers. Mehrlander (1994: 20) states that among the unemployed, 20 per cent of the *Aussiedler* had been educated at technical school, college or university level compared with only 12 per cent of the German unemployed.

Some parallels can be seen in the contrast between formal and informal attitudes of the host population toward diaspora immigrants. In both societies there is a formal ideology of welcome and acceptance expressed in extensive institutional support mechanisms. In both societies the immigrants are ethnically identical to the host population. However, their basic Jewish or German identities are overlaid with other ethnic identities associated with the countries and cultures in which they lived before immigrating. Thus in Israel the population of immigrants has in common its basic Jewish identity but at the same time is highly differentiated in terms of a variety of cultural traditions, modes of practising religious rituals, occupational skills and social resources

imported from specific countries of origin. While all are formally accepted, and benefits are universally distributed, the host population responds in a variety of informal modes, ranging from adherence to the official welcoming stance to indifference as well as covert or overt hostility (Leshem, 1994).

In Israel, deprived social groups, especially those of lower socio-economic status, have increasingly expressed overt resentment regarding benefits given to new immigrants. In periods of economic cutbacks these protests tend to become especially strident. In the late 1990s, during the large immigration from the former Soviet Union, voices were raised to reconsider the open-door policy on grounds that there was a large proportion of non-Jews among the arrivals (who gained admission through marriage to Jews), and because of claims that the Russian mafia was bringing in prostitutes and streaming money to Israel in order to launder it. In addition, doubts raised by orthodox religious and right-wing groups regarding the authenticity of the claims for Jewish identity among groups of Russian and Ethiopian immigrants have resulted in some political discussion calling for limitations to be set on the Law of Return. One proposal has been to do this by activating a provision that permits prevention of entry of criminals who may endanger public safety in order to stop Israel from becoming a refuge for anyone seeking an accessible asylum. To date the pro-migration ideology has constrained public discourse on these issues which has not passed the discussion stage. There have been no changes in the Law of Return or in the basic priority accorded admission of immigrants, the national commitment to their needs and the package of benefits to which they are entitled.

Similarly, in Germany there is evidence that, despite the formal acceptance of ethnic Germans, they are generally perceived and categorized as foreigners (Munz and Ohlinger, 1997). Veteran Germans resent the fact that newly arrived ethnic Germans receive generous social benefits (Zick and Six, 1994). Martin (1994) notes that when few ethnic Germans arrived, they were welcomed. But when numbers increased, there was growing overt hostility. These shifting attitudes were associated with processes of economic expansion and recession. When unemployment increased, suspicion was voiced regarding the authenticity of their German credentials. They were accused of buying and selling documents to prove that their ancestors had served in the German army. The high costs of housing have been attributed to ethnic Germans and there is resentment with regard to their access to German language courses. In 1990, there were voices calling for quotas on admissions in order to reduce social tensions (Martin, 1994).

In 1993, when the number of ethnic Germans permitted to enter Germany was limited by law to 225,000 a year in response to these protests, a number of restrictions were also imposed with regard to the benefits *Aussiedler* are entitled to receive. A limit of nine months was set for "integration" pay, which is equal to the average unemployment insurance payment; and the duration of

their language course was limited to six months. Some called for the abolition of Article 116 of the German Basic Law. It was also noted that there was a need for “educational programmes” to legitimize the *Aussiedler* by making it clear to veteran Germans that ethnic Germans are descendants of Germans who suffered in their adoptive countries during and after World War II (O’Brien, 1992).

The two societies differ in their basic orientation to diaspora immigration: the Israeli stance seeks to encourage Jewish immigration while the German Government’s position regarding admission of ethnic Germans is ambivalent. There are political demands for the “return of our German brothers and sisters” who wish to live as Germans among Germans; and a prominent columnist wrote in 1988 that “the coming home of Germans ... has priority over the reception of aliens” (quoted by Joppke, 1997: 279). However the Social Democrats and Greens favoured the elimination of Article 116, describing it as an anachronistic relic of *volkisch* nationhood; they expressed support for an American-style immigration quota system in which ethnic Germans would be defined as just another immigrant group (Joppke, 1997). At the same time, the Government seeks to stem the flow by providing funds for economic assistance to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in an effort to *prevent* emigration. In 1992, Germany spent DM 180 million in these countries to encourage development and assure political freedom in areas where ethnic Germans live. In 1993 it was planned to spend DM 250 million for these purposes (Martin, 1994: 217; Shevtsova, 1992; Zick and Six, 1994).

Ethnic diversity

Despite the fact that virtually all immigrants to Israel are Jews, the multiplicity of their countries of origin and the extraordinary heterogeneity of the cultural traditions they imported, have led to an ongoing assumption that this ethnic variety is *sui generis*, and has made the society different from others. Indeed, in 1995, 39 per cent of the Jewish population were born outside the country and an additional 40 per cent are children of immigrants. Since 1948, the countries of origin of immigrants to Israel include over ten in Asia, seven in Africa, over 12 in the Americas and virtually every country in Europe (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996: 150-151).

While the assumption that this phenomenon was unique may have been partially appropriate during the early years of statehood, it seems less so in recent years. Since the 1980s more countries have been transformed from being culturally homogeneous into diversified, multi-ethnic societies as a result of ethnically diversified immigration. For example, in 1990 foreign residents in Western Germany came from over twenty countries and most did not share any form of German cultural background. Similarly, settlers in Australia in 1990-91 came from dozens of countries, only a minority of which had an “Anglo”

background (Castles and Miller, 1993: 100-101). In the 1990s, many societies are facing some of the issues that have long been familiar to Israeli sociologists: feelings of deprivation by under-privileged ethnic groups, inter-group conflicts, inequality, integration processes, legitimacy of the persistence of ethnic enclaves. Many other societies are aware that the notion of a single “melting pot” no longer seems useful since it conflicts with widespread democratic ideologies which advocate mutual tolerance and acceptance of differences. At the same time there is uncertainty and ambivalence with regard to the policies necessary to attain successful integration of widely different groups (Castles, 1992; Castles and Miller, 1993; Heisler, 1992; Martin, 1994).

For example, in Australia multiculturalism has been embraced as an official policy and is expressed in the encouragement of bilingualism and the formal requirement that government departments ensure that their programmes are responsive to the needs of diverse groups (Castles, 1992). In the US in 1995 the Commission on Immigration Reform indicated that, while the melting pot may work over a period of several generations, there is increasing awareness that many recent immigrants do not speak English and do not even seek to become citizens (*Migration News*, February, 1996).

In its early years, Israeli society was less able to accept the retention of ethnic traditions and idiosyncratic behaviour of immigrants, viewing them as a threat to its newly emerging culture; it therefore demanded both acculturation and assimilation. This policy took its toll among many immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East whose resentment of these policies and their implications has persisted into the second generation. As in other societies, these feelings of deprivation have been transformed periodically into political action.

But time, as well as considerable success in the acculturation of thousands of immigrants, has produced a society that is more sure of itself with regard to its dominant language and indigenous culture, and less threatened by large enclaves of ethnic groups. Thus there are numerous newspapers and theatres in Yiddish and Russian, a phenomenon that was generally unacceptable during the first decades of independence. Research carried out in the early 1990s, after the arrival of 600,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union, suggests that, while these immigrants know that they need to learn Hebrew and the basic elements of Israeli culture, many place great value on their earlier cultural traditions, seeking to retain their original language and much of their cultural heritage and to pass them on to their children. This pattern has been termed “additive bilingualism and biculturalism” (Ben Rafael et al., 1998).

Thus there is evidence that recently arrived immigrants from the former Soviet Union – possibly more than other immigrant groups in the past – are developing a sense of internal cohesiveness and solidarity which is expressed in active

efforts to preserve their ethnic culture and transmit it to their children through a variety of cultural institutions. These include a network of extra-curricular schools (Mofett) geared to supplement the curriculum of the regular school system which is viewed as unsatisfactory by the standards of many of these immigrants. The sheer size of the Russian-speaking community (close to 700,000) makes these processes possible and attractive to many.

The extent of this separatist phenomenon and its implications have only begun to be studied systematically. It is not yet clear to what extent they reflect dissatisfaction and alienation or efforts at “additive” acculturation in which Russian culture is seen to be an additional element to mainstream Israeli culture. The extent to which the phenomenon is ephemeral or will be long-lasting is also unknown. In the past, Israeli society has looked askance at active efforts toward the maintenance of ethnic identities beyond the folkloric, culinary or time-limited use of languages other than Hebrew. Indeed, mainstream pressures supported by the “nation-building” ethic have been such as to discourage preservation on more than a ritual basis. For the second generation such patterns of preservation have been fairly limited and have never been powerful enough to threaten the mainstream culture. The size of the Russian community raises numerous questions as to the form of the newly emerging pluralism and its effects on the overall solidarity of the society.

Foreign workers – legal and illegal

Israel’s increasing similarity to other countries is seen in the relatively new phenomenon of legal and illegal foreign workers. Estimates for the number of foreign workers in Israel in 1997 range between 250,000–400,000. Della-Pergolla’s (1997) estimate of 300,000 indicates that about 200,000 of them were illegal. When, in 1993, the entry of Palestinians from the occupied territories was curtailed as a result of fears of terrorism, foreign workers were recruited especially for the building industry, agriculture and unskilled service occupations. Driven by unemployment and economic deprivation in their home countries, many saw in Israel a society offering work and economic attractions.

In addition to workers who are recruited legally, many additional foreign workers continue to enter Israel legally as tourists or pilgrims and then stay on, melting into the invisible grey market. As in other countries, private enterprises have sprung up to recruit foreign workers, channel them to employers and arrange living quarters for them, often in socially isolated, slum settings. Foreign workers are under-paid and are entitled to few or no social or health benefits. Some come from countries in which AIDS is endemic. In Israel these workers provide the same potential for violence, racism, prostitution, drug use and exploitation as in other countries (*International Herald Tribune*, 25 August 1996).

Efforts to deport illegal workers have been only partially successful. In an effort to avoid deportation there are increasingly frequent marriages of foreign workers to Israeli women. In 1996 an estimated 4,000 such marriages were performed. As long as there is widespread unemployment in certain countries, and demand for cheap labour continues in the formal and informal markets of Israel, it will be extremely difficult to contain or control illegal immigration. This experience parallels that in other countries in which there are large numbers of illegal immigrants (Carmon, 1996; Teitelbaum and Weiner, 1995).

Ideological mythology

The assumption of uniqueness of immigration to Israel has been further questioned by recent historic research which has raised some questions regarding the mythology that surrounded (and continues to surround) the collective memory of mass immigration of the 1950s. Devora Hacoheh has examined two notions that served as axioms of the society's mythology: the assumption that the announcement of independence caused the awakening of thousands of Jews and their streaming to Israel; and the consensual support of the society's leadership for the open door policy (Hacoheh, 1994).

Careful documentation shows that in fact Jews from Western, democratic countries did *not* "rise up" and come. Those who came from post-war Europe were camp survivors (Displaced Persons) who had been prevented from entering Palestine during World War II and detained by the British in Cyprus camps, and Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe. Those from Islamic countries came to escape extremist Islamic and anti-Semitic groups whose hostility increased when the state was established. Indeed, thousands *did* come; however, motives and attributes were not very different from those of refugees in other settings.

The open door policy was not accepted by all parts of the population and the political leadership itself was divided. Hacoheh's research shows that although the leadership during the early years of independence was indeed committed to immigration, there was considerable disagreement about its timing and dimensions. There were those who favoured selective admission rather than a full open door policy because they feared that the fledgling society would be unable to absorb such large numbers and that they would destroy its fragile infrastructure. In an ongoing, often acrimonious, political debate, Prime Minister Ben Gurion won the battle for open immigration against considerable opposition which sought a policy of slower, better organized and regulated admissions. While the Prime Minister believed that large numbers of immigrants were a *sine qua non* for security and stability, he faced a variety of interest groups wielding significant power and influence, including individuals

and groups in the Jewish Agency, the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Health, and groups in the Opposition. Fear of the open door policy was based on apprehension that the open doors would enable the entry of undercover, hostile agents and non Jews. There was concern with regard to the high proportion (9 per cent) of old, chronically ill persons and carriers of infectious diseases among immigrants in the early 1950s (Hacohen 1994: 49). Nevertheless, despite instructions to limit their entry, most immigrants gained admission because of a lack of consensus among decision makers and implementors of policy: either the Jewish Agency officials let them through or the immigrants themselves succeeded in concealing their illnesses. The newspapers generally maintained a discrete silence with regard to the debate on these issues. Ben Gurion's forceful stance for a full open door policy won against the overt and covert opposition (Hacohen, 1994).

In his analysis of immigration to Israel during the 1990s, DellaPergola (1998) confirms the notion that the ideology of “ingathering of the exiles” and its centrality as an existential tenet of the society, are relatively unimportant in motivating immigration. Indeed, his analysis shows that the pace of immigration is largely determined by economic, political and cultural trends which operate in a global context and within each of the countries of origin. He notes that economic conditions in Israel are what stimulate or discourage immigration and emigration – rather than ideologies.

With a per capita GNP of approximately \$15,000 in 1996, Israel is located in about the middle of the list of European countries. The society shows many social and economic characteristics of other developed countries. With regard to emigration, Israel is not very different from other migration countries. Variation in annual rates of emigration, which show frequent short-term ups and downs, is broadly parallel to fluctuations in the business cycles. This is the leading explanation for emigration in other developed countries where it is generally a function of socio-economic and labour market indicators (DellaPergola, 1998).

Political activism of immigrants

A recent change which makes Israel more similar to other immigrant societies is the role of immigrants in its political life. The 600,000 or more immigrants from the former Soviet Union between 1989 and 1995 have begun to exert a major influence through their voting privileges. Until this period, efforts at forming immigrant parties were largely unsuccessful and the immigrant vote was generally distributed among the veteran political parties. However, in 1992 the vote of immigrants from the former Soviet Union played a major role in bringing the Labour Party back into power (Horowitz, 1994) while in the 1996 elections, an immigrant party, largely representing immigrants from the former

Soviet Union (Yisrael Be'Aliya), obtained sufficient support on issues having to do with immigrants' rights and benefits to gain two ministers in the coalition Government.

Refugees and immigrants

A considerable part of research on migration in the general literature has focused on *refugees* rather than the more general category of "migrants". Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has been uncomfortable with the idea that Jewish immigrants be categorized as "refugees" in their homeland. While it is clear that anti-Semitism and persecution have been prominent factors in motivating migration to Israel, admission to that country has never required the kind of proof demanded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that an individual left her/his country of origin because of a "well founded fear of persecution" (Teitelbaum and Weiner, 1995: 255). The very existence of an independent state has been interpreted to mean that Jews can come freely to Israel where they gain automatic citizenship. Furthermore, the state has been active in providing transportation and generous social benefits for newly arrived immigrants during their early years in the society. Thus it has been felt that refugee issues do not really apply to Jewish immigrants to Israel since they are engaged in a process of "homecoming". What is more, according to this view, Jews leaving Israel cannot claim refugee status in other countries because their ascriptive status as Jews means that they have a homeland of their own and cannot allege to have suffered persecution in that country. This social-political construction has served to isolate Israel from major streams of research that are related to migration in the refugee context.

CONCLUSION

It appears that Israel is becoming more like other societies to which there is large-scale immigration (Shuval and Leshem, 1998). Every society has its unique cultural qualities but also shares many characteristics with other societies in which parallel social processes are taking place. The mythology of Israel's "uniqueness" in the field of migration no longer seems appropriate. Looking back over 50 years of independence, it is clear that many elements of the mythology were socially constructed in such a way as to obscure contradictory evidence. Thus the refugee issue would seem to be more of a political than a sociological one; there are other countries which admit "diaspora immigrants"; and the issues surrounding foreign workers and illegal entrants also plague many other societies.

Emigration patterns resemble re-migration from other societies which have admitted large numbers of immigrants. Even the "open door" policy applies

only to Jews and the criteria determining this identity require legitimization in specific ways that in some cases are contested. What is more, the "open door" policy itself has been increasingly questioned. As in other domains, it would seem that with regard to its ethnic diversity, Israel is becoming more like other societies. Multi-ethnicity resulting from immigration is prevalent in numerous societies which, like Israel, are seeking modes of integration which are acceptable in the context of a democratic, tolerant society. Different societies have adopted a variety of approaches to the complex issues of multi-ethnicity, although these are often not stated in formal policies. They range from efforts to attain rapid conformity to the dominant language and cultural patterns, to policies which accept the ongoing use of ethnic languages and practice of traditions, if only as a time-limited mode of easing entry into the new society. Large enclaves of immigrants, as well as inexpensive transportation and ongoing communication between geographically distant locations, make it easier for immigrants to maintain their traditional languages and cultural patterns in the face of homogenizing pressures.

Along with increasing tolerance and acceptance of ethnic diversity, there are simultaneous expressions of overt racism and xenophobia in many countries, notably Germany and France. There is increasing racist discourse in a context of radical nationalism and fundamentalism as well as growing ethnic cleavages and inequality. Indeed, virtually all West European countries have an anti-migration party (Teitelbaum and Weiner, 1995). In the past, such overt events have been sporadic and relatively infrequent in Israel. However, in the 1990s, the visibility and striking cultural differences of the Ethiopian immigrants have resulted in some similar responses at the informal and institutional levels. Sociologists have pointed to mistakes in policy as well as to evidence of racism in the society (Bernstein, 1980; Halper, 1985). The rejection of Ethiopian immigrants' blood donations by the Blood Bank in 1996 on the grounds that AIDS was endemic among them, and the resulting discourse accompanied by violent public demonstrations, can be viewed in this light.

For many years, dominance of the external threat to its security provided Israeli society with a strong basis for solidarity. However, in the long run, it can be argued that one of the consequences of the persistence of parochial, particularistic identities is its threat to the collective, national solidarity of societies. It is unclear whether a society that accepts the legitimacy of a wide variety of ongoing ethnic sub-cultures can attain real commonality with a sufficient consensus to provide for national identity. Immigrants who continue to adhere to particularistic identities rather than to a common one can pose a threat to national consensus. This issue is exacerbated by inequality and the potential for inter-group conflicts with which such diversity is inevitably accompanied (Shuval, 1988). It is precisely in the liberal, democratic ambience of Western Europe that this issue is especially evident and Israel faces many of the same issues.

The tradition of “uniqueness” remains strong in the sociology of migration in Israel. This is less evident in other areas of sociology – stratification, family, work and occupations, health, religion, organizations – in which Israeli sociologists see themselves as part of a world community of scholars studying social phenomena that can be seen in other societies even though they may assume an indigenous form in Israel. Consideration of empirical reality at the end of the 1990s suggests that the sociology of migration in the Israel context has many important parallels in other societies and is best understood in a global context of theory and practice.

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TABLE 1
 AVERAGE YEARLY NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS TO ISRAEL
 AND GERMANY, 1990-1994

	Israel		West Germany	
	Number (thousands)	Average yearly rate per 1,000 population	Number (thousands)	Average yearly rate per 1,000 population
1960-64	50.7	22.2	576.2	10.2
1965-69	24.1	8.9	706.1	12.1
1970-74	44.3	14.0	873.1	14.7
1975-79	25.0	6.9	527.5	8.7
1980-84	16.7	4.1	502.2	8.2
1985-89	14.0	3.2	817.8	13.4
1990-94	121.9	23.7	-	-
Mean	42.4	11.9	667.1	11.2

Source: DellaPergola, 1998, Table 4.

L'EMIGRATION VERS ISRAËL :
MYTHOLOGIE D'UNE "SPECIFICITE"

L'auteur s'est interrogée sur l'hypothèse largement répandue selon laquelle l'émigration vers Israël serait un phénomène unique, différenciant fondamentalement de l'émigration vers tout autre lieu. Cette hypothèse découle du principe qui voudrait que les migrants, lorsqu'ils décident de partir, quittent un pays qu'ils considèrent comme leur patrie pour se trouver une patrie d'adoption. Par contre, lorsqu'il s'agit d'émigrants juifs partant pour Israël, l'idée prévaudrait selon laquelle ils quitteraient ce faisant un pays auquel ils étaient étrangers.

La Loi du Retour (1950), qui instaurait une politique de porte ouverte pour les Juifs et de généreux avantages aux immigrants dans un contexte de consensus social présumé, a généralement été perçue comme unique en son genre. L'auteur a examiné des pièces qui montrent que dans les années 80 et 90, Israël a rapproché sa politique de celle des autres pays occidentaux vers lesquels ont afflué en grand nombre des réfugiés, des demandeurs d'asile, des travailleurs étrangers, des personnes sollicitant le regroupement familial et des migrants des différentes diasporas.

Comme dans d'autres sociétés d'immigration, la multi-ethnicité pose un problème d'intégration culturelle et l'on constate que certains groupes s'efforcent activement de garder les éléments principaux de leur héritage culturel antérieur.

Les immigrants sont devenus une force politique identifiable avec laquelle il faut compter. On assiste aujourd'hui davantage que dans les années précédentes à une remise en question non déguisée, au sein de la société israélienne, de la politique de porte ouverte en faveur des immigrants juifs. Néanmoins, la sociologie de l'immigration en Israël reste fortement marquée par cette tradition de spécificité. L'examen de la réalité empirique, à la fin des années 90, fait apparaître que la sociologie de l'immigration dans le contexte israélien a de nombreux parallèles importants dans d'autres sociétés et qu'il est préférable de l'appréhender dans une perspective mondiale, à la fois du point de vue théorique et du point de vue pratique.

MIGRACION A ISRAEL: LA MITOLOGIA DE LA “SINGULARIDAD”

El artículo analiza la extendida idea de que la inmigración a Israel es un fenómeno único que difiere estructuralmente de las migraciones a otros lugares. Se parte de la idea de que los migrantes a otros destinos en general abandonan un lugar que consideran su hogar, para hallar otro nuevo. Según la construcción de Israel, los judíos han sido “extranjeros” en sus países de origen y tratan de hallar un nuevo hogar por medio de la migración.

La Ley de Retorno (1950), que establece una política de puertas abiertas a los judíos e importantes apoyos a los inmigrantes en un contexto de presunto consenso social, siempre ha sido considerada como una ley muy particular. El artículo presenta informaciones demostrativas de que en los años ochenta y noventa Israel va pareciéndose cada vez más a otros países occidentales que admiten a gran número de refugiados, demandantes de asilo, trabajadores extranjeros, aspirantes a la reunificación familiar y migrantes de la diáspora.

Como en otras sociedades de migración, la multiétnicidad plantea problemas de integración cultural y algunos grupos tratan de conservar activamente los elementos fundamentales de su anterior herencia cultural.

Los inmigrantes han llegado a constituir una fuerza política identificable con la que se ha de contar. Más que en años anteriores, la sociedad de la política de puertas abiertas a los judíos se pone explícitamente en tela de juicio. Ello no obstante, la tradición de “singularidad” sigue estando fuertemente asentada en la sociología de la migración en Israel. El análisis de la realidad empírica a fines de los años noventa sugiere que la sociología de la migración en el contexto de Israel presenta muchos paralelismos importantes con la de otras sociedades y que se hace más comprensible en un contexto global de teoría y práctica.