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Research Article

Categorization, Proletarianization and Exclusion: The Two Generations of the Immigrant Middle Eastern Jews

Abdüssamet Yılmaz[1]

Abstract

In its general framework, this study focuses on the Jews who immigrated from the Middle Eastern countries in the early years of Israel's foundation, starting from 1948. These immigrants who came to Israel in these years had difficulties in their living conditions and remained in the lower strata of the society compared to the European Jews who arrived earlier or immigrated after the Holocaust. Although it has been studied extensively in the literature, the emphasis has been the cultural roots of the social exclusion. In this study, both the continuity of the situation and the political and economic dimensions of it are examined.

Keywords: Israel, Mizrahi, Zionism, Proletarianization, Gentrification, Exclusion, Jewish Immigration

JEL Codes: I32, J61, J70, N35, Z13

[1] Researcher, Writer, ylmz.abdussamet@gmail.com.

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Araştırma Makalesi

Kategorizasyon, Proleterleştirilme ve Dışlanma: Orta Doğu Göçmeni Yahudilerin İki Nesli

Abdüssamet Yılmaz[1]

Öz

Genel çerçevesiyle bu çalışma 1948 yılından başlayarak İsrail'in kuruluşunun ilk yıllarında Orta Doğu ülkelerinden göç eden Yahudileri merkeze almaktadır. Bahsedilen yıllarda İsrail'e gelen bu göçmenler yaşam koşullarında zorluklar çekmiş ve de onlara nazaran erken gelen ve ya Holokost sonrası göç eden Avrupalı Yahudilere göre toplumda arka planda kalmıştır. Literatürde çokca incelense de, dikkati çeken kısım toplumsal dışlamanın kültürel kökenleri olmuştur. Bu çalışmada bahsedilen durumun sürekli hale gelmesi ve bu sürekliliğin siyasi ve ekonomik boyutları incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İsrail, Mizrahi, Siyonizm, Proleterleştirme, Soylulaştırma, Dışlama, Yahudi Göçleri

JEL Kodlar: I32, J61, J70, N35, Z13

[1] Araştırmacı, Yazar, ylmz.abdussamet@gmail.com.

Introduction

Even a cursory glance will reveal the dominance of Ashkenazim in Israeli society. Corey-Gil Shuster's initiative 'The Ask an Israeli/Palestinian Project' reviewed Jews of Middle Eastern origin in investigating their preference of traditional Ashkenazi clothing. Most of the interviewees replied that they prefer it because they think it is the religious clothing or it is the unifying symbol of Jewish society[1]. In addition to cultural hegemony, Ashkenazim who consist of one-fifth of the Israeli population, are the ones that founded and controlled the state mechanisms. This has been a major source of important debate over time. For example, sometimes Israel is referred to as an apartheid Ashkenazi regime (Massad, 1996:66). Ashkenazim is one of the three major ethnic groups of Israeli society. The others are the Mizrahi Jews and non-Jew Arabs. It is widely accepted that Zionism which laid the foundations of the Israeli state is associated with the Ashkenazim elite whereas the remaining ethnic groups were marginalized.

The issue subject to debate starts with the reasons for the marginalization. It has been argued that the gap between the immigrant Mizrahim and receiving Ashkenazim is a gap between traditional and modern society (Peres, 1971). Therefore, it was predicted that as the former will be filtered to the Jewish melting pot, the gap will diminish. This modernization theory has been fiercely attacked and became subject of the Orientalism. Critical studies delve into the Zionist discourse in evincing its Orientalist nature. These works focused on the creation of the Mizrahi identity (Khazzoom, 2003) and Zionism's constant actions of re-producing the ethnic gap (Massad, 1996) for the benefit of their superior position in the society. Other than the discursive level, major critical works demonstrated different layers of the problem. For instance, Bernstein and Swirski discussed the ethnic division of labor in Israeli society as it stemmed from the economic transformation period that resulted from expanding capitalist relations of production (Bernstein et al., 1982). It is the period in which the role of Mizrahi workers was contested. The elections of 1959 play an important part at that point because the Labor Party's victory is interpreted as the culmination of the rational oriental votes of the conscious Mizrahi working class (Barelli, 2018).

Other important critical studies focused on the geographic distribution of ethnicity. While Yiftachel and Tzfadi studied the Development Towns in showing the reflections of ethnic segregation on Mizrahi identity (Yiftachel et al., 1992.), Maya Shapiro discussed how blackened areas emerged in the outskirts of big cities such as Tel-Aviv (Maya, 2013). On the other hand, the growing appearance of Moroccan music and various festivals in developing areas started to take place which is regarded in terms of cultural recognition and the rise of the Mizrahi middle-class. However, Uri Cohen and Nissim Leon argued that the important change in showing the rise of Mizrahi middle-class in the developing areas lies in the aspects of employment, education, consumption and housing (Cohen et al., 2008). Nonetheless, his arguments do not overshadow the steady ethnic gap in higher education rates (Cohen et al., 2007) and the fact that Mizrahi spaces have been undergoing planned gentrification (Leibner, 2011).

Amid a state-formation, it is the fact that Jews from the Middle Eastern countries were excluded and deprived of their major capabilities. In explaining this exclusion political-economic factors and cultural factors do not mutually exclusive, they reinforce each other. The point I attempt to make is in addition to long-term cultural determinants i.e., Orientalism, one

[1] Shuster is studying on Israeli-Palestinian conflict for almost two decades. For the website of his project, see: https://coreygilshuster.wixsite.com/understandconflict

must not deny the mid-term political and economic factors as well as the ad hoc contingency factors.Hereby with the contingency, I mean the holocaust, emigration ban of Soviet Union and consequently the sudden demographic need of the postbellum period of 1948-1952. The exclusion and the oppression that Mizrahi faced in Israel have to do with being an immigrant as much as being an oriental and should be analysed reducing neither one to the other. If the latter was the case, as the modernization theorists suggest, the policies that have been implemented would have aimed to assimilate the Orientals in the Jewish melting pot but instead they have striven to proletarianize the Mizrahim and forced them to remain at the lowest end of the society. In this paper, I plan to start by explaining the contingency factor arguing against the determinacy of cultural explanations. Then I will demonstrate the dimensions of the exclusion in depth. Furthermore, I will conclude by discussing which way of politicization entails the struggle of exit from the exclusion.

1. Historical contingency: Holocaust, Soviet migration ban, and the 1948 War.

Zionism came into being in Western society by a Jewish elite therefore, it was natural that the founding fathers of the country were using an orientalist discourse. As such Zionism carries glimpses of orientalism per se yet this does not necessarily suggest a sufficient Picture to explain the position of Mizrahim in Israeli society. The aim was to create a Jewish state for the European diaspora, migration of Jews from the Middle Eastern countries was a result of unprecedented obstacles for the Zionists. Among those obstacles, Holocaust comes first. Secondly, there comes the migration ban of the Soviet Union and it is followed by the sudden demographic need in the aftermath of the 1948 wars. If it were not for the first two occurrences, Zionism's needed human resource would have ensured from the European diaspora. Moshe Sharett, then foreign minister of Israel, stated that for the purpose of building up the country Jews of Eastern Europe are the salt of the earth; Moroccan Jews cannot be counted on this purpose (Massad, 1996:56). Unable to bring Western Jews from Europe, Zionists established commissions in Muslim countries to ease the influx of immigration in case the occasion arises. In this context, the third factor above, unexpected territorial expansion occurred in the 1948 wars. Following these developments, Israel started ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. Hence, more Jews were needed not only for the political-economic aim of replacing Palestinian workers in pre-existing jobs of pre-state making years but also for the demographic purposes of re-populating the newly conquered areas (Ein-Gil, 2009:3). Although what happened between 1939-1948 cannot rule out the orientalist discourse of Zionism, the instances posit enough evidence to prevent us from ending up a deterministic cultural explanation which emerged due to the fact that ethno-class adversity of Israeli society dovetails with the orientalist discourse of Zionism.

2. The period of proletarianization: 1950-1970.

First Mizrahi immigrants were placed to transit camps which were built to the large cities where the receiving, old-timer Ashkenazim were settled. These transit camps underwent a series of transformations through time. First, most of the camps were placed by ma'abarot which was a major public project to accommodate new immigrants. It was an area that included both social and housing policies. In 1951, 75% of the approximately 250,000 people living in 127 ma'abarot were Mizrahi (Swirski, 2002:114). After the first social services and provision of ratios, the government informed the migrants that they need to find work for themselves and consequently lack of opportunities forced immigrants to take up menial jobs in those Ashkenazi settlements (Massad, 1996:58). This early stage initiated the ad hoc proletarianization of the immigrants in large cities. In the mid-1950s some of the ma'abarots and transit camps turned

into Development Towns[2] (henceforth DT) as well as some peripheral areas. Only after the emergence of DTs, it is possible to talk about the systematic proletarianization of immigrants. The economy in the DTs depended on a single factory system which was owned and run by the state-owned federation of trade union, the Histadrut[3], or Ashkenazi businesses in which Ashkenazim consist at least %85 of all the factory managers (Massad, 1996:59). Therefore, the ethnic structure between workers and the owners of the first-generation immigrants and oldtimers in the 1950s in DTs laid the foundations of the ethno-class power relations that will become chronic in the next generation.

The wage policy in the DTs and the income gap between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim were highly contested. Massad argues that "wages in the DT's are much lower than the rest of the country even within the same industry" (Massad, 1996:58). On the other hand, Avi Barelli claims that Labor Party followed an egalitarian wage policy in DTs which found political support from Mizrahim and it culminated in the victory of 1959 elections (Barelli, 2018:240-244). Perhaps the wage policy should be divided as before and after the 1959 election which impinged on the income gap of the 1960s. As Peres noted, in the 1950s the old-timer's standard of living increased more than immigrant's standard of living, but the gap started to diminish in the sixties (Peres, 1971:1026). G. Hanoch reported in 1961 that the income gap actually did not diminish on the contrary it is increasing due to the growing income differentiation between manual and professional workers, but he updated his explanation in 1969 by arguing that the growing income gap is a result of an increase in the untrained labor force and hence it does not demonstrate an increase in the income gap between immigrants and the old-timers since more young immigrants attained better training, as well as the rise in the untrained labor force supply leveled off in the 1960s[4]. Joseph Massad points out this debate exhaustively. He contends academics predicted that this gap would close as the Mizrahim starts to attain more benefits by Ashkenazi modernization showed no sign of diminishing[5], besides, it got worse after the economic boom that followed the 1967 Arab-Israeli war as Ashkenazim gained more benefit (Massad, 1996:61). He adds that the Horovitz committee of inquiry that was set up by the government after the Wadi Salib uprising found out that the Mizrahi standard of living between 1959-1969 had declined (Massad, 1996:61). The issue subject to debate above concerns firstgeneration immigrant Mizrahim. Developments in the following decade show that either way, the income gap increased or decreased[6], the problem is inherited by the second generation i.e., it became chronic.

At the beginning of the second decade, Mizrahi children were raised at the lowest echelons of the society with insufficient housing, employment opportunities. Why the problem became chronic and (forced to be) inherited by the next generation can be understood from the access to education. Yehezkeli showed that only "%5.2 of university students were Mizrahim (first generation Israeli-born); furthermore, he compared the number of Mizrahi students in Israeli high schools with the number of Jewish students in Iraqi high schools before the

[2] New settlements that provide permanent housing and employment away from the central urban areas.

[3] Histadrut was formed before the establishment of Israel by the Zionist Labor Party.

[4] For Hanoch's and other contemporary economics' debate over the income gap in the 1960s, see: (Peres,1971:1026-1027)

[5] Here I should note that in 1971 Yochanan Peres implicitly mentioned the possible danger of the problem as "This tranquility is astonishing if one considers that almost all leadership positions in the country are occupied by Europeans, that European per capita income is about twice that of Orientals (Peres, 1971:1024)."

[6] Considering other factors of deprivation, e.g., space, education and criminalization that are being discussed in this paper- income does not constitute the essential determinant for the problem of inequality;therefore, it needs no further discussion for evincing the problem.

immigration to Israel, and found that in Iraq, more Jewish students had applied for matriculation in a year than the total number of Mizrahi students who had applied for matriculation in a year in Israel" (Meir-Glitzenstein, 2020:127). Mizrahi children were not only impeded from higher education they were also steered through certain professions. Most of them were relegated to agricultural and vocational schools and the vast majority of them did not attend regular academic schools (Meir-Glizenstein, 2020:127). Upon directing through vocational school, immigrant children were precluded from upward social mobility. Therefore, in the first generation the inferiority drew from being immigrant forced Mizrahim to become proletarian, turned into a rigid socio-economically looked down position in the second-generation.

2.1 Spatial segregation and criminalization of the Mizrahi immigrants.

Spatial classification is another dimension of this social stratification. Starting from transit camps and DTs the stratification and conflicts manifest themselves in spaces where "the Mizrahim, primarily manual laborers, were confined to three principal geographic locations: densely populated and poorly developed neighborhoods on the outskirts of large cities, immigrant moshavim situated in border areas, and development towns. (Cohen et al., 2008:54)" As DTs have been discussed above, those towns are self-evident in showing ethno-class segregation. Therefore, the outskirts of the large cities provide more fruitful hallmarks of ethnoclass conflicts. Similarly, Shapiro thinks that most of the scholarship focused on DTs in demonstrating spatial segregation and exclusion of the Mizrahim, but he thinks that Tel-Aviv is also a good example of showing how the Mizrahi space is blackened since South Tel-Aviv has emerged as Israel's symbol of urban decay because it contains a large number of Mizrahi population, abandoned factories, a jail, a red-light district, and now an increasingly large settlement of homeless African asylum seekers (Shapiro, 2013:432-433). Kfar Shalem for instance is a neighborhood in Southeastern Tel-Aviv that was occupied after the 1948 war. The Palestinian villagers were expelled and mostly Mizrahi immigrants were replaced, afterwards the older Palestinian village Salam was renamed as Kfar Shalem. In the 1960s Kfar Shalem became one of the urban renewal projects after the government established the 'Authority for Redevelopment and Demolition of Slum Areas'. Since then, Kfar Shalem has become the target of urban renewal projects and gentrification. One of the major incidents in this process happened in 1982. A resident named Shimon Yehoshua was killed by police while defending his home from demolition. Bloody clashes happened after Yehoshua was killed and the government demolished one hundred buildings, during the demonstrations following the epithet 'Ashke-nazi' was often hurled at police (Massad, 1996:63).

Another incident happened in the Wadi Salib[7]the neighborhood of Haifa where most of the residents are of Moroccan descend. Protests were started when the government granted comfortable housing to immigrants from Poland when most of the Mizrahim were living in slums, then protests were exacerbated as one resident was killed by police (Massad, 1996:60). The demonstrations spread around Mizrahi neighborhoods and took the form of a riot. The government fiercely started to criminalize and delegitimize the protestors. "Four union leaders were given six-month prison… and labor minister voiced that only a framed enemy of the Jewish people could have invented this treacherous and corrupting deed of inflaming group against group (Massad, 1996:60)." The two examples, Kfar Shalem and Wadi Salib, demonstrate the spatial feature of the ethno-class exclusion in the outskirts of large cities. Therefore, the spatiality of the exclusion does not occur only in DTs vs. urban areas dichotomy, it also happens in places where the boundaries of the accepted and the rejected remains fixed in

[7] Similar to Kfar Shalem, it used to be an Arab part of the Haifa, but the Palestinian population was replaced by Jewish immigrants.

ethno-class feature, yet the boundaries of settlements sometimes overlap. The conflict arising from this overlap is being dealt with dispossession through criminalization and gentrification.

2.2 Right-wing at the stage: Likud Party takes over the political power from Labor Party.

Upon being stuck in the lowest strata of the society and having been subject to criminalization, Mizrahi finds a political voice in racist and orthodox religious parties. In 1977, the right-wing Likud Party ended the dominance of the Labor Party. One of the explicit reasons behind this political shift is the inheritance of relative deprivation in the second-generation Mizrahim. It is also important to point out a major turning point in 1967 when non-citizen Palestinian workers were accepted into the labor market which caused the Arab-Jewish clash at the bottom of the labor market due to the decrease of the pay scale in industries where cheap labor is most represented in numbers (Peled, 1990:350). Therefore, the participation of the noncitizen Palestinians into the labor market paved the way for the right-wing politics and also religious parties whose anti-Arab ideology was a simple matter for the exploitation of the Mizrahi vote. Other than the nationalist right-wing Likud Party that won the election, two important political figures arouse in this context. First, the Shass Party which was founded by Rabbi Ovaida Yousef followed a religious and ethnic political agenda. Second, Meir Kahane who was elected to the Knesset in 1984 was known for his extreme political agenda in which he fiercely stood for the displacement of all Palestinians and a fight for biblical territory. Peled's survey on the Development Towns where Meir Kahane had his most support shows that %60 of the Mizrahi thinks that their economic problems will get worse in the future, %50 of them thinks that their unemployment is due to the Palestinian workers; and he concludes his survey by demonstrating that Kahane's vote that made him elected in 1984 became almost three times more in 1988 (Peled, 1990:354-355). Following years of 1987, the first intifada, although most of the Palestinian workers displaced from the labor market; they were replaced by foreign workers[8] which did not alter the elevation of the right-wing politics in the third generation.

3. Continuity of social stratification: evidence in the third generation.

The scope of this is restricted to the first two generations because in the third generation even though the ethno-class stratification remains; the problem becomes more complicated due to the rise of right-wing politics and enactment of neo-liberal agendas. For a brief example of the limited upward social mobility, it is necessary to look at the higher education rates. Yinon Cohen et al. questioned whether this ethnic gap in the third generation and found out that "The ethnic gaps in university graduation rates among men and women of the third generation are about as wide as the gaps in the second generation… that the gaps between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim are as large in the third generation as in the second generation (Cohen et al., 2008:904-906)." Education rates' reflection on the marriage patterns also signifies the steady gap between the two ethnicities as follows: "among persons of mixed ancestry, those who are more educated are more likely to marry persons of Ashkenazi origin, while those who are less educated are more likely to marry persons of Mizrahi origin. (Okun, 2004:108)" Another indicator is of ongoing ethno-class conflict is the spatial struggle in south Tel-Aviv. Protestors resist the gentrification in the HaTikva neighborhood. The two choices they were offered are either drowning in mortgage debts to have their own apartment in the neighborhood or

[8] For the Israeli politics of foreign migrants see: Adriana Kemp. "Labour Migration and Racialisation: Labour Market Mechanisms and Labour Migration Control Policies in Israel." Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture 10,2 (2004): 267-292

relocating to peripheral areas where state-subsidized houses are made which means pushing out the poor habitants mostly Mizrahi, Ethiopian Jews from south Tel-Aviv (Leibner, 2015:160). Hence, with the passage of time Mizrahim being stuck at the lowest strata of society became chronic. This situation leads us to the big question. What sorts of political agendas Mizrahim have been able to employ or what thwarted them from doing this? I think the answer lies inside the question. It is the category of Mizrahim the answer.

3.1 Which political agenda prevails in potential: class or identity?

Let us start by emphasizing that the Mizrahi identity is made by others that are to say it did not develop as a cultural blend of Jews who came from Muslim countries. These immigrants came from more than five countries that have their own culture, language and unique background with an emphasis on their own Jewishness[9]. Therefore, it was not an identity but a category. Jews from Morocco, Turkey, Iraq and even Bukhara found themselves in the middle of this category without any common cultural points. This category is so culturally fragmented that even the Arabic-speaking immigrants do not speak the same dialect which makes finding common ground for communication more than difficult if not altogether impossible. Besides, some of the immigrants like Iraqi Jews defined themselves as Baghdadi or Babylonian Jews underlining their historical background and dignity while despising Moroccan tribal Jews whom they were referred together under the Mizrahi category. The most striking example is that without showing any solidarity Iraqi immigrant club Ramat Gan defined the Wadi Salib uprisings as uncivilized, violent protests (Meir-Glitzenstein, 2020:130). Many other instances showed no sign of complete solidarity between components of the Mizrahi category as it had been started to be exploited by the right-wing politics in the second generation while the exclusion remained continuous. The results have been discussed above in different dimensions as being stuck at the lowest strata of the society where another conflict takes place between the Mizrahim and non-citizen Palestinians. While most of the Palestinians were expelled from the labor market before the 1990s, the conflict between third generation Mizrahim and immigrants remained the same. Shapiro thinks that one of the conflicts take place between Mizrahim and immigrant women in the domestic works as the latter constitutes a privileged underclass since their middle-class Ashkenazi employers struggle for them to gain citizenship while Mizrahim are driven to anti-immigrant mobilization to be able to feel more secure in the labor market (Shapiro, 2013:437-438).

Looking back to the dimensions that were discussed above, one might see the patterns and commonalities that carried the potential of becoming political agenda. Mizrahi, non-citizen Palestinians, immigrant workers of recent decades were not only the denomination of socioeconomically deprived people but also shared the status of being immigrant. What do they all common is far from culture-based commonalities and hence this particular fragmentation might be the thwarting reason behind the struggle against exclusion. In this vein, focusing on acts of inclusion through culture might distort this political agenda. For instance, in addition to the festivals and rituals, it has been often put forth that Mizrahi music prevails in Israeli society as the radios and televisions started gave them wide coverage. One needs to note here that what is prevailing in Israeli society is Maghrebi music not Mizrahi music since the one cultural component of the Mizrahi category cannot be generalized as an umbrella gain.

As the concluding remarks, two possible explanations can be drawn from this example to see the mismatch between the problem and the identity-based solutions. First, accepting the Maghrebi music as the quintessential of the Mizrahi people, i.e., the Oriental Jews, is the perfect

[9] "In Morocco, we were considered Jews, and here we are called Moroccans," is a frequently heard complaint by the immigrants see: (Peres, 1971:6).

example of how Orientalism works. Thus, one might fall prey to the mistake s/he has been criticizing by essentialization of the marginalized groups' identities. Second, internalizing this category as an identity and drawing a political line on this fragmentation, one accepts a passive role in the struggle of inclusion where the description of the identities and the limits of the struggle is defined by the socio-economically upper group. Thereby the struggle can be politically paralyzed by the hegemonic power through promoting differences. In addition to accepting a passive voice, cultural arguments and oft-used apartheid metaphor are doomed to fail since "the Zionist definition of Israel as a state of all the world's Jews (rather than of its own citizens) makes it automatically an Ashkenazi state: the Ashkenazim are an overwhelming majority of world Jewry (Machover, 2009:4)."

Conclusion

During the state formation, immigrant Middle Eastern Jews were excluded and deprived from their major capabilities. As an examination of the two generations of the Mizrahi Jews, the attempt in this article has been made to demonstrate different dynamics of their position in the society. The fact that the Zionist founders of the Israel state had orientalist ideas in the origin does not explain the deprivation of the Mizrahi immigrants. Nor does old modernization theory prove satisfactory considering the continuity of the exclusion. In the long-term, the problem posits different multi-faceted implications. First the sudden demographic need after the WWII and holocaust is a clear contingency factor which needs to be taken into account while analysing Zionist discourse of pre-state formation. Since the mass migration exceeded the earlier demographic plans and hence the problem faced by these newcomers should be associated with their immigrant identity not less than their Oriental identity. Then, in the following decades most importantly the forms of exclusion other than the cultural one, such as space, education and criminalization, show the ways in which how the stratification occurs in the society.

It is highly important to realize that forming a political project out of a fragmented identity is nearly difficult as rising a solidarity out of a categorization made by a hegemonic power. Therefore, social exclusions do not happen only in mentality and have its reflections on culture; it is rather interwoven in social and political structure and environment. One of the emphasis in this study have been to show recent events happening in space, the planned gentrification that started as urban renewal projects in very earlier decades. This reminds us the open question of to what extent possibilities in the future will show any difference in society under the various process of neoliberal transformations and ongoing non-Jewish immigrant influx.

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