Israel As a Multicultural Democracy: Challenges and Obstacles

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine possible implications should Israel incorporate multicultural principles in its ‘basic structure’. The paper divides into two main sections. In the first section I will embark on a short theoretical discussion concerning the relationship between claims of recognition and claims of distribution. In the second section I will assess the implications of this discussion for Israeli society, focusing on the main schisms characterizing Israeli society (Israeli Palestinian and Israeli Jews, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews, religious and non-religious Jews, veterans and immigrants, and gender relations). One of the main arguments of the paper is that the separation of claims of recognition from claims of distribution presents insurmountable difficulties. These claims are very often inextricable. The fusion of these claims, however, underscores the utmost importance of the multicultural project. It shows that claims of distribution cannot be accommodated by a social system purporting to secure equality for all members of society irrespective of race, gender and cultural differences. This conclusion is valid either for societies whose basic political principles claim cultural neutrality or for societies whose principles forfeit such neutrality but promise universal inclusion of all members of society.

At the outset of the last century, Israeli culture was ‘imagined’ as an ethno-national culture. That is, it assumed common primordial roots that allegedly bind all Jewish communities everywhere in the world and throughout history. As Ben Zion Dinur and Isaac Baar, prominent and leading Zionist historiographers, had argued, ‘Jewish history is unified by an homogenous unity that encompasses all eras and all places, reflecting upon each other’.1 Accordingly, concentrated efforts had been made to produce the symbolic repertoire embodying it. The purpose was to employ this repertoire in cultivating a culturally homogenized collective that blurs the boundaries between state and society, people and land and Jewishness and Israeliness. Given this strict ethno-national grammar, there emerged a mutation in Israeli national identity manifested through a series of negations: negation of Diaspora, negation of Arabic culture and negation of religion. That is, while officially and even vehemently negating these

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elements, Israeli national identity derives – one way or another – some of its basic symbols and values from them.

The early 1990s signify the beginning of a pronounced change in this cultural and political reality. It seems that there emerged a combination of centrifugal forces that present a real challenge to the hegemonic national culture. The role models of Israeli national culture become ever diversified and the possibility to break loose from the firm grip of this culture is rendered tangibly real. Parallel to this change, it was often possible to hear demands made by many sectors of Israeli society that it should incorporate multicultural principles in its ‘basic structure’. This reality presents, then, what can be described as ‘the multicultural condition’. That is, it is a reality in which difference and diversity receive growing legitimacy.

This vigorously emerging reality raises several questions. How should the demand that Israel incorporate multicultural principles in its ‘basic structure’ be interpreted? What is the nature of these principles and how are they related to distributive claims? What can be said in favour of those who believe that efforts should be made to forestall the transformation of Israel into a multicultural society?

The purpose of this paper is to examine possible answers to these questions. It divides into two main sections. In the first section I will embark on a short theoretical discussion concerning the relationship between claims of recognition and claims of distribution. In the second section I will assess the implications of this discussion on Israeli society (Israeli Palestinian and Israeli Jews, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews, religious and non-religious Jews, veterans and immigrants, and gender relations).

One of the main arguments of the paper is that one cannot separate claims of recognition from claims of distribution. These claims are very often inextricable. Being inextricable, however, underpins the utmost importance of the multicultural project. It shows that claims of distribution cannot be accommodated by a social system purporting to secure equality to all members of society irrespective of race, gender and cultural differences. This conclusion is valid either for societies whose basic political principles claim cultural neutrality towards their members or societies whose principles forfeit such neutrality but promise universal inclusion of them.

MULTICULTURALISM: BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Multicultural politics is designed to address social practices that involve misrecognition or negative labelling of certain groups in society. But there are controversies among supporters of multiculturalism as to the operative conclusions and steps that ought to be embarked upon when addressing these practices. Should collective identities be politicized? It is possible to
identify two main approaches in this regard: a non-multicultural, 
minimalist approach and a multicultural, maximal approach.

The minimalist approach is the one maintaining that political efforts 
should be made to lift all obstacles preventing individuals from integrating 
as full and equal members in society. Nancy Fraser, for instance, gives a 
systematic expression to this approach. Fraser states that misrecognition 
indeed constitutes a form of institutional inferiority, and therefore severely 
violates the principles of justice. But the demand for recognition, she 
argues, should not be viewed as a demand to fortify group identity but to 
overcome the inferior status in which members of a cultural group – either 
ascribed or constructed – are confined. ‘Misrecognition’, says Fraser, ‘does 
not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity. Rather, it 
means social subordination in the sense of being prevented from 
participating as a peer in social life.’ Fraser distinguishes then between 
two models derived from the politics of recognition: an identity model 
and a status model. However, she rejects the former and espouses the latter.

The identity model, says Fraser, should be rejected for two main 
reasons. The first reason – consistent with the criticism made by those 
associated with the American left – is that this model leads to the 
displacement of the politics of distribution by politics of identity. This is 
done, according to Fraser, either by those who ‘simply ignore’ distributive 
issues and exert efforts to changing the culture, or by those who believe 
that ‘maledistribution is merely a secondary effect of misrecognition’, and 
want to rectify this problem. In either case, Fraser argues, the identity 
model of the politics of recognition is misguided, since it severely 
compromises the concern of male-distribution.

The second reason – consistent with postmodern and poststructuralist 
approaches – is that the identity model leads to the reification and 
esentialization of cultural identities. This, in turn, formidably confines 
individuals within cultural communities. ‘Stressing the need’, Fraser says, 
‘to elaborate and display an authentic, self-affirming and self-generated 
collective identity, it puts moral pressure on individual members to 
conform to a given group culture.’ The reification of culture is a problem 
that carries special significance to cultural groups that maintain hierarchies 
between their members such as between men and women or between 
Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews in the case of Israeli Jewish society. Thus, 
emphasizing the significance of culture may result in providing moral 
support to discriminatory practices against women.

In view of the problems plaguing the identity model of the politics of 
recognition, the status model appears to provide better solutions to 
inequalities figuring a strong connection between the inferior socio-
economic status of certain members of society and their cultural 
distinctiveness. Thus, this model suggests that the required form of 
recognition is the one allowing them to participate as full and equal
members in all aspects of social life: political, economic and cultural. The desired form of recognition then is not the one intended merely to rectify group identity but to secure the equal status of all individuals as full and equal members of society. That is, the status model is concerned with the lifting of the obstacles put in front of them, obstacles resulting from attempts to confine them within deprecatory and demeaning collective identities. The status model of the politics of recognition aspires to bring about a situation in which the social status of individuals is not affected by this distinctiveness.

Following this approach, it means that the identity model of recognition is replaced with the status model. This model, Fraser argues, is ‘not committed a priori to any one type of remedy for misrecognition; rather, it allows for a range of possibilities, depending on what precisely the subordinated parities need in order to be able to participate as equal peers in social life’.7

Fraser’s reservations about the identity model receive attention in the work of those who share these reservations but emphasize, nonetheless, the significance of cultural identity as a principle of political action. They endorse the call to move away from essentialism but support nonetheless political action based on collective identity as an important and necessary tool for social change. Actually, they endorse Spivak’s idea of ‘strategic essentialism’8 and Appadurai’s idea of ‘structured primordialism’.9 That is, while acknowledging that collective identities are ‘socially constructed’ and may occasionally be harmful, they believe that there are good reasons why sometimes they should nonetheless be constructed. The construction of such identities may provide social groups which face various forms of oppression with the symbolic and material wherewithal needed to initiate meaningful social change.

In contrast to these somewhat reserved approaches towards collective identities, there are other thinkers who maintain more favourable attitudes towards collective identities. This is, then, the maximal approach. Supporters of this approach argue that collective identities and cultural communities are crucially important to propitious development of human beings. Communitarians such as Sandel and Taylor argue that individuals cannot form their personal identities independently of a given community and its values.10 Individuals, they add, learn about themselves and consolidate their identity only within a community in which they are embedded and from which they derive the values and ideals that give meaning to their lives.

Although not espousing an essentialist position with respect to cultural communities and collective identities as Taylor does, Will Kymlicka also emphasizes the crucial role that community plays in the formation of self-identity. Furthermore, the community, he argues, provides the meaningful context for choice for human beings, a context without which personal
autonomy – which is so central to the liberal worldview – loses all meaning.\textsuperscript{11}

Independently of the ontological status of cultural identities, Kymlicka distinguishes between three kinds of collective rights: rights to self-government, polyethnic rights and representative rights. The aim of these rights – that are consistent with universal principles – is to protect minority groups from the political and economic power of society at large, while each is intended to deal with one kind of constraint.\textsuperscript{12} These rights, however, presuppose that every political framework carries – either implicitly or explicitly – a distinct collective and cultural identity. That is, the demand to secure some of the rights assumes that the cultural and collective identity is an integral part of every polity – there is no polity that lacks collective identity.

\textit{Self-government rights} secure a considerable measure of autonomy to certain cultural groups. The provision of self-government rights are intended to ensure these groups ‘the full and free development of their cultures and the best interests of their people’.\textsuperscript{13} These rights concern ‘societal cultures’, namely cultures that ‘provide their respective members meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres’.\textsuperscript{14} Indigenous and national minorities are the typical examples of the groups who are entitled, according to Kymlicka, to these rights.

\textit{Polyethnic rights} intend to protect ‘specific religious and cultural practices which might not be adequately supported through the market . . . or which are disadvantaged . . . by existing legislation’.\textsuperscript{15} Polyethnic rights are provided to groups that do not display characterizing societal cultures, such as immigrant groups. These groups, Kymlicka argues, consist of individuals who voluntarily immigrated to the country of their choice and they struggle mainly for their right to assimilate into society as full and equal members. Polyethnic rights are intended therefore to facilitate this process. They are intended, as Kymlicka argues, ‘to help ethnic groups and religious minorities express their cultural particularity and pride without it hampering their success in the economic and political institutions of the dominant society’.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Representative rights} are intended to provide rights to ethnic or national minorities within political institutions so that their interests are not compromised by decision making of political processes.\textsuperscript{17} (Unlike self-government and polyethnic rights, representative rights are considered as temporary measures aiming to compensate for systematic discrimination resulting from under-representation of various groups in society, i.e., ‘ethnic and racial minorities, women, the poor and the disabled’.)\textsuperscript{18} One of the obvious forms of representative rights is manifested in the policies of affirmative programmes.\textsuperscript{19}
It should be noted that the distinction Kymlicka makes between the different types of rights provokes some important reservations. Critics of Kymlicka believe that these distinctions are too rigid. The main thrust of the criticism is directed against the manner in which he defines those groups entitled to polyethnics rights – immigrant groups. His critics argue that it is inaccurate on his part to view all immigrants as individuals who voluntarily join the receiving society and want to assimilate within it. Immigration, they say, is often a traumatic experience forced upon individuals and hence cannot be perceived as an act of choice exerted under optimal conditions. Many immigrants are willing to migrate to any society that is willing to take them in or to any society displaying readiness to provide them with a shelter from political persecution, economic distress or natural disasters. Therefore, their immigration to this or that country does not indicate their willingness to relinquish their culture. In view of these considerations, it is questionable whether the rights to self-government should be reserved only to indigenous national minorities. Thus, for instance, it is possible to imagine providing Turkish minorities in Germany, Pakistanis in England and North African Moslems in France the authority to run their own educational systems and other aspects of their cultural life.

Who is right and who is wrong? What form should multiculturalism take? Should we opt for a status model of the politics of recognition, or for the identity model? How do we decide when to bestow this or that kind of collective rights? Now, the pronoun ‘we’ should not be understood as if we are able to assume a universal point of view. That is, there is no universal point of view that can assist us in determining a priori, for example, that the politics of identity should assume either the identity or the status model. Similarly, and contra Kymlicka, one cannot determine a priori that self-government rights are bestowed only on indigenous national minorities. As stated, although such minorities often present clear cases when the status of their members as free and equal human beings can be guaranteed by endowing them with such rights (on top of other rights), it is not clear that self-government rights are not sometimes required to secure this status to immigrant communities. Thus, for instance, the fact that ultra-orthodox Jews constitute an immigrant community in the United States does not make their demand that it is granted some self-government rights unreasonable or illegitimate. In short, decisions in such matters are deeply context-dependent. Hence, in the following section of the paper I will examine the various multicultural remedies against the backdrop of Israel’s social reality. Although the results of this examination may evince some general truths, they will be restricted to the case of Israel.
MULTICULTURALISM IN ISRAEL: GENERAL IMPLICATIONS

What are the implications of multiculturalism to Israeli society and its ‘basic structure’? Attempting to answer this I will focus, as stated, on four social divides: the Palestinian/Jewish divide, the religious/non-religious divide, the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi divide, the gender divide and the veteran/immigrant divide. Broadly speaking, these divides yield different solutions, making different uses of the three types of group rights suggested by Kymlicka. That is, while the Palestinian divide and the religious/secular divide requires multiculturalism in separate public spaces (MSPS), the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi divide and the gender divide requires multiculturalism in common public spaces (MCPS).

The distinction between the MSPS model and the MCPS model is not definitive. But, in contrast to the MCPS model, MSPS typically involves the demand of minority groups to be granted self-government rights, which, in turn, require the establishment of separate arrangements and institutions. Thus, the MSPS model may require, for instance, the establishment or reinforcement of segregated neighbourhoods and towns, separate educational streams (that use the language of minority groups and develop a curriculum emphasizing the culture and history of each group) and separate media institutions (e.g., TV and radio channels). Similar arrangements may be also required in other fields of art (film, theatre, etc.) and even in the economic fields, where novel initiatives are needed in order to boost minorities’ economic development.

In contrast to MSPS, the MCPS model involves polyethnic and representative rights. The main concern of these rights is that the cultures of various minority groups and their histories are integrated within the common public spaces. The groups advancing the multicultural demands that accord with this model do not wish to establish their own segregated communities. Rather, they argue that that society at large misrecognized them and their respective cultures and hence encourages the creation of formal and informal obstacles that impede their full and equal integration within society. The cultural demands that accord with the MCPS model amount to, as Kymlicka would describe it, temporary measures aiming to secure equal and full participation of minority groups in society. This, however, should not mislead us to underrate the value of the cultural demands that accord with the MCPS model, for the integration of the culture and history of minority groups may often entail considerable revisions of the culture and history of society.
MULTICULTURALISM AND SEPARATE PUBLIC SPACES

The Jewish-Palestinian Divide
In many respects, the Palestinian/Jewish divide is the most rigid of all divides characterizing Israeli society. The Israeli Palestinians constitute an indigenous national minority that once was a majority within the territorial borders of Israel. It gained its status as a minority following the 1948 war. Like other indigenous national minorities, it satisfies Kymlicka’s definition of a societal culture, and hence its demands accord with the MSPS model. What exact form should this model take? The political and academic discussions give rise to two main consociational arrangements entailing self-government rights. The first consociational arrangement suggests that while Israel should maintain its Jewish character, it must recognize the Palestinians’ right to cultural autonomy.22 This might mean, for instance, that while granting equal rights to all its citizens, Israel should afford its Arab citizens full cultural autonomy. ‘Jewish and Arab democrats’, as Bishara puts it, ‘have no other model [than consociational liberal democracy] to which they can aspire.’23 According to him, this entails the cultural neutralization of the State of Israel. Bishara’s position, however, finds a clear expression in the platform of the Palestinian Balad party that won three parliamentary seats in the general elections of January 2003. This platform calls upon Israel, on the one hand, to adopt a constitution that ‘will form the legal basis for social equality and political partnership in a state of all its citizens’. The platform goes on to state, on the other hand, that Balad will act ‘for the recognition of the Arab minority in Israel as a national-cultural minority, and insist on its right for self-rule in those matters that distinguish it from the Jewish majority in the state’ (italics in original).24

The second consociational arrangement suggests that Israel is transformed into a bi-national state that incorporates either the territories ranging from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea or only the territories included in Israel’s 1948 borders. As Raz-Krakozkin puts it, however, bi-nationalism is not a mere political arrangement. Rather, it is a moral perspective suggesting a strong form of recognition of Palestinian rights and history. It offers an ‘historical understanding’ according to which ‘the birth of Israel and the Palestinian tragedy are not two separate events, but one and the same’.25

Anyhow, those supporting the more extensive bi-national arrangement argue that the prospect of two separate states is anyway becoming difficult to realize due to the following two main reasons. First, demographically speaking, it becomes ever more difficult to secure either a Jewish homogenous nation state or a Palestinian homogenous nation state due to the existence of a sizeable Palestinian national minority living within Israel’s 1948 borders and due to the increase in the number of the Jewish
settlements and settlers in the occupied territories (especially in the West Bank). Second, the Jewish and Palestinian populations are spread over a limited territory that shares the same ecological system that requires close cooperation to manage and control it. Third, Palestinian society is highly dependent on the Israeli economy, sharing, for instance, the same labour market. Thus, in not instituting a bi-national arrangement, the implementation of the two-state solution will lead to the political and economic subordination of the Palestinian state to the Jewish state.

In any case, the demand to grant Palestinians cultural and national autonomy (while neutralizing Israel's Jewish character) and the demand to transform Israel into a bi-national state encounter fierce objection from most Jewish citizens of Israel. Most Jews believe that these demands are incompatible with their morally grounded right to national self-determination. The most they are willing to concede is some form of 'improved ethnic democracy' that allows Israel to maintain its character as Jewish-Zionist while granting the Palestinians some degree of cultural autonomy. This objection, however, is likely to have the following consequence: the stronger the objection, the more alienated will the Palestinians become from the State of Israel. This, in turn, will further consolidate them as a national minority seeking separate arrangements vis-à-vis the State of Israel and its society. This development is not unique to the Palestinian national minority of Israel. Rather, it indicates a general pattern. As Kymlicka puts it, 'refusing demands for self-government rights will simply aggravate alienation among national minorities, and increase the desire for secession'. In the case of Israel’s Palestinian minority, this development begins to be manifested, for instance, by a growing inclination among Israeli Palestinians to boycott the general elections of January 2003. The head of the northern faction of the Islamic Movement in Israel, Raed Slaah, gives this development unequivocal expression. ‘We act openly’, he recently stated, ‘to establish an autarchic society, a society that runs its own daily affairs … we aspire to establish an autarchic society that unites all members of our Palestinian people.’

The Palestinian quest for self-government rights – in one form or another – should be examined against the concerns raised in the previous section about the problems associated with the politics of recognition. These rights, no doubt, entail some form of identity model of the politics of recognition. That is, they include the Palestinians’ rights to manage their own educational and cultural affairs, intending to preserve and cultivate Palestinian national and cultural identity. Can we say, therefore, that the demand to satisfy these rights involves ‘the problem of displacement’ and the ‘problem of reification’? That is, can we say that the demand to satisfy them emphasizes issues of identity at the cost of ignoring issues of distribution? Furthermore, to what extent does this demand confine individuals within rigid collectivities?
In fact, when we ponder these questions we see that no simple answer can be given to them. More importantly, we also see why it is impossible to make a clear-cut distinction between the identity model and the status model. Let us examine these issues closely by looking first at the context in which Palestinians' demand for self-government rights come about. First, the Palestinians constitute a national group that began to form, according to some historical accounts, in the 1830s. Now, like all national groups, the Palestinian national group is no doubt an ‘imagined community’ that involved selective interpretation of history and the fabrication of primordial past and myths. But this does not change the reality of Palestinian collective identity, as much as the use of the same methods does not change the reality of other national identities. Kymlicka’s words on this issue are right on the mark. ‘Much has made’, writes Kymlicka, ‘in the recent literature of the social construction of national identity, and of the invention of tradition. And of course much of the mythology accompanying national identities is just that – a myth. But it is important not to confuse the heroes, history, or present-day characteristics of a national identity with the underlying national identity itself. The former is much more malleable than the latter.’

National identities do indeed involve a considerable measure of reification and maybe should be transcended, but it is unreasonable and unfair to demand that national minorities relinquish ‘their’ national identity while they constitute oppressed minorities within states (e.g., Israeli Palestinians) that assume a strong ethno-national culture. By relinquishing national identity, national minorities propel themselves into a rather disadvantageous political position. That is, even if one supposes that this identity is tenuous and lacking strong roots – which is not the case – those belonging to it would be advantaged by putting effort into solidifying and strengthening it as a political means to fight discrimination, exclusion and marginalization exercised against it by the dominant national group. It is an awareness of this fact that leads Spivak and Appadurai, for instance, to advocate, respectively, ‘strategic essentialism’ and ‘constructed primordialism’. These methods are after all the weapons left for the weak to use, even if these methods lead inadvertently to the reification of group identity.

The struggle against the various forms of oppression shows that the identity and the status models are often inextricably intertwined. That is, strengthening and solidifying group identity is sometimes a necessary means for a successful struggle for equal status in society. There are no short cuts in this regard. That is to say, the prospect of transforming Israel into a secular liberal democracy in which the legal status of all citizens is secured independently of their respective group identities is very unreal in the foreseeable future. It seems that neither Jews nor Palestinians are eager to adopt this position. Thus, under such circumstances the
cultivation of national identity by minority groups may serve to articulate their distributive demands – not to dissipate them. Furthermore, the cultivation of group identity and the articulation of distributive demands – which has the quality of an organic whole – facilitate the development of the political might needed to bring about the satisfaction of these demands.

The Religion/non-religion Divide

Although quite different in nature, the option of a consociational, multicultural democracy seems also to be an adequate solution, *mutatis mutandis*, to the relationship that should hold between religious and non-religious groups. Granting religious groups cultural autonomy that accords with the MSPS, they should be able, with the assistance of the state, to maintain their unique way of life. That is, they are granted the right to a separate educational system and the right to control the public sphere of their segregated communities. As we saw, unlike the analogous demand in the case of the Jewish/Palestinian divide, these rights are fully met, with one major exception. While recognizing the equal right of all groups to religious autonomy, non-Jewish religious institutions are severely discriminated against, as stated, in the allocation of material resources.

The provision of cultural autonomy to religious groups leaves an important issue unresolved. Religious groups may argue that this arrangement works in favour of the dominant groups because it leaves no room for religious groups to participate in shaping the character of the common public spaces. This disadvantage, they might continue, cannot be justified, especially when a state displays no neutrality towards the different cultures existing within it. Thus, they may demand that they be allowed to partake in shaping the character of the common public spaces by incorporating religious elements in them. And, indeed, this is the demand that Jewish religious leaders make against the State of Israel. They state that they recognize the right of non-observant Jews to lead their private life as they wish but demand that the public sphere carry the hallmark of Jewish religion. ‘The practical and positive attitude of the ultra-orthodox Judaism to the State of Israel’, states Rabbi Shtookhammer, the former secretary of the ultra-orthodox religious party, Agudat Israel, ‘is expressed in its concern with the Jewish character of the State ... We beg and demand that at least the public sphere of the State will derive its character from Jewish roots, so that the state will deserve its name as the State of Israel’. In making this pledge, Rabbi Shtookhammer voices the feeling shared by many religious and ultra-religious Jews that over the last decade Israeli society has witnessed a pronounced tilt of the pendulum in favour of non-observant Jews. As stated, they perceive ‘the constitutional revolution’ of 1992 and some of the decisions that the Supreme Court has taken since then, based on the new basic laws (Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, and Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation) embodying this
revolution, as an illustration to this tilt. They cite in this regard, for instance, the ruling of the Supreme Court against the policy of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare to fine businesses that operate on the Sabbath and the ruling against the ban on the import of non-kosher products. They also point to the legislation in 1995 of the Marital Affairs Law (that erodes the monopolistic authority of Rabbinical courts to rule in such affairs) and government’s ordinance allowing for secular burial services (1993).

The demand of ultra-orthodox Jews that the public sphere of Israel ‘derives its character from Jewish roots’ is a source, however, of deep resentment and rage on part of many secular Jews. They argue that religion is already granted an excessive role in the public and private spheres of Israeli society. They cite the following examples to underscore this point. First, Israel’s national definition derives its symbols, flag and national anthem from religious sources. Second, Jewish religion plays a crucial role in Israel’s Basic Law of Return. This law recognizes the right of Jews worldwide to become citizens of the state provided that their mothers are Jewish or that they converted to Judaism and belong to no other religious affiliation. Third, religious courts are granted almost full monopoly over the determination of personal status (marriage, divorce, alimony, maintenance, etc.). Fourth, religious restrictions are imposed in many fields of life. Such restrictions are imposed, for instance, on the operation of the means of public transportation (including Israel’s national air company El Al) on the Sabbath and other holy days. Similar restrictions are still widely imposed on leisure activities such as movie theatres and restaurants on the Sabbath and other holy days, and on the import and sale of pork and other non-kosher products to Israel.

Given what they see as excessive intrusion of religion into Israel’s public sphere, secular Jews might argue that the implementation of the ideal of multicultural democracy definitely does not require further inclusion of religious elements into Israel’s public sphere but rather a reduction of such elements. Such a reduction is requested, they convincingly claim, if Israel is to be a multicultural democracy. To put it differently, they might argue that if the implementation of the policy of even-handedness requires some adjustments with respect to the state/religion relations then these adjustments surely must be in favour of secular Jews. The intransigent positions held by both camps forestall the possibility of reaching in the near future an agreement about how Israeli society should determine the nature of its public sphere so that it can develop ‘bonds of a more encompassing community’.

The demand of religious groups to be granted government rights clearly underscores the shortcomings Fraser associates with the identity model of the politics of recognition. Thus, for instance, one can hardly deny that the demand of ultra-religious groups to be granted self-government rights that protect their unique way of life indicates a flagrant and willing repudiation
of the politics of distribution on behalf of the politics of identity. Following a critical theme, commonly directed, against the politics of identity, it is possible to say that the protection of this way of life is crucially detrimental to the well-being of the members of ultra-orthodox groups. It does not encourage the development of the capacities and competence of their members needed to exploit the opportunities for economic improvement and self-realization offered by Israeli society. That is, ultra-orthodox religious values and codes of behaviour put religious individuals at a disadvantage in Israeli society. Although some may argue that this criticism presupposes a bias dominating post-industrial capitalist societies and reflecting bourgeoisie ethos and values, they cannot so easily dismiss it. They cannot ignore the fact, for instance, that the rate of members of ultra-orthodox groups living below the poverty line is extremely high. One cannot, then, convincingly justify abject poverty by appealing to cultural norms and ideals.

However, things become more complicated when we recognize that the protection of the way of life embraced by members of ultra-orthodox religious groups does not touch merely on the question of whether the state can or cannot interfere with it in order to increase their life chances. As things stand, the protection of this way of life requires generous material assistance provided by the state, which, in turn, plays a crucial role in its expansion among the members of these groups. Hence, is not the state within its right to create negative incentives to encourage them to seek economic independence? Is not the state within its right to create such incentives in order to mitigate the threat posed to its welfare system by the allocation of generous welfare benefits to citizens who decline to be part of its working force? The multicultural position I advance suggests that the state is within its right to act in this manner. I believe, however, that many ultra-orthodox Jews and their leaders understand that the state cannot continue to provide this assistance and are making attempts to integrate actively within Israel’s economic infrastructure.

Viewed from a multicultural perspective, the way of life embraced by ultra-orthodox groups involves another major problem. This problem is also associated with the provision of self-government rights to religious groups; namely, the problem of the reification of culture. As we saw, the problem is that minority groups often use these rights to impose oppressive codes of behaviour on some of their members. As Kymlicka and Cohen-Almagor emphasize, (liberal) multiculturalism rejects such practices and condemns them. But he – as well as other multiculturalists – does not offer a systematic way showing how to handle such practices.
MULTICULTURALISM AND COMMON PUBLIC SPACES

Compared with the difficulties posed by religious groups to the possible implementation of the ideal of multicultural democracy, for other segments of society its implications are much easier to accommodate. I have in mind women, Mizrahi Jews and new immigrants, mainly from the former Soviet Unions and from Ethiopia. These are the main groups whose cultural and economic interests have been compromised or are at risk of being compromised under the current state of affairs.

Implementing the ideal of multicultural democracy regarding these groups would require mainly revisions of symbolic institutions and public practices that underpin the various forms of exclusion, discrimination and marginalization directed against them. Thus, the implementation of the ideal of multicultural democracy in the case of these groups can be facilitated by granting them mainly polyethic and representative rights. On some occasions, however, this ideal can also be facilitated by granting them quasi-self-government rights.

Gender Relations and the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi Divide

As far as the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi divide and the gender divide go, it is generally the case that the oppressed groups (Mizrahim and women) do not call for the establishment of segregated communities. The main concern of these groups is to curtail the discriminatory practices that are mediated through cultural misrecognition of their members. Thus, on the one hand, there are the forceful claims that Israel’s ethno-cultural national identity is basically Eurocentric and thus imbued with Orientalist preconceptions of the east in general and of Mizrahi Jews in particular. These preconceptions amount to a misrecognition of Mizrahi Jews and their culture, thus confining them to a ‘demeaning and contemptible picture of themselves’ and ‘imprisoning them in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being’.46 This misrecognition in turn has infiltrated the educational system leading to the creation of an ethnic Mizrahi working class.47 Furthermore, it has also given rise to the creation of formal and informal discrimination against Mizrahim in the allocation of material resources.48 On the other hand, there are the similar forceful claims by women that Israel’s ethno-cultural national identity is saturated with gender-based preconceptions that reinforce a patriarchal social order which, in turn, discriminates against women and curtails their life chances.49 That is, in contrast to its ethos of equality between men and women, Zionism has reproduced and in some cases even reinforced gendered divisions in Israeli society.50

The struggle of women and Mizrahim bear strong similarities since both groups, as stated, seek the rectification of their group identity as one of the necessary means to participate in social life as full and equal members.51 As stated, these groups do not wish to establish segregated communities but
want to bring changes in the very hegemonic culture. The desired changes cannot be dismissed as a trifle. In the case of Mizrahi Jews it may, first, call for a new narration of the common and troubled Mizrahi/Ashkenazi past; and, second, it may require the incorporation of Mizrahi historical and cultural heritage (that does not fall squarely within the strictures of Zionist logic) into Israel national culture. Actually, the incorporation of Mizrahi cultural outlook is something that requires Israeli society to come to terms with the very Eurocentric and Orientalist preconceptions permeating Zionist ideology. This outlook calls for the dissipation of a deeply rooted perception that Zionism’s unrequited mission is to redeem the Semitic region (including Mizrahi Jews) from the alleged darkness and cultural wasteland in which they have been mired for a very long time.52

Similar revisions in the national culture are required in the case of women. ‘Do women’, asks Herzog, ‘have interests qua women?’53 Rightly, Herzog does not give a straight answer to this question, for it is highly controversial. Reviewing, however, some of the work written by Israeli women on gender and gender inequality it becomes clear, more or less, that most of them favour strategies and are committed to causes that may secure women equal and full participation in society. Thus it is mainly a combination of a struggle to uproot preconceptions that degrade women and confine them to inferior social status and a demand to grant women representative rights in the political arena and in the public job market (e.g., affirmative action programmes aiming to increase the ratio of women in these fields). Furthermore, as Friedman notes, the quiet ‘gender revolution’ of the last two decades has taken place mainly in home-based politics, challenging patriarchal hegemony and achieving a considerable equality between the sexes.54 This orientation mirrors the effect that women authors have on Israeli society. ‘Literary representations’, writes Naveh, ‘partake in public debate concerning the concept of nationality, and they infiltrate parliamentary discussions and the Supreme Court. This is a special contribution of women as writers and readers.’55 However, looking at the activities carried out either by Mizrahi activists or women, one may conclude that in spite of the fact that these groups do not seek to reify their collective identity, some degree of reification becomes inevitable. This necessarily ensues even when social activists belonging to these groups adopt strategies borrowing from the status model of the politics of recognition. One of the main examples that can be introduced in this regard is the initiative by ‘Kedma’, a movement established in the mid-1990s by Mizrahi intellectuals and educators, to establish a chain of Mizrahi schools. But even this example suggests a limited degree of reification of Mizrahi culture. While those pushing this initiative stress the importance of exposing Mizrahi children to Mizrahi cultural heritage and history, they vow to prepare them for successful integration within society.56
Although completely different from the two schisms dealt with before, these schisms also (the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi schism and the women/men schism) do not permit an easy severance between claims of recognition and claims of distribution. That is, the fact that most Mizrahi Jews and women seek full and equal integration within society does not mean that they relinquish claims to recognition. Thus, even those matters that seemingly touch solely on issues of recognition tend to have distributive ramifications. This is the case, for instance, concerning the demand that the ‘nation’s collective memory’ incorporates the unique role that Mizrahi Jews and women had played during Israel’s modern history (even if this role requires a considerable change of Israel’s self-image). Such incorporation may contribute to the creation of a social and cultural setting that instils in Mizrahi Jews and women a sense of belonging to society, which may, in turn, enhance their self-esteem and facilitate their integration as equal and full citizens in society. Furthermore, claims of recognition may be manifested through various affirmative action programmes aiming at members of these groups. Should society initiate such programmes, it would actually grant Mizrahi and women some form of collective rights, aspiring thus to intervene directly on their behalf in the political and economic spheres. That is, it directs special efforts, based on group affiliation, towards these groups, aiming to improve their distributive lot.

Russian Immigration: Multicultural Challenges in a global Era

In comparison with the Mizrahim and women, immigrants from the former Soviet Union present a different multicultural challenge to Israeli society. First, it should be noted that the integration of the Russian immigrants to Israeli society has not been accompanied by a strict adoption of the Israeli and Hebrew culture. This explains in part the fact that the Russian community has developed a vibrant publishing industry, during the 1990s, producing books, newspapers and journals. At the beginning of the last decade the distribution of all these publications has reached one million: four national newspapers, nine local newspapers, twelve weekly magazines, one children’s magazine, and five periodicals dealing with culture and literature. Not only does it construct Israeli reality differently than the Hebrew publishing industry, but it also challenges the boundaries of Israel collective memory. For instance, a few years ago veterans of the Red Army demanded that the day of victory over Nazi Germany be declared a national holiday, thus attempting to reshape Israel’s politics of remembrance in a manner to secure within it space for themselves. Parallel to their attempts to integrate within Israeli collective memory and to reshape it, many Russian immigrants keep close and uninterrupted contact with their country of origin. This contact is maintained by various means. Russian immigrants are continuously exposed to Russian TV channels,
they read Russian newspapers, attend cultural activities featuring guest artists from the former Soviet Union and frequently visit their countries of origin. It is possible to say that immigration from the former Soviet Union to Israel bears the stamp of the present global age.\textsuperscript{60}

What is the appropriate way to accommodate the need of Russian immigrants to maintain their cultural identity? What is the way to transform the \textit{de facto} multiculturalism displayed in the relationship between the Russian immigrants and Israeli society into \textit{de jure} multiculturalism? Does this \textit{de facto} multiculturalism require self-government rights or only polyethnic and representative rights? Do the Russian immigrants, as Kymlicka would have argued, constitute a group that wants to assimilate within Israeli society and hence should be denied self-government rights? I believe that it is impossible to provide a straightforward answer in favour of Kymlicka’s position in this regard. While maintaining their unique cultural identity, most immigrants from the former Soviet Union seek a form of ‘instrumental integration’ within Israeli society.\textsuperscript{61} That is, while integrating into Israel’s political, economic and social life, they are determined to preserve many aspects of their cultures and values. Thus, the role of the state in this regard is not merely to secure them polyethnic and representative rights, designed to either expedite their assimilation into mainstream society or to redress past injustice and discrimination against them. The state should also assist them in asserting their differences in various fields of life, differences that can also be seen as economic assets in the global age in which we live. These differences require, then, that the state grant quasi-self-government rights to Russian immigrants.

Ethiopian Immigration: Multiculturalism and the New Challenge of Race

A more complicated case, however, is the status of Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. These immigrants add an important element of colour to the Israeli hierarchy (i.e., ‘black’). Related maybe to this element, their Jewishness was considered by state and rabbinical authorities as something constantly in doubt. Thus, more than any other group, Ethiopian immigrants present a considerable moral challenge before Israeli society, a challenge that it miserably fails to meet. Israeli society witnesses sharp racist attitudes towards Ethiopians. These attitudes are displayed, for instance, by leaders and residents of municipalities (many of them of Mizrahi origins) who strongly object to Ethiopians residing there, and by schools that either refuse to admit Ethiopian children or keep them in segregated classes. In reaction to these attitudes, many Ethiopian youngsters adopt black rap music and perceive it as a source of black pride. Thus, Israeli society needs to accommodate Ethiopian immigrants on different levels. First, Ethiopian immigrants, more than any other group, force Israeli society to rethink the basic preconceptions lying at the heart of its Eurocentric national identity.
Second, it seems that Ethiopian immigrants require the protection of a mixture of self-government, polyethnic and representative rights that may secure their integration within Israeli society as full and equal members.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Israeli society has traditionally aspired to become a homogeneous collective modelled after ethno-cultural principles. Nonetheless, and after many and continuous efforts to achieve this goal, Israeli society is characterized by accentuated cultural heterogeneity. Actually, these efforts themselves have crucially contributed to the consolidation of some of the cultural schisms characterizing Israeli society. Furthermore, these very efforts that have assumed rigid cultural hierarchy have also contributed to the emergence of socioeconomic inequalities in Israeli society. That is, these inequalities were facilitated by the dialectics of nation-building processes – processes that simultaneously construct a homogeneous collective and divide it into different social groups that are assigned different cultural and human worth. This is, then, the historical context in which the practices of misrecognition and non-recognition have taken place, leading to various forms of formal and informal discrimination. How should oppressed groups (and society at large) act against these forms of maltreatment? Multicultural democracy aspires to provide an answer to this question. It suggests an approach that combines claims of recognition and claims of redistribution. This is not to say, of course, that these claims cannot exist independently of each other. The sentiment towards reductionism ought to be resisted when it comes from either direction. Resisting this sentiment, however, we should realize that practices of misrecognition and practices of male-distribution very often coalesce into an indistinguishable whole. Hence, the remedy to this unholy union must assume a two-fold approach.

This approach requires various strategies (that vary, as we saw, according to changing circumstances). Sometimes it requires that members of minority groups (e.g., national minorities) develop awareness of their cultural distinctiveness and define their own sectarian interests, whether symbolic or/and material. On other occasions it requires that members of ethnic groups form ad hoc organizations and movements whose aim is to facilitate the incorporation of their heritage within mainstream culture and their full and equal participation in society.

Multiculturalism and its attendant strategies reflect the disillusionment of many social groups from grand narratives and universal political programmes. It emerged after they realized that while such programmes – e.g., liberalism, nationalism, socialism, capitalism and now globalism – carry a universal promise of economic progress and personal self-development, they tend to further mainly the interests of the few – the dominant groups of every society. Multiculturalism is not necessarily
inconsistent with some of these programmes; but it requires that special attention is given to social groups in their implementation. It emerges, as stated, in reaction to the tendency of grand political programmes to allow discrimination and marginalization of social groups while promulgating universal values and ideals.

Now, of course, one has to concede to the charge that multiculturalism runs the danger of undercutting efforts to form an extended social coalition against formidable forces that cause deep socioeconomic inequalities in society. Identity politics may encourage mutual alienation and resentment among social groups which face similar oppressive practices. This is indeed a possibility that often follows the essentialization and reification of cultural identity. It presents a substantial challenge, therefore, to those supporting the multicultural approach. Multiculturalism can offer a viable and legitimate political agenda only when it meets this challenge successfully.

NOTES
5. Ibid., p.112.
7. Fraser, ‘Rethinking Recognition’, p.113.
11. Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship, Oxford, 1995, p.93. To secure the liberal character of multiculturalism and to forestall the danger of reification, Kymlicka emphasizes that parallel to the right of cultural communities to preserve their identities and ways of life, the right of individuals to exit from the community must be maintained. But, as critics of Kymlicka rightly argue, the practical significance of this right is doubtful.
19. It seems that the demand to secure minority groups’ polyethnic rights is consistent with the position of Fraser as well as with Spivak’s ‘strategic essentialism’ and Appadurai’s ‘structured primordialism, and this is due to the temporary dimension of this demand. So it seems one should not confuse the ontological status of cultural identities with the collective rights discourse. That is to say, there is no reason why those who view these identities as a result of social processes and not as primordial and essential entities endorse this discourse (except if, like Fraser, they reject this discourse straightforwardly).
21. Ibid.
22. Consociational arrangements are not the only possibility introduced in discussions concerning the Palestinian/Jewish divide. There is a third possibility, one that defies the logic of the first two. It suggests doing away with group rights altogether and transforming Israel into a secular state that may, like the bi-national model, assumes two different variants. This arrangement is post-national in character since those supporting it believe that it should transcend Jewish and Palestinian cultural identity and ground the institution of citizenship and universal principles.
27. This development is not unique to the Palestinian national minority of Israel. Rather, it indicates a general pattern. As Kymlicka puts it, ‘refusing demands for self-government rights will simply aggravate alienation among national minorities, and increase the desire for secession’. Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship, p.183.
28. Ibid., p.183.
33. It seems that Azmi Bishara’s position concerning Palestinian national identity follows this line of argument. He advocates a three-stage programme. The first stage is completed after securing for the Palestinians within Israel cultural (non-territorial) autonomy while transforming Israel into a liberal democracy that displays neutrality towards all cultures. The second stage will be achieved after transforming Israel/Palestine – incorporating the territories form the Jordan River to the sea into a bi-national state that recognizes the national rights of Jews and Palestinians. The third stage – ideal and utopian in nature – is to transform the bi-national state into a liberal democracy, which severs the connection between citizenship and national cultures. See, for example, Azmi Bishara, ‘Between Nationality and Nation: Thoughts on Nationalism’, Theory and Criticism, Vol.6 (1995), pp.19–43 (Hebrew); Azmi Bishara, ‘On the Question of Palestinian Minority in Israel’, Theory and Criticism, Vol.17 (1997), pp.7–21 (Hebrew); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice’, Wedge, Vol.7/8 [Winter/Spring] (1985), pp.120–130; Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Minneapolis, 1996.
34. It should be noted that according to multiculturalists such as Kymlicka the demand for minority collective rights is also justified when the state is modelled after the ideal of liberal democracy and not only after ethno-cultural principles. The reason justifying this demand under such circumstances is that in the absence of protection from the state, the culture of minority groups faces a serious danger of extinction. As we saw, this is also the position held by Bishara.
35. Jews are much more entranced in their objection to this arrangement than Palestinians. According to Smooha, only 4.5% of them supported this option. See Smooha, ‘Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype’, p.230.


38. It is difficult to draw the analogous and possible claims of non-Jewish religions against the State of Israel. Like Jewish religious groups, they might also demand that the public spaces of Israeli society give some room to elements drawn from their religions. However, refusing to relinquish its ethno-cultural, Jewish character, the Jewish state would find it utterly unacceptable to accede to these demands. This, of course, does not nullify the prima facie force of this possible demand.


40. There is an on-going controversy over the authority of ‘non-recognizable Jewish streams’ (Reform and Conservative Judaism) to convert non-Jews to Judaism within Israel. Religious groups in Israel demand – and so far are granted – exclusive authority in this field.


42. For this kind of criticism, see, for instance, Jose Brunner and Yoav Peled, ‘On Autonomy, Competence and Democracy: Critique of Liberal Multiculturalism’, in Menachem Mautner, Avi Sagi and Ronen Shamir (eds.), Multiculturalism in a Democratic and Jewish State, Tel Aviv, 1999, pp.107–32 (Hebrew).


45. Will Kymlicka and Raphael Cohen-Almagor, ‘Democracy and Multiculturalism’, in Raphael Cohen-Almagor (ed.), Challenges to Democracy: Essays in Honour and Memory of Isaiah Berlin, London, 2000, pp.89–118. One of the means to curtail these practices is to ensure members of minority groups the right to exit. But this right, as critics of multiculturalism argue, in many cases lacks operative significance.


49. Dafana Izraeli et al. (eds.), Sex, Gender Politics: Women in Israel, Tel Aviv, 1999 (Hebrew); Ishak Saporta and Yossi Yonah, ‘Pre-vocational Education in Israel: Nationality, Ethnicity, and Gender’, Theory and Criticism, Vol.22 (2003), pp.35–66 (Hebrew).

51. The grouping of members of Israeli society into women and Mizrahim is of course too simple. But aside from the majority of Palestinian and ultra-orthodox women whose demand for recognition may be met within segregated public spaces, the demands for recognition of most other women is likely to be met within common public spaces, despite the difference among them.


56. For more on this topic see, for instance, Yossi Dahan and Gal Levi, ‘Multicultural Education in a Zionist State’, Studies in Philosophy and Education, Vol.19, Nos.5–6 (2000), pp.423–444. Shas, of course, contradicts this claim. But I chose to place it under the category of ultra-orthodox religious groups. However, this is not intended to overlook the fact that Shas provides a good example whereby the reification of cultural identity produces the problems associated with it. Actually, this reification was clearly apparent during the election campaign of Shas prior to the last general elections (January 2003). While advancing an ultra-orthodox political agenda, it stresses a Mizrahi narrative of oppression and discrimination of the state and its Ashkenazi elites against Mizrahi Jews.

57. Following this logic, the Minister of Education has decided that beginning in 2004, 30% of the literary works included in the school curriculum will be by Mizrahi authors.


60. See article by Tamar Horowitz in this book.
