

From Laboratory to Field: Notes on Studying Diversity in Israeli Society

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ABSTRACT: *The paper presents a research path capable of comprehending the dynamics of diversity within Israeli society. It reviews earlier research paradigms as well more recent analytic stances that stress the society's fragmentation into disparate units. The research approach seeks to identify themes that run through Israeli culture even as they are subjects of difference and conflict. It stresses the importance of ethnography while theoretically expanding the notion of "field" to encompass historical and cultural factors that enter into complex social situations.*

Introduction

Diversity in Israel is a highly dynamic, sometimes absurd reality that manages to surprise even those whose professional life is invested in studying it. Hagar Salomon, one of the authors, recently experienced the potency of Israeli irony while on a bus ride from Egypt to Israel. During the period preceding the 1999 Israeli elections, she overheard a conversation between the bus driver - an Israeli Arab from Jerusalem - and a passenger - an Israeli Arab from the lowlands town of Taibe. A third party to the discussion was an Israeli Jew, on whose account the conversation was held in Hebrew. The passenger from Taibe asked the driver how he intended to vote in the upcoming elections, stating that it was his intent to vote for the progressive, left-wing *Meretz* party. The driver's answer that he and his whole family would vote for *Shas*, the Jewish, *mizrahi* (Eastern) ultra-Orthodox party, succeeded in shocking her, even though she was, like most other Israelis, familiar with the "folkloristic" use of Jewish kabbalistic amulets among Israeli Arabs.¹ The driver then explained further that his family fully supported *Shas'* then leader, Aryeh Der'i, through his trial and sen-

* The co-authors' names appear alphabetically. The paper has benefited from contributions and comments by Orit Abuhav and Efrat Lapidot.

1 *Shas* had a practice of distributing amulets linking private and personal success with voting for the party. This was outlawed in the most recent elections.

tencing for corruption. In a spontaneous expression of his conviction he abruptly switched to Arabic, proclaiming dramatically, with a cry usually inciting anti-Zionist sentiments: "With Blood, with Spirit, we will redeem you, Oh Der'i."

It is easy to chuckle at, or to be charmed by, such seeming "incongruities" of Israeli life, but beyond their amusing exterior, they reflect deep social dynamics and cultural developments which deal a new hand to conventional sociological wisdom. It is the purpose of this paper to draw attention to the limits of past approaches to internal cultural diversity and to sketch out possible avenues of access to this ever-changing matrix.

Unraveling Diversity In Israeli Society: Some Critical Comments

The most general challenge presented by evolving social realities in Israel is that the establishment of an independent state, and the demographic success of "ingathering the exiles," has had effects far more complex than those of creating a single national culture. After over half a century of researching Israeli society, we are still left with important, salient social and cultural developments in the society which fit neither the categories and meta-conceptions of the "classic" sociological perspectives, nor the analytic emphases of the more recent critical approaches.² In contrast with trends of the late 1940s - 60s, we now witness the continued importance of ethnic identity among groups of people who are no longer underprivileged, along with the linkage of ethnic identity to religion and to religious parties. Other examples are from newer immigrant groups, such as the Jews from the Former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. To further emphasize the complexity of interlacing ethnic fields, Arabs in Israel, exposed to both Palestinian cultural currents and the massive influence of Jewish Israeli society, constitute another category which is internally diverse and far more complex than allowed for by existing social science paradigms (Sa'di, 1997; Rabinowitz, 1998).

The growth of the social sciences in Israel was closely linked to the establishment of the state and the growing diversity thereafter. Yet, the study of diversity presented a challenge that Israeli social science has faced with only partial success. This is evident in the features of the dominant sociological thinking that emerged in the 1950s, and in a comparison between these and the common basic assumptions regarding cultural diversity within the humanities.

One feature of the then regnant sociological approach was the tendency to underestimate the significance of history for the deciphering of socio-cultural

2 An important exception is the introduction to Leshem and Shuval's edited volume (1998), which touches upon many of the themes identified in the present article.

dynamics. This tendency appeared with regard to all newcomers, among them European and Middle Eastern Jews (Goldberg, 1977, 1985). Populations from Europe were viewed in terms of "a relatively great 'neutralization' of the social influences of the countries of origin of the immigrants" (Eisenstadt, 1950). Even the very immediate past, including the Holocaust, whose monumental historical impact was recognized in other spheres, did not appear as a factor in conceptual approaches regarding Israeli society. Parallel to the "blind eye" turned toward European Jewry's past, the main claim with regard to Middle Eastern immigrants was that their specific histories were only marginally relevant to an understanding of the emergent society, the relevant history beginning only after immigration to Israel (Ben-David, 1952).

A second feature of sociological thinking was the organization of research around envisioned future-oriented models enlisting, as it were, in the national effort of social planning. This was apparent in the study of *kibbutzim*, of immigrant *moshavim* (cooperative settlements) and of development towns (Cohen, 1970; Weintraub et al, 1971; Talmon, 1972). This approach led researchers of the social sciences to isolate concrete subjects and loci of study, as well as schemata that inform the formulation of research issues. Along the same lines, the study of social and cultural interactions within urban life was relatively neglected.

A reduction of the complexity of the social dynamic processes in Israel within the country can also be seen in the reliance upon and the politics of the categories delineated by the Central Bureau of Statistics to classify country of origin. The categories reflect an arbitrary division of continents and the little attention paid to differences among countries or regions within countries. The division into two groups, Europe-America and Asia-Africa, creates false dichotomies of East and West, along with their well-known orientalist hierarchies. Another error of simplification is the practice of defining "country of origin" with reference to fathers only, a further indication of the inability to relate to complex social fields, in this case, the increasingly hybridized ethnic identities in Israel that are essential to understanding the dynamics of Israeli ethnic diversity.

In contrast to the lack of historical depth within the future- and present-oriented social sciences, both the destruction of European Jewry and the mass migration of Jews from many Muslim countries stimulated students of the humanities, in particular folklore specialists, to salvage aspects of these "lives left behind" before memories of them vanish. This led to extensive documentation in realms such as folk literature, language traditions, music, dance and clothing, of separate, rigidly defined ethnic groups. The attempt to "capture" this rich ethnographic reality, however, was predicated precisely on the assumption of its rapid disappearance. There was little focus on the overlapping histories of

these communities, the links between them, or their connection to the present. At a disciplinary level, sociology was structurally separated from folklore, and anthropological approaches, which highlighted the concept of culture, were often criticized as too narrow for the task of understanding changing Israeli society. Both the humanities and the social sciences, though with different emphases, had romanticized views of internal Jewish diversity and did not assign enough importance to its complex history and potential impact in emerging Israeli society.

More fundamentally, however, the study of social change, "modernization" and even the muted attention that was paid to ethnicity were, in many cases, divorced from research on other spheres, such as the very important realm of religion. Early study of religion focused on problems of religion and state and on the place of *haredim* (ultra-orthodox Jews) in the new situation of autonomous nationhood (Zucker, 1973). Religious patterns of Middle Eastern Jews were not examined seriously as religious components in their own right, but were seen instead as purely traditional. In addition, along with the conceptual wedge placed between the major Jewish sectors of Israeli society and their pasts, the study of different Arab communities, among them Christians and Muslims, Druze and Bedouin, villagers and those in mixed cities, treated each as an entity unto itself, even while placing them in the Israeli context (Rosenfeld, 1964; Cohen, 1965; Marx, 1967; Oppenheimer, 1980).

One way of summing up these tendencies is by reference to the image of Israel as a "laboratory", an image shared by researchers of different orientations, including anthropologists bemoaning the fact that field research was not able to take full advantage of the cultural diversity of the early 1950s (Deshen, 1979). At times, the notion was explicitly mentioned (e.g. Matras, 1965; Horowitz and Lissak 1990) or hinted at by use of terms like "test case" (Talmon, 1972). The laboratory image encapsulates the features already mentioned: disconnection from history and the surroundings, and the isolation of empirical phenomena as if analytic distinctions were coterminous with social reality "on the ground." Also entailed in the laboratory metaphor is the assumption of "control". This resonates with the focus on social planning within Israeli social science, and the putative affinities between social science work and centers of policy and decision-making.

Reservations have long been voiced regarding/in regard to the main sociological orientations of the 1950s-60s. The functionalist paradigm was criticized for assuming consensus and ignoring conflicting processes within the society (Smootha, 1978). "Dependency theory" was invoked to better understand Israel's ties to wider economic and political forces, and to characterize relations among stronger and weaker groups within it (Swirsky and Bernstein, 1980).

Questions have been asked about the close fit between sociological perspectives and prevailing understandings of the dominant and policy-setting forces within the society (Bernstein, 1980; Shenhav and Kunda, 1992). In general, sociology has been placed under the scrutiny of theories that assume the close nexus of "knowledge" and "power" (Ram, 1995).

One important and often missing aspect of research strategy is paying close attention to the media. A lost opportunity on Goldberg's part illustrates the potency of this angle, which can sometimes offer valuable and unexpected insights into subtle, cultural complexities. When, in 1963, he was conducting research on a *moshav* of the group that had come to be known as the "cave dwellers," he went into Netanya one evening with some men in their late teens and saw *Salah Shabati*³ with them, when the film had only recently been released. To his surprise, not only did the young men enjoy the movie, but they laughed throughout the picture in a totally easy fashion. Later, they explained to Goldberg that "that was our parents, when they arrived." They viewed themselves as belonging to an entirely different reality. This is a very different reading of the film from that which emerges, for example, in the analysis of Ella Shohat (1989). It is not a question of one reading being correct while the other is not, rather the point that conventional field studies should pay more attention to media experiences, and media analysts could take "the field" more into account than they have in the past.

Utilization of media technology in social research involves several levels, the most basic being documentation. Once associated with the "preservation" of traditional cultures seen as being on the verge of disappearing, it is now clear that documentation is also important with reference to the emergence of new socio-cultural forms, and that social phenomena, which are presently salient, may rapidly "become history." Anthropologists now appreciate that "we need to incorporate the complexities of expressive representation into our ethnographies, not only as technical adjuncts but as primary material with which to construct and interrogate our own representations" (Appadurai, 1996: 64).

Beyond documentation, the media are now a key element in identity politics. Electronic recording can tap "mediated" identities emerging from the meeting of intimate and mass-produced experiences which now are integral in processes of cultural identity-formation (Kugelmass and Romeyn, 1996; Abu-Lughod, 1999). These technologies may elicit interesting reflection both among the "ob-

3 *Salah Shabati* is the title of a well-known Israeli film as well as the name of the film's main character, who experiences ethnically-loaded encounters as a new immigrant from a Middle Eastern country.

jects” of research and the researchers, and the dynamic field created by the confluence of both. Finally, visual recordings can provide diverse sectors of a society with opportunities to react to images of one another, simulating processes of pervasive societal influences which we claim can be found in Israel’s many subgroups, even as these put forth claims of distinctiveness from one another. In light of this, and with the perspective of several decades, it is clear that the image of a dynamic social field would have been more appropriate for grasping early social trends as well as for following subsequent developments.

The utilization of a social field perspective, linked to the theory of Kurt Lewin, or to its development by anthropologists (Gluckman (1958) and Marx (1980) in the context of Israeli society), is a well-known antidote to the functionalist assumption about the boundedness of social units. It is now apparent that the study of complex society requires simultaneous attention to several interconnected fields. More recently, Bourdieu (1990) has utilized the term “field” to refer to a culturally structured domain of interests and action. In doing so, Bourdieu has insisted upon the historically constituted nature of such fields. Thus, in addition to following social links to wider political and economic contexts, social theory is challenged to find ways of incorporating “the past” into the purview of ongoing social and cultural processes of coalescence and conflict (see also Gupta and Ferguson, 1997).

Recently, in an ASA presidential address, M. T. Hallinan (1997) stressed the challenge of social theory to relate to “catastrophic events.” This is of special relevance to Israeli society where developments like the Holocaust, mass migrations and repeated armed conflicts have played a major role in structuring current social and cultural fields. We claim that attention to defining “events” and other aspects of a society’s specific history, like the complex relations between Israel and Diaspora communities, should be merged with “universal” sociological perspectives in order to achieve a more adequate grasp of Israeli diversity and its internal and external linkages.

Most generally, critical perspectives on Israeli society, their trenchant criticism notwithstanding, perpetuate some of the shortcomings of earlier approaches. A corollary of an a-historical stance, which privileges political and economic factors, is the lack of theoretical regard for religion that is also shared with the earlier paradigm. Another limitation is that claims about the “interested” nature of social thought in maintaining relations of domination are formulated from the stance of general social theory, but are rarely investigated empirically, specifying institutions and particular actors in defined situations. One aspect of this vagueness is the tendency of critical theory to pay minimum heed to anthropological work that examines complex social forces operating *in situ* (Deshen and Shokeid, 1984). Another aspect is the failure of that theoretic-

cal orientation to locate itself in social space. Parallel to all the aforementioned oversights, is the relative inattention to processes in which formerly less powerful and less influential groups have, in fact, gained a "voice" in Israeli society, contesting "hegemonic" understandings and even altering them. In saying this, we refer to highly explicit processes of gaining political power, as well as to groups that by their very existence shatter identity definitions in Israel. In this sense, the Ethiopian Jews are a catalyst for the exploration of a variety of topics hitherto dormant in Jewish consciousness. Their presence as a group with different skin color and a different form of Judaism, challenges simplistic assumptions about the physical and spiritual unity of the Jewish people, and clarifies much of the complexity inherent in the diversity of Israeli society and culture (Salamon, 1998, 2000). Immigration from the Former Soviet Union brought to Israel large numbers of people who are not Jewish. This immigration also brought Jews, primarily from the Caucasus and Central Asia, who did not easily fit the division between *Ashkenazi* (European) and *Mizrahi* (Eastern) that became the common conceptualization as a result of immigration in previous decades (Gitelman, 1991; Zand, 1991; Bram, 2001). These processes may best be grasped by coordinated and focused "field" studies, which both keep wider cultural frameworks in view and reflect upon the place of research orientations in the process of investigating fluid social fields.

The unspoken assumption behind the tendencies to sub-divide and separate may have been that the creation of a new state paralleled a neatly bounded and subdivided society, an assumption which was later understood to be patently unacceptable. The segmented nature of Israeli life has of late been increasingly recognized, almost to the point of becoming a cliché. It was perhaps first widely promulgated by Amos Oz's socioliterary depictions in *Poh ve-sham be-eretz yisrael* (1983); a later anthropological collection presented Israel in terms of a "composite portrait", explicitly disavowing the possibility of providing an overall view (Marx, 1980). More recent discourse, both within and without the social sciences, reflects current political, social and religious divides by citing images such as "tribalism" or "castes" (Kimmerling, 1996). These claims and approaches overlook the fact that the very attempt to erect and maintain socio-cultural enclaves entails active engagement of competing "sectors" and agonistic attitudes toward overlapping social fields and public spheres. It should be remembered that the internal cultivation of individual segments within a society does not always entail their complete detachment from other social arenas.⁴ Viewed historically, the disparate post-emancipation developments among

4 As an illustration of this point from the period prior to the 1999 elections, the *J'accuse* videotape of Aryeh Der'i which attacks "mainstream" (Ashkenazi and secular) Israeli society

modern Jewish societies in different geopolitical areas have all entered the cultural fields (and not compartmentalized “sectors”) of Israeli life (Weingrod, 1985; Ben-Rafael and Sharot, 1991; Yanow, 1993). The Israeli state and society have helped preserve, cultivate and create a kaleidoscope of religious, ethnic, political and many other forms which influence and compete with one another. Moreover, these developments both affect and are affected by current trends within Diaspora Jewries and by global cultural currents in general. In addition, the partial acceptance of Israel within the Middle Eastern world, linked to the erratic peace process, opens up new forces of globalization that have the potential of significantly influencing a diverse array of both Arab and Jewish groups in Israel. These cases, and many others, require in-depth field research that attends to interlocking socio-cultural contexts affecting the specific developments under examination.

Steps in a New Direction: A Suggested Research Path

On the background of these developments, we wish to sketch a possible approach to diversity research equipped to take into account the set of dynamic processes described. Clearly, the dynamic and complex nature of the subject does not allow for one comprehensive framework. However, we hope that the introduction of these new mechanisms will generate innovative thinking, widening the spectrum as more and more ethnographers find ways to link their research and findings to a coordinated set of interlaced field studies. This endeavor seeks to go beyond the study of specific ethnic groups, and their links to changing social circumstances, and focuses on processes that occur *between and among groups*. Since we continue to use this “group” terminology, we need to acknowledge that while it still refers to the reified group definitions carrying great significance within Israeli society and for the individual, it now applies to group boundaries constantly in flux, with an emphasis on the rich cultural and historical dialogue between the two.

We were drawn to this approach while discussing the limits of our own individual ethnographical works. We therefore choose to demonstrate the suggested framework using examples from our own work on Jews from Libya and Jews

comes to mind. Drawing upon the words of Emile Zola, it hints simultaneously at Herzl in relation to the Dreyfus trial and Der'i's claim that Shas represents the true Zionism. Produced with the help of (former actor and now ultra-orthodox) Uri Zohar, one is also reminded of another, much older but famous video-clip in which Zohar is prominent, together with singer Arik Einstein, commenting upon the waves of Jewish immigrants (who learn to curse in Arabic) and their views of one another. Whatever this represents, it is certainly not cultural isolation. To this we might add that information on these events reached one author (Goldberg) while in Istanbul, via the Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post websites.

from Ethiopia, while leaving room for an in-depth focus on the highly relevant, Arab society. Our illustration, then, relates to what is called the "Middle Eastern" category within Israeli society. If we accept the "Middle Eastern" sector for analysis, we do not do so unthinkingly but rather as a first cut into a thick socio-cultural reality. The historical messiness and arbitrariness of the category are not ignored, but maintained and kept available for inspection, even while our research proceeds based on this initial "definition." Thus our "definition," when utilized in a comparative field context, serves not to neatly include and exclude certain phenomena, but to help us discover complexities within and on the borders of a flexible research focus. Our first step, before going into the field, is, therefore, to examine some possible threads within this category, and to discuss their implications for field research in the broadest sense.

As intimated, the wider category, "Middle Eastern" and, in fact, every attempt to study ethnic relations in Israel, requires the inclusion of Arab society, in itself diverse. The cultural overlapping between Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs, while familiar, is only rarely placed at the center of research interests (Nakhleh, 1975; Kressel, 1984; Shokeid and Deshen, 1982; Lavie, 1995). Both Middle Eastern Jews in Israel and local Arabs have been subject to cultural pressures and cues working in contradictory directions. Middle Eastern Jews were encouraged to immigrate to numerically strengthen the Jewish population, but quickly were perceived as bringing the threat of "Levantinization" to the country. Arabs in Israel were faced with the influence of the most immediate examples of economic and social advance, the Jewish majority on one hand, and loyalty to Arab heritage, identity and politics on the other. It is often claimed that Middle Eastern Jews are particularly anti-Arab in their orientation, either because "they suffered in Arab countries" (an example of pseudo-historical wisdom) or because it was necessary for them to differentiate themselves from closeness to Arabs which was a reigning perception of them on the part of European Jews (Goldberg, 1985). At the same time, casual observation shows that there are many cases of routine interaction between Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs in everyday life, particularly in economic spheres and it is certainly the case that aspects of Arab culture, such as music, have made their way into the repertoire of Middle Eastern Israeli culture (Regev, 1986). After the 1967 War, many Palestinian Arabs moved into lower economic slots previously occupied by Middle Eastern Jews, another example of the partial conceptual overlapping of the categories which is both simultaneously widely known and explicitly ignored. None of these observations are new, except that these complex socio-cultural "border" processes are usually cited as explanations for developments *within* each group and have rarely been placed at the *center* of research concerns. The fact that despite common knowledge of these phenomena,

there has been no focus on the conceptual and cultural interlinkages of Arabs and Middle Eastern Jews, makes these processes all the more deserving of systematic attention. For example, to what extent is the distinction between Middle Eastern and European Jews important to various sectors of Arab society in Israel? All this points to the necessity of bringing the study of Arab groups into the program of interlaced study with Jewish groups.

The paradigm of interlaced exploration should yield insights reflecting the particular situations of each group, but also stress the subtleties of the discourse in which they are engaged vis-à-vis one another, other sectors of the society and the broad cultural fields in which they are all enmeshed. Such discourse includes both public and academic forums, such as portrayal in the media and in publications, perceptions of the groups by members of other groups and conceptions embodied in folklore genres such as jokes, folktales and proverbs (Hasan-Rokem, 1993).

Sampling Three Ingredients: A Taste Of Future Explorations

In this section, we suggest, as examples, three themes pervasive in Israeli life which, when focusing on specific groups, are often bracketed out as separate or “only background” subjects of research. The three themes, the Holocaust, the “Who is a Jew?” controversy and the Arab-Israeli conflict, are highly potent even as they relate to individual groups in our own independent research. We first present these generally and then comment on their relevance to the specific groups we have mentioned.

1) The Holocaust has held a shifting place in Israeli consciousness. From concern in the 1950s that native-born Israelis ignored it, the Holocaust has become a major trope justifying Israel’s existence and some of its foreign-affairs policies. At the same time, the topic of “race,” central to the question of ethnic diversity, has been mostly overlooked because of the historical complexities attached to it. Also in question is the degree to which the Holocaust has entered the consciousness of Middle Eastern Jews and Israeli Arabs, an issue which has both an objective, historical dimension and components reflecting the hierarchies of Israeli social structure.

2) The specific political-religious conflicts over “who is a Jew” reflect the more basic challenges that have arisen in the attempt to define Judaism in the post-emancipation era when religion, culture and symbols of peoplehood no longer even *seem* to overlap. These issues first touched upon Jewry in West and Central Europe, but have since widened to affect Jews everywhere, including Jewish Israelis from non-European backgrounds and those in Diaspora communities. On the other hand, in the State of Israel, these issues have become linked

to questions of political power and hegemony in a manner quite distinct from most Diaspora situations.

3) The sustained conflict between Israel and the Arab peoples around it is such a popular topic that only occasionally is it asked how the conflict-ridden engagement affects cultural processes internal to Israeli society. As indicated, some have offered interpretations linking features of the Jewish groups from Arab countries to their past in those lands, but these have not been researched in depth. The partial opening up of links to the Arab world demands more systematic attention to the paradoxical complexities of Israel-Arab distancing and engagement, as a general factor in Israeli social and cultural life.

Next, it is proposed that regardless of the specific group identities addressed, general cultural themes, such as (but not limited to) the three we discuss, be explicitly addressed. Taking a more in-depth look at these themes, we see that even though two of the three (the Holocaust and “who is a Jew”) are historically more connected to European Jewry than Middle Eastern Jewries, today they are relevant to all Jewish groups, even within a research project of Middle Eastern orientation. Our research paradigm would thus take different groups and, in a coordinated fashion (the degree of coordination partially dictated by the field situation “on the ground”), examine the ways these themes may be interlaced with more particular processes of identity construction, maintenance and change. For present purposes, we briefly provide some telegraphic references of how the three themes may appear in each of the ethnic categories referred to above.

Holocaust:

Jews in North Africa, both in Libya and Tunisia, experienced the presence of German troops. Some were interred in forced labor camps, particularly those with French or British citizenship. How these experiences figure in self-understanding today needs investigation. The Jews of Ethiopia, relatively small in numbers, carry a heavy load of Jewish and Israeli symbolism. The question of race inevitably evokes notions of the Holocaust, whether people are eager to talk about it or not. With special regard to American Jewry, for example, the dramatic “rescue” operations in Ethiopia are sometimes couched in terms of compensating for inaction during WWII (Salamon, 2000). For Arabs, the Holocaust may reverberate in a number of directions. Some Jews may seek to remember the links between Palestinian leader Haj Amin al-Husseini and high Nazi officials, while more recently, from the Palestinian side, one hears of *An-*

*Nakbah*⁵ ('the Catastrophe') spoken of in terms of a holocaust. Like any potent symbol out in the public sphere -- once there, no group can be assured of completely monopolizing it.

Who is a Jew?:

At first sight, this might seem like a topic of little relevance to North African Jewry which knew little intermarriage in the Maghreb and did not create innovative religious ideologies. Nevertheless, the move to Israel brought about some awareness of this issue, and many North Africans in Israel recognize trends of intermarriage among former community members, and even relatives, in France. The "religious" accusations hurled by the former Minister of the Interior at Russian Jews during the election campaign are ample evidence that consciousness of this question has become quite general. "Who is a Jew," of course, is central with regard to Ethiopians and needs little elaboration. It is also a matter which directly concerns Arabs, because Jewish debates over the nature of Jewishness in relation to the state have an impact on conceptions and laws regarding citizenship, the law of return and the general question of the place of religious and secular notions in the constitution of Israeli society.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict:

Aside from its general impact, this theme has a number of implications for North African Jews. We have already mentioned the complex interweaving of cultural associations connecting and separating Arabs and Middle Eastern Jews. There are other relatively recent phenomena such as trips to visit former homes in Morocco, and later Tunisia, or the organizing of care for Jewish cemeteries there. The 1996 elections showed the possibility of an alliance between some (Bedouin) Arabs and Ethiopians on the basis of "blackness" (Salamon, 1998). In general, the question of who is the "other" for Ethiopians is an issue very much in flux. Finally, it is essentially a tautology to say that the Arab-Israeli conflict is relevant for Arabs, but many subjects under that reified rubric deserve closer examination, for example, differences within Jewish and Arab groups with regard to "the conflict", or the differences between public ideological pronouncements and patterns of everyday behavior.

To highlight the research path advocated herein, Table 1 summarizes and exemplifies the three cultural themes considered that are interlaced throughout

5 *An-Nakbah* (Lit.- 'the Catastrophe') is the Palestinian commemoration of the shattering of Palestinian society and the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem in 1948. The date chosen is close to that on which Jews celebrate Israeli Independence Day.

Israel's social fabric. We suggest that these, or other pervasive themes, be studied ethnographically in a coordinated framework. This would involve selecting several specific groups while also attending to the larger fields constituted by the topics and tensions outlined. Seeking nodes of inter-group and inter-category meanings should be a major focus of any such field study. Attention to recent modes of identity work, in particular with regard to the media, also needs emphasis, while not neglecting the way ethnography has always illuminated these processes in intimate family, communal and public settings. Such a research orientation should help reach a balanced account of internal diversity that is heavily engaged in social and cultural processes which cross group boundaries and are linked to both national and international settings.

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