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**Collective memory and cultural identity:  
a comparative study of the politics of memory  
and identity among Israelis of Polish and  
Tunisian descent**

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## Preface



Image 1 - Eliahou Eric Bokobza's "Yom Ha'atzmaut" (2013) 90 x 110 cm and "Bar Mitzvah" (2014) 140x110. Oil and acrylic on canvas.

The two paintings above portray a young man in two different situations one public and one private. In the first case he is celebrating Israel's Independence Day<sup>1</sup>, and in the other he is celebrating his Bar Mitzvah<sup>2</sup>.

In the former, the protagonist seems out of place, simply holding an Israeli flag with a lost look on his face, while all around him garlands representing Israel's national colors, fighting soldiers and a tank hang above his head, symbolizing the festive atmosphere. On the background there are different themes representing each one something Israeli: the sea, an urban and a rural landscape and a reference to the star of David. Even in a completely secular context, such as Independence Day (*Yom Ha'atzmaut* in Hebrew), there is a reference to religion given by the kippah the boy is wearing, albeit in

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<sup>1</sup>(in Hebrew *Yom Ha'atzmaut*) Day commemorating the Israeli Declaration of Independence, announced on the 5th of the Jewish month of Iyar, in 1948 (14 May 1948). The day is marked with a series of official and unofficial celebrations and ceremonies and plays a significant role in the creation of Israeli national identity. See Avner Ben Amos, *Israël, la Fabrique de l'Identité Nationale* (Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Jewish religious ceremony for boys (for girls: Bat Mitzvah) that marks the coming of age and signifies becoming a full-fledged member of the Jewish community, responsible for one's own actions.

the national colors. The second image portrays that same boy celebrating his own bar mitzvah. There are few hints in the pictures to the Jewish character of the ceremony: the small doll on the cake is indeed carrying a Torah scroll and wearing a kippah, but for the rest the atmosphere recalls a party in the 1970s, with an oriental touch given by the belly dancer, which also hints at the sexual maturation of the adolescence, marked by the ceremony of the bar mitzvah. The other character in the picture, a black man, hints at the ethnic mix composing Israeli society, adding another touch of exoticism.<sup>3</sup>

These paintings are part of an exhibition entitled “United Colors of Judaica – Eliahou Eric Bokobza – Multiple Jewish Identities: A New Perspective”, exposed at the Beit HaTefutzot museum in Tel Aviv, between 2015 and 2016.<sup>4</sup> The themes they evoke, namely the ethnic, religious and cultural aspects of Jewish identities in Israel give rise to a set of questions that are the core of my research. In particular: how Israeli Jewish identities have been built over time and space? What is the role ethnic stratification played in their creation and why ethnicity still plays a central role in today’s Israel? My aim is to question the paradox of a society that was created to unify the Jewish people under one ethnic/religious umbrella, and that found itself divided along those same ethnic lines it tried to erase.<sup>5</sup> The conundrum of a shared Jewishness that has been used both as a unifying factor (Biblical narrative, Jewish law and tradition), and as

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<sup>3</sup>“United Colors of Judaica – Eliahou Eric Bokobza,” Last modified August 6, 2019. <https://bh.org.il/event/united-colors-of-judaica-eliahou-eric-bokobza-multiple-jewish-identities-a-new-perspective/>.

<sup>4</sup> The artist, Eric Bokobza, was born in Paris to Tunisian parents, and emigrated to Israel with his family in 1969. See note 1 above.

<sup>5</sup> The latest example is the Basic Law known by the name of Nation-State of the Jewish People law, passed on 18 July 2018 by the Israeli parliament, the Knesset. This law specifies the nature of the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. The law, largely symbolic, was met with sharp criticism, and the Supreme Court is now considering if there is a case for unconstitutionality. As declared in a press agency released by the Knesset: “The law enshrines, for the first time, Israel as “the national home of the Jewish people” in its Basic Laws. It also declares that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, sets Hebrew as its official language and the Hebrew calendar as the official calendar of the state, [...]” For more see: “Knesset passes Jewish Nation-State bill into law,” last modified July 19, 2018, [https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/Pr13979\\_pg.aspx](https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/Pr13979_pg.aspx).

a line of demarcation (different Jewish communities in the Diaspora), pushed me to ask questions about how references from the past have been reworked in the present to establish what it means to be “ethnically Jewish” in Israel today<sup>6</sup>. Regardless of all the policies carried out by the state and its agencies to assimilate new immigrants, ethnicity remains until today a structuring factor of Israeli society, more than class, gender and age.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, ethnic classification of Jewish groups referred predominantly to specific communities (Jews of Bukhara, Persian Jews, Jews of Livorno, Jews of Silesia etc.), and the terms Ashkenazi and Mizrahi/Sephardi were used to refer to Jewish communities belonging to wide geographical areas: the former located in Central Eastern Europe, and the latter in the Iberic Peninsula, later expanded to include North Africa, Anatolia, the Levant and the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> So how did it happen that these categories in Israel became umbrella terms for ‘West’ and ‘East’, reproducing power differentials, and therefore social hierarchies, that are still relevant today?

The classification Ashkenazi/ Mizrahi, as used in today’s Israel, is the product of the large scale immigration of the 1950s, when the newborn state was faced with the ingathering of a massive number of people coming from Europe on one side, and Asia on the other.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman, *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns* (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2004), in particular parts I and II.

<sup>7</sup> The relevance of the intra-Jewish ethnic issue has been recently brought under the spotlight again by the riots of Ethiopian immigrants, protesting against discriminations clearly based on ethnic grounds. The protests were held in July 2019 by Israelis of Ethiopian origin in response to the death of the 18-year-old Solomon Teka at the hands of a police officer in Kiryat Haim. This was the most recent of a series of protests initiated by the Ethiopian community in Israel against what they perceive to be as a systemic discrimination, due to their skin color. For more see: “Ethiopian-Israelis protest for 3rd day after fatal police shooting,” last modified July 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/03/world/middleeast/ethiopia-israel-police-shooting.html>, and Shalva Weil, “Religion, Blood and the Equality of Rights: the Case of Ethiopian Jews in Israel,” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 4 (1997): 412-497.

<sup>8</sup> Harvey E. Goldberg, “From Sephardi to Mizrahi and Back Again: Changing Meanings of ‘Sephardi’ in its Social Environments,” *Jewish Social Studies* 15 (2008): 165 -188.

<sup>9</sup> *Edah* (He: community pl: *Edot*): defines in modern Hebrew the different ethnic origin of the various communities making up Israeli society. For more on ethnicity

Quickly these ethnic categories were associated with power positions within Israeli society, flattening out differences and overlooking the plurality of Middle Eastern identities, as well as their roles in shaping the ethnic discourse in Israel.<sup>10</sup> Along with groups of immigrants, also the terminology referring to them was flattened, and popular ethnic categorizations, 'official state' definitions and concepts from the social sciences were all conflated together, creating complex interactions and outcomes.

In my research, I will try to explore the power structure behind these terms, that led not only to the creation of an Israeli intra-Jewish division between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, but also to a situation where manifestations of pluralism and diversity were disregarded and overlooked, in favor of this dichotomic division. Ethnic identities were thus a product of specific socio-historical patterns, that influenced and changed power relations among different groups, and of these same groups with the state.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, along with Brubaker, ethnicities are to be defined more in terms of an individual perspective on the world, rather than in terms of having an actual attribute linked to someone's objective characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

Against this background, my endeavor is to analyze the role played by memory in reproducing such ethnic identities and divisions, both on the private and on the public level. Similarly, I will also interrogate myself on the task of cultural heritage transmitted by families, and

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in Israel see Eliezer, Ben- Rafael, *The Emergence of Ethnicity: Cultural groups and Social Conflict in Israel* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982).

Uziel O., Schmelz, Sergio, Della Pergola et al. (eds.), *Ethnic Differences among Israeli Jews: A New Look* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> The opposition Ashkenazim/Mizrahim does not reflect the historical and sociological complexity of the two groups, and looking at Jews coming from the MENA region as 'powerless' and at European Jews as 'powerful', it mashed together in one category (Mizrahim) very different groups: for example European Jews living in Egypt and Moroccan Jews coming from the Atlas Mountains. In the following chapter we will dive deeper in the subject of ethnicity and power in Israel. For an overview on the genesis of the debate, see Harvey E. Goldberg and Chen Bram, "Sephardic/ Mizrahi/Arab-Jews: Reflections on critical sociology and the Study of Middle Eastern Jewries within the Context of Israeli Society," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 22 (2007): 230.

<sup>11</sup> Michael, Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Rogers, Brubaker et al., "Ethnicity as Cognition," *Theory and Society* 33 (2004): 31-64,

on the references to the past that this transmission mobilizes. How does the current generation of young Israelis relate to ethnicity? Do they still use the categories of Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, even if their families have been in Israel for more than one generation and, in many cases, they were born from mixed couples?<sup>13</sup> These questions must be placed in a context, such as contemporary Israeli society, constantly evolving but at the same time closely influenced by its history and past. In a society, where immigrants coming from all over the world joined the state at different times, national identity was created from scratch, relying on one master narrative, the Zionist one, and leaving the others at the margins.

This is why the lens of memory is particularly useful to engage with today's Israeli identities. It is in fact through memory that stories so far left behind or remained untold, alive only in the memory of those who lived them, can be brought back to light. What was omitted from the national narrative, was not forgotten, and kept on living in family and group memories, only to be retrieved later on. By looking at the process of memorialization of these two groups, and by questioning both individual and collective practices, we will try to understand how identities and narratives were formed and circulated within Israeli society, while also shedding light on the relationships existing between the different Jewish ethnic groups within the country.<sup>14</sup> To do so we will consider both the private and the public sphere. In the first case we will consider the transmission of memories within families and across generations, through family stories and traditions, among them holiday celebrations and culinary traditions

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara S. Okun, "Insight into Ethnic Flux: Marriage Patterns among Jews of Mixed Ancestry in Israel," *Demography* 41 (2004), 173–187;

<sup>14</sup> John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3-26.

On ethnic divisions see Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, Inc., 1969); Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups Culture in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2/1 (1979): 1-20. And in Israel: Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations," 54 (2013): 399-423; Sammy Smooha, "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State," *Nations and Nationalism*, 8/4 (2002): 475 – 503; Oren, Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

(Part I). In the second one, we will study how the 'public narrative', or the *mise en récit publique* of the memories and of the identity representations of the two groups (museums, heritage centers, and public ceremonies) has evolved throughout time<sup>15</sup> (Part II).

### *Questioning the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi divide through a comparative analysis*

In my analysis I will consider two specific ethnic subgroups: Israelis of Tunisian and of Polish descent. They are here presented as examples of the categorization that was just outlined, done by forcing people coming from many different places and cultures under the labels of Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. By creating a binary division, this process made it increasingly common to label individuals and groups on the basis of their country of origin, rather than according to their community of origin, thus aggregating persons from very different backgrounds (for instance, in the case of Moroccan Jews, people from Casablanca and those from the Atlas Mountains). This categorization was adopted at a governmental level, where immigration officials, and later on the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), classified people by country of origin, reifying the difference between European and MENA Jews, West and East.<sup>16</sup> These categories were by all means approximations of existing social realities, and the national identities that were arbitrarily assigned to these immigrants were not questioned. In this sense, Israeli social scientists, except a few

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<sup>15</sup> Piera, Rossetto. *Mémoires des Diaspora, diaspora des mémoires. Juifs de Libye entre Israël et l'Italie, des 1948 à nos jours*, Tesi di dottorato, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia e École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> This classification soon shifted into 'continent of origin', becoming a basic element in the demographic and sociological analysis of immigration to Israel. In the North African case, which we are in part considering, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are always clustered together in demographic accounts, thus making it hard to distinguish these three groups, that were considered quite the same by all accounts. See Goldberg et al., "Sephardic/ Mizrahi/Arab-Jews," 230, and "Publications: Immigration- Statistical Data of Israel, 2018 - n.69," last modified September 10, 2018, <https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/publications/Pages/2018/Immigration-Statistical-Abstract-of-%20Israel-2018-No-69.ssp>

exceptions, did not challenge this arrangement.<sup>17</sup> In our case, both Jews of Polish origin and Jews of Tunisian origin were grouped, respectively, in the two overreaching categories of Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, without considering their heterogeneity in relation to these categories and to their own internal makeup. Considering these two particular groups (Israelis of Tunisian and of Polish origin) will help me to shift the focus from one single perspective to multiple points of view, continuously moving from the particular to the general and vice versa.

Regarding the use of comparison as a method, it is worthwhile noting that the choice of which entities to compare, and of how to compare them, is always a sensitive issue, ultimately a political one<sup>18</sup>. Here, we are to discuss the phenomenon of ethnic categories and groupings in Israel, by comparing two groups that were quite arbitrarily classified under the two big ethnic labels of Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. Comparing two different groups requires an explanation on the comparison method adopted. According to the sociologist Cécile Vigour “it is important to keep in mind that comparing encompasses at the same time the act of assimilating and of differentiating, in relation to a criterion”.<sup>19</sup> In this case comparison will be “lateral”, where a number (two) of the cases under study are posed side by side.<sup>20</sup> Comparing these two groups will allow to “bracket” my work, reducing its scope and allowing me to “interrogate the particular case by constituting it as a ‘particular

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<sup>17</sup> See Efrat Rosen-Lapidot, “De’francophonisme in Israel: Bizertine Jews, Tunisian Jews,” in *Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places*, ed. Andre’ Levy and Alex Weingrod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 270–295.

This pushes us to question even more this national/continent classification which is adopted even today both on an official level and in common speech.

<sup>18</sup> Andrea Mubi Brighenti and Nicholas DeMaria Harney, “Introduction,” *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* 2(2019): 127.

<sup>19</sup> Cécile, Vigour, *La comparaison dans les sciences sociales. Pratiques et méthodes* (Paris : La Découverte, 2005) 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Matei Candea, *Comparison in Anthropology: The Impossible Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

instance of the possible' [...] in order to extract general or invariant properties that can be uncovered only by such interrogation."<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, Israelis of Polish and Tunisian descent represent two cases of the paradox we outlined at the beginning, that of an ethnic division that was created at the moment of the establishment of the state, where Jewishness was used both as a unifying and as a divisive factor. But why are these two cases interesting? In the case of Israelis of Polish descent it is interesting to understand why a group of immigrants that played such a substantial role in the definition of Israeli identity and culture, and among whose members you could find the founding fathers of the Yishuv<sup>22</sup>, has been so understudied from an academic point of view, and remained under the radar until very recently also in the public debate.

For different reasons, also the case of Israelis of Tunisian descent has been kept under the radar and included in the general category of Mizrahim, without paying too much attention to their own specificity. This happened in part due the small number of Tunisian Jews that emigrated to Israel, if compared to other groups coming from North Africa and the Middle East (e.g. Moroccan or Iraqi Jews), and its consequent minor role in the definition of what was 'Mizrahi' in Israel. In part, because of their alleged 'easier integration' within Israeli society, due to the Western (French) education many of them received and to their activism within Zionist movements in Tunisia. However, the main reason why I am including the Tunisian case in my study is because in many cases they opposed an overreaching classification reworking their identity in Israel based on their specific community of origin (e.g. Djerba, Tunis, Sfax), rather than on their

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<sup>21</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 233. Quoted in Mubi Brighenti et al., "Introduction," 128.

<sup>22</sup> In this respect see the exhibition "From Poland we came... the contribution of Polish Jewry in building and developing the state of Israel," curated by Batya Brutin, Ewa Wegrzyn and Katarzyna Odrzywolek, exposed at the 6th EAIS Annual Conference « Israel Identities: Past, Present and Future » - 10-12 September 2017 - University of Wrocław, Poland.



being 'Tunisian', 'North-African' or 'Mizrahi'.<sup>23</sup> Finally, both Tunisians and Polish Israelis have a peculiar relationship to the Holocaust, another pillar of Israeli identity. Being the first ones, almost a unique case in North Africa, having been touched by Nazi occupation and the Holocaust<sup>24</sup>; and the second ones, especially those who survived the Holocaust, representatives of a version of diasporic Judaism that the new state of Israel tried to leave behind.

This will allow for a more general understanding of the integration dynamics in a multi-ethnic society, such as Israel is, and, most importantly, will serve to highlight the steps in the identity building process of the two groups considered according to the historical, socio-economic and political developments in relations with Israeli history up to present time. Further, it will allow to explore how the construction of the past and the creation of a national master narrative, through a process of invention, appropriation, exclusion and reception, affected the relationships of power within the two groups considered and the society they integrated in and contributed to build. In conclusion, I argue that both cases, with their specificities, will help me retrace how the two ethnic poles they represent (Ashkenaziness and Mizrahiness) were created and maintained throughout time, how the recourse to binary divisions flattened out differences in the histories of both Middle Eastern and European Jews in Israel, and how these classifications still influence social interactions within Israeli society.

### *The Fieldwork*

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<sup>23</sup> For a study on how Tunisian Jews in France adopted a community-based, rather than a national-based identity, see Efrat Rosen-Lapidot, "De'francophonisme in Israel," 270–295.

<sup>24</sup> Regarding the different stages of Holocaust memories' integration in Israeli society, see Dalia Ofer, "The Past That Does Not Pass: Israelis and Holocaust Memory," *Israel Studies* 14/1 (2009): 1-35; Anita Shapira, "The Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memories," *Jewish Social Studies* 4/2 (1998): 40-58; Hanna Yablonka, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Kastner and Eichmann Trials," *Israel Studies* 8/3 (2003): 1-24; Gad Yair, "Israeli Existential Anxiety: Cultural Trauma and the Constitution of National Character," *Social Identities* 20 (2015): 346-362; Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

The sources I considered for my research are both primary and secondary sources. The former consisting of in-depth interviews conducted by the author and of periods of participant observation to public and community events organized within cultural associations and ethnic museums in Israel. As a study aiming at analyzing identity and collective memory, it must rely on qualitative methods, allowing to examine the social reality from the individual and subjective point of view of those living it.<sup>25</sup> To understand how Israeli identity has been built throughout time, and the influence ethnic categorization had on it, we have carried out 30 in-depth interviews: 15 with Israelis of Polish descent and 15 Tunisian descent.<sup>26</sup> We used as a criteria self-identification with one of the two cultural heritages or the fact that one of their close relatives (parents, grandparents) immigrated to Israel from either Poland or Tunisia.

The interviewees, selected through the snowball sampling method, were diverse, coming from the whole country, and belonging to different social classes. Being the generational transmission at the heart of my work, I interview people of different age groups, sometimes belonging to the same family, from the age of 19 to the age of 90 years old. This allowed me to gain a trans-generational perspective and to appreciate how the perception of what it meant for them to be Israelis of Tunisian or Polish descent developed throughout time. The interviews were conducted by the author in different fieldwork trips in Israel between March 2017 and March 2019. The fact that I am not Jewish, nor I had any personal connection to Israel, Tunisia or Poland delimited my research and determined, to a certain extent, the perception my interlocutors had of me. More often than not, interviewees were curious about the

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." In *Interpretive Social Science*, ed. Paul Rabinow et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 33-81.

<sup>26</sup> All interviews are anonymous to protect the privacy of the interviewees, except in case of explicit authorization. I am grateful to all the people who accepted to meet me, and without whom this project wouldn't have been possible. See Appendix 1 for the list of interviews.

reasons that pushed to pursue such an endeavor. Most of them were surprised of my choice of the topic, being completely disconnected from it. At times this costed me the access to some people, most times it made them curious about my quest.

Interviews were carried out in English, Hebrew, French or Italian according to the disposition of the interviewee. At times in a mix of more than one language. Each interview opened with a request to tell the story of the interviewee's life and with a question regarding his/her ethnic identity. From this point the interview moved on to the history of the family, its arrival in Israel, its integration in the country and the role ethnicity played in this, in a fluid way according to the inclination of the interviewees. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The analysis was carried out by reading the interviews and extracting the major themes from the life stories of each interviewee. Following, the themes were linked to the context of ethnic identities in Israel and memoryscape and analyzed accordingly<sup>27</sup>. The main idea behind the interviews was to let the interviewees freely express themselves on what it meant for them to be Israeli of Tunisian (Mizrahim) or Polish (Ashkenazim) origin in today's Israel.

I am aware that, my research aims at shedding some light on a very specific segment of the Israeli population, and that it is limited by the number of interviews carried out and by its qualitative approach.

Therefore, the interviews have been enriched with a substantial corpus of secondary sources including a series of personal testimonies retrieved in different archives, personal journals and diaries, and artistic production of different kinds. In addition to that also archives of cultural and citizens associations, newspaper and magazine articles, websites and Facebook pages dealing with the cultural heritage and memory of the two groups concerned were used.

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<sup>27</sup> Slawomir Kapralski, "Amnesia, Nostalgia and Reconstruction: Shifting Modes of Memory in Poland's Jewish Spaces," in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica T. Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 149 – 150.

Most of the people interviewed were secular, or national religious, our sample in fact did not include ultra-orthodox Jews, a population that presented specific obstacles in being reached. Finally, this is a study on the Jewish population in Israel, and for this reason all other ethnicities were not included here.



# *Introduction*

## *Zionism, Jewish ethnicities and the making of Israeli society*

The aim of this first, introductory chapter is to offer an historical overview of the process that led to the creation of Israeli national narrative and identity. In particular, it will focus on how different migratory waves that preceded and followed the establishment of the state were received, on the ethnic nature of this process, to focus then on the specific case of Israelis of Polish and Tunisian origin. Despite the great amount of changes that Israel went through since its establishment, both from an economic and a political point of view, some assumptions on its demographic composition, cultural and social boundaries remain true. According to sociologist Baruch Kimmerling, Israel remains an active immigrant settler society and a relatively strong state, both domestically and internationally, based on two deep cultural codes, shared, in principle, by all its Jewish citizens: its Jewishness and the military.<sup>28</sup> However, two contradictory phenomena challenged this balance. The first regards the crumbling, at the end of the 1970s, of the Zionist hegemony into many conflicting ideological divisions, referring in their turn to many different and diverging parties and civil society organizations. The second phenomenon consists in the persistence of a strong state, in terms of monopolizing regulations regarding the common life of citizens, and in a continuous influx of new immigrants to the country.<sup>29</sup> These events, in the absence of a precise policy favoring multiculturalism, led to the emergence of a system of cultural and social plurality, where Israeli identity continuously underwent a process of redefinition of its social boundaries and institutions, as new groups of immigrants came to the country and strived for their

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<sup>28</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society and the Military* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *The End of Ashkenazi Hegemony* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 2001) [Hebrew].

own space and integration. The fact that each group came to the country with its own culture, and preserved it to some extent, resulted in a situation where the discussion on the meaning of being Israeli continuously reshaped the country's political direction, its social and cultural policies, and, as a consequence, its collective identity.

But what is it the common core on which Israeli national identity and cultural memory were built? It is at the end of the XIX century, in the context of assimilated and secularized East European Jewry, that Zionist ideology was conceived by Theodore Herzl<sup>30</sup>. At its core a nineteenth century nationalist, European and enlightened version of Judaism. The main factors that led to the inception of the Zionist endeavor were: the massive demographic boom of European Jewish population, from 3 million people at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to close to 13 million people at the end of that same century<sup>31</sup>; the developing and diffusion of nationalist ideologies all over Europe; and some violent pogroms at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1881-82 and 1903-05). The creation of a Jewish state was then considered as the only possible solution to a long history of persecution and discrimination. To this end, the Zionist movement<sup>32</sup> started to produce and objectify a knowledge and a set of practices that would serve as the grounds for the creation of a Jewish state, with its own national narrative, identity and memory.

Following the 19<sup>th</sup> century's nationalist tradition, Zionism interpreted Jewish history, from its antiquity to the present with a teleological direction. Upholding a sense of continuity with the antique and

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<sup>30</sup> Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State. An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question* (New York, Dover Publications, 1989).

Anita Shapira, *Israel, A History* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 3-64.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Abitbol, *Histoire des Juifs* (Paris : Editions Perrin, 2013), 502.

<sup>32</sup> Zionist ideas first began to appear in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as small segments of European Jews became convinced that the integration promised as a result of the Enlightenment would not be forthcoming. Borrowing from other nationalist movements in Europe, the Zionists argued Jews could not live freely by assimilating into European societies, but instead they promoted the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine, considered as the ancient homeland of the Jews.

biblical period, negating entirely the time Jews lived in the diaspora, the Zionist movement established itself as a continuation of the Jewish 'golden age' of antiquity, with the aim of returning to the Land of Israel and obtaining national redemption.<sup>33</sup>

This project proved to be finally successful when, in 1948, the state of Israel was established. It had a Jewish population of about 600.000 Jews, and, over the following decade, as it transitioned to a state with an independent government and economy, Israel received around over a million immigrants, from over 20 countries of origin, nearly tripling its existing population<sup>34</sup>. It soon became clear that the newborn state was not at all prepared for the arrival of such an enormous number of people. The first immigrants to arrive were those from the displaced persons camps in Europe, those who survived the Holocaust. Followed what was left of Bulgarian, Polish and Romanian communities, that right after the end of the war were allowed to leave for Israel and took that chance. Meanwhile, in the Middle East and North Africa the relationship between Jews and Muslim had been strained after the establishment of the Jewish State and the 1948 Independence war. In many countries, such as Egypt, Iraq and Yemen the tensions were coming both from the governments and from the people, pushing the Jewish communities in those countries to leave. These waves of immigration from the MENA region, happened mostly during the 1950s and changed permanently the European outlook of the newborn Israeli state, forcing it to assimilate a substantial number of people coming from a different cultural background and religious tradition.

To cope with the challenge of creating a single nation out of a very diverse group of immigrants, the Zionist establishment deployed a normative self-image of the nation, based on a Hebrew/Jewish/Zionist system of values that would be able to

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<sup>33</sup> For further details on the Zionist construction of the past and its myths see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> Aziza Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State Engineer Segregation? On the Placement of Jewish Immigrants in Development Towns in the 1950s," *Social Forces* 84/1 (2005): 116-117. Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 222- 246.



supply knowledge and symbols to structure the growing Israeli society.<sup>35</sup> In this context, the idea of return to the motherland was essential. Therefore, Israel's founding fathers borrowed a religiously preserved collective memory, that of Zion, and readjusted it to fit the secular character of Zionism.<sup>36</sup> To encourage Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel they punctuated the Israeli calendar with holidays and memorial days chosen to remind Jews of their traumatic history, both ancient and contemporary<sup>37</sup>. Most of these memorial events supported a rhetoric of detachment from Jewish life in exile, considered as a completely negative historical phase, in between the antique and the modern phases, regarded as positive ones by Zionism. In this way, a Zionist reinterpretation of the Jewish Biblical past was included in Israel's habitus and national narrative, adding up to build what Polish sociologist Zubrzycki defines as "national sensorium": a set of various practices, crystallized in material culture and embodied in different performances, which helps render the abstract idea of the nation concrete for individual subjects<sup>38</sup>.

On a more practical level, the principle of "*kibbutz galuyot*"<sup>39</sup>—the ingathering of the exiles, coupled with the doctrine of the "melting pot" – requiring Jews from different cultures to come together, allowed for the population of the newly founded Jewish state to coexist, conferring legitimacy to it. According to the latter, all new immigrants were to drop any trace of previous identities and cultures, to create a "uniform new Israeli persona and personality"<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> On the distinction between Jewish, Hebrew and Israeli see Motti Regev, "To Have a Culture of Our Own: on Israeliness and its Variants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23/2 (2000): 223-247.

Yael Zerubavel, "The 'Mythological Sabra' and Jewish Past: Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identities," *Israel Studies* 7/2 (2002): 115-144.

Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 133- 153.

<sup>36</sup> In this context, Zion is intended as a synonym for Jerusalem and for the Land of Israel as a whole, viewed in an eschatological dimension as the place where the entire Jewish people was to return. See Kimmerling, *Invention*.

<sup>37</sup> See Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

<sup>38</sup> Geneviève Zubrzycki, "History and the National Sensorium: Making Sense of Polish Mythology," *Qualitative Sociology* 34 (2011): 22.

<sup>39</sup> *Kibbutz galuyot*: (Hebrew for: ingathering of the exiles) is a core idea of the Zionist ideology, and later, of the state of Israel itself, to welcome all Jews coming to the Land of Israel.

<sup>40</sup> Kimmerling, *Invention*, 97.

The policies of the first decades of the state were thus based on denying the existence of ethnic and cultural stratification within the Jewish people, in favor of the creation of one nation with no divisions<sup>41</sup>. To achieve such an end a number of state agencies – notably the educational system, youth movements and the army – were recruited to instill the new national ethos and to pass on a historical narrative based on the concept of the *shlilat ha-golah*<sup>42</sup> and on a newly invented Hebrew-speaking, Israeli tradition<sup>43</sup>. Underlying to this unifying narrative historians identified two main interrelated Zionist projects that would have shaped the state of Israel for a long time to come: the project to make the newborn state completely Jewish, by producing a Jewish/Arab divide and establishing a Jewish social and cultural dominance, and the project of making the state of Israel Western and modern.<sup>44</sup> The achievement of the latter, in particular, provoked an Ashkenazi/Mizrachi divide based on the differences between immigrants deemed as representative of the Zionist Western ideal, mostly coming from Europe and North America (Ashkenazim); and those hailing from Middle Eastern and North African countries (Mizrahim). This dichotomy, created by state officials and reproduced by social scientists (e.g. Eisenstadt)<sup>45</sup>, soon became common sense and was internalized by the Israeli social discourse, which considered the norm a society divided in two separate and homogeneous groups of ‘Easteners’ (Mizrahim) and

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<sup>41</sup> Regarding ethnicity within Jewish groups see Herbert Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups Culture in America,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2/1 (1979): 1-20; Stephen Sharot, “Jewish and other National and Ethnic Identities of Israeli Jews,” in *National Variations in Jewish Identity: Implications for Jewish Education*, ed. Steven M. Cohen et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 299; Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty: Toward a Critique of the ‘Negation of Exile’ in Israeli Culture, Part I,” *Theory and Criticism* 4 (1993):23–55; [Hebrew]; Ella Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29/1(1999):5–20.

<sup>42</sup> *Shlilat ha-golah* (Hebrew for negation of the Diaspora): Zionist concept used to explain the impossibility of Jewish emancipation in the Diaspora.

<sup>43</sup> See Regev, “To Have a Culture of Our Own”.

<sup>44</sup> See Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 239-240; Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35.

<sup>45</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “The Oriental Jews in Palestine (A Report on a Preliminary Study in Culture-Contacts),” *Jewish Social Studies* 12 (1950), 199-222.

'Europeans' (Ashkenazim). As a result, Israeli society was characterized by the national dichotomy between Jews and Arabs on one side, and by the ethnic dichotomy created artificially between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. Research showed that these two groups were reified through state projects and policies, such as land allocation policies, that pushed newer immigrants (most of whom Middle Eastern Jews) to the more peripheral regions of the country, or school integration programs, encouraging traditional Jews (most of whom Middle Eastern) to abandon their religious practices in favor of more secular, and allegedly more modern, ones.<sup>46</sup> This ethnic stratification was also reflected in the political realm, since both left and right wing parties saw these new immigrants, most of whom came from the MENA region, as a source of votes, thus putting in their hands the electoral power. And in fact, it was at the end of the 1970s, after 29 years of ruling, that the socialist party, Mapai, lost the elections to the right-wing bloc guided by Menachem Begin<sup>47</sup>. This major change was due to a set of reasons, certainly political, namely the demise of the Zionist ideology, but also demographic and social. In fact, during those years, many of those Middle Eastern Jews that were snubbed by the Ashkenazi socialist elite, grew an increasing resentment towards the Mapai establishment and changed their vote. After an event so disruptive of what the political and ethnic balance had been thus far, the category of Ashkenazi started to re-emerge in the ethnic and public discourse in Israel. This could be seen as a sign of the success of Middle Eastern Jews that, by getting to name what was once considered to be as the Jewish standard in Israel, called it into

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<sup>46</sup> Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim"; Aziza Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel," *American Sociological Review* 68/4 (2003): 481-510; Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: a Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> "Israeli elections 1977," <https://en.idi.org.il/israeli-elections-and-parties/elections/1977/>; Asher Arian (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 1977* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1980); Don Peretz, "The Earthquake: Israel's Ninth Knesset Elections," *Middle East Journal* 31(1977), 251–266.

question along with its being hegemonic. 48

*Ashkenazim and Mizrahim: abstract social categories or reality?*

But how and why ethnicity became the main criteria informing the process of ingathering of the different Jewish communities? To tackle this question, I want to introduce two more terms: 'Ashkenaziness' and 'Mizrahiness'. These two categories, linked to the terms Ashkenazi and Mizrahi but not corresponding to them, were created to deal with the social categories and power dynamics that were established with the state itself between social groups, rather than individuals. Ashkenaziness and Mizrahiness are thus the local, contemporary ethnic categories, commonly associated in the first case with Western culture and an elite social status; and in the second one with an Oriental, underdeveloped and pre-modern culture.<sup>49</sup> But how were these two categories created in the first place, and why these and not different ones?

The prominence of ethnicity as an axis of social inequality was embedded in Israeli society from its very inception. As pointed out earlier, on the eve of Israeli independence, the vast majority of the Jews living in the country came from Eastern and Central Europe, (Ashkenazim). After the Declaration of the State (1948), the national ethnic profile changed dramatically. Over the following decade, Israel absorbed over a million immigrants from more than 20 countries (mainly from Europe, North America, Middle East, Asia,

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<sup>48</sup> Harvey E. Goldberg and Chen Bram, "Sephardic/ Mizrahi/Arab-Jews: Reflections on critical sociology and the Study of Middle Eastern Jewries within the Context of Israeli Society," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 22 (2007): 233-234.

<sup>49</sup> The translation of the Hebrew terms "Ashkenaziyut" and "Mizrahiyut" as Ashkenaziness and Mizrahiness is intended to preserve the meaning of an entire social category as opposed to individuals. For a deeper analysis on the usages of these terms, see Orna Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations: Evolving Ethnic Perceptions Among Dominant Groups," *The Sociological Quarterly* 54 (2013): 399-423; Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim"; Ruth Halperin-Kaddari and Yaacov Yadgar, "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality among Jews in Israel," *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development* (June 2010), [http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/\(httpPublications\)/52D5E8193068EB78C1257753002B4E68?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/(httpPublications)/52D5E8193068EB78C1257753002B4E68?OpenDocument)

and North Africa). Despite a significant heterogeneity in social and economic structures among immigrants, a binary social structure emerged where Ashkenazim had greater political power, occupational and educational attainments than the immigrants from Muslim countries, known as Mizrahim<sup>50</sup>. This led to an uneven distribution of resources, and eventually to a lower socio-economic status for a great number of Oriental Jews, thus embedding a class-based dynamic in what originally was an ethnic differentiation. Such a process, defined by sociologist Aziza Khazzom as a process of “ethnic formation”<sup>51</sup>, is indeed specific to Israel, and holds a number of unique features, the most specific one being that both Ashkenazim and Mizrahim belong to the Jewish people, which is considered as being the same racial group<sup>52</sup>. Such a sharp categorization, drawn from the colonial and orientalist East/West, Christian/Muslim divide, jammed together groups of immigrants with a very different cultural and social background (such as: Moroccans, Egyptians, Turks etc.), correlating ethnic affiliation to a given socioeconomic status.<sup>53</sup> Such a process of ethnic differentiation, along the line of an East/West criteria, and the domination practices that ensued from it, have not been object of critique, or even attention, by the Israeli academia up until very recently. Earlier researchers considered this ethnic classification as a neutral tool, finding that inequality was the result of cultural, educational and occupational disadvantages immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East brought with them to Israel.<sup>54</sup> More recent works considered group relations as conflictual from an ethnic point of view, but without questioning why those specific group relations

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<sup>50</sup> Khazzoom, “Did the Israeli State Engineer Segregation?”; Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim”.

<sup>51</sup> Khazzoom, “The Great Chain of Orientalism”.

<sup>52</sup> Dvorah Yanow, “From What Edah are You? Israeli and American Meanings of ‘Race-Ethnicity’ in Social Policy Practices,” *Israel Affairs* 5 (1998):183-199.

<sup>53</sup> Moshe Semyonov and Noah Lewin-Epstein, “Wealth Inequality: Ethnic Disparities in the Israeli Society,” *Social Forces* 89/3 (2011): 935-960.

<sup>54</sup> See S.N. Eisenstadt, *Israeli Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson): 1967; Moshe Lissak, “Patterns of Change in Ideology and Class Structure in Israel,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 7/1 (1965):46-63; S.N. Eisenstadt, “The Oriental Jews”.

were in place<sup>55</sup>. At the same time, during the 1990s, a group of sociologists started questioning the East/West divide, directly challenging its neutral nature and suggesting that in fact it was not the product of pre-existing conditions<sup>56</sup>. They, in fact, claimed that Israel did not receive groups of Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, but rather created these categories, producing a binary ethnic divide, where, in reality, there were many different ethnic groups. In this sense, Khazzoom goes deeper by asking why specifically Ashkenazim and Mizrahim were the categories chosen, and why the first group would be dominant on the second. She identifies the answer to these questions in two main factors: first in the competition for scarce resources, and second in the influence that European, nationalist and orientalist discourse had on Jewish thought, and its wide diffusion among Zionist environment, making it an effective and already tested premise for group formation and exclusion<sup>57</sup>. As explained again by Khazzoom, this division rested upon the link that subsisted between European orientalism and the Jewish world. She argues that, in the past two centuries of Diaspora, Jews and Jewish culture underwent a process of orientalizing<sup>58</sup>. And it is precisely through this process that European Jewry came to consider Jewish tradition as oriental, and thus inferior, developing an intense commitment to the West and its alleged cultural superiority, which would lead them to self-improvement<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> Hanna Herzog, "Ethnicity as a Product of Political Negotiation: The case of Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7/4 (1984): 517-533;

Shlomo Swirski, *Israel: The Oriental Majority* (London: Zed Books, 1989)

<sup>56</sup> See Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism"; Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim"; Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jew*; Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs, Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 1993); Yaacov Nahon, *Patterns of Educational Expansion and the Structure of Occupational Opportunities: The Ethnic Dimension* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1987); Deborah Bernstein and Shlomo Swirski, "The Rapid Economic Development of Israel and the Emergence of the Ethnic Division of Labour," *British Journal of Sociology* 33 (1982): 64-85.

<sup>57</sup> Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism".

<sup>58</sup> Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism," 483.

<sup>59</sup> In such a system of thought an opposition is posited between Occident and Orient, building on it to construct the Orient as inferior, to "dominate it, restructure it, and have authority over it. The process of orientalizing is a relational one: not simply because one category implies another but because constructing the East is how the East produces itself. Cf. Said, *Orientalism*, 1-28.

Many scholars supported this thesis by asserting that the European political and intellectual elites ruling Israel in its first decades of existence, indeed applied an orientalizing and colonizing paradigm on Jews coming from the MENA region. Using a previously existing dichotomy created in Europe, that of East and West, they introduced a binary construction of ethnicity in Israel that would allow to simply disregard the heterogeneity of the incoming immigrants and to classify them into two homogeneous categories: Ashkenazim, to be considered as fully 'Western', and Mizrahim to be considered as generically 'Eastern'. Accordingly, the West was portrayed as rational, cultured, developed and thus superior, whilst the Orient was seen as aberrant, undeveloped, and thus inferior<sup>60</sup>. But why this specific division, and not others, has been adopted as an axe around which exclusion and privilege mechanisms developed? The extent to which one could be considered Western became one, if not the main, determinant for the evaluation of other Jewish communities and their traditions. As a consequence, European culture was situated in a position of dominance, dismissing the possibility of an Oriental/Arab cultural context to Jewish history, and subordinating altogether Jews from Islamic countries, to an allegedly 'universal,' but in reality, Eurocentric, Jewish paradigm<sup>61</sup>. The demands for unity were actually demands for Westernization, leading to the establishment of a clear hierarchy in terms of cultural legitimacy of one's origin. New immigrants, especially those coming from North Africa and the Middle East, were asked to conform to a national narrative they did not contribute to create, and where their origin positioned them at the 'wrong pole' of the newly created social order<sup>62</sup>. And, in fact, it was not the actual existence of ethnic differences that accounted for the emergence of ethnic discrimination, but how those ethnic identities were represented in the context of the new Israeli society. Language played a key role in this process of social definition, and the very act of naming a group

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<sup>60</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim".

<sup>62</sup> Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism".

constructed simultaneously that category, as it happened with the category of 'Mizrahim'. This allowed the group that invented the classification, i.e. the European Zionist elite, to establish what represented the norm (the West) and what would differ from it (Oriental/Arab/non-Western culture).

*The ethnic discourse in Israel: The Invisibility of Ashkenaziness*

The idea of an intra-Jewish division, however, was in sharp contrast with the equalitarian ethos at the basis of Zionist ideology, that denied "the possibility of racial or ethnic inequalities among Jews"<sup>63</sup>. Assimilation theory (commonly labelled as "the melting pot") was considered as a cornerstone of the new collectivity and fundamental for the creation of a homogeneous Israeli nation. To claim full membership in the new society, immigrants were required to adopt the new Israeli (but in reality, Zionist/European) culture, considered better and more 'advanced', and to leave behind their 'old' culture without looking back.<sup>64</sup> Throughout time, as a consequence of this dichotomy emerged a pattern of economic, political and cultural advantage for the Ashkenazi group, resulting in an unequal distribution of resources.

To legitimate this new social order, European Jews inextricably linked their ethnicity and culture to Israeli national identity, creating a strong connection between the two. Ashkenazi ethnicity (Ashkenazi-ness), with time was thus perceived to be less salient thanks to its identification with a normative Israeli identity.<sup>65</sup> The unmarked nature of dominant ethnicity and the normalization of its privileged situation, enabled the group carrying it to formulate a set of ethnic and racial understandings that tended to justify the denial

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<sup>63</sup> Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations"

<sup>64</sup> Ashley W. Doane, "Dominant Group Ethnic Identity in the United States: the Role of 'Hidden' Ethnicity in Intergroup Relations," *The Sociological Quarterly* 38 (1997): 385.

<sup>65</sup> Wayne Brekhus, "A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting our Focus," *Sociological Theory* 16/1 (1998): 34-51.



of ethnicity as a meaningful social force.<sup>66</sup> Ethnic inequality was thus attributed to the “cultural deficiency” of the subordinated group, rather than to structural inequality. Accordingly, most of the studies carried out in the 1990s, up until the years 2000s, dealt only with the visible category of ‘Mizrahi-ness’, without touching the unmarked, and apparently invisible, category of ‘Ashkenazi-ness’.<sup>67</sup> One of the first researchers dealing with the concept of dominant group ethnicity in Israel is sociologist Orna Sasson Levy. In her work she took as a model American studies on whiteness, inferring that, as whiteness in the USA, Ashkenaziness is the “unmarked marker” in Israel —identified with a “neutral” universalism, while serving as a criterion against which all other groups are marked and racialized<sup>68</sup>. The use I have done so far of the concept of ethnic identity derives from a series of researches made in the 1990s that came to redefine the way this concept was considered. Ethnic identities, in fact, passed from being considered as an essential attribute, to being seen as the byproduct of specific social and historical conditions. Ethnic identities thus became an evolving and changing entity in the context of power relations with other elements of society, such as other groups within the state, and the state itself<sup>69</sup>. Sociologist Roger Brubaker defined ethnic identities in terms of personal beliefs, perceptions, understandings and identifications, as a “perspective on the world”, categorizing others as well as ourselves<sup>70</sup>. It’s a cognitive practice that establishes relations of power between two groups: an ethnicizing and an ethnicized, and that uses boundaries

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<sup>66</sup> Doane, “Dominant Group Ethnic Identity in the United States.”

<sup>67</sup> Khazzoom, “The Great Chain of Orientalism”; Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim”; Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jew*; Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs, Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 1993);

<sup>68</sup> Orna Sasson-Levy and Avi Shoshana, “Passing as (Non) Ethnic: The Israeli Version of Acting White,” *Sociological Inquiry* 83 (2013): 448-472; Orna Sasson-Levy, “A Different Kind of Whiteness: Marking and Unmarking of Social Boundaries in the Construction of Hegemonic Ethnicity,” *The Sociological Forum* 28/1(2013): 27–50; Sasson-Levy, “Ethnic Generations”.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Jenkins, “Rethinking ethnicity: Identity, categorization and power,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17 (1994): 197-223

<sup>70</sup> Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov, “Ethnicity as Cognition,” *Theory and Society* 33 (2004):31.

as a mean of creating and preserving ethnic identities and groups.<sup>71</sup> The relations between ethnic groups, and more in general groups within a society, are dynamic and driven by a dialectical process that reflects the relationship between the power exerted by the dominant group and the ability of the subordinate group to resist domination. To maintain its position of power in the face of the real or perceived challenges posed by other ethnic groups, the dominant group uses different techniques to legitimate itself. One of the strategies deployed, as we just saw in the case of European Jews in Israel, is to posit one's own ethnicity and culture as normative. Israeli national identity was thus appropriated for a long time by the dominant group, interested in facilitating actions that promoted mainly its own welfare. This tendency is reflected, for instance, by the cultural and academic production of the 1960s and the 1970s. Its main aim was, in fact, to defend the existing social order by keeping the ethnicity of the dominant group invisible and by ascribing the history and culture of the dominated group under one single typecast.<sup>72</sup>

The Ashkenazi/Mizrahi ethnic categorization outlined thus far remains relevant and used till today in the Israeli public discourse.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> John L. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution," in *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, ed. Patrick McAllister et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 166; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2010); Florence Haegel and Marie-Claire Lavabre, *Destins ordinaires : Identité singulière et mémoire partagée* (Paris : Les Presses Sciences Po, 2014).

<sup>72</sup> For an example of this tendency in the field of cinema see Yaron Peleg, "Ecce Homo: The Transfiguration of Israeli Manhood in Israeli Films," in *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*, ed. Yaron Peleg and Miri Talmon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 30-40; and Yaron Shemer, "Trajectories of Mizrahi Cinema," in *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*, ed. Yaron Peleg and Miri Talmon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 120-133.

<sup>73</sup> For the presence in the public discourse of ethnicity and ethnic categorizations see: Almog Behar, "What is Mizrahiness? Seeking answers through questions," last modified September 26, 2013, <https://enghaokets.wordpress.com/2013/09/26/what-is-mizrahiness-seeking-answers-through-questions/>; Naama Katiee, "But you are not really Mizrahi: Rewriting an Erased Identity," last modified September 15, 2013, <https://enghaokets.wordpress.com/2013/09/15/but-youre-not-really-mizrahi-rewriting-an-erased-identity/>; Tal Kra-Oz, "Israeli TV Series examines the lives of Mizrahim," last modified September 13, 2013, <https://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/145059/israeli-tv-series-examines-the-lives-of-mizrahim>; Yitzhak Laor, "Wiped out," last modified September 28, 2001, <https://www.haaretz.com/life/books/1.5414278>

It underwent some adaptations to include new groups of immigrants that reached the countries later on (USSR Jews and Ethiopian Jews), but the original correlation between ethnicity and socioeconomic status was left unchanged.<sup>74</sup>

It can thus be observed that Israeli society was not structured as a melting pot, but rather along a Western-Ashkenazi vision that merged with Eurocentric modernization. Indeed, Zionism, in the footsteps of European nationalism, imagined itself, from its inception, as a Western movement, opposed to the Orient.<sup>75</sup> It is only very recently that the link between ethnicity and national identity in Israel has been analyzed more thoroughly with a series of studies on the ethnic nature of Ashkenaziness, as the case for dominant group ethnicity in Israel.<sup>76</sup>

It is against this background that we are going to outline the migration and integration history of the two groups we are going to consider for our study: Israelis of Polish and of Tunisian origin. In the first place we will give an overview of the history of these communities in their country of origin and of their migratory routes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; followed by a brief overview on their settlement in the Land of Israel and their integration into Israeli society.

### *Tunisian migrations to Israel and Zionism in North Africa*

Jewish presence in North Africa spans over nearly two thousand years. More specifically in Tunisia it dates back to the times of the Carthaginian empire. Starting from the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> For more on the integration of Jews from the former USSR and Ethiopia see: Larissa Remennick, "What Does Immigration Mean? Social Insertion of Russian Immigrants in Israel," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 4/1 (2003): 23-49; Shalva Weil, "Religion, Blood and the Equality of Rights: The Case of Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 4/3-4 (1996): <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718119620907256> and Uri Ben-Eliezer, "Multicultural Society and Everyday Cultural Racism: Second Generation of Ethiopian Jews in Israel's 'Crisis of Modernization'," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31/5 (2008): 935-961.

<sup>75</sup> Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jew*; Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations".

<sup>76</sup> Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations"; Kimmerling. *The End of Ashkenazi Hegemony*.

century, Jewish communities in Tunisia could be found in the cities of Kairouan, Mahdiya, Sousse, Tunis and in the island of Djerba, where an old and reputed rabbinic tradition developed over the centuries, up to this day. Jewish population was well integrated in the urban fabric of the different cities, and only Tunis and Djerba had separate Jewish neighborhoods. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> century AC the region was under Islamic rule, with the Umayyad Caliphate conquering North Africa. As all “people of the Book” living under Muslim rule, also Tunisian Jews were accorded the status of *dhimmi*, which was maintained until the advent of European colonialism, when France established a protectorate in Tunisia (1881-1956), putting an end to the ruling of the Ottoman Empire in the region.<sup>77</sup> For Jews, the modern period and the colonization by European powers of the MENA region, meant, in most cases, an access to modernity and an improvement of their social condition, distancing, if not estranging them from the local Muslim populace. In the Tunisian case, already during the years preceding the establishment of the French protectorate, the condition of Jews underwent a significant improvement, especially with the enactment of the *Pact Fondamental* (1857). The *Pact* was a civil rights charter that granted Jews civil liberties, religious freedom, fiscal equality vis-à-vis Muslim subject and right to property. <sup>78</sup> These reforms, along with the establishment of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU)<sup>79</sup> schools (1864), were the consequences of the growing influence of

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<sup>77</sup> *Dhimma* in Arabic ‘protection contract’. In Islamic law is the legal status given to the People of the Book (Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians) living under Muslim rule, and grants protection in exchange for the payment of a tax (*jizya*) and the recognition of Muslim authority. For a more precise history of Jewish communities in Islamic countries see Antoine Germa, Benjamin Lellouch and Evelyn Patlagean, *Les Juifs dans l’Histoire* (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> For more on the *Pact Fondamental* and the colonial influence on North Africa see Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> The Alliance israélite universelle is an international Jewish organization founded in 1860 by the French statesman Adolphe Crémieux. The main aim of the organization, until mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, was to safeguard human rights and promote the education of Jews around the world, especially of those leaving in the MENA region. For a deeper understanding of this institution and its history see André Kaspi et al. *Histoire de l’Alliance israélite universelle de 1860 à nos jours* (Paris : Armand Colin, 2010.)

Europe in Tunisia, and more generally in North African affairs, that led in 1881 to the establishment of a French protectorate over Tunisia. At this date the Jewish population in Tunisia counted about 25.000 people mostly living in Tunis and in other coastal towns such as Sfax, Sousse, Gabès<sup>80</sup>.

In this same period (1880-90) two main events closely linked with the advent of French protectorate took place and influenced the Jewish Tunisian community as a whole: a series of anti-Jewish riots, and the demands *en masse* of Tunisian Jews to be naturalized as French citizens. These demands were finally accepted in 1910, when the access to French nationality of Tunisian subjects was reformed, allowing to Tunisian Jews to obtain French nationality on an individual basis, and to refer to the French judiciary system, so far precluded to them. Moreover, as a result of the modernization process brought about by European influence, more and more Jews started to move from the villages in the countryside to bigger urban centers located on the shoreline.

Until the end of the French protectorate, the Jews of Tunisia experienced a phase that Lucette Valensi called "openness, differentiation, bifurcations"<sup>81</sup>. In fact, through the diffusion of French language, culture and mores, the spatial redistribution of the urban population, the creation of new places of sociability, and the access to a modern education thanks to AIU schools, Jews benefited from a wide sociocultural transformation and a certain social decompartmentalization, that provided them with new opportunities for social and economic improvement. The francization and the relative secularization of Tunisian Jewish population deriving from it, divided Tunisian Jewish population in three different groups: Tunisian subjects, French citizens and Italian Jews living in Tunisia. The first group still constituted the majority of Jewish

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<sup>80</sup>Haim Saadoun, "Tunisia" in *The Jews of Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*, eds. Reeva Spector Simon, Michael M. Laskier and Sara Reguer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 444-457.

<sup>81</sup> Lucette Valensi, "Espaces publics, espaces communautaires aux XIXe et XXe siècles" in *Confluences Méditerranée : La Tunisie au miroir de sa communauté juive* 10 (1994) : 102.

population and could be divided according to its degree of French acculturation. Those Jews living in the cities and town of the coastal line were more assimilated to French culture, compared to those living in rural areas or to the traditional religious Jews in Djerba<sup>82</sup>.

According to historian Paul Sebag, Tunisian Jews at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were essentially a urban population. Those living in urban areas amounted to 97,5% of Jewish population in 1921, and to 97,3% in 1936. More specifically, around half of the Jewish population in the country lived in the city of Tunis and its outskirts, and in other cities along the Tunisian coastline such as: Sousse, Djerba, Sfax<sup>83</sup>. The growing degree of urbanization and of assimilation to French culture of many Tunisian Jews, gradually led not only to a decline in the religious practice, but also towards a transformation of Jewish – Muslim relations. In fact, the growing assimilation of Tunisian Jews to French culture, and the increasing struggle for Tunisian national independence against French colonial rule, created a split and jeopardized the very pragmatic and, generally speaking, pacific relationships that existed so far between the two groups.<sup>84</sup>

As in other parts of the Diaspora, in North Africa, the hope for a return to Zion as always existed, resting more on messianic and religious motives than on political ones. It was only around the beginning of the XX century, sometimes in conjunction with the visit of European Zionist emissaries, that Zionist ideas began to be spread in North Africa too.<sup>85</sup>

In Tunisia the development of a modern Zionist movement was promoted by Alfred Valensi, author of a study on Zionism, published both in French and in Judeo-Arabic.<sup>86</sup> The colonial dynamics and the prospect that Zionism would realize the goal of a Jewish

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<sup>82</sup> Haim Saadoun, "Tunisia," 448.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Sebag, *Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie : des Origines à nos Jours* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1991), 185-186.

<sup>84</sup> For an extended account of the history of Tunisian Jews see Sebag, *Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie*.

<sup>85</sup> Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, 32.

<sup>86</sup> Alfred Valensi, *Sion et Liberté* (Tunis : Imprimerie Finzi, 1919).

homeland were key factors in the development of the movement in Tunisia. The first Zionist society, *Agudat Zion*, was established in 1910, while the Tunisian Zionist Federation was established in 1920 as an umbrella organization for all Zionist activities in the country. The Federation had a number of problems mainly due to the fragmentary nature of Tunisian Zionism and to the opposition coming from within Tunisian Jewish society to Zionist ideals, among others from the AIU. Nonetheless, Zionists had a primary role in the struggle against anti-Semitic manifestations in the country and participated in all aspects of Jewish community life, trying to make place for themselves among the other political movements at the time, in particular the communist and the socialist party, very popular among Jewish youth.

Starting from 1926 to 1939, a number of youth movements were established in Tunisia, both on the left (e.g. *ha-Shomer ha-Tzair*) and on the right (e.g. *Betar*) side of the Zionist political spectrum. These movements were more vital and organized than previous Zionist activity in the country, both lowering the age of activists and allowing for the participation of women in their groups' activities. Moreover, *ha-Shomer ha-Tzair* was the first movement to advocate for youth '*Aliyah*<sup>87</sup> to mandate Palestine, in support of the kibbutzim movement. At this time however, few people replied to that call, partly because of the repercussion it would have on the traditional family structure, and partly because of the collectivist lifestyle lived in the kibbutzim. Eventually efforts towards '*Aliyah* included overall only a very small number of Tunisian Jews. Most of them were young individuals, fervent Zionists, that settled in different kibbutzim all over Israel.<sup>88</sup>

The situation of the Tunisian Zionist movement changed completely with the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1943). During WWII Tunisian Jewry was affected by the developments in Nazi-occupied France, and, as Tunisia was under the rule of the Vichy

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<sup>87</sup> '*Aliyah* (Heb. for 'ascent') is a term referring to the immigration of Jews from the Diaspora to the Land of Israel.

<sup>88</sup> Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, 39.

government, anti-Jewish laws were enacted there as well. These laws, first published in 1940, concerned three main areas: the legal status of the Jews, the quotas in education and measures taken against Jewish economic influence. In general, Tunisian Jewry was only marginally touched by these laws: in the first place because their application was lengthy, and in addition to that because both French and Italian authorities in Tunisia kept a positive attitude towards the Jews<sup>89</sup>. While the debate on the application of anti-Jewish laws was still ongoing, the Nazis started to move their troops to Tunisia, occupying it (November 1942 - May 1943) in reply to the Allies' "Operation Torch" in Algeria and Morocco<sup>90</sup>. In this context, a *Comité d'administration de la Communauté israélite de Tunis* was established with the aim of representing the community before the Nazi High Command, and of providing the required Jewish labor to be sent to the forced labor camp near Bizerte, mainly for military purposes. German direct occupation led to a steady deterioration of the conditions of the Tunisian Jewish community, that, suffered also from the aerial bombardment of the Allied and German forces fighting on Tunisia's territory.

Until War World II and German occupation, Zionism was one of the many ways Tunisian Jews had, in particular those who did not obtain French citizenship, to express their aspirations for a Jewish future in Tunisia, and its activities were mostly of a social and cultural nature. However, the war and the fact that not only France failed to protect its Jewish citizens against harsh attacks and anti-Semitic discriminations, but also initiated anti-Semitic activity itself, influenced Jewish attitude towards the Zionist enterprise.

Not considering possible anymore to be part of the French nation and with the rise of Tunisian national aspirations for independence, Zionists in Tunisia understood that the establishment of a Jewish state and '*Aliyah*, were the final aim of their movement and they began to act accordingly. In particular, preparatory camps that

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<sup>89</sup> Haim Saadoun, "Tunisia," 454

<sup>90</sup> Michel Abitbol, *Histoire des Juifs* (Paris :Éditions Perrin, 2013), 233.



included agricultural training and learning Hebrew became significant activities for the Tunisian Zionist movement, that was becoming more and more oriented towards emigration to Israel. The afterwar years were thus characterized by an increase in the number of Zionist parties, particularly those connected to world political movements. The Revisionists of *Beitar* still enjoyed a huge popularity, but there were also other movements, combining socialism and Zionism, such as the *Tse'irei Zion*, aligned with the *Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad*, and *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsa'ir*, which renewed their Tunisian activities in 1946. The religious Zionist movement also had two branches. One was aligned with *Torah ve-Avoda* party, and the other was *Ateret Zion* in Djerba, which had no specific affiliation. The Tunisian Jewish community started leaving the country at a pace that would become higher and higher, to reach its peak in the mid 1950s. The first significant migratory wave to Palestine took place between end of the war (1945) and the establishment of the state of Israel (1948). As all migration that occurred in this period it was illegal, as the British limited and then closed Jewish immigration to Palestine in 1939 (White paper)<sup>91</sup>. Therefore, only a small number of Tunisian Jews left for Palestine in those years. Those who did it, belonged to the Zionist elite in Tunisia and are to be counted among the pioneers who contributed to the establishment of the state of Israel. They can be divided into two main groups: a secular one, that settled in Kibbutz Regavim in Northern Israel, composed mainly of affiliates of the *Tse'irei Zion* movement; and the other one religious, which settled in Yavné (central Israel) composed mainly of affiliates of the *Hovevei Zion* movement. These immigrants, originating from the coastal towns in Tunisia, despite their little number, were the harbingers of Tunisian Jews' integration in Israel.

In the early 1950s, the bulk of the Jewish population was still in the country, concentrated in Tunis (65,000), Sfax (4,500), and Sousse (4000). Other cities with a significant Jewish population were Gabès, Nabeul, Medenine and Jerba. The rest of Tunisian Jewry was

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<sup>91</sup> Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 87.

dispersed in peripheral towns and villages, mainly in the Southern and Northern regions of the country.<sup>92</sup>

The establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948, led more than 4.000 Tunisian Jews to leave in 1951, followed by 2500 more people in 1952, and by 600 people only in 1953. Emigration reached again a peak the following year (1954) with 2600 Jews leaving the country as a consequence of the growing political autonomy granted to Tunisia by the French protectorate. In 1955 more than 6000 Jews emigrated to Israel, followed by 6500 in 1956, the year of Tunisian independence<sup>93</sup>. This '*Aliyah*' was organized by the Jewish Agency, which sent emissaries to Tunisia, and by the Mossad, who was active by training young Tunisian Jews in paramilitary activities, starting from the 1950s. This third wave of emigration to Israel was the most conspicuous one: around 22.200 people left the country overall. The majority of them were artisans, shopkeepers, merchants and members of the liberal professions.

This third, and bigger, wave of migration is part of a wider South-North migratory trend that affected the whole Mediterranean region in the postwar and decolonization years. In fact, not only Jews were emigrating from North Africa, but also Muslim and Christians were moving for economic reasons to Europe, North America and other Arab countries, depending on the social capital available to them.<sup>94</sup> North African Jews acted along the same line and, if educated and wealthy, they moved preferably to France or North America to achieve social advancement; while the poorer and less educated segment of the population had little choice but Israel. Many of them were of rural origin, very traditional, with little education and little knowledge of the Zionist enterprise, which was active in Tunisia mainly in an urban environment. The westernization process brought about by French colonization was confined to the upper- and middle-class urban societies of the coastal cities, such as Tunis,

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<sup>92</sup> Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, 257.

<sup>93</sup> Haim Saadoun, "Tunisia," 456.

<sup>94</sup> Frédéric Abecassis et al. « Le monde musulman : effacement des communautés juives et nouvelles diasporas depuis 1945,» in *Les Juifs dans l'Histoire*, ed. Antoine Germa et al. (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011): 815-840.

Sfax and Sousse, leaving behind the rest of the population, Jewish and Muslim alike. In spite of the educational endeavors of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, most rural communities were characterized by a pre-modern lifestyle, based on agriculture and on the patriarchal family whose hierarchical structure was based on gender and age.<sup>95</sup>

When these immigrants arrived, after a first period in a transit camp, they were transferred to temporary settlements called *ma'abarot*, where the living conditions were very hard and services almost non-existent.<sup>96</sup> Migration to Israel disrupted the traditional patriarchal structure of the family, putting on the lower step of that hierarchy, the figure that once was on top, i.e. the father. In fact, adults, usually with little knowledge of the new language, were obliged to rely on their children to communicate and integrate in the new Israeli society. Extended families that once lived together were separated and broke into smaller units, scattered into various settlements.<sup>97</sup> Many of these immigrants remained unemployed for a long time, and were forced to accept any kind of labor available, to provide for their numerous families. These and other concurrent factors, made it so that those who migrated to Israel in the 1950s, mainly from North Africa and the Middle East, had to face the harshest conditions.<sup>98</sup>

In the period going from 1956 to 1961, the tensions between those Jews who remained in the country and Tunisian authorities decreased markedly, and in 1957, the year after Tunisian independence, Jewish emigration dropped to about 2600 people.

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<sup>95</sup> Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, 254-286.

<sup>96</sup> Ma'abarah (Hebrew, pl. Ma'abarot): temporary immigrant and refugee absorption settlements built by the Israeli government to accommodate the 1950s great migratory wave. For more see: Piera Rossetto, "Space of Transit, Place of Memory: Ma'abarah and Literary Landscapes of Arab Jews", *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 4 (2012):103-127.

<sup>97</sup> On downward social mobility among refugees and immigrants cf. Herbert J. Gans, "First Generation Decline: Downward Mobility Among Refugee and Immigrants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32/9 (2009): 1658 – 1670.

<sup>98</sup> The integration of the migratory waves of the 1950s was particularly problematic due to the amount of people arriving all at once, the precarious economic conditions of the newly established Israeli economy and the permanent state of danger that characterized those first years of statehood. For more on this see: Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 179-246.

However, in spite of the liberal character of Tunisian Constitution, which on paper favored Jews' full integration in the new Tunisian society, they felt that a process of Arabization was undergoing and there was no more space for them in the new democratic Tunisia. In particular, from 1961, the conditions of the Jewish community in the country deteriorated further, and many families closed down their businesses and emigrated to France. Only Jews bearing French citizenship were allowed to leave with their belongings, while those holding Tunisian citizenship could not leave the country with their properties and were permitted to take with them only 30 dinars and some personal belongings. In 1966, only 23.000 Jews still lived in Tunisia. In 1968, after the Six-Day War and a violent pogrom that ensued, more people left the country and Tunisian Jewish population was estimated at 10.000. From 1968 to 1984 most of the remaining Tunisian Jewish population left—11,133 people—for Israel or France. Currently, only 1500 Jews live in Tunisia, concentrated in Djerba and Tunis<sup>99</sup>.

In Israel, Tunisian Jews settled all over the country in different locations, depending on the time of their arrival and on their social network in Israel. I will consider in the next section a couple of kibbutzim and a moshav originally established by Tunisians, and a development town, in the southern region of the country, where a significant number of Tunisian immigrants was relocated. They are:

- Kibbutz Regavim: located in the North of Israel, created in 1949 by German and Tunisian pioneers in equal number. It served as a main gathering point for the Jews originating from Tunis;
- Moshav Yanuv: established in 1950 and located in central Israel. This moshav was populated by Tunisian immigrants mainly from Tunis, Sousse, Moknine and Gabès;
- Kibbutz Karmia: located in the South of Israel, was established by *HaShomer HaTzair* members from France and Tunisia;

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<sup>99</sup> Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, 457.

- Development town of Dimona: established in the Negev desert in 1955. Numerous Tunisian Jews settled here, especially those part of the big migratory wave between 1955 and 1960.

It is hard to give a precise estimate of how many Israelis today are of Tunisian origin. This is due to a relatively high rate of intermarriage and to the statistics that, in this regard, are not accurate, giving an aggregate data for all immigrants from North Africa, namely: Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria.<sup>100</sup>

### *Polish migrations to Israel and Zionism in Eastern Europe*

Jewish presence in Poland dates back to over a thousand years. Poland was for centuries home to the largest and most significant Jewish community in the world. In particular, starting from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the country became a shelter for persecuted and expelled European Jews, thanks to a long period of statutory religious tolerance and social autonomy.<sup>101</sup> This came to an end with the partitions of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793, 1795) that marked the destruction of Poland as a sovereign state at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Particularly, with the 1795 partition among Prussia, the Austrian and the Russian empires, Jews were subject to the laws of the partitioning powers. Here Jewish emancipation did not happen, as in France for instance, by the establishment of equal citizenship, rather it was a long process that depended on the partitioning powers. Notably, in the increasingly anti-Semitic Russian Empire, Jewish emancipation was obtained only in 1917 with the Russian Revolution; in Galicia, under the

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<sup>100</sup> In statistics of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and in academic demographic researches as well, aggregate data are provided for the following three countries: Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria.

<sup>101</sup> Jews were accepted and protected in different cities and areas in Poland according to the social and economic role accorded to them by the local ruling noble. See Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, "Les Juifs dans les sociétés d'Europe Centrale et Orientale du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Les Juifs dans l'Histoire*, ed. Antoine Germa et al. (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011), 333 and 358.

Austrian empire, it was obtained in 1789 when the edict of toleration was extended to Jews; while in Prussia it was obtained in different steps, first with an edict of emancipation in 1812, followed by another one in 1869.<sup>102</sup>

This same period, the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was marked by substantial migratory movements throughout all Eastern Europe, touching Jews and non-Jews alike. The main push factors were a massive demographic boom in the region, political instability and poverty, that led many to look for better opportunities in the New World, where a fast-growing economy was requiring an increasing amount of labor force.<sup>103</sup> Between 1871 and 1915, more than 2.430 million Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States, South America, Western Europe (UK, Germany, Austria, France etc.) and Palestine.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, many of those who stayed begun to promote a secular Jewish culture and assimilation, in the framework of the *Haskalah* movement that proliferated in Poland during the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>105</sup>. In opposition to it, Hasidism emphasized traditional study and a Jewish non-secular response to the problems of antisemitism, focusing on the continuation of religious tradition and on a way of life based on the Jewish law.<sup>106</sup> Starting from 1890, the intellectual debate created by the *Haskalah* reflected itself into a growing number of political movements (Zionists, Bundists<sup>107</sup> and Communists) within the

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<sup>102</sup> In this context, assimilation was considered as a precondition for emancipation. It is interesting to notice that the term used at the time was not to 'assimilate', but rather to 'civilize', pretending from Jews first a Europeanization and later on a 'Polonization' in exchange for equal rights. See Paul Zawadzki, « Les Juifs en Pologne des partages de la Pologne jusqu'à 1939, » in *Les Juifs dans l'Histoire*, ed. Antoine Germa et al. (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011), 478-480.

<sup>103</sup> Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "What Drove the Mass Migrations from Europe in the la Nineteenth Century?" *NBER Working Paper Series on Historical Factors in Long Run Growth* 43 (1992): 1-53.

<sup>104</sup> Claudie Weill, « Les Juifs de Russie (1772-1953), » in *Les Juifs dans l'Histoire*, ed. Antoine Germa et al. (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011), 512-513.

<sup>105</sup> Heb: wisdom, erudition. Intellectual movement considered the Jewish version of the Enlightenment, born in Germany in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and developed in Russia and the pale of Settlement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>106</sup> Mystic movement born in Poland at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century thanks to the efforts of Israel Ben Eliezer, the 'Baal Shem Tov'.

<sup>107</sup> Bundism (from Bund: General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia): secular socialist Jewish party ad trade union established in Vilna in 1897.

Jewish community, covering a wide range of views and participating in local and regional elections. It was exactly in this period that Zionism became popular with the advent in Poland of the *Poale'i Zion* Marxist party (1901), as well as the religious parties: Mizrahi (1902) and *Agudat Israel* (1912).

Following World War I and Poland's independence, the country became again an important center of European Jewish life, despite the growing, generalized antisemitism that gave rise to a number of pogroms between 1918 and 1919.<sup>108</sup> In this same period, the migratory fluxes to the United States that started in the previous century and stopped during World War I, resumed, and, in fact, about 289.200 Jews left Eastern Europe for the United States. More than half the immigrants in this period (1920-1939) originated from Poland. In 1921, the United States for the first time set some serious restrictions to immigration, cutting by half the number of immigrants allowed to enter the US. By 1924, when the US put a further limit on migrations from Eastern Europe, the majority of Jewish immigrants to the US (225.200) had already reached the country. Notwithstanding, Poland (2.8 million Jews in 1921) and the Soviet Union (2.7 million in 1926) were the two countries in Europe with the largest Jewish population <sup>109</sup>, which increased further in the interwar period to reach, by the beginning of World War II, 3.3 millions of Jews in Poland alone<sup>110</sup>.

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Particularly influential in Poland in the interwar period and opposed to Zionism and migration to Palestine. See Paul Zawadzki, « Les Juifs en Pologne, » 476.

<sup>108</sup> Paul Zawadzki, « Les Juifs en Pologne, » 489.

<sup>109</sup> "Population and Migration: Population since World War I," [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Population\\_and\\_Migration/Population\\_since\\_World\\_War\\_I](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Population_and_Migration/Population_since_World_War_I).

For this period numerical data are based mostly on religious affiliation as recorded in national censuses, except for the Baltic States and the Soviet Union, where they are based on ethnicity data from the censuses. Conceptually, these numbers correspond to what has been defined in Jewish demography as the "core" Jewish population. The "core" Jewish population is the aggregate of all those who, when asked, identify themselves as Jews.

<sup>110</sup> "Population and Migration," [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Population\\_and\\_Migration/Population\\_since\\_World\\_War\\_I](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Population_and_Migration/Population_since_World_War_I) and "The American Jewish Yearbook vol. 1-20," <http://www.ajarchives.org/main.php?GroupingId=10031>

From a political standpoint, this was also the period when Jewish and Zionist politics reached their highest in Eastern Europe. In a political and historical moment where nationalistic ideals were thriving, Zionism found its place as yet another nationalist movement in Europe. Zionist parties sponsored a number of youth movements connected to them. One of the most important was the radical Marxist *ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir*, that divided the scene with many others, such as *ha-Halutz* and *Betar*.

Despite the presence of Zionist parties and youth movements in Poland, during the interwar years Jewish migration to Palestine constituted only a little percentage of general Jewish migration from Eastern Europe at the time, about 2% or 210.000 people. The situation changed in 1925, when the US completely closed its borders and Palestine became the preferred destination for Jews, accepting more than 29.000 people only that year.<sup>111</sup> Jewish immigration continued throughout the 1930s in different waves ('Aliyot) until 1939, when severe limitations were imposed by the British Mandate (the White Paper)<sup>112</sup>, making clandestine immigration the only option for European Jewry fleeing the Nazis.<sup>113</sup> And in fact, migration played a crucial role for Eastern European Jewry before and during World War II. After the outbreak of the war in 1939, 0.2- 0.3 million Jews found refuge in the area of Poland that fell under Soviet control, thus escaping Nazi occupied Poland and extermination. The Holocaust caused indeed a dramatic drop in the Jewish population in all Eastern European countries, leaving the Soviet Union as the predominant country of Jewish concentration in the region. The Polish Jewish community was the one to suffer the most in the Holocaust. About 3 million Polish Jewish citizens were killed in the Holocaust, and Poland was the country where Nazi

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<sup>111</sup> "Population and Migration."

<sup>112</sup> Paper issued by the British government in response to the Arab revolt of 1936-39 against Jewish immigration to Mandate Palestine. According to the Paper: "Jewish immigration to Palestine under the British Mandate was to be limited to 75,000 over the next five years (starting from 1939)". See Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 87.

<sup>113</sup> "The American Jewish Yearbook: vol. 22- 41": <http://www.ajcarchives.org/main.php?GroupingId=40>



Germany planned on exterminating the Jews of Europe. It is hard to ascertain the number of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust, also considering that many of them fled to the Russian part of Poland after the annexation at the beginning of the war, thus getting Russian nationality. At the end of 1944, the number of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union and the Soviet controlled territories was estimated at 250.000 -300.000 people. Between the end of the war and 1948, an agreement between the Soviet Union and Poland allowed for the repatriation of 157.000 Jews. By adding this number to the number of those who survived the Holocaust in Poland, and to the number of those repatriated from other countries, it can be estimated that, at its postwar peak, up to 250.000 returning Jews might have resided in Poland, mostly in the cities of Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, Wrocław and in Lower Silesia<sup>114</sup>.

Most of them, 170.000 people, left Poland almost immediately due to episodes of antisemitism such as the infamously known pogrom of Kielce in 1946. According to historians antisemitic violence in postwar Poland caused between 1000 and 2000 Jewish victims in the years between 1945 and 1947.<sup>115</sup> Jewish refugees fleeing Europe were settled in displaced persons (DP) camps located in Germany, Austria and Italy.<sup>116</sup> They constituted the bulk of the *Berikḥah*: the clandestine Zionist movement of Jews fleeing Eastern and Central Europe for Israel after the war. <sup>117</sup>

When the state of Israel was established, in May 1948, Polish born residents numbered 161,700 people – 35% percent of all non-native residents and were the largest ethnic group in the country (the second largest group – Romanian born Jews –numbered only about

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<sup>114</sup> “The American Jewish Yearbook: vol. 47 (1945 -46),” <http://www.ajcarchives.org/main.php?GroupingId=10080>

<sup>115</sup> Jean-Charles Szurek, « Les Juifs en Europe de l’Est depuis 1945» in *Les Juifs dans l’Histoire*, ed. Antoine Germa et al. (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011), 770-771.

<sup>116</sup> Szurek, « Les Juifs en Europe de l’Est depuis 1945,» 770.

<sup>117</sup> *Berikḥah* (Heb., flight or escape) was a clandestine, Zionist-organized mass movement whose aim was to bring European Jews who survived the Holocaust to Palestine. This movement at its peak counted about 250,000 Jews from Eastern and Central Europe. The term refers to both the migration itself and the organization that assisted it. See: Arieh Josef Kochavi, “Britain and the Jewish Exodus from Poland following the Second World War,” *Polin* 7 (1992): 161–175.

50,000 people)<sup>118</sup>. And in fact, the presence of Polish Jews can be traced in all 'Aliyot from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the establishment of the state, and later on. In almost all migratory waves, especially starting from the second 'Aliyah (1904-1914), Polish immigrants constituted one of the largest, and more ideologically dominant, group of immigrants. As a matter of fact, they created the bulk of the leadership of the Jewish Yishuv<sup>119</sup> and would have embodied that of the future state. Many prime-ministers and presidents, were, in fact, originally from Poland and the Western regions of the Russian Empire<sup>120</sup>. In the third 'Aliyah (1919-1923), when immigration to Palestine resumed after the war, Polish immigrants formed some 30% of the immigrant population and in the fourth (1924-1929) they constituted about half of it, whereas in the fifth 'Aliyah (1929-1939) – the last wave prior to the establishment of the Israeli state - Polish Jews were over 40% of the 255,000 new immigrants to Israel<sup>121</sup>.

Between December 1949 and March 1951, around 28.000 Jews arrived in Israel from Poland, as part of a great wave of immigrants – the mass 'Aliyah – who flocked to the newly founded state from all over the world. In total, between the establishment of the state and the end of 1951, 105.300 immigrants originating from Poland were registered in Israel, most of them Holocaust survivor and refugees from the war<sup>122</sup>.

After the establishment of the state of Israel and due to the increasing hold of Stalinism on countries under the Soviet influence, more and more Jews tried to leave Eastern Europe. In Poland, legal immigration was interrupted in 1950, when Zionist organizations and

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<sup>118</sup> Israel CBS, *Jewish Population, 1931-1954*, November 1955, table 6.

<sup>119</sup> (He: settlement) Term used to describe pre-state Jewish residents in the Land of Israel. Sometimes divided into old and new Yishuv. The former referring to all Jewish resident prior to the first 'Aliyah, whilst the latter referring to Zionist Jewish residents who settle in the Land of Israel after 1882. See Shapira, *Israel: A History*.

<sup>120</sup> Among the most notable Israelis of Polish origin there is a number of prime ministers of the first decades of the state. Among them: Ben-Gurion, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Shimon Peres.

<sup>121</sup> Irith Cheniavsky, "Does Poland lie on the Mediterranean Coast? 'Polish Jews' and their descendants in Israel," and Israel CBS, *Population Registry 1949*, special publication no. 53, table 13.

<sup>122</sup> "Population and Migration," and "The American Jewish Yearbook vol. 41-60," : <http://www.ajcarchives.org/main.php?GroupingId=40>

parties were shut down, allowing to one last group of Jews (150.000 people) to leave the country for Israel.

After Stalin's death in 1953, and the rise to power of Nikita Khrushchev, Stalinist leaders were substituted. In Poland Wladyslaw Gomulka became the new communist leader. He allowed antizionist demonstrations and favored the emigration of the remaining Polish Jews. Under his leadership in between 1956 and 1960, a first group of Jews, about 42,000 people, left the country. Following, after the Six Day War (1967), in the years in between 1968-1971, the migration of the last Polish Jews, almost imposed by Gomulka, brought to Israel some 13,000 people, bringing to an end the thousand-year-old Jewish community in Poland <sup>123</sup>.

Upon arrival, immigrants from Poland, most of them city and town dwellers, settled chiefly in urban locations. When the state of Israel was established, in 1948, some 40% of them were living in Tel Aviv, 35% more in other cities and towns and only about a quarter decided to settle in non-urban locations, such as kibbutzim and moshavim. At the time, Polish born immigrants constituted the largest ethnic group (a third or more of the residents) in all major cities and towns: Tel Aviv, Haifa, Jerusalem, Petach Tikva, Bnei Brak, Givatayim, Herzliya, Netaniya and Ramat Gan, as well as in many rural communities and kibbutzim; indicating Polish immigrants preeminence among pre-state Israel's population.

In certain communities and regions, the rate of Polish immigrants was particularly high, a phenomenon that profoundly influenced the newborn Israeli culture and society. In 1948, the rate of Polish immigrants in many of the Kibbutzim reached 40-50%, and in several communities was as high as 70-80%<sup>124</sup>. The preference among Polish immigrants for urban locations in the central district of Israel continued, and even intensified after the establishment of the state. By 1961 more than 90% of Polish born immigrants that arrived

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<sup>123</sup> Szurek, « Les Juifs en Europe de l'Est depuis 1945,» 778-779.

Israel CBS, *Immigration to Israel 1929-1948*, part B, table 2, *1961 census*, publication 13, table 14, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, Population chapter.

<sup>124</sup> Israel CBS, *Registration of Population* (8.XI.1948)

in Israel settled in urban communities, 30% of them in Tel Aviv<sup>125</sup>. In certain neighborhoods within larger cities, there were areas where a significant part or even the majority of the population consisted of Polish immigrants. In a small area of Jerusalem, for instance (Amos, Nahum, Obadiah and Zachariah streets) half the residents were Polish immigrants. In the northern neighborhoods of Tel Aviv, they constituted 40% of the population, and in many other neighborhoods they amounted to a quarter to a third of the population. The same is true of many neighborhoods in Haifa.<sup>126</sup>

As mentioned above, immigrants from Poland formed over a third of the population of the newly established State of Israel, a much higher proportion than any other incoming group. The mass 'Aliyah (1948-1951) decreased the rate of Polish immigrants to about 23%, and by 1961 their rate was further reduced to 18%. Since then, their rate among the general population of Israel has steadily declined.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, the prominence of Polish immigrants within cities and in many kibbutzim in a critical, formative period for the Israeli state, shaped the cultural and political outlook of the future society.

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<sup>125</sup> Israel CBS, *1961 Census*, Demographic Characteristics, publication no.22, table 12.

<sup>126</sup> *Cheniavsky, Irith. "Does Poland lie on the Mediterranean Coast? 'Polish Jews' and their descendants in Israel."*

<sup>127</sup> Israel CBS, *1948 Population Registration*, special publication no. 53, table 14, *1961 Census*, Demographic Characteristics of the Population, publication no. 22, table 12.



# *Part I: The private sphere: Family memories and cultural heritage*

## *Chapter 1.*

### *1.1 Generations, memory and cultural heritage*

*“Io penso che il modo con cui costruiamo la nostra memoria, la maniera in cui cuciamo gli scampoli dei ricordi, è simile alla Teshuvah. Ecco la mia Teshuvah laica è la scelta dei ricordi che evoco quando cerco di capire chi sono, per poter agire.”<sup>128</sup>*

Taken from the last autobiographical novel of journalist Wlodek Goldkorn, *L'asino del Messia*, this excerpt presents memory as a tool to understand ourselves and our own identity. Here the author connects memory to the concept of *Teshuva* (a secular one), thus making it a means of self-transformation that allows individuals to understand their own past, and, as a consequence, to act.

Taking from this definition of memory, my aim for this first part of the thesis is to analyze the transmission and usage of memories and cultural heritage within families, as instruments for creating and preserving group identities and ethnic boundaries within contemporary Israeli society.<sup>129</sup> To do so I will start with a brief

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<sup>128</sup> Wlodek Goldkorn, *L'asino del Messia* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2019), 154. My translation from Italian: “I believe that how we build our memory, how we glue together what’s left of memories, is similar to the *Teshuva*. My secular *Teshuva* lies in the choice I make of which memories to evoke when I try to understand who I am, so that I can act.

*Teshuva* (Hebrew: lit. return but also repentance), in Jewish tradition means atoning for a sin. By repenting for past transgressions, the chance than one will be committing those same transgressions in the future is reduced. Hence, the purpose of repentance in Judaism is ethical self-transformation. Here the author connects his use of memory to the concept of *Teshuva*, as means of self-transformation, allowing to the individual to understand his/her past and act accordingly.

<sup>129</sup> Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartman, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1998); Michèle Lamont, and Virág Molnár, “The Study of Boundaries Across the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002):167-95.

overview on the concept of intangible cultural heritage and on how it evolved throughout time both in common thought and in the field of academic research.

The topic of heritage preservation and transmission was brought to the attention of the public opinion in the 1960s with the first UNESCO campaign. They introduced the idea that the preservation of cultural and natural heritage and its transmission to future generations were responsibility of the entire international community.<sup>130</sup> With the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, intangible cultural heritage was included among the types of heritage to be preserved:

*“[...] This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.”<sup>131</sup>*

Even according to this rather normative definition of cultural heritage, the role of memory in the reproduction and creation of identities is highlighted as very important. Anthropologists Irène Maffi, Laurence Gillot and Anne-Christine Trémon, researched the concept of cultural heritage and its development throughout time. They observed that, at the beginning of the years 2000s, cultural heritage started being studied as a process and a social practice,

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<sup>130</sup> This UNESCO enterprise received legitimation through a series of international conventions that started being issued in the 1960s; in particular the convention issued in 1972 for “the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage”. For more on this topic see: David Berliner and Chiara Bortolotto, “Introduction. Le Monde selon l’UNESCO,” *Gradhiva* 18 (2013): 4-21.

<sup>131</sup> “Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible Cultural Heritage 2003,” last modified March 11, 2019, [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL\\_ID=17716&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

rather than just a list of sites and monuments.<sup>132</sup> This shift led to consider processes of heritagization (heritage-making) as a matter of cultural production, transmission and preservation. Suddenly questions such as: why some information is transmitted instead of another? Who makes the choice of what to pass on and why? became relevant to the reconstruction of a group's past and thus identity, ultimately making heritage a political matter. This understanding of heritage proved to be controversial when different categories of actors (public, private, groups, individuals) were in competition to lay down their rights in relation to the past.<sup>133</sup>

With respect to my research I will consider two of the factors determining cultural heritage's role both in the public and in the private spheres: transmission and usage. Transmission is a process that anthropologist Treppe intends as "to make something pass (from someone) to someone else"<sup>134</sup>. This happens through a transfer of representations, practices, emotions, and traditions into the present<sup>135</sup>, and concerns both objects (tangible heritage) and cultural practices (intangible heritage).<sup>136</sup> However, the choice of which information is to be transmitted and the usage that will be made of it, contributing to the continuation of the cultural heritage of any given group, entails a decisional process. The importance of this transmission/usage mechanism, lays in the fact that, by analyzing it, it is possible to understand and question the construction of the reality we live in.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Laurence Gillot, Irène Maffi and Anne-Christine Trémon, "Heritage-scape or Heritage-scapes: Critical consideration on a concept," *Ethnologies* 35/2 (2013): 3.

<sup>133</sup>See: Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, "Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India," in *Museums and Communities The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp et al. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) 34-55; Laurier Turgeon, *Patrimoines métissés. Contextes coloniaux et postcoloniaux* (Paris : Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2003).

<sup>134</sup> Marie Treppe, "Transmettre : un point de vue sémantique," *Ethnologie française* 30/3 (2000) : 361-367.

<sup>135</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social memory studies: from "collective memory" to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998):105-140.

<sup>136</sup>See Laurier Turgeon, "Spirit of Place: Evolving Heritage Concepts and Practices." In *The Spirit of Place. Between Tangible and Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurier Turgeon, (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009) 33-47.

<sup>137</sup> David Berliner, "Anthropologie et transmission," *Terrain* 55 (2010): 4-19.



As we can imagine, in the process of heritage-making, memory plays a crucial role, constituting the link between a group's present and past, and a means to perpetuate group identities. In fact, even though heritage and memory may be experienced on an individual level, it is through social interaction (familial, national, global) that heritage fully comes 'to life'<sup>138</sup>. A number of studies dedicated to the concept of memory may help understand the social conditions of its production and its social function.<sup>139</sup> In particular, I will consider collective memory as created at the crossing of individual and group memories, given that every person exists at the same time in relation to him/herself and to the different groups he/she belongs to.<sup>140</sup> This kind of memory (collective) allows a group to perpetuate its own past, in a proactive and shared way, according to its present needs. As it happened for the concept of cultural heritage, the concept of memory too has evolved from being considered static to being considered as a process, continuously changing, and serving different functions at different points in time, rather than a static transfer of the past into the present.<sup>141</sup>

In order to understand how memory processes are operated, in this first part of the thesis I am going to narrow my analysis to the social institution of the family and its relationship with memory, which passes inevitably through intergenerational transfers. The study of generations is intended, in sociology, as the study of a series of interactions, occurring at the same time: between an individual and

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<sup>138</sup> James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Aleida Assmann, "Four Formats of Memory: From Individual to Collective Constructions of the Past." in *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German-Speaking World Since 1950*, ed. Christian Emden and David Robin Midgley, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002) 19-37; Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (eds.), *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>139</sup> For a deeper understanding of the concept of memory in social sciences and its connection to the collective see: Marie-Claire Lavabre, "Usages et Mésusages de la Notion de Mémoire," *Critique Internationale* 7 (2000) : 48-57 and Marie-Claire Lavabre, "Paradigmes de la Mémoire," *Transcontinentales* 5 (2007) : 139-147.

<sup>140</sup> Lavabre, "Usages et Mésusages de la Notion de Mémoire," 55.

<sup>141</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit 1* (Paris : Le Seuil, 2014) Kindle edition.

a family, biology and society, culture, social structures and history<sup>142</sup>. These interactions are shaped by time and place and are given different meanings according to different contexts. That is why the concept of 'generation' has gone through some redefinitions throughout time.<sup>143</sup> As stated by sociologist Karl Manneheim, I will not consider generations in the narrow sense of a cohort, representing groups of people being born at a similar time and connected to one another by a relation of lineage, as for instance grandparents, parents and children<sup>144</sup>. Nor will I consider generations from a strictly historical point of view. In fact, the recognition of an 'historical generation' is usually made a posteriori, by society, that selectively reconstructs the past by defining what is to be remembered and by who.<sup>145</sup> Such a process keeps alive a given event and associates with it a group of people, entrusted with the role of collective witness of that event for future generations<sup>146</sup>. Rather, I will regard generations as socio-historical entities. As an interaction between "new participants in the cultural process" and the society in which they were born and through which they interacted with the world<sup>147</sup>. In this respect, the problem of generations is a problem of knowledge: how a society's past is collected and transmitted in the present in order to shape its future? To tackle this issue, I will take advantage of some of the criticisms that were addressed to Mannheim's theory of "generations". In fact, he links the creation of a generational consciousness to a specific historical context that shapes people belonging to a given generation as they come of age. However, this is not enough.<sup>148</sup> I will also consider other social and cultural identifiers that are linked to

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<sup>142</sup>Jennie Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations: New Directions and Challenges* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p 1.

<sup>143</sup>Marie-Claire Lavabre, "Génération et Mémoire", Intervention au Congrès de l'Association Française de Science Politique, 22-24 October 1981, Table ronde n.2 "Génération et Politique", 1-11.

<sup>144</sup> Karl Manneheim, *Le Problème des Générations* (Paris : Armand Colin, 1952)

<sup>145</sup> Sara Arber and Claudine Attias-Donfut, *The Myth of Generational Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

<sup>146</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1997).

<sup>147</sup> Manneheim, *Le Problème*, 292.

<sup>148</sup> Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations*, 6-7.

the grouping and “marking” of people of similar age (such as the school, the army etc.), creating a common point of reference and a collective set of shared experiences. In this regard, it is interesting to take into consideration as well Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*<sup>149</sup>, that adds to Mannheim’s theory an additional layer. This concept can be used to redefine a generation as a “a cohort of persons passing through time who come to share a common habitus, hexis, and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time.”<sup>150</sup> This re-definition of the concept includes both a shared/collective cultural field (of emotions, attitudes, values, and dispositions) emerging at a particular moment in history, and a set of embodied practices (such as culinary, literary and leisure activities).

This definition of generation, consisting of many different facets, is relevant to the study of ethnic and groups identities since the creation and existence of ethnic boundaries often involve classification passing through cultural habitus practices. These combinations of historical, social and individual experiences are internalized during the formative years of a person but continue to influence him/her throughout the course of his/her entire life, both on a collective and on an individual level. In this sense, and slightly deviating from Mannheim’s theory, generations may be formed by a major event, but are also constantly evolving and moving through time<sup>151</sup>. Finally, the feeling of belonging to a generation comes not only through horizontal socialization process, such as shared meaningful historical events, but also vertically, through family transmission<sup>152</sup>. This is very important, since it allows to focus on

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<sup>149</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>150</sup> Ron Eyerman and Bryan Turner, “Outline of a Theory of Generations,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 1(1998):93.

<sup>151</sup> Claudine Attias-Donfut, *Sociologie des Générations. L’Empreinte du Temps* (Paris, P.U.F, 1988); Raviv Amiram, et al., “Young Israelis’ Reactions to National Trauma: the Rabin Assassination and Terror Attacks”, *Political Psychology* 21/2 (2000): 299-322.

<sup>152</sup> Sara Arber and Claudine Attias-Donfut, *The Myth of Generational Conflict*, 3.

the individual life-course perspective, giving a better understanding of individual present circumstances by referring to people's prior life course. Accordingly, I will use the concept of generation as a fluid one, that will allow to appreciate differences in self-perception when it comes to ethnicity and identity, their mutual relation, and the formation of a common Israeli identity.

So far only a few studies focused in a comparative way on the ethnicity of dominant and dominated groups throughout generations, especially in the context of Israeli Jewish society<sup>153</sup>. According to sociologist Orna Sasson-Levy, who studied the relationship between ethnic perceptions and the belonging to a given generation, differences in perceptions are explained by three main factors. The first consists in the dominant discursive order of the historical period these individuals are socialized in; the second in the role played by the state and institutional policies enacted during that same period; and the third in the encounters with different ethnic groups, Jewish and non-Jewish, within the state of Israel<sup>154</sup>. In particular, the concept of "discursive order" is coined to emphasize the significance of dominant discourses in the shaping of (ethnic) identities. The interaction of these three factors contributed in the shaping of individual perceptions about ethnicity and the cultural heritage linked to it. Based on the interviews and the fieldwork carried out, a different perception of ethnicity is observed among elderly, adults and younger people, and, as a result, these groups have a different understanding of what is considered worthy of being passed on as cultural heritage.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, ethnic identities are to be considered as a product of specific socio-historical circumstances, as a view on the world, which is performed in practices of self-classification and of classification of the other, rather than a fixed attribute. They are defined in terms of personal

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<sup>153</sup> Hanna Herzog, "Ethnicity as a Product of Political Negotiation: The Case of Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7 (1984): 520–535; Orna Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations: Evolving Ethnic Perceptions among Dominant Groups," *The Sociological Quarterly* 54 (2013): 399–423.

<sup>154</sup> Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations," 401.

<sup>155</sup> See Appendix 1– List of Interviews.

beliefs, perceptions, understandings and identifications, and therefore shift with time.<sup>156</sup>

The transmission of cultural heritage is thus closely related to the ethnic identity of each individual and to the different circumstances faced before and after the arrival in Israel.<sup>157</sup> Against such a background how do individuals and groups come to terms with their personal and family narrative? How do they maintain a shared imaginary of what has been, and of what is now, after two or three generations in Israel? In a migration context, the past is often challenged in favor of the new and does not necessarily constitute a social capital defining and creating an individual's or a family's identity. It could be argued that, for many families, migration broke the link between past, present and future, giving life, in different generations, to different ways of "doing" memory and thus to the creation of new 'post-migration' identities.

By considering life paths as a relevant factor, my aim is to highlight the diversity of individual experiences, bringing together images, words, and elements coming from different spatial and time frames. Narration thus becomes an intergenerational tool used to rewrite collective and personal history and to negotiate between past and present, with the aim to give back a version of the past that is in some way geared to the present. Varying according to group belonging, social class and capital and culture - the articulation of memories is structured along a common narrative thread, which upholds the creation of a time and events that are considered memorable, worthy of being remembered<sup>158</sup>.

These individual narrations use factual history by selecting some key historical dates and events that are closely related with the

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<sup>156</sup> Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov, "Ethnicity as Cognition," *Theory and Society* 33 (2004):31; John L. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution," in *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, ed. Edwin N. Wilmsen and Patrick MaCallister, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996),162–184.

<sup>157</sup> Régine Azria, « Introduction : les Juifs dans le monde depuis la seconde Guerre mondiale, » in Antoine Germa et al., *Les Juifs dans l'Histoire* (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011), 629.

<sup>158</sup> Lucette Valensi, *Fables de la mémoire. La glorieuse bataille des Trois Rois* (Paris : Seuil, 1992).

social group they belong to, in this case the family, and its migration history. For instance, the establishment of the Zionist movement and, later on of the state of Israel, are showcased in the life stories of the interviewees as factors that deeply influenced their lives and migration choices, for better or for worse. Some of them, especially those driven by a Zionist ideal, characterized these events as having had a positive effect on their life choices. Others who migrated to Israel out of necessity rather than choice, represented these events as disrupting, and their migration to Israel as a traumatic process characterized by poverty, loss of social status, family members and properties. Both instances were mirrored and passed on to following generations, albeit in different ways.

I have decided to develop my analysis following two points of entry, namely: (1) family memories and stories, Holocaust memories and (2) food and traditions. Taking the cue from them, my aim is to gain an insight on the way individuals, belonging to both groups, made sense of their life stories and ethnic identities vis-à-vis the collective discursive order they experienced when they arrived in Israel. The individual is thus approached in his/her own relationship to history, allowing me to analyze from a different scale, the individual one, bigger phenomena such as migration and integration in Israel and the ethnic categorization that ensued.<sup>159</sup> Adopting this method will allow me to appreciate the complexity of individual paths, while keeping in mind their multiple levels of interactions with collective dynamics.

By examining individual narratives, I will try to catch a sight of how the two groups considered: Israelis of Polish and of Tunisian descent, negotiated their identity vis-à-vis their migratory experience, the collective discourse about ethnicity and national identity they encountered in Israel. Moreover, an analysis carried out across generations will allow to gain insights on the relevance of those same ethnic identities today. I will here refer to a series of

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<sup>159</sup> Florence Haegel et Marie-Claire Lavabre, *Destins ordinaires. Identité singulière et mémoire partagée* (Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2010), 85.

narratives, obtained through in-depth interviews with people belonging to both groups.<sup>160</sup> These narratives by focusing on personal stories, will introduce a certain degree of subjectivity to the official history, propelling the reconstruction of more individual trajectories, while still keeping in mind their interdependence with a wider group dynamic.<sup>161</sup>

In fact, individual accounts of migration are built both according to a personal and to a group (family-village-country) timeline, which is not necessarily coherent with the wider historical and social context. The expression of these memories, mostly in the form of personal stories and journals, are part of a specific *chronotope* that sometimes mixes places and dates, associating the precision of daily personal details with the memory gaps about precise historical events<sup>162</sup>. In this sense, there is a complex entanglement of family narratives, national memory, media and historical knowledge, genealogy and even literature, from which each individual can weave its own perception of the past.

In the Israeli case, the narrative adopted from the very beginning was a Zionist one, that posed the creation of a Jewish state as the starting point for a new history for the Jewish people, determining the boundaries of its identity and socio-historical community.<sup>163</sup> Ethnicity, however, especially in the first stages, was not included within the parameters making up the new national identity, mainly because the group of Zionist founding fathers and ideologists was quite ethnically homogeneous. Therefore, their memories were those memories that were passed down from hand to hand, making them the nation's accepted forefathers, or as Valensi puts it: "the real or imaginary parents of our being in this world".<sup>164</sup> By being part of the limited number of figures (and narratives) that were passed

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<sup>160</sup> The interviews used in this chapter belong to the series of interviews the author has carried out during her fieldwork in Israel from 2014 till 2018. However, when relevant, interviews carried out by other researchers may be quoted.

<sup>161</sup> Aleida Assman, *Ricordare*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 154.

<sup>162</sup> Régine Robin, *Le roman mémoriel. De l'Histoire à l'écriture du hors-lieu*, (Longueuil : Le Préambule, 1989).

<sup>163</sup> Valensi, *Fables de la mémoire*, 443.

<sup>164</sup> Anne Muxel, *Individu et mémoire familiale* (Paris : Nathan, 1996), 181.

on from one generation to the following, they became the normative cultural heritage of the state, making their narrative more powerful than any other dissonant one that might have come up in the future. I am here using individual memories in an attempt to re-construct a past that is multifaceted, in dissonance, at times, with 'the' normative national narrative. In fact, individual memories, where subjects give a particular significance to their own life or conduct, can function as archives and contribute to a deeper and more diversified understanding of the past, questioning the construction of normative collective narratives, such as the Zionist one. Life stories, considered as a biography in the form of narration, have thus proven to be a very useful tool, allowing voices previously left behind, to be heard.<sup>165</sup> The importance given to them in the collective memory building process depends on the nature of the relationship each individual has with all those different groups constituting his/her own personal memory (family, ethnic group, social class, religious affiliation and so on).

The memory of the groups we are considering, i.e. Israelis of Tunisian or Polish descent, is thus based on individual memories being accepted and merged into the ethnic group's collective memory, and later on to be possibly included also into the wider national memory. Thanks to this system, different versions of the past are accepted and continue to live, carrying on the legacy of groups different from the hegemonic one. This system provides the members of minority groups, and eventually society at large, with the heritage of that specific group, especially in the face of major historical changes or catastrophic events, such as immigration to Israel or the Holocaust.<sup>166</sup> Through the transmission of experiences, symbols and places of memory, the individual takes part in maintaining the collective memory of the smaller group he/she

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<sup>165</sup> Daniel Bertaux, *Les récits de vie*, Paris : Nathan, 1997.

<sup>166</sup> Emanuela Trevisan Semi and Piera Rossetto, "Introduction: Memory and Forgetting among Jews from the Arab-Muslim Countries. Contested Narratives of a Shared Past," *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History, Journal of Fondazione CEDEC* 4(2012).



belongs to, be it the family, a religious or an ethnic group.<sup>167</sup> And not only that, by choosing which memories are important and worthy of being passed on to the next generations, each individual redefines the borders of his/her group's identity, and its role within the society where it belongs.

We asked ourselves how the events lying behind the migrations of the two groups considered, influenced the representation each group had of its own identity and past, vis-à-vis the new identity that was to be created in Israel. Which elements have been passed on and which left behind and why? And what have been the consequences of this uprooting both on the individual and group/family level? Being family a fundamental dimension in the transmission of memory and cultural heritage, I will concentrate at first on the relationship between generations, in particular between the first and the second generation, or as Marianne Hirsh defined it, the generation of "postmemory"<sup>168</sup>. This generation, defined as the "hinge generation", has an extremely peculiar relationship with the memories of those who came before, as they experienced them through "the stories, images and behaviors among which they grew up."<sup>169</sup>

In the case of Jews coming from the MENA region, the major historical event that marked all those communities was being uprooted from a country and a culture they lived in for centuries, to be 're-implanted' in a new culture and reality they had no voice in shaping. Moreover, their being classified under the general label of 'Mizrahim' and posited on the lower step of the social hierarchy, as a dominated/ethnicized group had a negative influence on narrative and identity representations, not only on the first generation but also

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<sup>167</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006).

<sup>168</sup> Marianne Hirsh, "The generation of postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29/1 (2008): 103 – 128.

<sup>169</sup> "[...] These experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" cf. Hirsh, "The generation," 106-107.

for generations to come.<sup>170</sup> For this reason, it was harder for Oriental Jews, at first, to counter the “dominant discursive order” and to display their own culture in public. As a consequence, the transmission of that Oriental cultural heritage, that was silenced in the public sphere, was entrusted to a familial and private sphere. With the passing of time, however, they were able to integrate their own cultural heritage in what was considered to be the normative Israeli one, making their integration a theme for public debate.<sup>171</sup>

On the other hand, the Ashkenazi case for transmitting cultural heritage is different and the issue goes back to the question of “what is/can be considered Ashkenazi/Polish in Israel?”. As previously argued, Jews of Polish origin constituted a significant part of the group that established the state of Israel and its institutions. In virtue of such a fact, the Ashkenazi/ European cultural heritage, of which the Polish one constituted a significant part, became the norm, and thus the invisible term of comparison for any other heritage about to enter the Israeli cultural sphere.<sup>172</sup> It was therefore not easy to pinpoint its features, which seemed as obvious to most people belonging to that same group.<sup>173</sup> Moreover, Polishness was simply associated to Ashkenaziness (Eastern European Jewish culture) without problematizing the existence of a Polish culture that was also non-Jewish, as it will be further expanded in the following section. In conclusion, while Mizrahiness was a category with clearly defined borders, Ashkenaziness proved to be a problematic one, harder to define because considered as the norm and therefore inconspicuous.

The integration within the newly established society of both groups depended not only on their ethnic origin but also on the time of arrival

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<sup>170</sup> Ella Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29/1(1999):5–20.

<sup>171</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” In *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (London: Macmillan, 1988), 271-313.

<sup>172</sup> Wayne Brekhus, “A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting our Focus,” *Sociological Theory* 16/1 (1998): 34-51.

<sup>173</sup> Sasson-Levy, “Ethnic Generations.”

in Israel and on the social capital they brought with them.<sup>174</sup> In the case of Tunisian immigrants, and more in general among Jewish immigrants from North Africa, there is a significant difference between those who arrived in Israel before or immediately after the establishment of the state of Israel, in 1948, and those who arrived later on, in the mid-50s, after the independence of the country (1956). This difference can be observed in their social and cultural capital, wealth and geographical location, that can be summed up in the social class they belonged to. Whilst the first to leave were usually young individuals moved by a Zionist spirit, who participated in Zionist underground and youth movements in Tunisia; the second group was mainly composed by families who decided to leave the country because they felt no more safe there. Their condition in Israel was thus greatly influenced by the timing of their migration and their social class, thus creating a gap between the two groups and their conditions in Israel.<sup>175</sup>

The same scheme could apply to Polish immigrants as well. In fact, also the integration of Polish Jews in Israel varies according to their time of arrival in Israel, which can be divided too in three distinct periods: the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before, during or after the Second World War and the Holocaust (1930s-1950s), and in the 1960s when the communist regime in Poland decided to oust the last Jews that remained in the country. While the first migrations were mostly dictated by ideological reasons, the following ones, during the war and later on, were driven more by the necessity to find a refuge from persecution. In the Polish case too, even if to a lesser extent, the social class and the level of education of the migrants played a role in their settlement and integration, in the new country.

In conclusion, in this first part of my work, I will consider the transmission and usage of memories and cultural heritage in the

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<sup>174</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>175</sup> Olfa Ben Achour, *De la Velléité à la Volonté : L'emigration des Juifs de Tunisie de 1943 à 1967, un Phénomène Complexe*, PhD thesis, Université Jean Jaurès Toulouse and Université de Tunis, 2015.

private sphere, zooming in on Israelis of Polish and Tunisian descent, considering them as a specific case-study of two more general instances within Israeli society: Ashkenazi-ness and Mizrahi-ness. In both cases, I will analyze how these two groups confronted and questioned their past, shaping the narrative on it according to their own perceptions and categories.



## *Chapter 2. Immigration at different times: families of pioneers and families of refugees*

### *2.1 Polish Jews at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*

Regarding the transmission of memories and traditions within the family I will analyze both groups according to their time of immigration to the country. In the case of Polish Jews, the first I will consider are those who immigrated to Israel during and after War World II, as war refugees and Holocaust survivors, and that were integrated by Israeli society at one of the toughest times for the state, during and right after its creation. The second case I will take into consideration is the case of those who, as emissaries of the numerous Zionist organizations active all-around Europe at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contributed to the creation of the Yishuv and the establishment of the state of Israel. Finally, I will consider the case of those Polish Jews who remained in Poland after the end of the war and that were expelled from the country at the end of the 1960s by the communist regime ('Aliyat Gomulka).<sup>176</sup> As I will show in the next chapters, these groups developed their identities as Israelis along different lines, due to their different migration and integration experiences.

Family as a social unit and as one of the primary agents in the socialization of an individual and in the construction transmission of one's memories and cultural heritage is the focus of my analysis in this chapter. Therefore, to better understand how each one of these migratory waves dealt with memory and heritage, it is useful to analyze the structure of the family in the Eastern European, and more specific Polish Jewish society.

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<sup>176</sup> I am here referring to the 'Aliyat Gomulka (1968-1970). The last significant migratory wave from Communist Poland, caused by the antisemitic campaigns promoted by the communist leader Władysław Gomułka, that caused those Jews that were left in the country (ca. 13.000 people) to leave for Israel. In the following paragraphs we will expand on this. For reference see also: Jean-Charles Szurek, « Les Juifs en Europe de l'Est depuis 1945 » in *Les Juifs dans l'Histoire*, ed. Antoine Germa et al. (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011), 770-771.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century Poland Jewish culture and folklore attributed to the family the role of guardian of traditions, shaping the lives of both individuals and communities<sup>177</sup>. Jewish families were typical of their times: a nuclear unit whose adult members were partners in production and property. As in non-Jewish families, there was a clear division of roles, with the woman in charge of domestic life and child-rearing and the man serving as income-earner. However, in Eastern Europe, including Poland, married women shared the income-earning role, since most of the Jewish families belonged to a middle-lower socio-economic class of laborers, artisans and petty merchants, with a few exceptions in both the lower and upper classes. Women were also in charge of social tasks outside of the close family, and sometimes also outside of the Jewish community, such as taking care of neighborly relations and activities, thus performing two apparently contradictory functions. On one side they were an agent of socialization with the surrounding society in everything related to culture, customs, manners and education, and hence an agent of change, but at the same time they were entrusted with the preservation of Jewish identity via family customs, Shabbat , holidays and the like<sup>178</sup>.

This concept of family changed greatly within Eastern European Jewish communities, mainly urban ones, starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to a movement called *haskalah*.<sup>179</sup> Its main aim was

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<sup>177</sup> Academic research on the Jewish family is only in its early stages and information on the Jewish family in Eastern Europe is particularly scarce. Prof. Dalia Ofer however, researched the topic and published quite extensively about it. See: Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1999); Dalia Ofer, "Everyday Life During the Holocaust: A Methodological Perspective," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9/1 (1995): 42–69; Dalia Ofer, "Cohesion and Rupture: The Jewish Family in East European Ghettos During the Holocaust," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry XIV: Coping with Life and Death: Jewish Families in the Twentieth Century* (1998): 143-165.

<sup>178</sup> Dalia Ofer, "Family During the Holocaust," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia - Jewish Women's Archive*, February 27,2009. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/family-during-holocaust>.

Nira Yuval-Davis, "Women and the Biological Reproduction of 'the Nation'," *Women's Studies International Forum* 19/1-2 (1996): 17-24.

<sup>179</sup> *Haskalah* (Hebrew for "wisdom", "erudition"), often defined as Jewish enlightenment, was an intellectual movement among the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. It arose as a defined ideological worldview during the 1770s and aimed at Jewish emancipation and integration into surrounding societies, putting

to promote Jewish cultural and moral renewal, while striving for the assimilation of Jews in the surrounding societies. This movement promoted the emancipation and the assimilation of European Jewry as a solution to the periodical waves of antisemitism, hitting especially in Eastern Europe. Promoting the secularization of Jewish culture, the *Haskalah* movement considered obsolete and regarded as negative for the development of the individual most traditional practices such as studying in the *heder*<sup>180</sup> or early marriage.<sup>181</sup> This would eventually bring about a revolution also in the understanding of the role religion and family had as pillars of traditional Jewish life. In fact, according to the *Haskalah*, only by changing the role of the family, considered the basic cell of Jewish communities, would lead to the transformation of the Jews in a modern people. This transformation went in the direction of putting more value and importance on the individual rather than on the group, thus revolutionizing the traditional definition of community and of self, adopted till then in traditional European Jewish societies. A new understanding of what was Jewish identity emerged: the idea that an individual could have a unique history of his own was the most groundbreaking concept proposed by the *maskilim*.<sup>182</sup> With a different ideological backgrounds and objectives, but with the same aim of solving the Jewish question in Europe, another movement developed at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century: Zionism. Deeply influenced by the nationalist developments occurring all over Europe, in particular by the Russian Revolution and the rise of an independent Polish state, the Zionist movement developed with the aim of creating a state for the Jewish people. Zooming in on Poland a vibrant Jewish culture, mostly in Yiddish, flourished during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite

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the emphasis on secular Jewish culture, rather than religion. See also David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: a History Across Five Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>180</sup> A *Cheder* (Hebrew for “room”) is a traditional elementary school teaching the Hebrew language and the basics of Judaism such as the Torah, the Mishna and the Talmud.

<sup>181</sup> See David Biale, *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), I-book edition, 2648-2650.

<sup>182</sup> Maskilim (Hebrew for “those enlightened”): followers of the Haskalah movement. See Biale, *Cultures of the Jew*, 2648-2650.



the big number of acculturated Polish Jews, the increasing Polish nationalism coupled with a rising wave of antisemitism, led many Polish Jews to develop their own culture simultaneously in Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish.<sup>183</sup> Culture in Hebrew was imported from Palestine, where a sizable community of Polish Jews was establishing the Yishuv since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, settling mainly in cities such as Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, and founding many moshavim and kibbutzim all around the country.<sup>184</sup> In this critical and formative period for Israeli society, Jews of Polish origin made up for the majority of Jewish immigrants to Palestine, contributing to create Israel's cultural, political and social shape, and simultaneously affecting Polish immigrants' place and image in Israeli society and culture. During the first years of the Yishuv, communications between Poland and Palestine were assiduous: Zionist emissaries used to visit Palestine quite often and the numerous articles and news reports about Eretz Israel, published in the Jewish press in Poland and available to the Jewish public, exposed Polish Jews to abundant information on the life and the events in Palestine. As the Ukrainian writer and journalist Berdichevsky (1865–1921)<sup>185</sup> wrote in a short story at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “A generation went and a generation came and a new generation rose in Israel, a generation that began to walk on the Sabbaths at the borders of the city.”<sup>186</sup> This “new generation” is the generation of pioneers who from Eastern Europe settled in Palestine, working towards the creation of the Jewish state.

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<sup>183</sup> Biale, *Cultures of the Jews*, 2733.

<sup>184</sup> See Shapira, *Israel*, 119 and Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>185</sup> Micha Josef Berdyczewski (Hebrew: מִיכָה יוֹסֵף בֶּרְדִּיכֵבְסְקִי), or Mikhah Yosef Bin-Gorion (August 7, 1865 – November 18, 1921) was a writer, journalist, and scholar born in Little Russia. He appealed for the Jews to change their way of thinking, freeing themselves from dogmas ruling the Jewish religion, tradition and history. He wrote in Hebrew, Yiddish and German.

<sup>186</sup> The borders of the city represented the farthest reaches Jewish law allowed one to walk on the Sabbath. Here quoted from Micha Josef Berdichevsky, “In Their Mothers’ Womb” (Hebrew), *Kitve* (Tel Aviv, 1965).

## 2.2 Polish pioneers



Image 2 - Map of main Polish settlements in Israel<sup>187</sup>

<sup>187</sup> "Israel," [https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=15307&lang=en](https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=15307&lang=en)

The wide majority of those who reached mandatory Palestine from Poland at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were young men and women without a family, fervent Zionists, interested in creating a homeland for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Their ideal aim was to create a Jewish society based on the Zionist principles of rejecting life in the Diaspora, working the land and creating a national state for all the Jews in the world.

These young pioneers brought with them little of their Polish cultural heritage. On one hand, because influenced by the Zionist principle of rejecting the Diaspora and its culture to build the new Jew in the land of Israel. On the other, most of those who immigrated as Zionists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were very young (15-20 years old) and, thus, had less time to be socialized and build their identity in Poland. Moreover, at that time Poland was not yet established as a nation-state as we know it today. Polish culture was therefore under construction and for a long period of time it remained influenced by the culture of the partitioning powers: the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Russian empire first, and Germany and Russia later on.<sup>188</sup>

From another perspective, the tragedy of the Holocaust severed most family ties running between Poland and the Yishuv, pushing Jews in the Yishuv to disavow any remaining link with the country and its culture and contributing to the reinforcement of their commitment to the creation of a new Jewish culture in Israel. Rivka, a woman in her 80s born in Israel before the establishment of the state from a Polish mother and a Russian father who arrived in Israel at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century said regarding Polish culture:

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<sup>188</sup> During the entire interwar period and WWII Polish borders were quite flexible due to the many different partitions and dominations over the country. Until 1989 when, finally, Poland became an independent country after the fall of the USSR. For more on Polish history and the influence of the different partitions on the development of its culture see: Norman Davies, *God's Playground: a history of Poland in Two Volumes: Volume II 1795 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

*“My mother for instance, she was Zionist, she came here with the youth movements in the 1920s and she started working the land in a kibbutz. Afterwards she moved to Tel Aviv, where I was born, and then to Jerusalem. At that time, she tried to get fake documents to get my grandmother and her sisters who stayed in Poland, where they had a farm, to the land of Israel. She was worried about Hitler, it was already 1938 and the Brits had stopped all Jewish immigration to Palestine, which is how Israel was called at the time. I never heard her speak Polish, at best some Yiddish or some Arabic and Ladino she learnt from our neighbors in Jerusalem, and Hebrew of course.”<sup>189</sup>*

Rivka’s mother tried to get her family who stayed in Poland fake permits they could use to get to Palestine, despite the British halt to Jewish immigration. She later told me that not all her family used that certificates to get to Palestine:

*“My grandmother did not use the certificate, she stayed in Poland with one of my mother’s sisters to tend to the farm. She did not want to abandon it. And you know now where she is? In Majdanek.”<sup>190</sup>*

Feelings of resentment against Poland are very common among Polish pioneers who were already in the Land of Israel when the war started and who lost all or part of their families to the Holocaust. As in the case of Chaia. She reached Israel in 1939, right after the war started in Poland, and when asked about her relationship with her Polish cultural heritage she said:

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<sup>189</sup> Interview of the author with Rivka, Rehovot 22/10/2017.

<sup>190</sup> Interview of the author with Rivka, Rehovot 22/10/2017.

*“Poles drink antisemitism with the milk of their mother. You wouldn’t want to return there, for no reason.”<sup>191</sup>*

Such strong feelings towards Poland were reflected on the following generations that, with little to no idea of Polish history and culture, when asked about their Polish heritage, they replied, in some instances, that there is no such thing and that they do not know. Most youth grew up hearing that there was no typical Polish heritage in their family, except, maybe, for some Eastern European Jewish food traditions, which we will deal with in chapter number three. Poland was a taboo topic for the generation of pioneers more than for that of the Holocaust survivors. As Rivka said again:

*“I tell my grandchildren not to go to Poland, not on holiday and not on those trips with school. It’s just better not to go there.”<sup>192</sup>*

This led younger generations to have a very limited idea of their Polish heritage and of life in Poland before the Holocaust. I had the chance to talk briefly with one of Rivka’s grandchildren, Elad. When the topic of Poland, Polish heritage and school trips to Poland came up, he could not explain why exactly, but he said he preferred avoiding having anything to do with Poland. When asked why, he said he was doing it also out of respect for his grandmother, who asked him not to go there, and for him it was not a big sacrifice to oblige.<sup>193</sup>

Another, different, reason why Israelis of Polish descent have a vague idea about their relationship to Poland and its cultural heritage is due to the fact that the majority of the first pioneers were very

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<sup>191</sup> Interview of the author with Chaia, Tel Aviv 22/11/2017.  
Feldman, Jakie. *Above the Death Pits Beneath the Flag: Youth Voyages to Poland and the Performance of Israeli National Identity*. New York and Oxford: Berghahan Books, 2010.

<sup>192</sup> Interview of the author with Rivka, Rehovot 22/10/2017.

<sup>193</sup> Interview of the author with Elad, Rehovot 22/10/2017.

young when they left the country for the Land of Israel and had less time to build their Polish identity.<sup>194</sup> Dalit, a woman in her 50s, daughter of a father of Polish descent and of a Tunisian mother, when asked about her life story and her heritage, she talked mostly about the Tunisian side of her family, how she perceived it as a child in the 1960s, how she perceives it now, and about her intentions of preserving it by researching the history of that side of her family. She had a much less clear idea about her Polish side of the family. She explained to me that her father was born in Israel from Polish parents who emigrated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her father was already a second generation and passed on to her very little of his Polish heritage. This is why she had very little clue of what could be for her Polish cultural heritage. She said:

*“You know I haven’t got much... most of the heritage I got is the food my mom cooked... my (Tunisian) mom, she cooked Polish food with some Tunisian spice (chuckles). [...] You know, I don’t know what Polish heritage may be. My dad was born in Israel and my husband’s parents were born in Israel both of them. So, the food is... whatever is food related... it is very similar to the Israeli one, what my mother is preparing for Passover, except for a few special Tunisian dishes, is what the other grandmother (Polish one) is preparing. [...] I can’t think of anything specifically Polish... you know maybe that “fiddler on the roof” ... but maybe it’s Russian.... in any case you don’t see it anymore. I don’t know what’s Polish culture...”<sup>195</sup>*

She maintained being more interested in the Tunisian side of her family history and its heritage, not being very clear to her what

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<sup>194</sup> See Biale, *Cultures of the Jews*.

<sup>195</sup> Interview of the author with Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

constituted the Polish one. When talking about what Polish heritage could mean to her, she reported leaving to her husband the task of researching about the genealogy and history of the Polish side of the family. In defining “Polishness” she was always quite vague, and she ended up associating it with Israeli culture in general, showing the invisible and ‘taken-for-granted’ character that Polish culture, associated to Ashkenaziness, assumed in today’s Israel.

However, she was conscious of the social hierarchy existing between the two different ethnic components of her family and associated, in her thought process, the Polish heritage with the concept of Ashkenazi-ness and of a higher position in the social hierarchy:

*“ [...] I am sure you read that Israel was established as a Western country and whoever had a different culture should not show it, one should be ‘tzabar,’ you should have the culture that was consolidated in Israel without any reference to the Sephardi culture. And that’s how I grew up you know... it’s something I am not inventing for you; it has been written in books. I basically went out [of the house] and behaved as a Polish little girl, and, honestly, I feel bad about it because it was only at university when I did the last year, that I started to ask more questions (about my Tunisian side of the family).<sup>196</sup>*

The fluidity in the use of Polish and Ashkenazi, and actually the interchangeability of the two terms in Dalit’s speech, denotes yet and again the identification that exists, until today, in Israel between the concepts of Polish and that of Ashkenazi. She continued:

*At that time, there was conscious and unconscious discriminations, social, employment, anything... the*

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<sup>196</sup> Interview of the author with Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

*culture of the young Israeli society was Ashkenazi, and if you wanted to integrate you couldn't say: 'I have some kind of... [Tunisian/Sephardi background]. I have seen it from my own experience when kids knew my mom was Tunisian, they wouldn't make friend with me anymore. Because that was the atmosphere back then, and it came from above, the government, the leaders [...]. Until then (university) I thought that the Tunisians were kind of primitives, not as cultured as Europeans.*<sup>197</sup>

These statements mirror in an emblematic way the ethnic unbalance and divisions that were created in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, and that lasted until the present day. All traditions that were different from the Westernized/European cultural norm established by Zionism were marginalized through a process of subordination and exclusion. Notably, cultural heritages of Jews coming from Arab countries were dismissed as “primitive,” vis-à-vis those hailing from Europe.<sup>198</sup> By accepting the new standard, immigrants had to leave behind their ‘old’ culture and redefine themselves in relation to the ‘new’ paradigm of “Israeliness”, which was Western.<sup>199</sup> Especially in the first decades of the state, the coexistence of different cultures and traditions was considered a threat to the idea of a homogeneous Jewish nation as conceived by the Zionist ruling class<sup>200</sup>. As reported by Dalit:

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<sup>197</sup> Interview of the author with Dalit, Tel Aviv, 28/03/17.

<sup>198</sup> See Aziza Khazzoom, “The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel,” *American Sociological Review* 68/4 (2003): 481-510; Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35.

<sup>199</sup> Kimmerling, Baruch. *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society and the Military*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2001.

<sup>200</sup> Sammy Smooha, “The mass immigrations to Israel: A comparison of the failure of the Mizrahi immigrants of the 1950s with the success of the Russian immigrants of the 1990s,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 27/1 (2008): 4-9.

Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: a Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).



*"[...] What I got (from the Tunisian side) is a part of myself, part of my heritage, but I did not get to share it, and again it's nothing that was talked about, it was said (that society was Ashkenazi-shaped), it was taken for granted, it was the society. So, I feel bad that I didn't check and that I didn't learn about this tradition before, because when I got to talk to and interview women from my family it was almost too late, they were in their seventies or eighties and one aunt died before I got to interview her."*<sup>201</sup>

These considerations, along with those made by Sasson-Levy, led us to think that "Ashkenaziness" was, and to some extent still is, seen as an unmarked trait in Israeli society.<sup>202</sup> According to Brekhus "the distinction between marked and unmarked elements is heuristically valuable for analyzing social contrasts (...). The concept of 'social markedness' [is used] to refer to the ways social actors actively perceive one side of a contrast while ignoring the other side as epistemologically unproblematic."<sup>203</sup> Most of the interviewees of Polish background did not recognize belonging to a specific category (Ashkenaziness), nor having some sort of specific Polish heritage. They were pretty insecure about what 'Polish' may mean to them and mentioned only a few recurrent elements such as the Yiddish language, some culinary traditions and the stereotype of the Polish-Jewish mother. For the rest, they felt "Israeli", considering the Polish/Ashkenazi side of their identity as un-problematic and representing "the vast expanse of social reality that is passively defined as unremarkable, socially generic [...]", and for this reason hegemonic.<sup>204</sup>

This was also observed with respondents who were born in a mixed family. When asked to identify with the cultural heritage of one side

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<sup>201</sup> Interview of the author with Dalit, Tel Aviv, 28/03/17.

<sup>202</sup> Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations."

<sup>203</sup> Brekhus, "A Sociology of the Unmarked," 50.

<sup>204</sup> Brekhus, "A Sociology of the Unmarked," 35.

of the family, they always chose the non-Polish 'side', be it German, Moroccan or Italian, as the more interesting/'problematic' one. Again, the Polish side was considered as not problematic, associated with Israeli culture tout-court, and thus not worthy of too much attention. To most of the interviewees, Polish equaled Ashkenazi and there was for them no difference between the two. Furthermore, I assume that it is specifically Polishness, more than other kinds of Ashkenazi backgrounds to have gained this role of invisible and unmarked character in Israeli society, as, respondents with another non-Polish Ashkenazi background, German for instance, were more likely to highlight it as specific and marked, with respect to the Polish one. In Dalit's case, it was for the Mizrahi-Tunisian background to be considered as different and thus, to her, more interesting and worthy of investigation and in-depth research. Starting from a 'safe' position of defining herself as an "Ashkenaziyah" she decided to explore her Tunisian heritage and memories, proving, to some extent, that ethnic boundaries are still quite strong in Israeli society.

However, the situation for Jews, both in Poland and in Palestine, abruptly changed with the advent of Nazism and the Holocaust, that almost completely obliterated any trace of Jewish culture and life in Poland.

### *2.3: Holocaust survivors and refugees*

As Zionist pioneers were establishing the basis of the new Yishuv in Palestine, in Europe the situation was getting worse and worse for Jews with the rise to power of Hitler. With the German invasion of Poland and the implementation of the Final Solution Jewish life in Eastern Europe was torn apart. Jewish communities started being systematically persecuted, secluded in ghettos and then deported to concentration and extermination camps. In such a situation, Jewish families and communities found themselves in extraordinarily arduous conditions, while trying to preserve a

minimum of unity and solidarity. Families were separated well before being deported: most men fled, were imprisoned and sent to forced labor camps, or murdered during the first months of the war, leaving many families without a husband and a father. As a consequence, the family structure had to quickly adapt, and women, both in ghettos and outside, became the main breadwinners, as well as the only person in charge of the family. This had an impact not only on women themselves but also on their children who, in most cases were left alone for the majority of the time<sup>205</sup>. However, in spite of the great difficulties, there was also considerable strength in family ties, a fact that helped keeping life 'normal' as long as possible.

In the camps the situation for families was certainly worse, considering the separation of sexes, and of parents from their kids. Despite everything, inmates tried to preserve some sort of family relationships, with siblings and cousins for instance, and when this wasn't possible to recreate such bonds with other prisoners, forming some sort of an alternative family.<sup>206</sup> This was more common with regards to women, that relied on memories of family and common life as a source of strength. For example, as described by historian Dalia Ofer, women survivors reported conversations about holiday customs and family life in general, as a way of coping with the violence of their daily lives. There is no better evidence of the family serving as a real anchor to life than the readiness of the survivors to set up families in the years immediately following the end of the war, even if they had lost a spouse and children.<sup>207</sup>

The Holocaust had an enormous impact on the family as a social unit, destroying not only its structure - and as a consequence, most Jewish communities throughout Europe, but also causing the loss of the heritage and memories of entire generations. Memory and

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<sup>205</sup> Dalia Ofer, "Cohesion and Rupture: The Jewish Family in East European Ghettos During the Holocaust," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 14 (1998): 143–165.

<sup>206</sup> Dan Bar-On and Julia Chaitin, *Parenthood and the Holocaust* (Shoah Resource Center: Jerusalem, 2001).

<sup>207</sup> Ofer, "Family During the Holocaust" and Bar-On et al., *Parenthood and the Holocaust*.

transmission of family heritage were brutally interrupted, and, even those who survived repressed memories of their life before the Holocaust for a long time, to be able to start a new life in Israel or elsewhere. Lizzie Doron, an Israeli novelist and herself second generation daughter of Holocaust survivors in her stories well depicts this sense of distance between life before and after the Holocaust. One of her books begins like this:

*“At the beginning of the fifties, in the state of Israel a new country was born, the country of ‘here’. In this country lives a foreign people who comes from the land of ‘there’. [...] After the chaos of the land of ‘there’, they imposed on themselves the task of creating a new thing, and they created a new world. In the country of ‘here’ also my mother Helena lives, after she died during the war, and here she raised me, alone.”<sup>208</sup>*

The spatial adverbs used by the author, “here” and “there”, give the idea of the distance between the two worlds, by defining present life in Israel as “here”, and life before and during the Holocaust as “there”.

Despite the new life Holocaust refugees had in Israel, their integration was a long and hard process both for the survivors themselves and for the Israeli society at large. The conditions of the state during the first years of its existence were quite difficult, especially from an economic point of view, and the attitude of the first Israelis towards Holocaust survivors was complex and contradictory, charged with emotions and prejudices, reflecting their own understanding of what being a Jew, and most of all an Israeli meant. As reported by Ilana, a 30 year-old theater actress and director whose grandparents immigrated to Israel from Poland after

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<sup>208</sup> Lizzie Doron, *C'era una volta una famiglia* (Firenze: Giuntina, 2009) 7 (my translation from Italian).

the war, in 1950 there was little understanding towards Holocaust survivors and what they had suffered. She said:

*“When they just arrived here ...it was hard... maybe the Eichmann trial was a turning point because up to then people used to say: “why did you not do anything, why did you let them treat you this way.” There was this saying: ‘to go like sheep to the slaughter’.<sup>209</sup>*

Ilana’s grandparents decided to rebuild their life after the war in Poland and, when they finally got to Israel, their decision was met with disbelief, if not contempt:

*People often asked my grandparents: how could you stay there after the war, in that land? So, my grandma wrote a book because she wanted to explain that to everybody. She said that if it was only about her, she would not have come to Israel, she had a good life in Poland. She had a good job she was a book editor.... And my grandfather was a journalist. They said they had a good life there after the war. But then there was a point when antisemitism was rising up again in Poland and they understood you can never run from it, so they came to Israel. She told me that this was the point when they understood that for the kids there would be no future in Poland and that they needed to leave.”<sup>210</sup>*

The fact that many refugees from Poland, especially those reaching the country after the war, brought with them their cultural heritage migrating to Israel out of necessity, rather than out of ideological

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<sup>209</sup> Interview of the author with Ilana, Tel Aviv 26/03/17.

<sup>210</sup> Interview of the author with Ilana, Tel Aviv 26/03/17.

motivation, was regarded with dislike by the Zionist establishment. The common view was that all new immigrants, without exceptions, had to abandon their diasporic identity and to adopt the new Israeli one. Socialist Zionism was particularly harsh with this policy, attacking Eastern European Jewry and its traditional way of living. As a consequence, the Diaspora was considered by many Zionists as a source of manpower for the newborn Yishuv.<sup>211</sup>

Giora Yoseftal, an executive for the Jewish Agency at the time was credited with saying: "Israel want immigrations but doesn't want the immigrants"<sup>212</sup>. These words reflect the spirit of the time, as many immigrants were taken in but not really wanted or accepted in Israel, especially those who were ill, both mentally and physically, as many Holocaust survivors were.<sup>213</sup> As historian Hanna Yablonka reports in her book *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel after the war*, this was the biggest prejudice held against European immigrants in Israel.<sup>214</sup> For a long time, the only aspect that interested Ben Gurion and the establishment of the Yishuv, was whether Holocaust survivors would emigrate to Israel and take part in the nation-building effort. Ben Gurion, the father of the state of Israel, himself of Polish origin, was known for his loathe for the Diaspora and some of the remarks he made about European Jewry, brought upon him, and the state of Israel he represented, accusation of lack of sensitivity towards the entire Holocaust issue<sup>215</sup>. As proved by the following statement, he was very harsh against Holocaust survivors: "*Among the survivors*

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<sup>211</sup> Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 31.

<sup>212</sup> Tom Segev, *1949: The first Israelis* (New York: Henry Holt Company), 119.

Giora Yoseftal (1912-1962) was a Jewish Agency Executive and later on held several ministerial portfolios in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Jewish Agency for Israel (in Hebrew: *HaSochnut HaYehudit L'Eretz Yisra'el*) is the largest Jewish nonprofit organization in the world. It is best known as the primary organization fostering the immigration and absorption of Jews and their families from the diaspora into Israel. Since 1948 the Jewish Agency for Israel has brought 3 million immigrants to Israel and offered them transitional housing in "absorption centers" throughout the country. The Jewish Agency played a central role in the founding and the development of the State of Israel.

<sup>213</sup> Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

<sup>214</sup> Hanna Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust, Israel after the War* (London: MacMillan Press, 1999).

<sup>215</sup> Anita Shapira, "The Holocaust: private memories, public memories". *Jewish Social Studies*, 4/2 (1998),49.

*of the German concentration camps there were people who would not have survived if they had not been what they were—hard, evil and selfish people, and what they underwent there served to destroy what good qualities they had left.”<sup>216</sup>*

The idea that new immigrants, no matter their origin and their past, should change to become part of the country was a widespread belief. Ben Gurion’s stance towards the human and individual experience of the Holocaust represented the general attitude of pioneers in Israel, who reproached to Holocaust survivors their weakness and their not being ‘*sabras*’.

Novelist, and himself Holocaust survivor, Ahron Appelfeld, in his novel *Searing light*<sup>217</sup>, describes a scene where he is bullied by his Israeli *sabra* peers for not getting a suntan as easily as they did. A similar experience is reported by Lizzie Doron in one of her novels:

*“Srulik used to say that because of my pale skin, blond hair and blue eyes I always looked like a child [...]. Mordekhai instead, once told me, laughing, that I would have always remained and immigrant from Poland. [...] He made me feel like a foreigner.”<sup>218</sup>*

Here the *sabra* Mordekahi not only mocks the main character, Lea, for not looking strong or *sabra* enough, in one word Israeli, but also associates this being weak and pale with being Polish. In this context, Polishness assumes a pejorative connotation related to weakness, and as Lea points out, to foreignness, in a country that was supposed to be her new homeland. These are just two examples of how the integration of Holocaust survivors and refugees was a hard process especially on the individual level, due to the hard conditions all new immigrants were facing and to the contemptuous attitude many pioneers had toward Diaspora Jews, making them feel

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<sup>216</sup> Ben-Gurion's Meeting with writers (Divrei Sofrim), 10.11.1949, Prime Minister's office files - division 43, National State Archive, Israel.

<sup>217</sup> Aharon Appelfeld, *Searing Light* (Bnei Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1980), 61.

<sup>218</sup> Lizzie Doron, *Giornate Tranquille* (Firenze: Giuntina, 2010) 95 (my translation from Italian).

resented and isolated. It is interesting to notice the ambiguity of the attribute of Polishness. If before the establishment of the state it was connected to characteristics considered positive, such as: being Western, cultured and modern; after the establishment of the country and the arrival of Holocaust survivors in Israel, it was demoted and linked to negative attributes such as weakness and life in the diaspora.

However, in spite of the difficult situation they found at their arrival and of the many prejudices held against them, Holocaust survivors, as a group, integrated fairly well and rapidly in the new society, as demonstrated by a number of researches, eminently carried out by Dalia Ofer<sup>219</sup>. At the eve of the War of Independence of the 118,993 immigrants that arrived in Israel in 1948, 102,498 were Holocaust survivors (86%). One year later, in 1949, of 141,608 arrivals, 95,165 were Holocaust survivors (67%). Holocaust survivors thus made up for almost 70% of the total immigrants during the first two years after the establishment of the state of Israel<sup>220</sup>. The first large wave of immigrants to Israel consisted of Holocaust survivors, that arrived in the country during the most critical stages of the War of Independence. In many cases they joined the ranks of the *Haganah* and fought for the independence of the country.<sup>221</sup>

The educational and professional profile of Holocaust survivors was, on average, very good. Illiteracy among these group was almost nonexistent: 97% of men and women could read and write, putting them in a very good position, close to the native population of Israel<sup>222</sup>. This, along with a shared Western and European cultural background contributed to the integration of these immigrants within the fabric of the veterans' society. The average age of the survivors, between 15 and 59 years old, is the index of the toll that the

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<sup>219</sup> Dalia Ofer, "Holocaust survivors as immigrants: the case of Israel and the Cyprus," *Modern Judaism* 16 (1996), 1-23.

<sup>220</sup> Ofer, "Holocaust survivors as immigrants," 10.

<sup>221</sup> HaHaganah (Heb for 'the Defense'): was the main paramilitary organization of the Jewish Yishuv that turned in to the Israeli Defense Force with the establishment of the state in 1948.

<sup>222</sup> Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust*, 12.



Holocaust exerted from the older and younger extremes of that community, braking intergenerational connections and interrupting the transmission of memory and traditions<sup>223</sup>.

Moreover, even among those who survived, the memory of the trauma just experienced was painful and people, in general, wanted to start over a new life without going back to them. Therefore, for quite some time, personal memories about that period remained silent. This was fostered as well by the fact that, especially during the first years, only a heroic narrative of the Holocaust was considered useful for the national interest. Individual stories were problematic because they made that tragedy real and human, and as a result, inconceivable. The novelist and journalist Wlodek Goldkorn narrated about his migratory experience from Poland to Israel in the late 1960s:

*"In Israel we talked about the (Warsaw) Ghetto uprising, but not that much actually, mostly in solemn occasions, to underscore how life in Diaspora, outside of the Land of Israel, was considered as some sort of deadly disease, and how acts of resistance were an exception, if compared to the passiveness of the Jews (in the Diaspora)."*<sup>224</sup>

The public discourse about the Holocaust, at the beginning carried out by state actors, was incorporated in the founding pillars of the state of Israel and its identity. This narrative was very simplified, and the rare events of active resistance against the Nazis (e.g. Warsaw ghetto uprising) were emphasized to the detriment of the experience the majority of Jews had during the Holocaust<sup>225</sup>. In this sense, the relationship between private and public memory was not

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<sup>223</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, *Annual Statistical Report (Jerusalem: 1950)*, 19.

<sup>224</sup> Wlodek Goldkorn, *L'asino del Messia* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2019), 65 (my translation from Italian).

<sup>225</sup> Shapira, "The Holocaust," 49; Segev, 1949, 155;

synchronized for a long time, as the private memories of survivors were not considered useful as a topic of legitimation for the existence of the state.<sup>226</sup> It was only during the 1960s, with the Eichmann's trial (1961), that individual memories of survivors could resurface, becoming accepted in the public discourse and integrated into Israel's collective memory.<sup>227</sup>

The main concerns of the state at the time were others: reconstruction, absorption of immigrants, the creation of a viable economy and of new families, after the destruction of the war. The will to rehabilitate oneself and to create something new prevailed. Moreover, at the time the ethic of bereavement was different, less public and more controlled. This resulted in what was defined as a "conspiracy of silence", that contributed for a long time to keep silenced individual stories and experiences, not only in the public sphere, but also in a familial environment. Survivors preferred not to awaken the phantoms, not to talk about those years even with their own children<sup>228</sup>. As well expressed by psychologist Dan Bar-On, himself son of two Holocaust survivors in a book about the memory experiences of his family:

*"we grew up with a peculiar combination of fear and hope, an experience shared by many of my generation. It was the legacy we received from our parents—Jewish survivors, escapees, and immigrants from Europe. We had to navigate our way to adulthood between these two poles: trying to overcome the fear while providing hope for our own children. [...] Today I believe it seemed peculiar because we never knew exactly where*

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<sup>226</sup> On the use of the Holocaust as a legitimation tool for the existence of the state of Israel see Goldkorn, *L'asino del Messia*, 111: "The Shoah is different: is the catastrophe of the West [...]. This is why reconstructing the West implied the establishment of the Jewish State. Without Israel there is no West."

<sup>227</sup> Hanna Yablonka, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Kastner and Eichmann Trials," *Israel Studies* 8/3 (2003): 1-24;

<sup>228</sup> Shapira, "The Holocaust," 50.

*we were: Were we afraid because something terrible had happened—or might happen? Could we hope for something better? These two feelings have been—and maybe still are—so deeply interwoven in our lives that we can hardly separate them from each other. I suspect that it has to do with the sense of being uprooted that we all grew up with. We did not really "belong" to a new stem, yet the old one had been abruptly cut off. One can fight uprootedness or behave "as if" it does not exist. Or one can accept it and try to live with it. Have we transmitted our feelings of uprootedness to our own children? Have we succeeded in working them through or, at least, in acknowledging them?<sup>229</sup>*

This excerpt raises the issue of intergenerational transmission and of Holocaust's influence on second and third generations: how did the traumatic memories of the first generation affected the construction of the life stories and identities of their children and grandchildren? How did the following generations work through this heritage? And on a different level: what is the difference between those Polish Jews who immigrated to Israel before and after the Holocaust as far as heritage and memory are concerned?

I will try to shed some light on these issues through the voices of my interviewees.<sup>230</sup> One of the themes frequently recurring in the interviews with sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors, is that of family bonds. Tami, a woman in her 50s, tells us about the relationship with her parents, both Holocaust survivors, and compares it with that of her husbands with his parents:

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<sup>229</sup> Bar-On, *Fear and Hope*, 1

<sup>230</sup> As laid down in the introduction, we interviewed people coming from the same family to gain an intergenerational perspective overall, when possible.

*"I don't know if it's because of their past. I don't see such a strong connection between my husband and his parents. They immigrated in '32. They immigrated with a Zionist movement from Poland. They came as teenagers and their family stayed and died in the Holocaust."<sup>231</sup>*

We can understand from this short excerpt the perceived difference between the connections within families who have a direct Holocaust experience, and families who do not because they immigrated to Israel before. Tami perceives her husband's connection with his parents as being less close than "it should be", and she ascribes it to the fact that, as a family, they did not experience the Holocaust directly. She, on the contrary, has a very close relationship with her parents, both Holocaust survivors, and she takes care of them on a daily basis.

A variation on the theme that recurred with her, as well as with other interviewees, is the importance of having a big family, with grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles. As families were decimated during the Holocaust, a great number of people arrived in Israel alone and had to rebuild from scratch their lives.<sup>232</sup> Tami again, makes a point in explaining both to her siblings and her children the importance of such a thing:

*"I always tell my children: "You don't know what it's like. Enjoy the fact that you have a grandfather and a grandmother." I preached to them all the time that having grandparents is a privilege. Not everyone has it."<sup>233</sup>*

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<sup>231</sup>Interview of the author with Tami, Jerusalem 04/05/2017.

<sup>232</sup> Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust*; Shapira, "The Holocaust,"; Segev, *The Seventh Million*.

<sup>233</sup> Interview of the author with Tami, Jerusalem 04/05/2017.

Another woman, Orna, in her 60s and whose parents immigrated to Israel before the Holocaust, said:

*“I keep an imaginary dialogue with my grandparents and with the brothers and sisters of my mother, they were all killed in Treblinka... and now that I am a grandmother too, I understand what it means to be without grandparents. I belong to a generation that grew up without grandparents, only with their pictures.”*<sup>234</sup>

Among members of the second generation, the presence of grandparents is considered a marker for a flourishing and ‘healthy’ family with solid roots in the country, while their absence is regarded as a sign for uprootedness and lack of connection to the land. It is for this reason that in many families of Holocaust survivors, a great importance is bestowed upon the re-creation of a numerous and well-connected family, as a sign of triumph, personal and collective, against the past and within the ‘new’ Israeli society.<sup>235</sup> The novelist Lizzie Doron, herself daughter of Holocaust survivors, carefully portrayed this situation in one of her novels *Calm Days*, where Rosa and Lea, the main character, are talking in front of a coffee in Rosa’s apartment:

*“Where are you from?” she asked “I don’t know” I replied. She (Rosa) suddenly understood, didn’t ask anything else and told me: “I am from there too, I am a bit older than you are so at least I remember a bit more.” Then she asked me (Lea) what I wanted to do, and I replied: “A family, I want a family.” Then we stayed silent for a while.*<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Interview with Orna, Jerusalem 18/04/2017.

<sup>235</sup> Ofer, “Holocaust survivors as immigrants”, Shapira, “Israel.”

<sup>236</sup> Doron, *Giornate Tranquille*, 16 (my translation from Italian).

In this excerpt are condensed some themes that emerged also from the interviews such as the resolve of many survivors to build a new life and a new family and the reticence in naming Europe, in this case Poland, as the places where the Holocaust happened. Rosa, an older woman from the neighborhood, is welcoming Lea and asking her what she wants to do in life and building a family is the only thing that seems to matter to her. Even later in the novel the first aim of Lea (the main character) is to build for herself and her son a 'family environment', which eventually she manages to create among the residents of the neighborhood. This need to re-create a family is especially present among the first and second generations, whose members feel entrusted with the recreation of a 'normal' life, where the past is commemorated only in given occasions (e.g. Holocaust Remembrance Day) and then the rest of the time is devoted to build a new future. In general, the Holocaust was considered as a sensitive topic, to be discussed in very specific circumstances.<sup>237</sup>

Only later on, individual experiences of the Holocaust became part of Israeli identity in a more direct and explicit way. According to historian Anita Shapira, this happened in the 1980's for two main reasons. First, because at that time the Zionist pioneering elite became weaker, along with the uniform Israeli identity it promoted, leaving space for different voices and more varied narratives.<sup>238</sup> Immigrants from all origins, included Eastern European countries, started to recriminate about the way they were pushed into a new, Israeli, standard mold, without paying attention, nor respect, to their previous cultures and heritages. Secondly, Israeli national identity was developed and established enough to allow itself to look deeper in its past, and to face as well cultural heritages and legacies not strictly adhering to the norm. In Tami's case, Holocaust Remembrance Day was the main framework when her parents used to talk about what happened with her and her children, but not the

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<sup>237</sup> Yablonka, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness."

<sup>238</sup> Shapira, "The Holocaust", Segev, 1949.

only one and she is proud to announce that, in her family, the Holocaust is not a topic that is “buried under the rug”:

*“My mother told me [about it], and she was a certified source. They talked about it a lot. They did not believe in not passing on the message and not including the children in their stories. The opposite was true: let the children know and not forget. These stories need to be passed on. My mother also tells my daughters her story. They also learned a lot in school. On Holocaust Day, they brought to school stories from their grandmother. They were really authentic, they told their stories and included us. It wasn’t buried under the rug. These were things that I lived with.”<sup>239</sup>*

The initial repression of memories and narratives had repercussions also on the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of memories, making, sometimes, the communication easier between grandparents and grandchildren, rather than between grandparents and their own sons and daughters. As Tami experienced in her own family:

*“Today, because of the children, my mother tells us a lot of stories about her life before and during the Holocaust. That she came from a very cultured family, for instance. But she doesn’t remember a lot of her childhood, she only remembers certain things. Today, only my mother tells stories. I only heard from my father for the first time last year about everything that happened, about what he went through during the war.”<sup>240</sup>*

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<sup>239</sup> Interview of the author with Tami, Jerusalem 04/05/2017.

<sup>240</sup> Interview of the author with Tami, Jerusalem 04/05/2017.

We can notice here that whereas Tami's mother talked with her about the Holocaust only in very specific and 'official' time frames, she started engaging with it more often thanks to her grandchildren. On the same line, another interviewee, Anat, testifies how, only in the last few years, her mother told her more about how she survived in the Warsaw ghetto and in Poland during the war. She notices how those stories changed her view about some episodes or behaviors her mother had in the past, making her to "connect some dots". For the first time, Anat became aware of the heroism and courage that took her mother to survive and, maybe for the first time, she felt proud of her just for the mere fact of having survived in those circumstances. These individual experiences mirror what happened throughout time to the public discourse in Israel. Holocaust survivors demanded their stories, even if of great suffering and weakness, to be heard and to be made part of the founding narrative of the state, thus enriching the Israeli collective understanding of the Holocaust phenomenon and making it more human and personal. It is after such a shift that many survivors felt they could go back to their painful experiences and memories and unpack them, which they did not do immediately after their immigration to Israel, being completely absorbed in rebuilding a new life.<sup>241</sup> This influenced also the second generation, which for a long time, knew little about the Holocaust past of their parents, and considered more heroic the fact that they created a new life in Israel as pioneers. As Anat said in a proud way about her parents' immigration to Israel and settling in a moshav in the South to do agricultural work and develop the country:

*"My parents came down to settle this place; they were pioneers—pioneers of the fifties— and the pioneers of those days were not like the pioneers of the eighties."*<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> See Yablonka, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness"; Shapira, "The Holocaust," and Segev, *The Seventh Million*.

<sup>242</sup> Interview of the author with Anat, Tel Aviv, 10/11/2017.



Anat's parents, as all new immigrants, spent some time in absorption camps, and were later on resettled, depending on their time of arrival, in development towns or moshavim in the southern and northern regions of the country to populate it. By employing the category of 'pioneer', commonly used to refer only to the pre-state period, Anat wants to legitimize and include the story of her parents in a wider effort of nation building that, de facto, occupied also the immigration waves that followed the establishment of the state of Israel.<sup>243</sup> By saying that her parents are pioneers of the fifties, she means that they contributed to the population and development of the country right after its creation, differentiating them from the pioneers of the eighties, mainly from the former USSR. She then continued by explaining how being a new immigrant wasn't something special when she was a kid, but the more she grew up the more she realized the extent of the effort her parents did to integrate in the new society. She said:

*Then, I didn't see new immigrants as being something exceptional. It is only now when I see new immigrants and I talk to them... then I understand."*<sup>244</sup> [...]

However, this sense of pride and of understanding did not manage to even out the sense of vulnerability that the second generation felt, especially in comparison to their *sabra* peers.<sup>245</sup> As Hanna, now a woman in her 60s whose parents were both originally from Poland, stated:

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<sup>243</sup> Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, 31.

<sup>244</sup> Interview of the author with Anat, Tel Aviv 10/11/2017.

<sup>245</sup> *Sabra* (Hebrew for prickly pear) is the term used to refer to any Jew born in Israel. The name of the fruit is used as a metaphor that assimilates Israeli Jews to a prickly pear: with a thick and thorny skin but delicate and sweet on the inside. See Zerubavel, "The 'Mythological Sabra.'"

*"I adjusted to the group, I was in the middle of things and I had friends. I was in the scouts and the whole story. But sometimes I think that when I would meet girlfriends from "old timers" houses I would still feel ... feel that my parents didn't know Hebrew well and all that."*<sup>246</sup>

Despite everything, for her it was still hard to be considered by 'old timers' inferior because she was the daughter of Holocaust survivors who did not speak Hebrew well, and were not so well established economically. This sense of estrangement, mixed to the will to belong, is characteristic of the second generation and is well described by Lizzie Doron in her novels where she portrays the life in a small neighborhood in Tel Aviv whose residents are mainly Holocaust survivors and their kids. In one of her novels, *Once there was a family*, she tell the story of the son of two Polish immigrants to Israel, and the hardships he experienced when trying to integrate:

*"Only then Chaiele told me how her brother, Yudele, was ashamed of his diasporic past, of how he saved dime after dime to buy khaki clothes and leather sandals to look like a kibbutznik."*<sup>247</sup>

The fact that Holocaust survivors' children were divided in between two worlds – the diasporic world their parents left behind and that was destroyed by the Holocaust, and the new Israeli world, full of vitality and connected to the land – made it complicated for them to retain any kind of Polish cultural heritage, both material (photos, diaries etc.) and immaterial (culinary traditions and language be it Polish or Yiddish) as they wanted to fully integrate in the new society. Most of the memory effort of their parents' generation was

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<sup>246</sup>Interview of the author with Hanna, Tel Aviv 17/11/2017.

<sup>247</sup> Doron, *C'era una volta una famiglia*, 58 (my translation from Italian).  
*Kibbutznik*: Hebrew for member of a Kibbutz

in any case directed to remember and honor the people who died in the Holocaust.

One example of this can be found in the words of Yael, a ceramic artist and teacher, who used her artistic work to pass on the memory of his father, a Holocaust survivor from the death camp of Sobibor, both in Israel and in Europe<sup>248</sup>. When I reached her to know if she was interested in being interviewed, she was very happy that someone wanted to her family's story. During the interview she showed me one of her artistic projects, called "Tracing oblivion".<sup>249</sup> Her aim was to recreate ceramic maps of the Sobibor death camp, as showed for the picture here below.

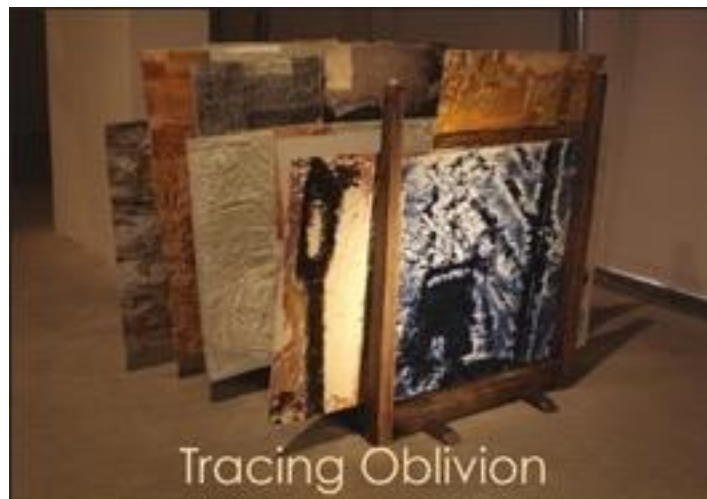


Image 3 - Tracing oblivion project Yael Atzmoni<sup>250</sup>

She said:

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<sup>248</sup>Interview of the author with Yael – Tel Aviv, 16/11/2017.

See also: "Survivors of the Revolt," <https://www.sobiborinterviews.nl/en/the-revolt/survivors-of-the-revolt>

In this case the interviewee did not mind being mentioned with her real name, considering that her work and her father's history are well known in Israel and abroad.

<sup>249</sup>"Tracing Oblivion Project": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9D2jpXXKd8&t=28s;>

Ester Beck, "Tracing Oblivion: Yael Atzmony's Sobibor Project," *Ceramics: Art and Perception* 96 (2014): 32-35.

<sup>250</sup> Picture kindly provided by the artist Yael Atzmoni.

*“My father, Dov Freiberg, was among the rebels, I have been to the site [Sobibor] three times and documented whatever I could. 30 maps existed of the Sobibor camp, drawn by survivors, SS people and Russian soldiers. Each map is a bit different. Even before my father died in 2008, I presented him with the outlines I had for a memorial works [ceramic art] about Sobibor. He preferred works which dealt with mapping the camp and said that it would be fantastic if through art something [of what happened] would obtain human recognition. I decided to work on memories which are not mine, primarily as I knew them from conversations and stories, and from the five books that my father wrote. How could I work with memories that weren't mine...? To this day I do not know...”<sup>251</sup>*

Yael's main preoccupation is to give a physical representation to the memories of her father and to pass on his story to the following generations, so that it would not be forgotten. She is aware of the complexity of dealing with someone else's memories, nonetheless she does not give up. On the other hand, she sounds a bit disappointed by the fact that her sons (39 and 33 years old) are interested in her work and in her father's heritage, but “up to a certain point.” She said:

*“They have strong obligation to this subject [Holocaust memory], but they are not committed to it all the time, especially when I tell them about my experience with their grandparents, I do not feel like they have a lot of patience nor time to listen to me. They were very connected to my father, though,*

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<sup>251</sup> Interview of the author with Yael Atzmoni – Tel Aviv, 16/11/2017.

*who was the typecast survivor and such a sweet man...".<sup>252</sup>.*

This shows how the second generation, usually born in Israel, is the one more interested in 'solving' a problematic past, researching about it, and in creating some sort of personal relationship and link with it, despite, in some cases, the reticence of survivors in talking about what they went through.

Members of younger generations (third and fourth generations) showed divergent feelings towards the past. On one side, some of them considered the past as detached from them or influencing their lives only to a certain extent. As Chani, an 18-year-old girl, daughter of Tami said:

*"All of that has no connection to the way that I was brought up and to who I am. I have my family, my parents, my society, my environment. The past does not have a deep influence on me. Of course, we talked about it (the Holocaust) when I was little, and even now, but I don't remember how much it affected me until I heard about it in school and I went to Yad Vashem. Up until then I didn't really understand. When I grew up, I understood more."<sup>253</sup>*

The main topic of our conversation regarded her daily life and future projects (the army, university, friends and so on), and her personal relation to Holocaust memory and remembrance came up only when connected to official or social circumstances, as she reported when asked how she commemorates Holocaust Remembrance Day:

*"I feel that it has been pretty much erased for most of my girlfriends, for most of the youth, for society.*

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<sup>252</sup> Interview of the author with Yael Atzmoni, Tel Aviv 16/11/2017.

<sup>253</sup> Interview of the author with Chani, Tel Aviv 15/05/2017.

*My girlfriends spend that day as if it were a regular day. If things were open in the evening, they would go out. I respect that day; I respect the losses. I wouldn't go out.”<sup>254</sup>*

On the other hand, older interviewees such as Ilana (30 years old), reported having always had an open discussion about the Holocaust, especially with their survivor grandparents:

*“I know my generation it's not very much into it, preserving heritage and memory. Sometimes it happens after somebody dies that they start asking questions... we used to ask questions all the time ... this was the main difference between me and other friends' families. For me, I was always interested in what happened I took a course about Holocaust and art. But I believe it's my family... also my older brother used to be very connected with my grandparents. [...] I talked about it with my grandpa, I talked with him about everything and I feel like they were talking with me more than they were talking to their children, my mom and my uncle.”<sup>255</sup>*

Here Ilana is aware of the lesser interest that her generation has towards not only Holocaust remembrance, but, in general towards the cultural heritage of their families. However, she also presents her own story as a contrast to this generalization.

It seems that most of the interviewees from the younger generations (third and fourth) have a double stance towards the past and the cultural heritage of their families. On one side, they are busy building their own identity, their life story is 'under construction' and has not yet taken its final shape, making it harder for them to relate to a

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<sup>254</sup> Interview of the author with Chani, Tel Aviv 15/05/2017.

<sup>255</sup> Interview of the author with Ilana, Tel Aviv 26/03/17.

distant past which has little connection to their daily life. There is a tension between the interest and love they feel for their grandparents and their stories and their will to keep going with their lives. On the other, as they grow older, it seems that the interest for researching and being connected to their own family history becomes more present, also because of the fact that part of that history is disappearing together with their grandparents.

*2.4 Tunisian Jews at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: a European  
- Arab Identity*

*“Let’s be clear: are you Jewish or Arab?”*

*“Both.”*

*“Half and half?”*

*“No, both, fully.”*

*“And when they fight each other, what side are you  
on?”*

*“On the wailing side.”<sup>256</sup>*

This excerpt is taken from an autobiographical novel by Guy Sitbon, entitled *Gagou*. The novel speaks about the life of a young Tunisian Jew and his quest for a new identity, first as a Frenchman, then as an Arab in independent Tunisia, to end up in the *Marais* in Paris looking for his relatives who abandoned the country after its independence.

This excerpt well exemplifies the complexity of Tunisian, and more in general North African, identities in Israel. A complexity that goes back to the centuries-old relationship with the Arab-Muslim society they lived in; to the upheavals brought about by French colonization of North Africa, and, since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the diffusion of Zionism in the region. The last two factors were the most influential in the creations of Tunisian Jewish identities.

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<sup>256</sup> Guy Sitbon, *Gagou* (Montpellier: Editions Grasset, 1980).

At a moment when in Europe national movements were catching on, Tunisian Jews found themselves divided between the emergence of Tunisian Arab nationalism, the rise of the Zionist movement in the country and the option given to them by France to apply for naturalization. Previously, Jews in Tunisia and in other Arab countries, as protected subjects of Muslim sovereigns kept a low profile, and, except for a few prominent individuals who contributed to the financial administration of the government, their involvement in the political sphere was minimal<sup>257</sup>. Following, with the arrival of the French protectorate (1881-1956) in the country, Tunisian Jews had access to French culture that would have freed them from their subordinate position and granted them access to modernity. In particular, the French defense of liberal and universalistic values turned out to be appealing not only for the intellectual class, but also for more modest circles that saw in those values and culture an enfranchisement from their subordinated position, distancing, if not estranging them from the local Muslim populace.

Zionism, on the other hand, would give the rise to an ideological bipolarization (Tunisia /Israel) marking the community life and Jewish Tunisian associationism in the aftermath of the First World War. Tunisian Zionists supported the development of an independent Jewish political and national consciousness and, encouraged by the Balfour Declaration, established the Zionist Federation of Tunisia in 1920. This led to the development of a Zionist press, youth movements, and the teaching of Hebrew, clearing the way for an action that World War II and the events in Palestine would amplify. In Tunisia the Zionist movement became the most developed of North Africa.<sup>258</sup> It was precisely the access to this new political culture, Jewish nationalism, in a context thus far characterized by Jews' subordination to Muslim rule and by the

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<sup>257</sup> Lucette Valensi, "Multicultural Visions: The Cultural Tapestry of the Jews of North Africa," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale. (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), I-book edition.

<sup>258</sup> Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).



imposition of a colonial regime, that represented one of the most decisive changes for Tunisian Jewry.<sup>259</sup>

On the eve of its migration to Israel, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tunisian Jewry was still a post-traditional society. In fact, despite the progressive Westernization and acculturation, Jewish communities, well integrated in the surrounding Arab society, remained for the great majority partitioned according to the old cleavages and traditional ways. Especially in the lower strata of the community, the social structure, remained traditional, revolving around the community and the family, as the main social units, leaving very little space for individual affirmation.<sup>260</sup> Accordingly, practices and roles within the community and the family were fixed, and one should conform to it without transgressing. As in the Ashkenazi world before and in between the two World Wars, the affirmation of one's individuality meant exposing oneself and one's family to hostility if not sanction from the part of the community.

Modernization was limited and confined mainly to the upper and upper-middle class urban societies in the coastal cities, such as Tunis, Sfax and Sousse. These changes were more evident in the public domain, rather than in the private one, and were greatly linked to the introduction of modern and Western education thanks to the endeavors of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. At the same time these messages of modernization were not meant to foster real equality among sexes. The patriarchal family mostly remained the basic social unit for Tunisian Jewish communities, and its hierarchical structure was based on gender and age.

Even the series of autobiographical novels that emerged among the Jews of the Maghreb around the 1950s, despite telling the life of a single individual, in reality were novels talking about family and

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<sup>259</sup> Haim Saadoun, "Tunisia," in *The Jews of Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*, ed. Reeva Spector Simon, Michael M. Laskier and Sara Reguer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 444-457.

<sup>260</sup> Valensi, "Multicultural Visions."

collective and multiple Jewish identities in Tunisia.<sup>261</sup> Identities that in the case of Tunisian Jewry were becoming more and more hyphenated: Jew and Arab; French and Maghribian; secular and religious and so on. These identities may be considered as a mark of modernity but, at the same time, are to be fully inscribed in the continuity of Jewish history in North Africa.

This complexity is, for instance, well exemplified by the writer Albert Memmi. The author is a man from Tunisia, writing in French, who is neither French nor Tunisian. He's a Jew, but he does not want to be one. And indeed, in his works he speaks about the impossibility of Tunisian Jews to adjust all these different parts of their identity in one they can reconcile themselves with. As Memmi well described in the preface of his book *The Pillar of Salt*, an autobiography where he narrates his life as a young Jew in Tunisia at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*“When The Pillar of Salt was first published in 1953, it was greeted in Tunis as a scandal. I, a Jew and son of a craftsman and an illiterate mother who lived at the edge of the equally poor Jewish and Muslim quarters, was describing not only the misery, deprivation, endemic diseases [...], obscurantism and superstition they contained, but the failings of the tiny local bourgeoisie, which thought itself opulent but was only ridiculous. I was no kinder to my Muslim fellow citizens or to the various European colonialists. The Pillar of Salt reads like a general indictment. No one contested its accuracy, just the fact that I had made it public. “One should not wash one’s dirty linen outside the family!”, was repeated angrily.”*<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Pillar of Salt* (Lexington: Plunkett Lake Press, 2013) Kindle edition; Serge Moati, *Villa Jasmin* (Paris : Fayard, 2003) ; Nine Moati , *Les belles de Tunis* (Paris : Seuil, 2013).

<sup>262</sup> Memmi, *The Pillar of Salt*.

This excerpt from the new introduction of the book, written in 2013, well describes the entanglement of identities and interests that characterized colonial Tunisia back in the colonial period and right before the independence of the country in 1956.

Such a premise is necessary to analyze and understand the development of Tunisian Jews' identities in Israel. From the interviews emerged that several different factors influenced such a development.

One of them is constituted by the social class immigrants belonged to before their immigration. Most Tunisian Jews that immigrated to Israel belonged to an urban population, composed of merchants, artisans, professionals and workers<sup>263</sup>, with only a small percentage of people coming from the countryside. The first migratory fluxes right before and immediately after the establishment of the state of Israel (1947-50) were constituted of young people, between 20 and 22 years old, usually individuals with a past in Zionist youth movements and associations, who acted as the avantgarde of the movement, allowing for a subsequent migration of their family. A considerable number of Tunisian Jews were Zionists, and Zionist youth organizations were very active in Tunisia, playing a great role in the subsequent migration to Israel not only of Tunisian Jews, but also of other North African Jewish communities.<sup>264</sup> As testified by Claude, a Tunisian Jew himself and also a sociologist and historian studying the history of Tunisian Jews:

*"In Tunisia, Zionism... we drank it as if it was our mothers' milk. In 1897 we sent a telegram to the Zionist Congress in Basel... between the two world wars, Zionist youth movements the Shomer [ha-*

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<sup>263</sup> Saadoun, "Tunisia."

<sup>264</sup> Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, 254-286; Saadoun, "Tunisia."

*Tzair] and the Beitar, were very strong in Tunisia.”<sup>265</sup>*

Another factor, a fundamental one, that had an impact on the creation of Tunisian Israeli identities can be retrieved in the reasons that informed the migratory project of those Tunisian immigrants: political, economic, social and/or ideological. These motives were usually combined. In the case of young individuals, the trigger was their activism within Zionist organizations, and their will to fight within the ranks of the newborn Israeli army in the war of Independence to create a new state for the Jews. In the case of older people or families the main trigger, along with religious motives, namely returning to Jerusalem and Sion, was political. In fact, the upcoming independence of Tunisia together with the development of an anticolonial nationalist movement, led to an increasing sense of insecurity that pushed many families to leave the country<sup>266</sup>.

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<sup>265</sup> Interview of the author with Claude, Tel Aviv 15/11/17.

<sup>266</sup> For more on the historical and political motives that informed Tunisian Jews' migration path see: Roger Janover, *L'intégration des Juifs tunisiens en Israël : le Moshav Yanouv*, (BNF, Paris : dactylographié ,1970) 112-119.

2.5 Tunisian Pioneers: Zionist youth movements and the establishment of the State (1919 -1952)



Image 4 - Map of main Tunisian settlements in Israel<sup>267</sup>

<sup>267</sup> "Israel," [https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=15307&lang=en](https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=15307&lang=en)

Compared to other North African countries, in Tunisia Zionist ideology was widespread and well grounded.<sup>268</sup> This is due to the freedom of action the French protectorate granted to various kind of associationism included the Tunisian Zionist movement which, at the beginning, was considered to be more a movement of cultural nature than a political one. First instances of the Zionism appeared in Tunisia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, until the interwar period, the movement could be considered an expression of modernity and the product of the social and political dynamics of the French colonial situation. Tunisian Zionism, especially in the first stages, was considered as a means to achieve political and social recognition in Tunisian society for Jews and an expression of their ancestral dream of returning to Zion.

The first to be involved with Zionism and to establish a Zionist organization in Tunisia were Jews of Italian origin, the so-called Grana<sup>269</sup>. In 1911 Alfred Valensi established the first Zionist association of Tunisia, opening the way to the creation of other associations, such as: Hibbat Zion (1913 – La Goulette), Yioshevet Zion (1914 – Tunis), Ohavei Zion (1913 - Sfax). Many other Zionist associations were established all over the country, leading to the creation, in 1920, of the Fédération Sioniste de Tunisie (Tunisian Zionist Federation), that, already in 1922, counted more than 2000 members all over the country.<sup>270</sup> The Zionist movement, mostly active on a cultural plan, brought together religious and secular Jews, rich and poor, Twensa and Grana, considering Zionism and Judaism two sides of the same coin. The activities of the Tunisian Zionist Federation slowed down on the eve of the promulgation of the decree that, in 1923, made more flexible for Tunisian Jews the

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<sup>268</sup> Saadoun, "Tunisia." Ben Achour, *De la Vellélité à la Volonté*.

<sup>269</sup> In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a group of Italian Jews, many from the seaport of Livorno, arrived in Tunisia. This created two separate communities—the indigenous Jews, called the Touansa, and the new immigrants coming from Italy, called the Grana. See Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, 446.

<sup>270</sup> Albert-Armand Maarek, *Les Juifs de Tunisie entre 1857 et 1958, histoire d'une émancipation* (Paris : éditions Glyphe, 2010) 223.

Mohammed Larbi Snoussi, *Les activités sionistes dans la Tunisie de l'entre-deux guerres (1920-1939)* (Tunis : CAR, 1980) 33.

terms to access French naturalization, putting many of them in the position of reconsidering their political and ideological stance. The activities, however, quickly resumed later on in the period between the two world wars. In those years Zionist activities in Tunisia gained momentum again, consolidating at the same time their affiliations to the World Zionist Organizations. The endeavors put in place by the emissaries (*shlichim*)<sup>271</sup> sent by international Zionist organizations (the Jewish Agency in particular) had the aim to help the local Zionist movements in the emigration effort.

Emigrating to the Land of Israel became more and more a real option for Tunisian Jews that were deceived by the treatment French government reserved them during the war, being Tunisia under German control, as other parts of France. Moreover, the precarious economic and political situation of the region after the end of the war and the mounting Arab nationalism convinced many Tunisian Jews to make 'Aliyah right after the end of the war and the establishment of the state of Israel (1945- 1948).

This first emigration wave, around 300 -350 people, was mainly composed of single individuals and a few families, who managed to get to Palestine illegally despite British restrictions to Jewish immigration were still in place. They managed to reach Palestine passing through Algeria and France. The organization of clandestine immigration from North Africa was supported by a number of rabbis and grand rabbis of the Zionist network. The intertwining of the religious and political dimensions in the actions of North-African rabbis, linked inextricably the biblical ideal of returning to Zion to the political enterprise.

The vast majority of these first immigrants originated from the big cities of Tunisia, such as Tunis, Sfax and Gabes.<sup>272</sup> They settled, for the great part autonomously, in moshavim and kibbutzim around the country. This people were the first Tunisian pioneers who

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<sup>271</sup> Shlichim (Heb. For delegates) were, and still are, 'the delegates of the 'aliya'. They were in the case of Tunisia emissaries sent by the Jewish Agency throughout North Africa to organize the emigration of Jews to the Land of Israel.

<sup>272</sup> Nava Yardeni, *Les Tunisiaéliens, les Juifs de Tunisie en Israël* (Jerusalem : éditions Elkana, 2010) 44.

established Tunisian moshavim and kibbutzim in Israel. Among them: kibbutz Regavim (1949) in northern Israel, founded by Tunisian members of the *Tze'irei Tzion* movement<sup>273</sup>, and kibbutz Karmia (1950) located in the South of Israel, established by *HaShomer HaTzair* members from France and Tunisia. In the same year, they also established moshav Yanuv, located in central Israel.<sup>274</sup>

The role these first migratory wave played, even if little in number, was substantial, as harbinger of Tunisian immigration and integration in Israel. The fact that most of these immigrants chose the kibbutz as a form of settlement, was in line with the ideology of the *Tze'irei Tzion* movement. These immigrants, very ideologically motivated, were, generally speaking, in a good socio-economic condition. They considered the hardships they were facing as a way to become like the 'natives' and integrate successfully in the new Yishuv.

To this end, the members of the Tunisian group had to acquire some knowledge on the concept and functioning of a kibbutz, spending a period of training in other kibbutzim before establishing their own. After spending some training time (1945-47) in the kibbutz Beit ha-Shita, these first Tunisian pioneers moved in 1947 to a Jewish Agency camp near the village of Kfar Saba, then moving North again in 1948 and establishing themselves close to kibbutz Gilead<sup>275</sup>. The main aim of the training was not only to familiarize the new immigrants with the practical details of life in a kibbutz, but also to teach them the new language and cultural codes of the new society, as a means of socialization and integration to be passed onto all newcomers to the kibbutz. All these activities of preparation led to the establishment of kibbutz Regavim in 1949. The creation of this kibbutz was very important because not only it marked the first core

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<sup>273</sup> *Tze'irei Tzion* (Heb: *Youth of Zion*), was an ideological circle that studied Zionism, Socialism and Jewish history. It merged in 1913 with the *ha-Shomer* scouting group to fund the *Hashomer Hatzair*, a socialist Zionist youth movement.

<sup>274</sup> Yardeni, *Les Tunisaéliens*, 43.

<sup>275</sup> Yardeni, *Les Tunisaéliens*, 73.



of Zionist Tunisian immigration to Israel, but also it became the kibbutz of reference for Tunisian immigrants. Half of the fifty members of the kibbutz were from the city of Tunis and were joined soon after by a similar number of pioneers coming from the capital and its surroundings<sup>276</sup>.

A similar story is that of kibbutz Karmia, established in 1950 by a group of Tunisian and French pioneers of the *Tze'irei Tzion* movement in the South of Israel, near Ashkelon. One of the first pioneers to settle in the Kibbutz was Renato, a Tunisian Jew of Italian descent. Before making 'Aliyah to Israel he was a *shaliach* for the *Aliyah Bet* in North Africa <sup>277</sup>. When asked how he decided to become Zionist and to participate in the Zionist enterprise of establishing a Jewish state he replied:

*“In Tunisia I was rejected by the French culture, even if half of my family lives now in that country; I was considered a second-class citizen by the Italians, and this is when I realized that I had no other choice but to be a Zionist and embrace Hebrew culture.”*<sup>278</sup>

Yigal, Renato's brother-in-law, and his wife Alisa, Renato's sister, had a similar story. They also made Aliyah and settled in kibbutz Karmia right after their arrival in Israel, in 1952. Yigal reported:

*“After making Aliyah, we spent ten years at kibbutz Karmia. No one sent us! We came here to build the state of Israel, real, genuine Zionism! Surely the kibbutz was the most appropriate place to be from the point of view of building the state... all historians*

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<sup>276</sup> Yardeni, *Les Tunisraéliens*, 45.

<sup>277</sup> *Aliyah Bet* (in Hebrew: עלייה ב', "Aliyah 'B') is the code name given to illegal immigration by Jews, most of whom were Holocaust survivors<sup>[1]</sup> and refugees to Mandatory Palestine between 1934–48, in violation of the restrictions laid out in the British White Paper of 1939.

<sup>278</sup> Interview of the author with Renato, Ra'anana 09/12/2018.

*agree on this. So, after ten years at the kibbutz, I kept on working in the World Zionist Organization. And as I was a Zionist, I continued to be a Zionist all my life, a professional Zionist.”<sup>279</sup>*

For Yigal is very important to highlight not only the fact that he is a Zionist, a “professional” one, and that he devoted all his life to the cause, but also that he settled in Israel independently, without “being sent” by anyone. By saying so he draws a parallel between himself, who made ‘Aliyah relatively early and chose where to settle as other European Zionist pioneers did before him, and the Tunisian immigrants that arrived in Israel after the establishment of the state and “were sent” by the state to settle in different areas of the country. By pointing out this difference and by using the category of ‘pioneer’, commonly used to refer only to the pre-state period, he wants to highlight his independence in taking part to the enterprise of establishing the Jewish state, thus including his story in the nation-building effort started by European Zionist settlers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alisa, Yigal’s wife and Renato’s sister, explains how they ‘chose’ Kibbutz Karmia as the place to settle in Israel. As in many other cases, family links were very important in the outlining of the migratory process:

*“After all the members belonging to Yigal’s group left for Israel, for kibbutz Karmia, [...] we also left Tunisia after getting married, and we already knew from the start that we were going to settle in Karmia. Most of all because my family was there... my brother and my cousin were there already... so we got there without any problem. We didn’t even think of going somewhere else.”<sup>280</sup>*

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<sup>279</sup> Interview of the author with Alisa and Yigal, Jerusalem 12/11/18.

<sup>280</sup> Interview of the author with Alisa and Yigal, Jerusalem 12/11/18.

The pride showed both by Yigal and Renato in describing their belonging to a Zionist narrative points to one of the reasons that made it easier for the first wave of Tunisian pioneers to integrate in the new Israeli society: their fervent affiliation to Zionism and their personal commitment to become part of the Zionist project. As Tzvia, another Tunisian pioneer, testified in her journal:

*“After two years in the kibbutz during the party for the second anniversary from the establishment of the kibbutz, we were dancing the horah<sup>281</sup>, and at that moment we felt we belonged to that communal life we longed to be part of for so long.”<sup>282</sup>*

Another very important factor, considered as a precondition for a good integration, was learning and speaking Hebrew. As Renato reported:

*“We were very ideologically motivated to succeed in our integration in the Zionist society we met in Israel. We found out that one of the best means to do so was the language. We were very determined not to be ‘those who spoke French’, and to acquire Hebrew culture, and be part of it abandoning the diaspora.”<sup>283</sup>*

Speaking the Hebrew language, which some of them already learned in Tunisia, or in Zionist training camps in Europe, was surely the quickest way to comprehend the new culture and society, and thus to become part of it. Language, along with the level of education and professional training were essential for a good integration.

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<sup>281</sup> The *horah* (Hebrew הורה) is a widespread Eastern European style of dancing, common in the Jewish diaspora, it played a foundational role in modern Israeli folk dancing. It became the symbol of the reconstruction of the country by the socialistic-agricultural Zionist movement.

<sup>282</sup> Yardeni, *Les Tunisraéliens*, 69.

<sup>283</sup> Interview of the author with Renato, Ra'anana 09/12/2018.

Moreover, a significant number of these first wave pioneers from Tunisia belonged to an upper-middle class of well-educated professionals, who studied in French or Italian institutions in Tunisia and in Europe. Having received to some level a 'Westernized' education helped them to overcome the cultural gap that many immigrants of the following waves, with lesser means and a lower social capital, would encounter. As Renato explained about himself:

*"As soon as I became a Zionist I wanted to leave for Israel. But I was convinced, and also my parents taught me so, that even if I was a Zionist, I shouldn't have gone to Israel to sweep the streets, but as a chemist, a scientist and so forth. It is for this reason that before doing my Aliyah I went to Algiers to study physics, chemistry and biology, when the war was still on in Europe. Then I decided I would be a chemist, and I enrolled myself at the Chemistry institute in Paris. Even though my parents were fervent Zionists they always encouraged me to study first, and then to go to Israel."*<sup>284</sup>

Following, he explains what happened when the second wave of Tunisian immigrants arrived in Israel and the reasons why, according to him, they had such a hard time integrating in the Israeli social fabric:

*"the majority of Tunisians who came to Israel after us... the situation was completely different; their conditions were much worse. Even us, that we went to a Kibbutz, we noted somehow some cultural differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim...let's say that those who came after us they were not welcomed in the best way... but at the*

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<sup>284</sup> Interview of the author with Renato, Ra'anana 09/12/2018.

*time we did not know anything about it, we were pretty isolated in the kibbutz... we really did not take part in any of that..."<sup>285</sup>*

It is worth noting that it is important for him and for his brother in law, as we will later see, to explain how they did not know about the treatment reserved to the second wave of Tunisian immigrants and in general to immigrants coming from Arab countries. Renato, as well as Yigal and Alisa, never identified with Arab culture, or with the group that was later on defined as Mizrahim in Israel. They rather identified themselves as Zionists with a French or Italian culture. And indeed, as Yigal and Alisa reported in a conversation on the topic, they talked about immigrants from North Africa as a group they did not belong to:

*Alisa: "This whole story [of the resettlement of North African Jews in development towns] ... there is even a documentary movie, made by a Moroccan, on how the government treated immigrants, especially Moroccans..."*

*Yigal: "Tunisians too"*

*Alisa: "yes, from North Africa in general... also because when they left Morocco or Tunisia they could not go back, while the Poles they could go back to Poland... so here you are, they were treated in an horrible way... and we were in the kibbutz, we did not realize, when we saw that documentary movie, we were all shocked."<sup>286</sup>*

As for Renato, both for Yigal and Alisa it is important to explain that they did not know how other North African immigrants were treated, not only at the time but also years after, they say until today. They

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<sup>285</sup> Interview of the author with Renato, Ra'anana 09/12/2018.

<sup>286</sup> Interview of the author with Alisa and Yigal, Jerusalem 12/11/18.

refer here to a documentary movie that was broadcast by the tv channel Reshet 13 in 2017, entitled *Salah, po ze Eretz Israel* (in English *The Ancestral Sin*) by director David Deri.<sup>287</sup> This documentary movie reveals, through many interviews and archival documents as well, the state policies behind the planning and establishment of development towns in Israel, which laid the foundations for the ethnic and class gap in Israel. The director shows the story of many families, including his own, who were sent to the periphery of the country to populate it, in the first years after its establishment.<sup>288</sup> Yigal and Alisa, during our conversation, continued to talk extensively on the topic, without me asking, as if they wanted to lay it all out precisely. They explained how, veteran Israelis, as they considered themselves, were not regularly in contact with the world of the new immigrants and of the *ma'abarot*. At that time, absorption difficulties were considered a business to be solved by the state on one side, and, on the other, to be accepted by the newcomers as the toll to pay to attain the Land of Israel.<sup>289</sup> Yigal continued:

*Yigal: in this movie, the director looked up for all the official documents of the time... many letters signed from ministers and all those people [...] It was necessary to populate the country, isn't it? And to do so they decided to establish some cities in the Negev... and when the Poles got there, they started sending letters to their friends and relatives (about their situation there) and this was causing some problems to the state, from a political point of view. This because Israel requested from Poland that*

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<sup>287</sup> "Salah, po ze Eretz Israel," last modified February 26, 2018,

[https://13tv.co.il/item/vod/sallah/episodes/sallah\\_ep\\_01-602791/](https://13tv.co.il/item/vod/sallah/episodes/sallah_ep_01-602791/).

<sup>288</sup> Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," Aziza Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State Engineer Segregation? On the Placement of Jewish Immigrants in Development Towns in the 1950s." *Social Forces* 84/1 (2005): 115-134; Ben Achour, *De la Velléité à la Volonté*.

<sup>289</sup> Shapira, *Israel*, 229.

*they let the Jews leave the country, and then Polish Jews wanted to go back (due to the bad conditions)... so they decided to put Polish Jews in the center of the country and to send all the Jews from North Africa in the Negev... and they didn't do it in the nicest way... meaning when the truck (with all the people on it) got there, and people didn't want to get off, they simply started throwing people from the trucks... and you have letters signed by ministers... this was from '54 till '60."*

*Alisa: "we had this information only a few months ago..."*

*Yigal: "the country had this information a few months ago... I mean, we knew, but nobody knew it was an official policy...." 290*

Even if these are historical facts that have been studied by historians and sociologists, Alisa and Yigal acknowledge with a certain surprise that there was a state policy of discrimination against immigrants coming from the MENA region, during the 1950s. They also point out the different treatment that North African and European immigrants had from the government, referring in particular to Polish ones. And in fact, especially right after 1948, Polish immigrants were the biggest group that reached Israel, and along with Bulgarian and Romanian Jews, they were the only Jewish communities from USSR countries that were allowed to leave. These were the first groups to reach the country after its independence and were thus resettled in the central region in abandoned Arab cities, villages and neighborhoods.<sup>291</sup> Contrarily to what affirmed by Yigal they could not go back to Poland, or any other country belonging to the USSR where they came from. Subsequent waves of migrants from Eastern Europe, especially from Romania,

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<sup>290</sup> Interview of the author with Alisa and Yigal, Jerusalem 12/11/18.

<sup>291</sup> Shapira, *Israel*, 223.

arrived at the same time than those from Nord Africa and the Middle East, and were settled all together first in *ma'abarot* and then in development towns throughout the country. The fact that Yigal had the impression they could leave these temporary settlements may be due to the fact that in general immigrants from Eastern Europe, and in particular Polish ones, had a wider social network in Israel than those coming from Arab countries. They could therefore rely on the help of relatives and/or friends to relocate in more attractive areas of the country.<sup>292</sup> What is interesting though is that two categories emerged from the conversation with Yigal and Alisa: on one side Jews coming from Arab countries, Moroccan in particular, who were discriminated by the system and sent to populate far away regions in the country, and Polish Jews who are portrayed here, once and again, as representatives of the Ashkenazi ruling class, well connected and able to resettle in the best regions of the country. As for their personal position, both Yigal and Alisa, and Renato too, place themselves in an intermediate position, definitely not identifying themselves with North African immigrants who reached the country in the 50s, but also not completely recognizing themselves with Eastern European pioneers either, due to their upbringing which was in any case different and European, French or Italian.

## *2.6 The second wave: Tunisian immigration between 1952 and 1960*

The biggest number of Tunisian Jews arrived in Israel in between 1949 and 1950, in a migratory wave dubbed by historians as the "great Aliyah".<sup>293</sup> The majority of immigrants in and after 1950 came

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<sup>292</sup> Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State;" Irit Adler, Noah Lewin-Epstein and Yossi Shavit, "Development towns and social stratification in Israel: A truism revisited," Presented at the Berkeley meeting of the International Sociological Association Research Committee on Social Stratification (RC28), August 14-16, 2001.

<sup>293</sup> Shapira, *Israel*, 222.



from Arab countries, outnumbering for the first time the European/Ashkenazi majority in the country.

Regarding Tunisian Jews, the majority of those who reached Israel in this period came from rural villages and cities in the South of the country (Sousse, Moknine, Sfax and Gabès), as opposed to what happened in the previous years, when the majority of immigrants opted for France and only a small part of those who left Tunisia immigrated to Israel<sup>294</sup>.

This was a different kind of migration for many aspects: the average socio-economic class of the immigrants was lower and the reasons pushing them to leave the country were also different. The motives were less ideological and more practical. Even if exposed to some extent to Zionist ideology, as most Tunisian Jewry, they were not bearers of the Zionist pioneering ideal. The main considerations pushing them to leave Tunisia were of religious, economic and political order. In fact, along with the aspiration to a better life from an economic point of view, most of these immigrants were still traditional and respectful of religious norms and saw their immigration to Israel as the fulfillment of a mitzvah. Lastly, the political and social instability that the whole region was experiencing due to the emergence of anticolonial Arab nationalist movements in North Africa, led a bigger number of Jews to fear for their physical security and added up to the motives pushing them to leave Tunisia and other countries in the region.<sup>295</sup> The testimony of Elie Cohen Boulakia is revealing of the reality I just outlined, where multiple motives played a fundamental role in the exodus of Tunisian Jewry to Israel:

*“(the main impulse for Jewish emigration) was a sum of Zionist ideals and messianic faith [...]. Along with some Zionist organizations that were already*

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<sup>294</sup> Paul Sebag, *Histoire des juifs de Tunisie des origines à nos jours* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1991).

<sup>295</sup> Antoine Germa, Benjamin Lellouch and Evelyn Patlagean, *Les Juifs dans l'Histoire* (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011) ; Ben Achour, *De la Velléité à la Volonté* .

*established in Tunisia, after the Second World War, were created some branches of the OSE (Oeuvre de Secours à l'Enfance) and of the ORT (Organisation – Reconstruction -Travail). These organizations, while improving the level of hygiene and of professional training of the lower classes, contributed to spread the Zionist ideal. This explains well the massive departures towards Israel starting from the establishment of the state in 1948. The Jewish communities of the inland were among the first to leave with these migratory waves. Three Zionist ships filled up with people sailed from Djerba, Gabes and Sfax.*"<sup>296</sup>

The situation Tunisian immigrants would have to face in Israel depended for a great deal on the timing of their arrival. Most of the immigrants who arrived in the country between 1948 and 1952, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, were resettled either in urban areas, in the houses abandoned by the Arab population that fled during the War of Independence, notably in Jaffa, Lod, Haifa, Akko and Jerusalem, or in moshavim and kibbutzim in the center-north of the country.<sup>297</sup> Life was easier for those who had more means, or whose family members already settled in Israel, as they did not had to pass through the Jewish Agency system and the series of temporary accommodations that were provided to newly arriving immigrants.<sup>298</sup> This was usually the case for European immigrants, but it also happened a few times in the case of Tunisian immigrants. As it happened in the case of the Zagron family reported by Nava Yardeni in her book *Les Tunisraéliens*:

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<sup>296</sup>Élie Cohen Boulakia, « Être et avoir été un Juif tunisien, » in *La Méditerranée des Juifs, Exodes et enracinements*, edited by Paul Balta, Catherine Dana et al. (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2003) 256-266.

<sup>297</sup> Shapira, *Israel*; Segev, 1949, 98-100.

<sup>298</sup> This situation, however, was true only in the minority of cases, as only 175.000 of the 914.000 people who arrived in Israel in 1948 and 1958 settled in the country without passing through the Jewish agency. Cf. Janover, *L'intégration des Juifs tunisiens*, 126.

*« Our emigration to Israel was not characterized by economic hardships nor by integration issues. This because my brother André which was part of the Aliyat ha-Noar movement, was one of the first youngsters to emigrate from Tunis in 1948; he welcomed us at the Haifa port and got us directly to our new home in Ramat ha-Sharon (north of Tel Aviv) that he bought for us with my father's money. Despite the disorder and turmoil of the situation, linked to all kind of migration, my integration was not particularly hard, nor shocking, thanks to my brother's help. He managed to solve for us all the problems that we were facing in that first period, thanks to his experience, the situation of economic security he was in, and most of all his being well rooted in the Israeli reality, being then engineer at the ministry for housing and integration.»<sup>299</sup>*

Such favorable conditions however, were the exception, and most of those who arrived in between 1950 and 1956, were sent to the absorption camp of *Shaar Aliya*<sup>300</sup>, the biggest and, for some time,

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<sup>299</sup> Yardeni, *Les Tunisois*, 26. My translation, the original in French : « Notre émigration en Israël ne s'est pas accompagnée de difficultés d'intégration économique puisque mon frère André [...] qui était de l'Aliyat Ha-noar et qui avait été l'un des premiers jeunes à avoir émigré de Tunis en 1948, nous a reçus au port de Haïfa et nous a conduits directement à notre maison à Ramat Hasharon [ville de la banlieue nord de Tel-Aviv] qu'il avait achetée pour nous avec l'argent de mon père. Malgré le bouleversement de la situation liée à l'émigration, mon intégration n'a pas connu de chocs spectaculaires, grâce aux instructions d'Asher, le fils et frère respecté. Il réussit à résoudre pour nous chaque problème d'adaptation, de par son expérience et son aisance économique et sociale. il était alors ingénieur au ministère du logement et bien enraciné dans la réalité israélienne ».

<sup>300</sup> Sha'ar Aliyah (Hebrew for immigration gate or Aliyah gate) was the first place where all the immigrants arriving after the establishment of the state were sent. As in the case of Atlit the camp was one a British military camp, and once the state was established Sha'ar Aliyah became the biggest absorption camp in Israel. See Rhona Seidelman, "Encounters in an Israeli Line: Sha'ar Aliyah, March 1950," *AJS Perspectives* (2014): <http://perspectives.ajsnet.org/the-peoples-issue/encounters-in-an-israeli-line-shaar-ha-aliyah-march-1950/> Accessed July 10, 2019; and Shapira, *Israel*, 225-226.

the only absorption camp, in Israel, who started working at the beginning of 1949 under the supervision of the Jewish Agency (*Sochnut*)<sup>301</sup>. Immigrants spent on average a long time in *Shaar Aliya*, even years in certain cases, living in extremely precarious conditions, in makeshift huts and virtually 'prisoners' of the camp.<sup>302</sup> After medical controls, registration as Israeli citizens, and some language and culture courses, they were resettled in other absorption camps (*ma'abarot*), that later on became development towns (*ayarot pituach*)<sup>303</sup>. These settlements were part of a development plan for the entire country with the aim of populating it, and of rebalancing the urbanization process (so far mainly in the central part of the country), orienting the majority of new immigrants towards areas of the country that were scarcely populated, especially at its northern and southern edges.<sup>304</sup> Such a re-settlement program was the reason why the majority of North African immigrants, among them Tunisians, were concentrated in the developing regions of the Galilee and the Negev desert. As a consequence, the social and ethnic makeup of most cities in the Negev was very similar. For the great majority immigrants came from North Africa and Asia, with numerous families and a low social capital. This had a strong impact on the chances of development of the single towns and of the region. In fact, the level of economic development, attractiveness and the improvement of services depended on governmental investments and on the quality of its population, two factors that remained at low levels at least until the 1970s.

As French sociologist Doris Bensimon-Donat explained: "the same settlement in those regions, vital to the development of the country itself, would not have been possible, if not for the influx of north-

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<sup>301</sup> See note 96.

<sup>302</sup> "Ma'abarot – Tohu waBohu."

<sup>303</sup> Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State;"

<sup>304</sup> Sometimes referred to as "the Sharon Plan" after the name of Arie Sharon, architect and urban planner during the first years of the Israeli state. He was the author of the first national outline plan for Israel, which dealt with settling in the regions of the Negev and Galilee. For more see: Shapira, *Israel*, 231- 232.

African immigrants”<sup>305</sup>. They constituted between the 30% and 40% of the population of those settlements which were to become the main development towns in Israel, such as Beer Sheva, Ashdod, Dimona, Qiriat Gat, e Qiriat Shmona; while they constituted only the 20% of the population in cities located in the central part of the country such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. This strategy, defined “from the ship to the settlement”, was carried out mainly by the Jewish Agency and the Israeli government, without the interested population having any previous knowledge of it, leaving them little to no agency in the choice of where to settle.<sup>306</sup>

These immigrants, rather than being considered Zionist pioneers as it happened with all the previous waves, were considered as passive actors, incapable of deciding for themselves, according to the idea that the Zionist establishment had of all those people who were not coming from Europe or were Westernized in culture. Therefore, they were considered easy to be directed according to a bigger social and political plan. As reported by Chaim Berginski, emissary of the Jewish Agency, these immigrants were considered back then as:

*“raw material in our hands...raw material in the hands of artisan... they had no idea of what we were going to do with them. [...]. We thought about them as people with no consciousness and because of this we could do with them whatever comes to our mind.”<sup>307</sup>*

As reported by many immigrants from North Africa, they were moved to these places without being informed beforehand where and why there were being transferred. This was possible because of the lack of precise information from the part of the Jewish Agency’s

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<sup>305</sup> Doris Bensimon Donath, « L’intégration sociale des Juifs nord-africains en Israël, » *Dispersion et unité* 10 (1970) : 119.

<sup>306</sup> William Berthomière, “Croissance urbaine et immigration: le cas des villes de développement en Israël,” *L’information Géographique* 67/2 (2003): 134-150.

<sup>307</sup> Chaim Berginski, member of the Jewish Agency Executive and Head of Absorption Department since 1948, in “Salah, po ze Eretz Israel.”

emissaries on the place and conditions of relocation in Israel. As one of them said when interviewed by documentarist David Deri:

*"[they told us] We will take you to a place where you will have an income to support your kids. We didn't know. We did not have any idea of what would await us. I said: where are you going to leave us, where are you going to drop us? This is the desert we are not going to get off (the bus). I thought it was the end of the world. I did not know at all what it was."*<sup>308</sup>

From this testimony, we can understand how most of the people transferred to these towns were not aware of what they would face. Many of these immigrants considered the Holy Land as an option to realize their religious and messianic aspirations, while improving their economic and social conditions. They believed they would have been relocated in place close to bigger cities such as Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and could not imagine they would have been sent in the middle of a desert, in place very similar to where they came from, in the internal regions of Tunisia or Morocco.

This situation of arbitrary re-settlement was detrimental in particular for the type of social organization of these migrants: the extended patriarchal family.<sup>309</sup> In fact, during the resettlement phase families and extended families were separated, thus breaking the traditional network of social and practical support that many families enjoyed in their home country. In particular, the role of the patriarch as the main breadwinner and chief of the family was challenged and diminished by a situation where most men were unemployed, not speaking the local language and depending on state support to maintain their families.<sup>310</sup>

Dimona, in particular, was a development town where a significant number of immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia were settled.

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<sup>308</sup> "Salah, po ze Eretz Israel."

<sup>309</sup> Sebag, *Histoire des juifs de Tunisie*, 196-198.

<sup>310</sup> Gans, "First Generation Decline."

Conditions in these towns were extremely difficult, especially at the beginning: there were no real houses nor infrastructures. However, after the first shock, these immigrants were obliged by the conditions they found themselves in to become 'unintended pioneers'. Here, once again, the Zionist definition of 'pioneer' is reworked to fit yet another group of immigrants, who tried to become part of the Zionist narrative in their own way.

However, in the case of pioneers of the 1920s and 1930s, the main type of settlement were the kibbutz and the moshav and new immigrants arrived in Israel with a previous knowledge of Hebrew and of Zionist principles. Conversely, in the case of 1950s and 1960s immigrants the situation was completely different: they were regarded by the establishment as "primitive and without any culture", as reported by David, the son of Tunisian immigrants who settled in Dimona:

*"There was a public understanding that immigrants from North Africa in general, were not educated, and worse than that, that they were incapable of studying in normal school because their intellectual level was too low..."<sup>311</sup>*

The fact that the majority of these immigrants spoke a different language and that they came from a completely different culture, the Arab one, which was deemed as the culture of the enemy, was considered by Ben Gurion and the Zionist establishment as something to be fixed, and, if not to be erased, to be put aside. As confirmed by Dalit:

*I am sure it is something that you read already: at that time (the 60s and 70s) you wouldn't say: "I'm Tunisian". Moroccan yes they would say "I'm Moroccan", but not Tunisians, not Iraqis, other than*

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<sup>311</sup> Interview of the author with David, Petach Tikva 30/10/17.

*the Moroccans who weren't afraid of talking about their heritage and showing it, other Sephardi were worried and kind of hiding their cultural heritage at that time, because there was conscious and unconscious discriminations*<sup>312</sup>.

This attitude of the government, and, as a consequence, of the Israeli society led to a repression of all identities that differed from the Ashkenazi/European that molded the new Israeli identity. Oriental cultural heritage, especially among the first generation had to be left behind or maintained private. For kids it was easier to integrate into the new society by learning Hebrew at school, and later on by being drafted in the army, considered by Ben Gurion as a “workshop for the creation of the pioneers of the nation and the tool that would have unified different cultures, communities, and would have elevated them from a cultural standpoint.”<sup>313</sup>

Against this background, Tunisian immigrants, along with many others, after the first moment of shock tried and, as confirmed by many interviewees, managed to preserve some aspects of their original culture; especially when linked to the celebration of traditional Tunisian Jewish festivals and to culinary traditions.

The majority of the Jews who immigrated to Israel with this second wave were religious to different extents. Some followed meticulously the Torah and its *mitsvot*, others were simply traditional. However, regardless of their level of education or religiosity, they all had to face the problem of how to integrate their Tunisian identity and culture with the new Israeli *sabra* one. In many cases, what happened was a process of cultural adaptation, or of “syncretism” as defined by the researcher Rahel Sharabi where “beliefs and mores from different traditions are brought together in a process where different traditions and forms of religion meet to reach a

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<sup>312</sup> Interview of the author with Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

<sup>313</sup> David Ben Gurion, *Like Stars and Dust: Essays from Israel's Government Yearbook* (Sde-Boker/Jerusalem: The Ben Gurion Research Center/The Bialik Institute, 1997) 27.



synthesis.”<sup>314</sup> In this case, a dominant culture, the Zionist Ashkenazi one, influenced the dominated minority group, in particular all those immigrants coming from Muslim countries, such as Tunisia. In this process of identity negotiation, Tunisian Jews aimed and managed to preserve Tunisian traditions, which was characterized more by habits and beliefs, rather than by religious orthodoxy. In particular, the celebration of some specific Tunisian holidays was brought to Israel and kept alive till today.

One of the traditions that was kept alive and passed on was that of the *hillula*, a pilgrimage to the tombs of Jewish *tzaddikim*.<sup>315</sup> According to anthropologists Shlomo Deshen and Moshe Shoked, this tradition was adjusted to the new life conditions in Israel. For instance, ceremonies that in Tunisia used to be performed at the tomb of the Saint, in Israel were performed at the synagogue named after that same Saint, and often accompanied by music, dances and a traditional Tunisian food<sup>316</sup>. These ceremonies had a double value for traditionalist, secular and religious people alike. On one side they contributed to create a link with their Tunisian past, their ancestors and traditions, making it possible to pass it on to the next generation in a social and enjoyable way. On the other, they offered the opportunity to unify the Tunisian community, at a moment where the integration in the new Israeli reality might have created some rifts. Moreover, as soon as the economic conditions of these immigrants became more stable, typically in the 1990s, the *hillula* was also celebrated with some trips directly to Tunisia, becoming a unifying factor for those family who decided to undertake the trip, and an

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<sup>314</sup> Rachel Sharabi, *Syncretism and adaptation: the encounter between a traditional community and a socialist society* (Tel Aviv: Ts'erikover, 2002), 17-22 (Hebrew).

<sup>315</sup> Hillula (Heb: הילולא) is a Jewish tradition that consist in the pilgrimage to the grave of *tzaddikim* (righteous) on the anniversary of their death, and to remember that death with a festive celebration where religious texts are read. See André Levy, “To Morocco and Back: Tourism and Pilgrimage among Moroccan-Born Israeli,” in *Grasping Land, Space and Place in the Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience*, ed. Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 25-46.

<sup>316</sup> Moshe Shoked and Shlomo Deshen, *The Generation of the Compensation: changes and continuity in the world of North African immigrants* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Tzvim 1999), 93-121 (Hebrew).

occasion for parents and grandparents to visit their homeland. As reported by Hanna, daughter of two immigrants from Nabeul, in Southern Tunisia:

*“I went myself on some trips to Tunisia: first in 1996, in the year 2000 with my children, and finally in 2001. The first time I went there was to do the pilgrimage (hillula) of the Saint Lakhtar, and then the second time when I organized a heritage trip for the whole family. I returned to Tunisia one last time in 2001, to Nabeul, with my mother and brother. After this last trip to Tunisia I became religiously observant as a way to keep my Tunisian tradition alive and to honor the memory of my father.”<sup>317</sup>*

In addition to the celebrations of the *hillula*, there are other traditional festivities that were kept alive and celebrated by the Tunisian community in Israel. In particular three celebrations: *Rosh hodesh el-Banat*, *Rosh hodesh Nissan* or ‘evening of the *Bchicha*’ and *Tseudat Yitro* were mentioned by all interviewees as the typical Tunisian celebrations that are kept alive and celebrated till today. The first one *Rosh hodesh el-Banat* falls on the sixth evening of Hanukah which coincides with the first day of the Jewish month of Tevet. This day for Tunisian Jews is traditionally the day of “the celebration of the girls”, probably the women in the Bible, Esther and Judith in particular. As Victor points out:

*This traditional holiday is interesting because, even in a patriarchal society such as the Tunisian one, there was at least an occasion that was reserved to the celebration of women. And even if this holiday has never been as important as the ‘celebration of*

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<sup>317</sup> Interview of the author with Hanna, Jerusalem 27/03/17.

*the guys' it was always observed by families by preparing a table of sweets and festive cakes.”<sup>318</sup>*

Another celebration of the Tunisian Jewish calendar is the *Seudat Yitro* or “the celebration of the boys”. This celebration occurs on the Thursday evening of the week when Yitro’s parashah is being read (notably during the month of Shvat). The origin of this holiday can be found both in written sources and oral traditions, and its celebration consists of a rich meal where all the family and relatives are invited

*All Tunisian Jews, both grownups and most of all kids, religious and non-religious celebrate Seudat Yitro. What is specific is that food is served in small dishes as if it was a kid’s meal. Sometimes there is also a blessing of the Thora and songs and Piyyutim<sup>319</sup> are chanted. It’s a few years now that some Tunisian cultural association organize communal celebrations for this holiday in Israel, providing the guests with Tunisian food, music and dances.<sup>320</sup>*

Finally, another important Jewish Tunisian celebration is *Rosh hodesh Nissan* or evening of the *Bchicha*. This tradition is centuries old and takes place on the eve of the beginning of the month (*Rosh hodesh*) of Nissan. Considered that the month of Nissan is the first month of the Jewish calendar, this event can be considered as an

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<sup>318</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

“La fete des filles – Roch Hodech el-Bnat,” last modified December 03, 2010, <https://harissa.com/news/article/la-fete-des-filles-roch-hodeche-el-bnat>.

<sup>319</sup> Piyyut, pl. piyyutim (Hebrew: פיוט, פיוטים) is a Jewish liturgical poem, usually designated to be sung, chanted, or recited during religious services.

<sup>320</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

“Seoudat Ytro ou Choudat Ytrou, La fete des Garçons, Coutume des Juifs de Tunisie,” <https://harissa.com/news/article/seoudat-ytro-ou-ch-oudat-ytrou-la-fete-des-garcons-coutume-des-juifs-de-tunisie>.

additional celebration, marking even more the holiday of *Rosh ha-Shana* (the Jewish new year). The *Bchicha*, as explained by Victor is:

*“a mixture of wheat and barley finely mixed with the addition of spices, coriander and fennel or anis. Some also add dates, almonds and nuts, raisins and sugar or honey. Once this mixture is ready all the family mixes it together with olive oil using a utensil shaped in the form of a key, and then everybody tastes it.”*<sup>321</sup>

This ceremony symbolizes the beginning of a new year fertile and plentiful of all that is good in the world.

All these ceremonies were preserved and passed down to younger generations, especially in those communities where the majority of the people were of Tunisian origin. These celebrations allowed for a renegotiation of Tunisian identities in Israel and contributed to the transmission of a cultural heritage and of a sense of Tunisian-ness in the new society.

Another facet of Tunisian integration in the new society is and was political identity. Especially at the beginning, but also in recent times, political involvement has been used as a means of personal and social advancement. This happened more in the case of moshavim, such as moshav Yanuv, and of development towns, such as Dimona, rather than in the kibbutz environment. In fact, in these two settings political affiliation was more fluid, at least on a personal level, allowing more space for negotiation. Contrarily to the first pioneers who resettled in kibbutzim and were very ideologically oriented, those who resettled in moshavim and development towns were less tied to the clear-cut left- and right-wing partition existing in

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<sup>321</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

“Roch Hodech Nissan ou la Soirée de la Bchicha par le dr Victor Hayoun,” last modified April 01, 2019, <https://harissa.com/news/article/roch-hodech-nissan-ou-la-soir%C3%A9e-de-la-bchicha-par-le-dr-victor-hayoun>.

Israel back then. Thanks to this flexibility, they could use their political activity to better negotiate their position in the new Israeli society. In particular, big parties, like the Mapai, used a very aggressive propaganda to recruit followers and votes in the wake of political elections.<sup>322</sup> For instance, some members of moshav Yanouv considered useful to accept the proposal of the political emissaries of the Mapai party, entering themselves the political arena in management positions within local and economic organisms.<sup>323</sup> This first step allowed them to advance their position, and, with time, to reach posts of national relevance, thus being able to bring forward the interests of their own communities. By the end of the 1960s these Tunisian politicians managed to gain key positions in the political and economic establishment, with some of them becoming Members of the Knesset and ministers. Some examples are Aharon Uzan and Mathilda Guez. The first was born in Moknine (South Tunisia) and made Aliyah in 1949, after attending a French college in Sousse and moving to France afterwards. He was one of the founding members of Moshav Gilat and, in 1965, he was elected to the Knesset and appointed as a Deputy Minister of Agriculture in 1966. He then became Minister of Agriculture in 1974, and Minister of Immigrant Absorption in 1981. Another example is that of Mathilda Guez, born in Sousse (South Tunisia), she received a French education as well. During World War II she was deported in a labor camp and, after this event, she decided she would become Zionist, and active in the Youth Aliyah movement in Tunisia and the WIZO association Tunisian branch.<sup>324</sup> She made Aliyah in 1957, after meeting Ben Gurion in a trip to Jerusalem, and started working at the Immigrant Absorption Department of the Jewish Agency. She

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<sup>322</sup> Mapai (in Hebrew: מפלגת פועלי ארץ ישראל acronym for Workers' party of the Land of Israel) was a center-left political party and the dominant political force in Israeli politics until its merger with the modern Israeli Labor Party in 1968.

<sup>323</sup> Yardeni, *Les Tunisiaéliens*, 204-205 and 270- 271.

<sup>324</sup> The WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization) is a volunteer organization dedicated to social welfare in Israel, to the advancement of the status of women and Jewish education both in Israel and in the Diaspora.

was elected to the Knesset in 1965 with the Rafi party.<sup>325</sup> After losing her position as member of the Knesset she continued her political activity in the bureau of her party and as a representative in the Zionist Congress.

These are just two examples of members of the Tunisian community that in Israel managed not only to succeed as individuals but also to advance, through their political action, the position of their community on a local and national level, mainly by promoting economic and social development in those areas of the country that were far away from its center and thus received less attention from the government.

### *2.7 The third wave: Tunisian immigration between 1956 and 1967*

The third wave of immigration from Tunisia arrived in Israel after the Six-day War (1967). Compared to the previous waves their condition was quite different. They got to settle in a country that was already relatively established, and, for the great part, they arrived from France, an intermediate stop in their migratory route, where they gained a better education, and thus social capital, to spend in Israel. As Claude explained to me when asked about his immigration history, it was easy for him to settle in Israel after his arrival and to find a good job in the administration of the municipality of Jerusalem. This was due on one side to the fact that when he arrived in Israel there were less practical and economic instability and it was easier to establish oneself from an economic point of view. On the other, as many other Tunisians of the middle-upper class, Claude was educated in French institutions first in Tunisia and then in Paris. Receiving a good and 'Western' education allowed him to have a higher social capital and to integrate more easily once arrived in Israel. However, he seems not to be aware of this and attributes his

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<sup>325</sup> The Rafi party (acronym in Hebrew for: Israeli workers list) was a center-left party established by Ben Gurion in 1965. In 1968 it merged with other parties to form the Israeli Labor Party. See Shapira, *Israel*, 300.

successful integration in Israeli society to his Tunisian-ness, declaring himself as proudly Tunisian:

*“Tunisia is a crossroad of cultures, it was inhabited and conquered by the Romans, the Spanish, the French... you can lose your mind. That’s why Tunisians, by nature, they assimilate everywhere, never mind if they are Jewish, Maltese, Italian or Muslims... it doesn’t matter. ... In our case the Tunisian dimension [of being Israeli] ... It is necessary to keep one’s culture, and not to be ashamed of one’s own specificity. This is Israel: the different communities constituting it, and after all everything has to be done ‘step by step’.”<sup>326</sup>*

However, later on in our conversation he stated:

*“I speak Judeo-Arabic, which is more a dialect than an official language. But in any case, it is not my culture, in the sense that I feel and I am French and my culture is French.”<sup>327</sup>*

In a somehow contradictory way, he declares himself as proudly Tunisian and he does not deny his origins, but he also maintains that his culture is French and that he feels French as well. The first reference to his Israeli identity emerged only later on in our conversation, when he explained the reasons behind his ‘Aliyah:

*“I was born in Tunis and French colonization taught me to be French, so I became a Frenchman in Tunisia. When I was in Paris, as a Jew, I became an Israeli, especially after the ‘67 war, and the*

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<sup>327</sup> Interview of the author with Claude, Tel Aviv 15/11/17.

*antizionist tendencies that originated from that war and the '68 student movement. Finally, in Israel, I became Tunisian.*"<sup>328</sup>

This last sentence puts together apparently contradictory claims he made before, laying out his identity journey from French to Israeli to Tunisian identities, finally tying them together in Israel, where he devoted his life to the study of Tunisian Jewry and its history both in Tunisia and in Israel.

The fact that many Tunisian Jews identify themselves as French, juggling their identities in a space which is in-between French and Tunisian culture, is a significant step in the process of renegotiation of their identity. Another interviewee, Hanna, made a similar claim talking about her French-ness:

*"Immigrants from Tunisia and Algeria are to be considered as Europeans, rather than Mizrahim. French colonialism had laws distinguishing Jews from locals in Tunisia. My father had a successful hosiery business in Nabeul, and he had strong connections both in France and in Israel."*<sup>329</sup>

By underlining that her main cultural reference was France, Hanna revendicated for herself what she considered to be cultural superiority, granted precisely by French language and culture, with respect to other immigrant from that same region (e.g. Moroccans). By doing so she takes some distance from Tunisian/Arab culture, applying herself a colonialist and ethnicizing paradigm to immigrants that did not carry a 'Western' asset in their cultural capital. However this is not a black and white situation and, along with Albert Memmi, it can be maintained that Tunisian Jews were both in the position of colonizers vis-à-vis the local Arab population, and of colonized vis-à-vis the French, maybe symbolizing the inextricable link between

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<sup>328</sup> Interview of the author with Claude, Tel Aviv 15/11/17.

<sup>329</sup> Interview of the author with Hanna, Jerusalem, 27/03/17



these two poles.<sup>330</sup> In Israel too they found themselves in this double position: as colonizers when turning towards French culture to claim a supposed superiority over other immigrants from Arab countries; and in as colonized for not being part of the European Zionist establishment who founded the state.

And in fact, this double experience can be noted in many of the interviewees' life stories, who while identifying themselves with French culture, considered superior because Western, did not let go of their Tunisian traditions and cultural heritage. As proved by Hanna who kept alive the relationship with her Tunisian-Jewish cultural heritage and is strongly committed to preserve it and pass it on to future generations in Israel. As she explained, her personal commitment goes into the preservation of traditional Tunisian food and holidays celebrations, such as those mentioned above, according to the Tunisian tradition. Moreover, she is involved in the activities of the World Federation of Tunisian Jews in Israel (*Federaziah ha-'olamit shel yahadut Tunisiah be-Israel*), where she is a member of the organizational committee and as such, is involved in many different public activities for the preservation of Tunisian cultural heritage in Israel.

In the same way also Claude felt responsible for the preservation of Tunisian heritage in Israel and recognized the importance of living in a country that is the product of many different cultures. He said:

*I think that our wealth is that we [Tunisian Jews and Israelis] are the product of many cultures, and many histories. I have written a lot about Tunisian Jews, because I feel like I have a responsibility towards my community. We [my generation] are the last of the Mohicans in a way. If we do not put an effort to preserve our heritage, which is very rich... I believe we have a responsibility, here in Israel, that every*

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<sup>330</sup> Albert Memmi, *The colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2003) 10.

*community has this responsibility, to contribute with its own heritage... if this would be the case Israel would be the best country and we would not miss anything.<sup>331</sup>*"

This may be considered as a synthesis of the fluid relationship that the second generation of Tunisian Jews have both with Tunisia and Israel and their cultures. A relationship that evolved during time, renegotiating its boundaries in relation to the social and political environment they are dealing with.

In the next chapter I will consider the second point of entry of my analysis: food and traditions.

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<sup>331</sup> Interview of the author with Claude, Tel Aviv 15/11/17.

### Chapter 3: Foodways to memory

In this third chapter I am going to analyze the way in which individuals of both Tunisian and Polish ancestry use food and culinary traditions to keep their family memories and traditions alive, and to relate to the current collective discursive order on ethnicity they experience in Israel. First, I will give an overview on the history of the foodscape in Israel, followed by two paragraphs that deal with the ways in which today Polishness and Tunisian-ness are performed and rediscovered in Israel, also through food.

#### 3.1 Food in the Land of Israel

Food and culinary traditions were and are a very important factor in memory and cultural heritage transmission, especially on a familial level. As it happened in many other migratory contexts, food is also considered as marker of ethnicity in the complex panorama of Israeli identity politics. As Appadurai suggests the emotional charge of food, and its essential nature, make it a “marvelously plastic kind of collective representation” that “can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion, and intimacy or distance”.<sup>332</sup> Along with him, Bourdieu, in a section of *Distinction*, describes how the preference for certain foods by a given group, it is not only the result of gendered division of labor or of income differences, but it also exemplifies embodied dispositions and habitus.<sup>333</sup>

A logic of nation building through food was already present in the Zionist discourse, bringing together different forms of habitus linked to social class, ethnicity and gender, and intersecting them with national dispositions.<sup>334</sup> The culinary traditions that the Eastern

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<sup>332</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia,” *American Ethnologist* 8/3(1981): 494.

<sup>333</sup> Pierre, Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), 193.

<sup>334</sup> Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 88-89.

European founding fathers of Israel brought to Palestine, were meant to maintain their association with European culture and to dissociate them from the local one, i.e. the Arab one. Ashkenazi-Israeli cuisine thus originated in the interwar period, when the first 'Aliyot from Eastern Europe to Palestine started.<sup>335</sup> Since Ashkenazi Jews, and Polish one in particular, were the biggest and more organized group of Jews in Palestine at the time, they were able to introduce their own cuisine, ignoring the traditions of pre-existing 'oriental' Jewish communities.<sup>63</sup> They imported and continued to eat foods that were part of their culinary tradition, even if they were not readily available in Palestine at the time, such as potatoes. In addition to that, a number of local, more Mediterranean, items, mainly fresh vegetables, tomatoes, cucumbers, and eggs, were chosen and incorporated in the new 'Israeli cuisine', without overturning the staples of Eastern European/Ashkenazi cuisine such as potatoes, different kinds of pickled vegetables and fish, root vegetables, rice stuffed vegetables, and very little meat.<sup>336</sup> This was considered important, as consuming produces harvested from that same land that the Zionist pioneers were trying to cultivate and settle, had the symbolic meaning of detaching them from the Diaspora and of making them an actual part of that territory they lived in, conducting an authentic life as 'natives'.<sup>337</sup> As stated in dr. Erna Meyer's book *How to Cook in Palestine*, published in Palestine in the mid-1930s:

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<sup>335</sup> The notion of cuisine is defined here as a set of "proper dishes" comprising ingredients that are considered to be fit for consumption and recognized as appropriate cooking by a sizable community of eaters. Since a cuisine emerges in the specific historical and social conditions of a given community, it is in constant evolution and change.

<sup>63</sup> Ofra Tene, "'The New Immigrant Must Not Only Learn, He Must Also Forget': The Making of Eretz Israel Ashkenazi Cuisine," in *Jews and their Foodways: Studies in Contemporary Jewry 28*, ed. Anat Helman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 47.

<sup>336</sup> Ofra Tene, "'The New Immigrant Must Not Only Learn,'" 52.

<sup>337</sup> See Yael Zerubavel, "The 'Mythological Sabra' and Jewish Past: Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identities," *Israel Studies 7/2* (2002): 115-144.

Motti Regev, "To Have a Culture of Our Own: on Israeliness and its Variants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies 23/2* (2000): 223-247.

*“We housewives must take an attempt to free our kitchens from European customs which are not applicable to Palestine. We should wholeheartedly stand in favor of healthy Palestine cooking [...]. We should foster these ideas not merely because we are compelled to do so, but because we realize that this will help us more than anything else in becoming acclimatized to our old-new homeland.”<sup>338</sup>*

This book published in German, English and Hebrew, was conceived for European immigrant housewives, and, along with urging for an adaptation to the new homeland by using local ingredients, it also tried to integrate the old and the new. An example could be considered the eggplant liver pâté, a recipe created to substitute the traditional Eastern European liver pâté with a version that could suit Mediterranean produce, such as the eggplant. Along with these dietary changes, the importance of all those social and cultural practices, aiming at creating some separation with non-Jews in the Diaspora, such as keeping kosher, was reconsidered. In Palestine/Eretz Israel, where “Jewish identity associated with the Diaspora was replaced by Hebrew identity, associated with the Zionist enterprise”, these habits were not needed anymore and Zionism, in its European, Ashkenazi and secular version, was considered to be the cultural expression of the dominant group<sup>339</sup>. Accordingly, during the first years of statehood, the Eastern European/Ashkenazi cuisine became the main cuisine in Israel, in the sense that it was deemed as the “proper” cuisine both in public discourse and, most importantly, in institutionalized culinary

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<sup>338</sup> Erna Meyer, *How to Cook in Palestine* (Palestine: Histadruth Nashim Zionioth, the Palestine Federation of the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO), 1936).

<sup>339</sup> Ofra Tene, “The New Immigrant Must Not Only Learn,” 54; Norah MacKendrick, “Foodscape,” *Contexts* 13 (2014): 16-18.

settings, such as school kitchens, hospitals, transit camps for new immigrants, a variety of workplaces, and the army.

This status was maintained even after the ethnic composition of the country massively changed in the wake of the great 'Aliyah from Islamic countries in the early 1950s, which resulted in Ashkenazim accounting for only about half of the total Israeli Jewish population. New immigrants were in fact confronted with a strong criticism of their way of life, social mores, and material culture which was not compliant with the new Zionist/Israeli identity. These 'new Israelis' came from a very wide range of countries and brought along with them culinary traditions that were Jewish variations of the culinary cultures of their countries of origin<sup>340</sup>. The variety and the wealth of the food of Jews coming from North Africa and the Middle East was due to the openness of the relationships that Jews had with their Muslim neighbors and was characteristic of most Jewish cookery in those areas, bringing together different cultures and traditions. As cultural anthropologist and cookbook author Claudia Roden put it: "[...] the very great culinary repertoire reflects the special symbiosis of the Jews with the Islamic world and with the complex environment of different ethnic and religious groups existing in that area."<sup>341</sup> The situation was different in Eastern Europe, where Jewish culinary traditions were less integrated with the local ones and were rather used as a means of separation from the surrounding Christian society, whilst in Muslim countries similar dietary restrictions (kosher and halal) made this separation less sharp.

Despite their variety and difference, however, these culinary traditions, as the general culture of those immigrants coming from Arab countries, were dismissed by the dominant Zionist establishment, and classified yet and again under the label of 'Mizrahi', perpetuating the dichotomous ethnic division even in the food realm<sup>342</sup>. Moreover, the general attitude of the Israeli

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<sup>340</sup> Ofra Tene, "The New Immigrant Must Not Only Learn," 55.

<sup>341</sup> Claudia Roden, "Jewish Food in the Middle East," in *Culinary Cultures in the Middle East*, ed. Sami Zubaida and Richard Tapper (London: 1994), 154–155.

<sup>342</sup> Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim."

establishment and of the Jewish Agency was in many cases a dismissive one. The new immigrants from Islamic countries were considered primitive individuals, to be educated and modernized. Journalist Arie Gelblum, after spending a month in an immigrant camp, disguised as an immigrant, wrote on Haaretz the 21 of April 1949, in the article entitled "The truth about the human material":

*"We have in front of us a population whose primitivity is at its highest, and whose education borders to complete ignorance, made even more drastically severe by the lack of attitude towards the comprehension of any intellectual matter."*<sup>343</sup>

The Zionist establishment thus wanted to 'educate' the new immigrants not only in matters of health, hygiene and education, but also in the realm of nutrition. The cuisine of North Africa was criticized, on the basis of preconceptions, for not being sufficiently nutritious, whilst on the other hand the 'European' Israeli diet was considered Western and thus ideal and modern<sup>344</sup>. Regardless of the fact that "compared to the cooking of Ashkenazi Jews, the home cooking of the Sephardim is immensely rich and varied, elaborate and sophisticated"<sup>345</sup>, Middle Eastern food was initially put aside because of the culture it represented, the Middle-Eastern one, to leave the stage to what was considered to be the food of the new state of Israel and of the 'new Jew'. Moreover, there are a few more reasons why, at least in the first years of statehood many new immigrants abandoned their traditional eating habits. Firstly, due to the precarious economic situation of the state itself, it was hard for them to source and choose their own food. Secondly, the will to

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<sup>343</sup> אריה גלבלום, "האמת על החומר האנושי", הארץ, 21 באפריל 1949 (my translation)-Arie Gelblum, "The Truth about the Human Material," Haaretz, April 21, 1949.

<sup>344</sup> Esther Meir-Glitzstein, "Longing for the Aromas of Baghdad: Food, Emigration, and Transformation in the Lives of Iraqi Jews in Israel in the 1950s," in *Jews and their Foodways: Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 28, ed. Anat Helman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 100.

<sup>345</sup> Roden, "Jewish Food in the Middle East," 154.

conform and be accepted by the new society they arrived in, brought many of them to pick up new 'Israeli food habits.'

As it was the case for most immigrants from North Africa, also Tunisian Jews at their arrival in Israel were sent to *Sha'ar Ha-Aliyah*, a transit camp through which all new immigrants were sent, mainly for medical checkups. All grouped together in what was actually a refugee camp, they realized for the first time the fact that they were now refugees, without the option of going back to their home country. For many of them it was the first time they experienced living in tents, in an enclosed camp, sharing private spaces with people coming from many different countries.<sup>346</sup> And it was indeed in this environment that, for the first time, they came into contact with Eastern European food<sup>347</sup>. To the hardships of being refugees in a new country, immigrants from North Africa had also to face the lack of familiar and comforting food.<sup>348</sup> In fact, not only food was scarce, due to the period of austerity that followed the war of Independence, but also not always appropriate to the new immigrants and their way of cooking and eating, making it hard for them to retain their food habits. As Eli from Tunisia reported about the first 'Ashkenazi food' he got to eat in a transit camp:

*They gave us noodles, but they were cooked in tons of oil, and because of this they were trembling, and this is why we named them worms (first in Arabic and then in Hebrew). The bread, it was black, rounded and a knife could not cut it, maybe and electric saw could have sliced it.*<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Anita Shapira, *Israel, A History* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 222.

<sup>347</sup> Meir-Glitzstein, "Longing for the Aromas of Baghdad," 97.

<sup>348</sup> Orit Rozin, "Craving Meat during Israel's Austerity Period, 1947–1953," in *Jews and their Foodways: Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 28, ed. Anat Helman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 65-88.

<sup>349</sup> "Ma'abarot – Tohu waBohu – Perek 1," <https://www.kan.org.il/page.aspx?landingpageid=1107>



Another woman interviewed remembers the time in the *ma'abarah* as a time of scarcity and of food that was strange and new for her:

*We got half an egg, and we joked about it, we said: the hen ate a razor that's why we got half an egg, seven olives, we said 7 is a lucky number, two slices of bread, some jam and a cube of margarine. What is this, what do you do with it (margarine)? we did not know.*<sup>350</sup>

Both excerpts highlight the estrangement that these immigrants felt towards the food they received, representing the new culture they would have to acquire and conform to in Israel. Despite the dire situation they were in, both interviewees faced it with some irony and downplayed the hardships they went through. They explained that in part this was due to the fact that they were both very young when they immigrated to Israel, and that kids face and adapt to hardships in a different way than adults. Moreover, they reported that despite the precarious conditions the *ma'abara* was considered as an “adventure” in their new homeland: Israel.<sup>351</sup>

For adults on the other hand, the lack of control on what they ate not only was a traumatic experience in terms of cultural loss (abandoning traditional dishes, flavors and ingredients), but also in terms of roles disruption within the family. And indeed, migration disrupted the traditional patriarchal structure of most households, putting fathers, once at the head of the family, in a position of weakness and dependency. In the new migratory setting, women's role too underwent a change: the mother, once relegated into the protected environment of the house, was pushed to work outside of it, becoming in many cases the main breadwinner.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> “Ma'abarot – Tohu waBohu – Perek 1,”

<sup>351</sup>For more see: Piera Rossetto, “Space of Transit, Place of Memory: Ma'abarah and Literary Landscapes of Arab Jews”, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 4 (2012):103-127.

<sup>352</sup> Herbert J. Gans, “First Generation Decline: Downward Mobility Among Refugee and Immigrants,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32/9 (2009): 1658 – 1670.

Once they left the transit camps and they regained some independence on their food, culinary tradition became one of the aspects that helped keeping together a world that for many new immigrants was crumbling. Food became a symbol that helped re-organize the new reality and preserve that history and culture that were left behind during migration.

As explained by historian Donna Gabaccia in her book *We Are What We Eat*, a study on ethnic food in the USA, during the first years in a host country new immigrants tend to stick to the familiar food of their home country, as old dishes tend to take on nostalgic and emotional meanings. As she notes, in a context of migration people face many circumstances over which they have little control – housing, employment, language. In such a situation of loss of status and independence, food plays an important role and represent one of the few areas where the new immigrants can exercise some control.<sup>353</sup>

In the Israeli case, food, especially for those Jews coming from Islamic countries, became a distinctive trait. On the other hand, European culinary traditions were faced with an ambiguous attitude from the Zionist establishment. In fact, even if partly included in the new Israeli Zionist narrative, it remained associated with the diaspora and the European Jewish world that ceased to exist with the Holocaust, evocating feelings of nostalgia for the culture and the society in which that food was consumed.<sup>354</sup> The fact that it was partly integrated and partly disowned in favor, ironically, of more local and ‘Mediterranean’ options, led to a limbo situation where Ashkenazi immigrants too abandoned gradually their traditional dishes, only to go back to them in certain occasions. Against this background, Ashkenazi cookery was quickly labeled as ‘Jewish’, thus restating the correspondence between

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<sup>353</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat, Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 48.

<sup>354</sup> Ofra Tene, “The New Immigrant Must Not Only Learn,” 46.

Liora Gvion, “Two narratives of Israeli food: ‘Jewish’ versus ‘Ethnic’,” in *Jews and their Foodways: Studies in Contemporary Jewry 28*, ed. Anat Helman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 126.

Ashkenazi/Jewish/Israeli created when the country was established. In particular Polish Jewish cuisine, that constituted a great part of the Ashkenazi culinary tradition, became part of what was considered traditionally Israeli, especially when it came to food prepared to celebrate the holidays. To the point that there are cases of Israelis of Mizrahi origins preparing Ashkenazi dishes for the holidays or mixing the two traditions.

This identification of Polish with Jewish can be found also in other instances: such as cook-books published about “Jewish cooking”, where the majority if not all the dishes are of Eastern European origin; Jewish restaurants food offer all over Israel; and the success of a certain number of dishes considered (wrongfully so) to be Polish, such as gefiltefish or rugelach, when in fact they had little to do with Polish cuisine, as we will explain later.

From the mid-60’s on, with the end of the austerity period and a more general opening of the country, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern culinary traditions started to gain more popularity in Israel. Aiming to break away from all that was connected to the East European Jewish diaspora and, by association, the Holocaust, Ashkenazi food was thus relegated to the holidays, its visibility in the public sphere becoming more and more limited. On the contrary, Middle Eastern/Mediterranean food, gained an increasing popularity and, by the 1980s, it dominated the public culinary scene, serving as the foundation of today’s Israeli cuisine.<sup>355</sup> The main reason why Middle Eastern food, associated in Israel with the category of Mizrahi, kept on being cooked and eventually became so popular, can be traced in the continuity that immigrants from different Mediterranean countries had in their food practices, once having gained some stability in the new country. This happened more easily in the domain of food, since culinary tradition is a daily, flexible knowledge that allows for the transmission of a cultural heritage and of family memories from one generation to another.

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<sup>355</sup> Gvion, “Two narratives of Israeli food,” 127.

Furthermore, especially starting from the 1980s, a wider social movement revindicating the importance of Mizrahi culture emerged in Israel, and food became one of the most successful ways through which Mizrahim advanced their identity within Israeli society.<sup>356</sup> This happened precisely at a moment when the second, and later on third, generation started to become more aware of their cultural heritage, and to go back to what was put aside during the assimilation process of the '50s and '60s.

As it usually happens with cultural heritage in migratory contexts, the first generation tends to preserve its (culinary) traditions and culture, whilst the second one tends to assimilate more in the receiving society, in order to better integrate, thus giving up some of their (culinary) traditions in favor of local ones.<sup>357</sup> Only with the coming of age of the third and fourth generations, the opposite process takes place. At this point, the descendants of the first migrants feel 'safe' enough to go back to their grandparents' culture, and recover it, reintegrating the past in the present and re-constructing one's family/group identity.<sup>358</sup>

A similar process of 'claiming back' a cultural heritage that was put aside in the past took place with Eastern European Jewish food heritage as well. This change in the attitude towards Eastern European culinary traditions, in particular the Polish one, can be ascribed to multiple reasons: in the first place, the decline of the political and cultural hegemony of Zionist ideology, allowing for more multicultural politics in general, and, more specifically, for the comeback of given Polish/Ashkenazi traditions. Another reason can be found in the nostalgia younger generations felt for a culinary tradition, in our case the Polish/Ashkenazi one, that they had very little idea or knowledge of.<sup>359</sup> Lastly, at the end of the 1960s, due to

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<sup>356</sup> Shapira, *Israel*, 391-395.

<sup>357</sup> Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*.

<sup>358</sup> Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2/1 (1979): 1-20.

<sup>359</sup> Nostalgia comprises convenient versions of fantasies, memories, and desires connected with the past. It can be restorative, aiming to bring back what is averred to have once been, or it can be reflective—content to regard the past as past,

the antisemitic campaigns that took place in Poland, some 4.000 Polish Jews left the country for Israel. In this occasion, and maybe for the first time, a group of people that were of Polish culture, came to the country, thus bringing a more Polish and less Ashkenazi culinary tradition.<sup>360</sup>

As in the Mizrahi case, cookery is one of the most common ways to go back to one's heritage, going back to what was once a well-established food tradition, and re-interpret it according to present needs<sup>361</sup>. This is mirrored, as we will see later in this section, in the reaction of some of the interviewees to the topic of culinary tradition, and by their stating how they were trying to recover their heritage by bringing up again "their grandma's food." Both groups are at present actively re-discovering/reclaiming their food traditions and narratives: Ashkenazim by taking back a culture that was abandoned to be included with full rights in the Zionist project; and Mizrahim by using food narrative to reveal connections between "social marginality and sustainability of a Mediterranean cookery in an Israeli context."<sup>362</sup> In both cases, the recovery process is not neutral and is accompanied by nostalgia, evoking connection with people and worlds that are no more, as I will show in the following paragraphs.

### 3.2. *Being "Polish" today in Israel*

From the interviews emerged several different aspects characterizing the relationship Israelis of Polish background have

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even if embellished. See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books 2001).

<sup>360</sup> I am here referring to the 'Aliyat Gomułka (1968-1970). The last significant migratory wave from Communist Poland, caused by the antisemitic campaigns promoted by the communist leader Władysław Gomułka, that caused those Jews that were left in the country (ca. 13.000 people) to leave for Israel. In the following paragraphs we will expand on this. For reference see also: Jean-Charles Szurek, « Les Juifs en Europe de l'Est depuis 1945 » in *Les Juifs dans l'Histoire*, ed. Antoine Germa et al. (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2011), 770-771.

<sup>361</sup> Gvion, "Two narratives of Israeli food," 130.

<sup>362</sup> Gvion, "Two narratives of Israeli food," 130.

with Polish culture and Poland today. The main ones are related to food and the use of Yiddish language.

The latter, in particular, assumed an important role in the preservation of the cultural relationship with Poland, especially among the first and second generation. Yiddish became in Israel the language of memory and nostalgia for a world that was erased. Despite the fierce opposition of the Zionist establishment to the use of any other language than Hebrew in the public sphere, Yiddish kept on living in the domestic sphere. Hebrew and Yiddish in a sense traded roles: Hebrew became a language spoken in a real place, the state of Israel; while Yiddish was the language of a place that did not exist anymore.<sup>363</sup> Yiddish thus became for many Polish Jews, in Israel and elsewhere, a way to keep alive that world that was destroyed during the war. As reported by Orna, one of our interviewees, born in Israel from Polish parents:

*Well in other countries it is clearly very different... there, parents, grandparents, gran-grandparents were born in the same place for centuries, it is something that by now it's taken for granted, you do not discuss about it. For me it's a new phenomenon. I remember that when I was a kid my parents' friends who survived the Holocaust and came to our house, said in Yiddish: "Was she born here?" As if it was a miracle.<sup>364</sup>*

Many of the older interviewees reported speaking the language within the family, and, even though the Zionist slogan was "Hebrew man, speak Hebrew!", and the general attitude was to abandon any vestige of the previous diasporic life to conform or embrace the new Israeli identity, in the private sphere, eventually, other languages were spoken too. The home was a space of multilinguism, and

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<sup>363</sup> Jeffrey Shandler, "Yiddishland: Language, Place and Memory," *History and Memory* 15/1 (2003): 123-149.

<sup>364</sup> Interview with Orna, Jerusalem 18/04/2017.

activities like reading and writing were carried out not always in Hebrew. Before the Holocaust, writing both letters and journals was an important activity, especially for women, in the Yishuv.<sup>365</sup> It allowed them to keep in contact not only with the family they left behind in Europe, but also with the languages spoken there. Reading in Yiddish was a common activity in the Yishuv, especially novels and newspapers coming from Europe.<sup>366</sup>

On the other hand, especially in an urban environment, male immigrants were more likely than women to speak Hebrew, since they spent significantly more time than their female counterparts in the public sphere, where Hebrew was dominant. This led them to speak more Hebrew also in the private sphere, to such an extent that many children grew up hearing the Yiddish mostly in their homes from their mothers<sup>367</sup>.

There was a contrast between bringing up the new 'Hebrew man', including speaking Hebrew with the children at all times, and keeping alive the Yiddish language and culture. Even the famous Israeli writer Amos Oz, in his autobiographical novel, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, testifies how his Zionist father banned Yiddish and any other language but Hebrew from his house, with the exception, as it happened in many families, of when he did not want his kid to understand:

*“Books filled our home. My father could read sixteen or seventeen languages and could speak eleven (all with a Russian accent). My mother spoke four or five languages and read seven or eight. They*

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<sup>365</sup> Selma Leydesdorff, “Introduction” in *Gender and Memory*, ed. Selma Leydesdorff et al. (New York: Routledge, 2017), lbook edition.

Guy Miron, “From Bourgeois Germany to Palestine: Memoirs of German Jewish Women in Israel,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues* 17(2009 ): 116–40.

<sup>366</sup> Liora R. Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jewish Nationalism and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920-1948* (New Heaven: Yale University Press: 2015) 40.

Deborah S. Bernstein and Musia Lipman, “Fragments of Life: From the Diaries of Two Young Women,” in *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel*, ed. Deborah S. Bernstein (Albany: State University of New York Press), 145–164.

<sup>367</sup> Halperin, *Babel in Zion*, 37.

*conversed in Russian or Polish when they did not want me to understand. (Which was most of the time [...]). Out of cultural considerations they mostly read books in German or English, and presumably they dreamed in Yiddish. But the only language they taught me was Hebrew. Maybe they feared that a knowledge of languages would expose me too to the blandishments of Europe, that wonderful, murderous continent."*<sup>368</sup>

The house thus became not only the place where women were supposed to take care of the family in a practical way, but also from a cultural and national point of view.<sup>369</sup>

This process by which Yiddish, the European Jewish language par excellence, was silenced and the figure of the Jewish mother became responsible for the mythical revival of Hebrew as a modern national language emerges in many interviews<sup>370</sup>. As Tami reported:

*"I am the only one in my family to have learnt Yiddish from my parents. My brother and my sister understand a word here and there, but I am the only one speaking the language, and this is because when we came to Israel, Ben-Gurion said that we don't have to speak Yiddish, especially with the children, that's the way it was..."*<sup>371</sup>

Not only the main intention was to speak to kids in Hebrew, but in many cases, thanks to Hebrew education they received in school,

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<sup>368</sup> Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (New York: Harcourt Books, 2004) Kindle edition.

<sup>369</sup> Yuval-Davis, "Women and the Biological".

<sup>370</sup> Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 109.

<sup>371</sup> Interview of the author with Tami, Jerusalem 04/05/2017.



kids became the link between their parents, or other immigrants, and the developing institutions of the Israeli state.<sup>372</sup> As testified by Anat:

*“What was it like? In the first grade there were five pupils. The teacher knew only Hebrew, one boy knew only Polish and another one only Romanian, and someone else only Yiddish—I was the only Hebrew speaker! So, for a while, I used to translate between the children and the teacher.”<sup>373</sup>*

In Israel, Yiddish passed from being a language of daily interaction to be a language that was spoken more and more by scholars and religious people only. However, especially in the last few decades Yiddish underwent a revival, not only in the academia but also among the wider public. This is due to state sponsored initiatives, such as language courses and Yiddish literature and theatre festivals, created to preserve Yiddish culture and language as the older generations are passing away and the number of Yiddish speakers has been steadily declining in the last decades. In addition to state sponsored activities, we can also count a series of preservation campaigns that the Hasidic ultra-orthodox community is carrying out since the years 2000s<sup>374</sup>. In a 2013 survey from the CBS about 2% of Israelis over the age of 20 recorded Yiddish as their native language.<sup>184</sup> In fact, the bigger number of Yiddish speakers in today’s Israel is located among the members of the Hasidic community.

In addition to language, another major aspect that emerged linked to Polish cultural heritage in Israel is food. As it often happens in a migratory context, also Polish immigrants in Israel brought with them

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<sup>372</sup> Gans, “First Generation Decline.”

<sup>373</sup> Interview of the author with Anat, Tel Aviv, 10/11/2017.

<sup>374</sup> Aaron Rabinowitz, “War on Hebrew - For Some ultra-Orthodox, There Can Be Only One Language,” *Haaretz*, September 23, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium/MAGAZINE-for-some-ultra-orthodox-there-can-be-only-one-language-1.5452371> last visited: 25/06/19

<sup>184</sup> Yaron Druckman, “CBS: 27% of Israelis struggle with Hebrew,” *Ynet*, January 21, 2013 <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4335235,00.html>

some culinary traditions. Depending on the time of their migration to Israel they brought to the country a different version of Polish food. In the case of those who reached Israel before and during World War II, they brought with them a Jewish version of Polish food, that, as previously explained, in Israel became Ashkenazi and, later on by extension, Israeli.<sup>375</sup> This meant that, until the last migratory wave of the 1970s from Poland, what was believed to be Polish food in Israel, was essentially Jewish food coming from Poland. As a Polish Israeli woman named Barbara, who immigrated to Israel in the 1970s, declared in an interview for the newspaper Haaretz:

*“Here in Israel, people confuse Polish-Polish food with Jewish-Polish food. In a real Polish restaurant, there’s no gefilte fish.”<sup>376</sup>*

Rightfully so, she believes that, in Israel, Polish and Jewish East European cuisines are mixed. What is defined as Polish food in Israel has nothing, or little, to do with Polish food in Poland. But why? There are many reasons why Polish and Jewish food are inextricably intertwined in Israel. The first one is that many among the founding fathers of the state of Israel were of Polish origin, and, as explained above, they introduced in the newly created ‘Israeli cuisine’, food that was familiar to them, typical of Jewish communities in Poland and in many other Eastern European Jewish cuisines.<sup>377</sup> On the other hand, they were ideologically motivated to leave behind any connection with the Diaspora and dived straight into the new *sabra* culture by eating produce coming from the land they farmed, leaving behind most Polish/Jewish food culture except for a few recipes, typically Jewish, prepared in occasion of the holidays. A second reason lies in the fact that the majority of immigrants, susceptible of carrying with them a Polish culinary

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<sup>375</sup> Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 48.

<sup>376</sup> Ofer Aderet, “Israelis who keep Polish cuisine in their heart,” *Haaretz*, December 04, 2014. <https://www.haaretz.com/food/premium-in-israel-polish-food-is-not-yet-lost-1.5340082>

<sup>377</sup> Ofra Tene, “The New Immigrant Must Not Only Learn,” 52.

tradition, were very young, and arrived to Israel as war refugees or Holocaust survivor, having a very vague idea of what was Polish food, if not for its Jewish component. This is the reason why in Israel there are few vestiges left of what could be actually defined as Polish cuisine today. This was possible thanks to those few Jews who remained in Poland after WWII and were forced to leave the country during the anti-Jewish purges of the communist regime, mostly at the end of the '60s. Those Jews grew up and lived in Poland, considered themselves Polish, and, as a consequence, had a very precise idea of what Polish food was. Once immigrated in Israel, they were even nostalgic about it, as is testified by the creation of a "Polish food club" in Haifa, called the 'Piast club'<sup>378</sup>. One of the members of the club stated:

*"Polish food – that's what I miss most [...] there is certainly no such thing in Israel."*<sup>379</sup>

The generations of immigrants that came from Poland in 1969, after the communist regime chased and ousted almost all Jews left in the country, is the most nostalgic about Polish culture. They kept on speaking Polish in their houses and thought it to their children, trying to pass on to them some Polish culture. But as they reported, also in this case their children are less keen into keeping their Polish heritage alive and are mostly assimilated into Israeli culture.

*"We held ceremonies on Independence Day" – the Polish one, on November 11 of course – "and celebrated Polish holidays; we sewed Polish national costumes. The children would dance, sing and put on plays in Polish .... But today they've*

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<sup>378</sup> Ofer Aderet, "Israelis who keep Polish cuisine in their heart," *Haaretz*, December 04, 2014. <https://www.haaretz.com/food/premium-in-israel-polish-food-is-not-yet-lost-1.5340082>

<sup>379</sup> Aderet, "Israelis who keep Polish".

*already finished university... they are not interested as much anymore.”<sup>380</sup>*

Another example of the evolution of the role cuisine has had in the preservation of Polish cultural heritage in Israel is given by the existence of many cookbooks and website listings under the category ‘Polish’. The oldest ones include a whole set of recipes and foods that are to be ascribed to a Eastern European Jewish cooking tradition. For instance, the website *Milon ha-Ochel shel Israel* (Israel’s food dictionary), under the category Polish food and recipes, lists a series of dishes: gefilte fish, cheese krepelach, borscht and poppy seed cake among others, that are typically Jewish<sup>381</sup>. In particular, gefilte fish appears on the website as “gefiltefish polani” (Polish gefiltefish).



Image 5 - Website: *Milon ha-Ochel shel Israel: gefiltefish polani* (Israel’s food dictionary: Polish gefiltefish).

Another example is a book published in 1993 and entitled “Shlomik Cohen’s Jewish Kitchen”, here the list of recipes defined as Polish includes almost the entire book. It was given to me as a gift by Rivka, a woman whose parents immigrated to Israel in 1882. She told me

<sup>380</sup> Aderet, "Israelis who keep Polish".

<sup>381</sup>“Ghefiltefish Polani,” Last modified: September 15, 2015, <http://www.foodsdictionary.co.il/Recipes/7347>

she bought it for her daughters so that they could have some of the traditional Polish recipes to prepare for the holidays, but eventually they never used it. In the introduction of the book the author goes like:

*“if you will meet a man who maintains to be of Polish origin but will turn his face to gefilte fish [...], I suggest that you check his origin, more thoroughly.”*<sup>382</sup>

Throughout the entire book, along with a series of recipes considered as ‘traditionally Polish’ such as: gefiltefish, egg salad, chopped liver, shmaltz, *reghel krusha* (calves’ foot jelly), we can find a series of old pictures, mostly set in pre-war Poland.



Image 6 - Shula Modan, *המטבח היהודי של שלומיק כהן* (ha-Mitbach ha-lehudi shel Shlomik Cohen).

In the picture above, we can see the cover of the book, where a Polish- Jewish family from Horodence (which was part of Poland until War World 2) is portrayed on the background; whilst on the foreground we can see a series of ‘Polish’ dishes prepared in Israel in the 1990s, thus linking two world that would be otherwise apart.

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<sup>382</sup>Shula Modan, *ha-Mitbach ha-Yehudi shel Shlomik Cohen* (Tel Aviv: Modan publishing, 1993) 8.

And Rivka, who gave me the recipe book, told me that for all important occasions and holidays she would prepare two versions of gefilte fish:

*“I usually prepare one gefilte fish with fish and another one vegetarian, using eggplants instead of fish. This vegetarian version is mostly for my grandchildren, because they don’t really like the original one. It is a dish I always prepare for holidays, especially for Rosh ha-Shana, even if my grandchildren don’t like it that much (laughing).”<sup>383</sup>*

By adapting a traditional recipe and making a vegetarian version out of it, Rivka wants to keep the Polish-Jewish tradition alive and tries to make it more palatable for her grandchildren, who seem to be less interested in it.

On the other side of the spectrum, there is a small group of Israelis, intellectuals and artists of Polish ancestry belonging to the third and fourth generation, that are trying to rediscover Polish cuisine and present it in Israel under a new light, changing the stereotyped idea that Israelis have of Polish food as “dull and tasteless”<sup>384</sup>. A good example can be found in the work of the Israeli food journalist Ronit Vered that, in collaboration with the Polish Institute in Haifa and Tel Aviv, organized for two years in a row (2014-15) the Polish culinary week. As the Israeli chef Maoz Alonim, who was in charge of the food for some of the events, said: “if you do it proper, you can find it’s sexy”. Alonim said to have returned to his grandmother cookbook to prepare this dinner, even if, contrarily to the original un-kosher Polish version, this dinner was conceived as kosher.

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<sup>383</sup> Interview of the author with Rivka, Rehovot 22/10/2017.

<sup>384</sup> “Israel’s Polish culinary week in Tel Aviv,” last modified April 23, 2015, last visited: 02/06/2019): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnVttDf3ZGs>

A second interesting case for the re-shaping of the image of Poland and its cuisine, can be found in the publishing of a book entitled “Polish: Polin, Ochel, Achshav” (Polish: Poland, Food, Now)<sup>385</sup>.



Image 7 - Arieh Rozen (ed.), Polish: Poland, Food, Now.

The aim of this book is to bring forward contemporary Polish cuisine and the people making it. The focus is on food, but the books also reveals a broader picture, composed of personal and moving stories of Jewish Polish and Israeli artists – cooks, food entrepreneurs, artists, designers, photographers and researchers. Some of them live in Poland, and others first visited the country for their work on the book, or because of their families’ connection with it.

This project too was born from the understanding of the huge gap between the prevailing Israeli perception of Polish food as ‘dull and grey’, as opposed to the rich culinary reality in contemporary Poland. The editor of the book Arieh Rozen stated:

*“it is an attempt to expand the perspective on Poland, and to offer a more complex view of the country, thus bringing the two culture closer together.”<sup>386</sup>*

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<sup>385</sup> Arieh Rozen, *Polish: Polin, Ochel, Achshav* (Tel Aviv: Asia publishing, 2016) [Hebrew].

<sup>386</sup> “Polish = Polin, Ochel, Achshav,” last modified December 9, 2016, <https://www.monitour.co.il/%d7%a4%d7%95%d7%9c%d7%99%d7%a9->

The book presents, for the first time in Hebrew, a lexicon and a detailed map of the food areas in Poland, including the food typical for each region and where to find it. In the last part, the book includes also a series of resources such as a glossary, a list of useful addresses and 13 Polish recipes. Each 'character' in the book tells the story in its unique and personal way, while not leaving aside the hardships of the Jewish people in the country. Through various Jewish-Israeli voices, led by Polish 'guides', the book tries to bring under the spotlight today's Polish cuisine and food scene; conveying a sense of loss and longing for the erased past, while offering at the same time hope and acceptance.

Both initiatives, the festival and the book, were successful, demonstrating a growing interest among the Israeli public at large, and Israelis of Polish origin in particular, for Polish culture, even when detached from its Jewish component. The image of Poland in Israeli society is still influenced by stereotypes about antisemitism as deeply rooted in Polish society, and by the role the country played in the Holocaust. However, this is a sign that Israeli society, in particular thanks to the work of younger Israelis of Polish origin, is undergoing a process of opening and integration of other cultures into the Israeli one. As one interviewee stated:

*“Polish food has a stigma in Israel because Israelis don't know what it is. The same thing happens on the other side with anti-Semitism in Poland. Young people in Poland can say they don't like Jews, even if, or maybe because, they've never met one.”<sup>387</sup>*

These initiatives are part of the complex web of mutual relations tying today's Israel to Poland, focusing mainly on cultural themes,

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<sup>387</sup> Interview of the author with Yonatan, Tel Aviv 14/11/17.



other than the Holocaust, which until the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the main topic of discussion when it came to Polish-Jewish-Israeli relations.<sup>388</sup> In conclusion, we can see how Polish heritage in Israel is undergoing a revival and how, through the revival of the Yiddish language and of Polish culinary traditions, even the younger generation is rediscovering a cultural heritage that for a long time, in Israel, was kept hidden in plain sight.

### *3.3 Being “Tunisian” today in Israel*

As far as Tunisian youth is concerned, the relationship with the previous generations (grandparents) is the main factor that influences their relationship with their Tunisian heritage. As in the Polish case most youngsters (third and fourth generation) are less interested in their past and cultural heritage, which they consider as somehow detached from their daily life. In the Tunisian case most of the interviewees replied to questions about their identity by saying that first of all they think of themselves as Israelis, and only later on in the conversation they acknowledged their Tunisian background. For instance, Shani a 30-year-old woman from Beer Sheva said:

*“I am half Tunisian and half Yemenite... But with me it’s funny because my grandparents are from Tunisia, but I was born in a kibbutz where there were a lot of Russians, so I grew up in a very mixed atmosphere... in any case yes... Tunisians are more conservative, more traditional, mostly the grandparents...I do eat Tunisian food like couscous and chraime<sup>389</sup> but I like all food, I like these food*

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<sup>388</sup> For more on Polish/Israeli-Jewish relations after WWII and the fall of the USSR see: Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, “Polish-Jewish Relations in The New Poland,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 30/1 (1997), 87-93.

<sup>389</sup> Chraime is Sephardic and North African fish recipe prepared with a spicy tomato sauce with the addition of smoked paprika and fresh cilantro on top. Chraime is traditionally prepared by Sephardic Jews for Friday night Shabbat dinner, and for Rosh Hashanah and Passover.

*the same as I like pizza.... There's not much difference... And music? I do not listen to Tunisian music, but in the house I listened to Arab music when I was a kid, my grandparents spoke Judeo-Arabic... so I can listen to that, but it's not something that I wish for or look for too much... it's not like I am willing to live there... I am Israeli, I was born in Israel and here it's about everything, to receive from every [culture] to taste every food... so I don't feel like I am attached to ... Tunisian culture... I feel like I am attached to being Jewish, to the Bible, to the Jewish life here in Israel.<sup>390</sup>*

However, differently from Polish youth, whose cultural heritage was homogenized with the Israeli one already in the previous generations, Tunisian youth are in some ways more aware of their Tunisian background and of the heritage of their parents and grandparents. This happened especially through food, music and language, not only Arabic, but in many cases also French, since many Tunisian Jews, especially in urban areas, considered French as their main language, having been educated in school of the Alliance Française. As reported by Dalit:

*My mother also spoke French and understood Judeo-Arabic, but her first language was French, because she grew up in a small town where most of the population was European, so she grew up with a mixture of French, Italian and very little Judeo-Arabic. She came to Israel with her parents at the age of twelve and then she got right away the Hebrew in Israel. [...] The only thing that the boys (her children) did and now also my girl is doing, is*

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<sup>390</sup> Interview of the author with Shani from Beer Sheva, at Tel Aviv University 05/12/17.

*that they studied French, because my mom first language was French, so they were happy to talk with her in French. Other than that, is kind of Israeli you know? It is all one (culture)...<sup>391</sup>*

Concerning food heritage and practices, in this case similarly to the Polish case, the heritage Israelis of Tunisian origin remained more in tune over the years with everything food related. After a first moment of shock and adaptation that followed settlement in Israel, Tunisian narrative around food and food practices was developed to be sustainable throughout time.

In general, during the 1980s and 1990s, the labels 'Mizrahi' and Mediterranean allowed for the creation of a common food narrative, that, preserving the specificity of each regional cuisine, focused on valorizing Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultural heritage through food. Culinary traditions belonging to Tunisian and other MENA region Jews, were particularly suitable to the climate and the ingredients available in Israel, being at their core cuisines that developed in the same geographical area<sup>392</sup>. This enabled first of all home cooks, notably women in the family, and later on Mizrahi chefs and food professionals to adjust easily to the new environment and to keep cooking the same traditional dishes with few adaptations. Especially third- and fourth-generation Mizrahi descendants, feel now free to put forward and renew a culinary heritage that was kept alive by their mothers and grandmothers.<sup>393</sup>

In this sense a testimony is offered by one of our interviewees, Rina, a woman of 50 years old, daughter of Tunisian immigrants from Gabes, that explained to us how she cooked traditional Tunisian dishes, and most of all that, when she cooks Tunisian, she still does everything like her mother did. Describing Tunisian cuisine, she said:

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<sup>391</sup> Interview of the author with Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

<sup>392</sup> Gvion, "Two narratives of Israeli food," 135.

<sup>393</sup> Meir-Glitzstein, "Longing for the Aromas of Baghdad."

*“As a North African cuisine, Tunisian is one of the richest, most delicate and varied in the region. It is characterized by the use of basic products such as vegetables and many legumes, using each ingredient to the fullest. Seasoning is gentle, but it can also get very spicy just by adding Harissa, a paste made by a mix of sun-dried tomatoes, chili paste and garlic. Moreover, a number of non-dominant spices are used, whose function is to enhance the flavor of the dish itself.”<sup>394</sup>*

She explains to me that she is too busy to cook Tunisian during the week, being an activity that requires a lot of time, and that she does that mostly when she hosts her family. In this regard she said:

*“I mainly cook memories. If I am to use a recipe, I use it only for the basis of that dish and then, what follows is memory work, the aromas and tastes that I absorbed by cooking in the house with my mother.”<sup>395</sup>*

When asked whether she tried to change or modify any given dish she replied with amazement: “Why?” adding after a few seconds:

*“The best compliment, one that fills my heart with happiness and great joy, is when my brothers or nephews say that the food I prepared is just like my mother’s. This is the best gift for me, since I do not cook only food. Every time I cook, I feel that I am cooking memories of a home, a family life around*

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<sup>394</sup> Interview of the author with Rina, Tel Aviv 13/09/18.

<sup>395</sup> Interview of the author with Rina, Tel Aviv 13/09/18.

*the food that connected and united us with great love, and that is my task now to.*"<sup>396</sup>

As testified by Rina food plays a fundamental role not only in passing on family memories, and indeed she takes pride in the fact that she is able to reproduce her mother's recipes accurately, but also in passing on Tunisian cultural heritage and specificity, as when she explains the peculiar traits of Tunisian cookery (delicate and rich). One of the factors that allowed to Mizrahi culinary traditions, and among them Tunisian one, to stay alive and to be passed on through generations is that there still are numerous people from the first and second generation alive and able to transmit their knowledge to the following generations. Even a younger interviewee such as Chen a 25-year-old woman from Tel Aviv, when it comes to Tunisian food and traditions is well aware of what we are talking about and makes a thorough list of dishes she consumes with her family:

*I am half Tunisian and half Syrian, but I would say the Tunisian side is more dominant.....my mom is Tunisian, she was born in Israel from Tunisian parents... well the culture now is mainly about food, we eat couscous fricassee, hamin<sup>397</sup>... the Tunisian version sweeter than the regular one... then there is Pkilla<sup>398</sup>... some fatty meat and semolina...and then you add it to the hamin... what else ? well the language... my parents know Arabic and French because those were the languages spoken by my grandparents... but I do not speak any actually ... we have Tunisian parties with darbuka... there is a*

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<sup>396</sup> Interview of the author with Rina, Tel Aviv 13/09/18.

<sup>397</sup> Hamin is a popular Jewish dish associated with home and family gathering time, usually for the Shabbat dinner. Hamin literally means heat and refers to its slow and long cooking method. There are many different versions of this dish both in the Mizrahi and in the Ashkenazi culinary culture.

<sup>398</sup> Pkilla or Bkeila is a Tunisian seasoning made of fried herbs, spinach and onion soaked in oil.

*lot of Tunisian music they still listen to.... On channel one they have all the Abdul Hakim... whoever... you have a lot of those guys... Fairouz... the famous ones.... [...] Yes, I think going back and visiting, making a root trip would be great!*<sup>399</sup>

From what emerged by the interviews and by periods of participant observation, young Israelis of Tunisian descent seems to be more aware of what is their cultural heritage compared to their Polish peers, especially when it comes to food. Food which they consider themselves as the main gateway to Tunisian cultural heritage, favoring its transmission between generations, together with music and language. Another trait that emerged from the interviews about Tunisian cultural heritage, lies in the pride Israelis of Tunisian descent feel for their traditions and cultural specificities. This happened especially with those interviewees belonging to the first generation to be born in Israel. On the other hand, for those who were more traditional and less Zionist, this process of preservation of their cultural heritage, was, and still is, a process of continuous renegotiation of one's identity in relation to present time political and social circumstances.

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To conclude, I want to consider and understand the relationship between life stories and life history: is the biography one builds for him/herself, and tells others, embedded in the historical events one has experienced or are there other motivating forces behind this process? This brings us back to Halbwachs and the concept of collective memory considered in the previous chapter, and at the beginning of this one, as the set of memories coming from the assembling of the memories of different groups in a society, and contributing to the creation of a shared collective memory regarding

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<sup>399</sup> Interview of the author with Chen, Tel Aviv 13/09/18.

a certain historical event or experience<sup>400</sup>. This explains, in a certain sense, also the similarity of the life stories, especially among members belonging to the second generation. The members of this generation, both in the Tunisian and in the Polish case, try to change the course of history by changing their own behavior as a reaction to that of their parents<sup>401</sup>. These reactions, intertwined with the attempt to develop an independent personality and an individual approach to what happened to their parents, allowed them to carry on their life stories while constructing their own, and maintaining a continuous interaction between the two. As we can see in the case of Hanna and Yael, they constructed their own personal life story in relation to that of their parents, trying, each in her own way, to carry on their histories and their cultural heritage. Hanna by celebrating Tunisian holidays, by conducting a research on the cult of female saints in Tunisia and by being involved in the activities of the World Federation of Tunisian Jews in Israel (*Federaziah ha-'olamit shel yihadut Tunisiyah be-Israel*) for the preservation of Tunisian cultural heritage in Israel (cultural events, publication of books, concerts, organization of heritage trips, etc.). Yael, on the other side, is a proud narrator of the story of her father that intertwines continuously with the History of the Holocaust and of Israel. While remembering her father's heritage as an artist, she is able to build her own life story which will keep a constant interaction with her father's. The fact that the majority of the interviewees are women, highlights the gendered dynamics of certain aspects of memory and cultural heritage transmission, especially in a private and familial environment. Gender, in fact, determines the way in which family history is remembered, especially in a migration context.<sup>402</sup> Memory is considered as a tool by women, used to come to terms with

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<sup>400</sup> Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*.

<sup>401</sup> Bar-On, *Fear and Hope*, 137.

<sup>402</sup> Mary Chamberlain and Selma Laydesdorff, "Transnational Families: Memories and Narratives," *Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs* 4/3 (2004): 227-241.

difficult or traumatizing past, either as individuals or as groups.<sup>403</sup> In our case for instance after the trauma of the Holocaust and of the migration and resettlement in a new, and not always welcoming, country.

As far as the younger generations are concerned, they seem to be still negotiating their identity in relation to their life story. The reality these youngsters are facing is quite different, they live in a modern developed country, facing a completely different situation from the one that Israelis only fifty years ago had to face. In such a situation, it is clear that their preoccupation with the past assumes a different meaning, as they try to make sense of it, by searching for significance in their own lives while simultaneously relating to what happened just two generations before. In this context, working through memories means going on reconstructing one's own biography in the present context by examining (rather than ignoring) the experiences and reactions of former generations<sup>404</sup>. As we have seen from the interviews, there is no simple relationship between life story and life history. While the life history frames the experience recounted in the personal narrative, the relationship between them may take many different routes through the generations.

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<sup>403</sup> Selma Leydesdorf, Luisa Passerini and Paul Thompson, *Gender and Memory*, ed. Selma Leydesdorf et al. (New York: Routledge, 2017), Ibook edition.

<sup>404</sup> Bar-On, *Fear and Hope*, 139.



## *Part II – Mise en récit publique and national narratives*

### *Chapter 1. National Narrative and Identity in the Public Sphere in Israel*

After having considered, in the previous part, the transmission and usage of memory and cultural heritage in the private sphere, in this new section I will proceed with the analysis of what happened in the public sphere. The question addressed here is: what versions of the past are being preserved, staged and passed on in public? In the specific case of Israel, it is interesting to understand which narratives and which ethnic voices found a space in the museum landscape, both official and recognized by the state and unofficial, especially in the form of heritage centers.

In the last two decades, there has been an exponential growth of studies related to memory and to the importance bestowed on it as the main component in the creation of groups' identity.<sup>405</sup> In Israel this is mirrored by the creation of many public places related to the commemoration of a number of founding events, for example: the establishment of the state, the Holocaust or the memory of the fallen in the many wars the country had faced so far.<sup>406</sup>

According to Aleida Assmann, remembering has an active and a passive side. While "institutions of active memory preserve the past as present, institutions of passive memory preserve the past as past".<sup>407</sup> This means that, in the first case, memory is actively circulated and displayed to fit and reinterpret the present time (canon), whilst in the second case it is just stored and used as an archive to know what happened in the past (archive).<sup>408</sup> This is an

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<sup>405</sup> Harth Dietrich, "The Invention of Cultural Memory" in *Cultural Memory Studies, An International Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 85-96.

<sup>406</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>407</sup> Assman, "Canon and Archive," 98.

<sup>408</sup> Assman, "Canon and Archive," 98.

important distinction if we consider that memory that is actively circulated, underwent a selection process and was staged by the hegemonic group to pass a specific message to the posterity. On the other hand, memory that is passively stored does not carry any preconceived message and needs to be interpreted. For this reason it can be considered an unmediated testimony of a given historical period, showing a version of history that remained untold. Similarly, cultural memory carries cultural messages that are directed to the posterity and intended for continuous use (active cultural memory). All the rest is defined as 'passive' cultural memory and, when decontextualized and deprived of its immediate recipients, it loses its intended meaning, leaving the way open for new interpretations. In the case of Israeli society both kinds of cultural memory, active and passive, are important and give us a chance to understand how that society came to be and developed throughout time, by analyzing how these memories were transmitted and staged. In fact, the active side of cultural memory supports the creation of a collective identity, based on a number of texts, places, persons and events that are used to constantly reaffirm the cultural capital and identity of a society. A number of institutions, such as the education system or the army, are charged of this task, and museums are among those that have a primary role in the preservations and development of cultural and collective memory, therefore shaping a nation's identity.<sup>409</sup> According to philosopher Michael Walzer, museums and monuments, whose aim is to represent a shared collective identity – the national one, but also that of smaller local communities – can be seen as indicators of the public recognition of ethnic minorities.<sup>410</sup> The fact that we live in increasingly multicultural societies makes the issue of recognition of identities even more

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<sup>409</sup> Tamar Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora in Israeli Vernacular Museums," in *Memory and Ethnicity: Ethnic Museums in Israel and the Diaspora*, ed. Emanuela Trevisan Semi, Dario Miccoli and Tudor Parfitt (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2013) 1.

<sup>410</sup> Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

poignant<sup>411</sup>. Equal recognition means a healthy democratic society, and its refusal could endanger the identity of those who are denied that recognition.<sup>412</sup> Museums are thus not only sites of cultural production but also of the reproduction of ethnic and national identities and of their display, negotiation and discussion in the public sphere. And in fact, they are used as assets in the realm of politics of recognition, where each group in a society is interested in carrying on its own history and culture. Their purpose is, first and foremost, to display a group's identity, providing the historical context for given narratives of the past, associated with national history, or the legacy of specific groups. Museums are thus considered as a stage to meet and discuss about different cultural heritages in a country. They are becoming more and more a place used not only by the state to present its master narrative, but also by smaller communities and minorities to represent their own memories, and, thus, version of history, boosting their sense of community and pride.<sup>413</sup>

While trying to understand how Israeli historiography and national narrative have been built over time, it is impossible not to notice the role that Zionist narrative occupied in the construction of the country's identity. In particular, the Holocaust played a key role in this narrative constituting the major event that symbolized Jewish

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<sup>411</sup> The idea of multiculturalism in contemporary political discourse and in political philosophy deals with how to understand and respond to the challenges associated with cultural and religious diversity. The term "multicultural" is often used as a descriptive term to characterize the fact of diversity in a society. But in what follows, the focus is on its prescriptive use in the context of Western liberal democratic societies. While the term has come to encompass a variety of prescriptive claims, it is fair to say that proponents of multiculturalism reject the ideal of the "melting pot" in which members of minority groups are expected to assimilate into the dominant culture in favor of an ideal in which members of minority groups can maintain their distinctive collective identities and practices. In the case of immigrants, proponents emphasize that multiculturalism is compatible with, not opposed to, the integration of immigrants into society; multiculturalism policies provide fairer terms of integration for immigrants. Cf. Sarah Song, "Multiculturalism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Edward Zalta (2017). <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/multiculturalism/>.

<sup>412</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26.

<sup>413</sup> Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Curator* 14/1 (1971), 11-24.

suffering and persecution in the Diaspora. The connection between the terms Holocaust and rebirth, sacrifice and heroism, and the establishment of the state of Israel were the main focus of research for Israeli historians until very recently.

For this reason, it is difficult to find an example of research on collective memory about Israel, that does not address, in some way, the basic issues brought up by the ever-present Zionist national narrative in Israeli life<sup>414</sup>. At the beginning, during the first years of existence of the state, the Zionist narrative, based on a Eurocentric cultural model and on the memory of the Holocaust, was accepted without being publicly questioned, as it was the unifying factor making it possible to establish a national community, by unifying Jews in Palestine and abroad for the cause of Israel. During the years this narrative was challenged, but managed to preserve and reproduce its own hegemony and legacy throughout time.<sup>415</sup> In the Israeli democratic context, hegemony was especially cultural, and it meant that the Zionist national narrative was understood as “objective history” and therefore deemed irrefutable by most Israelis of the time.<sup>416</sup> This narrative offered a wider national meaning to the personal sacrifice committed by individuals towards the establishment of the state. Along with the narrative of destruction and rebirth, linked to the Holocaust and the establishment of the state, another tenet of the Zionist narrative was the ‘melting pot’. The concept of melting pot, originally American, has been translated in the Israeli context to an ethical and mythical enterprise of creation a new nation, Israel, evolving on its historical territory through the ‘ingathering of the exiles’. However, three main issues threatened

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<sup>414</sup> Michael Feige, “Introduction: Rethinking Israeli Memory and Identity,” *Israel Studies* 7/2 (2002), v-xiv; Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2014).

<sup>415</sup> As Antonio Gramsci stated in his writings on hegemony, the hegemonic position of a regime can be preserved only at the price of a relentless work to maintain that hegemony, and it can be lost at any time, when the ruling group is no longer able to manage all the groups composing that society, and to impose on them its own view of how that society should exist. Cf. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (Torino: Einaudi, 2014).

<sup>416</sup> Feige, “Introduction,” vi.

the successful implementation of the Zionist ideal of melting pot: Zionism negative relation to Oriental Jewry; the religious fanaticism of Ultra-Orthodox circles; and, finally, in the general elitism expressed by the cultural elite of pioneers. As defined by historian Yosef Gorny, Zionism succeeded in creating a “minimum” melting pot, meaning a Hebrew-Zionist framework culture, that allowed for the creation of a unified society, without, however, managing to integrate all the newcomers.<sup>417</sup> In fact, the initial attempts to create a common national identity based on Zionist values, suppressing all different cultural identities quickly failed, leading to a more divided and polarized society.<sup>418</sup>

This was clear for the first time in the late 1970s, when the socialist party in power for the first 30 years of the state’s existence (Mapai) lost the elections to its right-wing opponent, guided by Menachem Begin.<sup>419</sup> This upheaval of unprecedented proportions showed the many shortcomings of the Zionist narrative of the melting pot and of the successful ingathering of the exiles. In fact, after the decline of the Ashkenazi cultural and political hegemony, a number of groups, until then underrepresented, such as Oriental Jews, Religious and Orthodox Jews, Russian Jews struggled against each other to gain more power and prominence within Israeli society. <sup>420</sup> The fact that there was no, or little, agreement among these groups on the multicultural nature of Israeli society pushed sociologist Baruch Kimmerling to believe that the State of Israel was “heading towards a cultural war, rather than towards multiculturalism.”<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Yosef Gorny, “The ‘Melting Pot’ in Zionist Thought,” *Israel Studies* 6/3 (2001): 54-70.

<sup>418</sup> Michael Walzer, “Comment,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 99.

<sup>419</sup> This change of government marked an important milestone for the political and social history of the state, bringing to the surface tensions and issues so far silenced. “Israeli elections 1977”: <https://en.idi.org.il/israeli-elections-and-parties/elections/1977/>; Asher Arian, *The Elections in Israel 1977* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1980); Don Peretz, “The Earthquake: Israel’s Ninth Knesset Elections,” *Middle East Journal*, 31/ 3 (1977), 251–266.

<sup>420</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, “The New Israelis: A Plurality of Cultures without Multiculturalism,” *Alpayim* 16 (1998): 264-308 (Hebrew).

<sup>421</sup> Kimmerling, “The New Israelis,” 1.

Other scholars, such as Menahem Mautner, Avraham Sagi and Ronen Shamir offered different thoughts on the situation, identifying the premises for multiculturalism in Israel.<sup>422</sup> Nevertheless, they agreed with Kimmerling in stating that Israeli society is currently not a multicultural one, since the groups composing it are mutually rejecting, rather than accepting, each another.<sup>423</sup>

In conclusion, it seems like most scholars in Israel tend not to consider Israeli society to be a multicultural one, since there is an ongoing struggle among the different groups for the control of the political, cultural and economic arena.<sup>424</sup> There is however an undeniable common ground unifying all Jewish Israelis and this can be identified in two main points, valid until today: the ingathering of the exiles and the Holocaust.

### *1.2 A new kind of history*

The political upheaval of the 1977 elections was due to a set of reasons: political (the Yom Kippur war and corruptions scandals hitting the Mapai party), but also demographic and social, in particular connected to ingathering of different ethnic groups (namely Mizrahim) and their integration. In fact, during those years, many of the immigrants from Muslim and Arab countries grew an increasing resentment towards the patronizing attitude of the Zionist Mapai establishment which culminated in the Black Panthers movement and the results of the 1977 elections.<sup>425</sup> The change of

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<sup>422</sup> Firstly, they maintain that each group has its own system of beliefs, ethos and practices, and that, to create its own identity, each group relies not only on this set of values, but also on the rejection of those belonging to other groups. Secondly, the formation of a very specific identity for each group may lead that same group to refrain from dialogue. And finally, having each group a more or less defined political identity, there may be fights over political, cultural or economic institutions. Cf. Menahem Mautner, Avraham Sagi and Ronen Shamir, *Multiculturalism in a Democratic and Jewish State* (Tel Aviv: Ramot, 1998) (Hebrew).

<sup>423</sup> Walzer, *Politics and Passion*; Dan Maoz, "The Most Israeli," *T\_o\_'a\_r\_* November (2011), 11-14 (Hebrew).

<sup>424</sup> Dan Maoz, "The Most Israeli."

<sup>425</sup> Another wave of protests based on ethnic grounds were the Wadi Salib riots in 1959. The main aim of both protest movements was to end the discrimination

the party ruling the state resulted in a weakening of the thus far all-powerful Zionist Socialist narrative and to its revision according to the values and interests of the party in power.

At this point a series of 'history wars' started to take place, putting under the spotlight the arbitrariness of a narrative, the Zionist one, that only some years before seemed to be set in stone.<sup>426</sup> This was possible due to a series of different reasons. Firstly, in the 1980s, the Zionist narrative gradually became less of service to the existence of the state, which led to its being taken for granted and, eventually, to its erosion.<sup>427</sup> In the second place, maintaining a socialist narrative became more and more demanding vis-à-vis a different social and economic situation and the new goals of the state, i.e. economic and technological development. Lastly, and not less importantly, a number of archival sources became available to researchers, making it possible to deconstruct the Zionist mythological narrative of the establishment of the state.<sup>428</sup>

The change of the party leading the government led to a change in the country's political balance and contributed to a decline of the old political and intellectual elites. This allowed for the emergence of a new class of sociologists and historians who gave the start to a more critical social thought and started to reconsider elements and events that were tenets of the Zionist narrative and, with them, the conception that had existed thus far of Israeli history and society.<sup>429</sup>

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carried on by the Ashkenazi group against the mainly North African Mizrahi group. For more on this see Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 321-322.

<sup>426</sup> Joseph Heller, "Alternative Narratives and Collective Memories: Israel's New Historians and the Use of Historical Context," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42/4 (2006): 571-586; Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 408.

<sup>427</sup> Feige, "Introduction," vii.

<sup>428</sup> "During most of Israel's history, Israeli social science was perceived as an integral part of the state- building process and the formation of the new society. In fact, the institutionalization of sociology and the evolution of the state coincided in many ways. The men and women who created this professional community became part of the society's elite. They offered their services to the Zionist venture because they were highly committed ideologically or because this was the only way to be integrated in the new society and its power structure." Cf. Kimmerling, "Sociology," 457.

<sup>429</sup> Anita Shapira and Derek J. Penslar, *Israeli Historical Revisionism: From Left to Right* (New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003); Derek J. Penslar, *Israel in History, The Jewish State in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 25.

The group of scholars who led this renewal effort was referred to as “new historians” and “critical sociologists”.<sup>430</sup> These academics, started to reexamine historical events, such as the war of Independence and the ingathering of the exiles, in the light of a series of Israeli Government papers that were declassified in 1978, 30 years after the establishment of the state. The Zionist narrative of these events, so far accepted as historical truth and considered by the Zionist establishment as the tenet of Israel’s identity, was scrutinized and questioned. Therefore, the emergence of a new generation of historians and sociologists changed the way Israel’s past was discussed in public, leading to a growing awareness towards the past and its representations.

In addition to that, the aging of the pioneering elite and the War of Independence veterans, pushed Zionist ideology and narrative even more into the realm of the past. These groups were mainly formed by European Ashkenazi immigrants, and as time passed, and their leadership dwindled, new ideologies and social groups, notably capitalism in the economic environment, and religious Mizrahi Jews in politics, started to emerge, and to require a share of the power. Against this background, the issue of memory, meaning the reproduction of the symbolic capital of the Zionist elite, became a

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<sup>430</sup> The term “new historians” was coined in 1988 by Benny Morris, one of the main representatives of this movement. Along with him other historians associated with the movement are: Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim and Simha Flapan. Following, many other academics, including historical sociologists such as Baruch Kimmerling, Tom Segev and Idith Zertal joined the movement. The work of these historians was made possible thanks to the disclosure of Israeli government archives that were declassified 30 years after the establishment of the state. Initially dismissed, the new Historians eventually gained legitimacy in Israel in the 1990s. Some of their work has been included in the political ideology defined as post-Zionism. However, it should be remarked that these historians even if categorized under a common label, hold different political views.

Cf. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1947-1951* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1992); Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: Norton, 2000); Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987); Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Culture and Military in Israel*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: Free Press, 1984); Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).



source of conflict, and the Zionist ethos became liable of being examined and contested.<sup>431</sup>

As a reply to this decline a series of museums and memorial sites were established both in cities and in kibbutzim to remember the endeavors of the pioneers.<sup>432</sup> On the same line, a number of museums telling the story of the different paramilitary forces that fought for the independence of the country, such as the *Palmach* and the *Haganah* were created along the years.<sup>433</sup> This switch from a spontaneous to a more official memorialization and “heritagization” happened as the social reality of Israel was radically changing in the 1980s, and the historical events of the pioneering and early state years were fading more and more into a distant past.<sup>434</sup> The memorialization of the Zionist version of national history via museums, monuments and memoirs thus became a crucial task for the European/Ashkenazi/Zionist elite, whose hegemony was more and more subsiding due to the political and social changes described above. In this process, and as an integral part of the European/Ashkenazi narrative in Israel, was included the Holocaust, seen as the paradigmatic trauma that marked European, and in particular Polish, Jewry.<sup>435</sup>

In this section, I am thus going to consider how the role of museums has changed throughout time, passing from a space used to represent the master narrative to a space that could also convey the

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<sup>431</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, "Sociology, Ideology and Nation-Building: Palestinians and their Meaning in Israeli Society," *American Sociological Review* 57 (1992): 446-460; Kimmerling, *The Invention*; Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

<sup>432</sup> Tamar Katriel, *Performing the Past: A Study of Israeli Settlement Museums* (New Jersey: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>433</sup> The Palmach (1941- 1950) Hebrew: פלמ"ח, acronym for *Plugot Maḥatz*, lit. "strike forces") was the elite fighting force of the Haganah, the underground army of the Jewish community in British mandatory Palestine.

The Haganah (Hebrew: ההגנה, lit. The Defence) was a Jewish paramilitary organization in the British Mandate of Palestine (1921–48), which became the core of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Cf. Avner Ben Amos, "The Palmach Museum in Tel Aviv: the Past as a Space of Education, Entertainment and Discipline," *Museum History Journal* 8/2 (2015): 147-167; Ofer Boord, "The War of Independence Exhibited: A Study of Three Israeli Museums," *Israel Studies* 21/1 (2016): 82-108.

<sup>434</sup> Ana Milošević, "Historicizing the present: Brussels attacks and heritagization of spontaneous memorials," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24/1 (2018): 53-65; Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora."

<sup>435</sup> Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*.

stories and perceptions of smaller communities such as, for instance, Jews of Oriental origin.<sup>436</sup> In the Israeli case, in particular, I will consider how this public representation was adapted, or not, to a situation where circumstances and power relations within society were shifting very rapidly.

In the following chapters (2 and 3) I will thus consider the role national museums played, especially in relation to two fundamental components of Israeli identity and memory, such as ethnicity and the Holocaust. Following, in chapter number 4 and 5, the case of ethnic museums and heritage centers representing European/Polish and Tunisian/Oriental cultural heritage will be considered. Finally, it will be presented a recent turn in the realm of memory and public commemoration, that is the use of the internet as a 'catalyst' for new ways of sharing memories and creating identities.<sup>437</sup> This trend has reached unprecedented dimensions in the last few decades, replacing more traditional modes of memorialization and making memory more and more a subject of public debate.

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<sup>436</sup> Ruth Kark and Noam Peri, "Museums and Multiculturalism in Israel," *Horizons in Geography* 79/80 (2008): 91.

<sup>437</sup> Feige, "Introduction," x.



## Chapter 2. Ethnic museums and heritage centers in Israel

In the last two decades, the use of museums and heritage centers as builders of collective identities has proliferated on a global scale.<sup>438</sup> These institutions are the expression not only of the state narrative, but, especially in the case of heritage centers, of the memory of minorities and marginalized communities.<sup>439</sup>

According to anthropologist Tamar Katriel, in Israel, there is a lively museum scene, especially when it comes to heritage centers and ethnic museums.<sup>440</sup> Having approximately 9 millions of residents in 2019, the state of Israel has over 200 museums in the fields of art, archeology, history of the Land of Israel and the Jewish people, nature, science and technology.<sup>441</sup> However, only 61 of these 200 museums are recognized by the Ministry of Culture and Sport under the Museums Act of 1983 and, thus, are financially supported by it.<sup>442</sup> The geographical distribution of museums and heritage centers is quite uniform throughout the country, as they can be found in peripheral cities, kibbutzim and moshavim, as well as in big cities. Museums provide a public platform to create and shape national and ethnic identities and display a specific version of the past.<sup>443</sup>

In particular, the representation of ethnicity in the public sphere has faced many changes during the years, to match the constantly

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<sup>438</sup> Sharon J. Macdonald, "Museum, National, Postnational and Transnational Identities," in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Bettina Messias Carbonell (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 273-286.

<sup>439</sup> As underlined by Tamar Katriel in her contribution to the volume *Memory and Ethnicity*, museums and heritage centers are key players in what Charles Taylor defined as 'the politics of recognition'. He maintains that identities are also shaped by recognition, or the absence thereof. "Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being." The need for recognition is defined by Taylor as one of "the driving forces in politics."

Cf. Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora," 1 and Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26.

<sup>440</sup> Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora," 1

<sup>441</sup> "Central Bureau of Statistics Homepage," Last modified December 2019, <https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/pages/default.aspx>

<sup>442</sup> "Ministry of Culture and Sport - Museums and Plastic Art," [https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/Units/museums\\_plastic\\_art](https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/Units/museums_plastic_art)

<sup>443</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998).

changing Israeli ethnic and social panorama.<sup>444</sup> For instance, the ethnic identity awakening of the 1980s has manifested itself also through the establishment of a number of (ethnic) museums. This trend has continued till today, considered that in the last three decades the proportion of ethnographic museums increased, reaching 10% of all the museums in the country.<sup>445</sup> A good example of the ongoing progression of the phenomena is the attempt to establish an ethnic museum for Ethiopian Jewry in Israel.<sup>446</sup>

The main questions emerging from these data are: why there has been a surge in the number of these small and very specific museums? and why some ethnic groups have their own museum while others do not? This pushes us to reflect again on the issues of recognition and legitimation, especially from the part of the state.

The main ethnographic museum dedicated to the ethnic communities in the Jewish Diaspora is the Museum of the Jewish People in Beit HaTefutzot.

This museum, established almost 50 years ago, offered quite a stereotyped version of the history and culture of the different Jewish communities in the Diaspora, without fully representing the cultural diversity characterizing Israel and without trying to establish a dialogue between the different ethnic groups and cultural heritages.<sup>447</sup> This museum well exemplifies the Zionist Eurocentric attitude of the time and showcases the narrative of destruction and

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<sup>444</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1969); Shlomo Deshen, "Political Ethnicity and Cultural Ethnicity in Israel during the 1960s," in *Urban Ethnicity*, ed. Abner Cohen (London: Tavistock, 1974), 281–309; Hanna Herzog, "Ethnicity as a product of political negotiation: the case of Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7 (4) (1984): 517–533.

<sup>445</sup> Kark and Peri, "Museums and Multiculturalism."

<sup>446</sup> Ayanawu Farada Sanbetu, "Museum on History of Ethiopian Jewry to Be Built in Rehovot," *Haaretz*, July 13, 2005, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4920747>.

<sup>447</sup> The negation of the Diaspora (Heb: שלילת הגולה, shlilat ha'golah) is one of the tenets of Zionist ideology. This concept maintains that Jewish life outside Zion would only lead to persecution or assimilation. Therefore, it proposes as a solution the creation of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, which would become the spiritual center of the entire Jewish people. Cf. Eliezer Schweid, "The Rejection of the Diaspora in Zionist thought: Two approaches," *Studies in Zionism*, 5/1 (1984): 43-70; Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 47-59.

rebirth at the base of the state's existence. The situation started to change during the late 1980s and 1990s, when non- hegemonic ethnic groups started to gain political power and to demand for recognition of their cultural heritage, bringing the issue of representation at the center of the Israeli cultural and museum debate.<sup>448</sup>

At the same time, a number of *entrepreneurs de mémoire* took the matter into their hands and begun establishing their own museums and cultural heritage centers to represent their past in a way they felt it was not previously included in the official state narrative. These museums, while keeping the Jewish tradition as the common point, displayed the differences among the cultures of the various communities within Israeli society, ending up mixing different museum categories. Such as, for instance, the traditional museum and the ethnographic museum.<sup>449</sup> Usually, these smaller institutions are active in portraying one specific ethnic group and its heritage, bringing to the front the debate about the relationship between Israeli identity and the different heritages ailing from the Diaspora. Correspondingly, the focus of the hegemonic Zionist narrative was widened and challenged throughout time by including in the public debate voices representing other sectors of Israeli society. The consequence was an "ethnicization" of the Israeli museum scene, mirroring both a reconfiguration of the ethnic hierarchies in Israeli society and a reconsideration of the role played by Jewish Diasporas in the creation of Israeli society and culture. <sup>450</sup>

### *2.1 National ethnic museums: Beit HaTefutzot*

A case in point for this change of direction is constituted by the history of the Beit HaTefutzot museum (Hebrew for "House of the Diasporas") established in 1978 in the campus of Tel Aviv

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<sup>448</sup> Yaron Tsur, "Israeli historiography and the ethnic problem," in *Making Israel*, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 231-277.

<sup>449</sup> Kark and Peri, "Museums and Multiculturalism."

<sup>450</sup> Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora," 2.

University. The main aim of this institution was to create a collective memory for all the different ethnic groups in Israel at the time. Up until today this museum is the only Israeli institution in charge of transmitting to future generations the memory of the Jewish world in Diaspora as a unique epos.<sup>451</sup> Despite being devoted to the history of Jewish life in Diaspora, the Beit HaTefutzot Museum presented, since its creation, a teleological narrative of Israel/Zion as the only possible homeland for the Jewish people.<sup>452</sup>

Originally named the Nahum Goldmann Museum of Jewish Diaspora, after its founder Nahum Goldman, the museum documented the cultural and religious background of Jewish communities throughout the world and the history of their return to Zion. The permanent exhibition, organized in seven different themes (family, community, remembrance, faith, culture, creation, existence and return to Zion), aimed at conveying a very specific narrative: the Zionist narrative of return to the land of Israel.

This line of thought was clear from the beginning and was coherent with the biographies and the beliefs of the founders: Abba Kovner, Nahum Goldman, Jesaja Weinberg and Meyer Weisgal<sup>453</sup>. All of them were fervent Zionists of East European origin and believed that their task was to tell the story of the Jewish Diasporas that ended

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<sup>451</sup> Shelly Shenhav-Keller, "Invented Exhibits: Visual Politics of the Past at the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora," in *Memory and Ethnicity: Ethnic Museums in Israel and the Diaspora*, ed. Emanuela Trevisan Semi, Dario Miccoli and Tudor Parfitt (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2013) 23.

<sup>452</sup> Shenhav-Keller, "Invented Exhibits"; Deborah Golden, "The Museum of the Jewish Diaspora Tells a Story," in *The Tourist Image*, ed. Tom Selwyn (Winchester: John Wiley and Sons, 1996).

<sup>453</sup> "About us – Founders," <https://www.bh.org.il/about-us/founders/>  
Abba Kovner (1918-1987): artist, writer and poet, he was a partisan fighter during World War II and a member of HaShomer haTzair youth Zionist movement. He made 'Aliyah in 1947 and created the concept of the first core exhibition of the Museum. Nahum Goldman (1895-1982): Statesman and Zionist leader, he was president of the Jewish Agency and the main thinker behind the idea of establishing the Beit HaTefutzot museum to spread the knowledge of Diaspora life among the younger generations. Jesaja Weinberg (1918-2000): made 'Aliyah in 1933 and was an active member of HaShomer haTzair youth Zionist movement. He was the first director of the Museum from 1976 until 1981. Meyer Weisgal (1894-1977): was a public figure, Zionist businessman, and fundraiser, who emigrated in the USA in 1905. He was also the first president of Beit HaTefutzot in the early 1970's and promoted the planning process that led to the museum's opening.

with the establishment of the state of Israel<sup>454</sup>. Accordingly, the original exhibition overlooked most Jewish modern history, and omitted completely the history of the Jewish Diasporas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, contemporary to the existence of the state of Israel. Hence, in its first realization, the museum was conceived to respond to a very precise need, that of supporting the master narrative of the Zionist national enterprise, even at the cost of marginalizing those groups and narratives that were not complying with it.

The trajectory of each thematic section is similar to the others: it begins with the integration and cultural prosperity of Jewish communities in a given region, only to be followed by crisis, persecution and the end of Jewish life. Both in the case of Eastern European Ashkenazi communities and in that of Oriental Mizrahi ones, Jewish life and mores in the Diaspora were represented in a folkloric way and, in some cases, even as backwards and pre-modern. Zooming in on the representations of Tunisian and Polish Jewry that were offered in the old core exhibition, in both cases we can see that life in the Diaspora is represented following a double standard. In fact, the traditional/religious part of those communities is represented as backward and primitive, as opposed to the Zionist activists that are portrayed in a completely different light, as modern and educated. Here below we can see two pictures that were part of the original core exhibition: the one on top represents a group of religious Jews in the Ghriba synagogue in Djerba; while the one on the bottom represents Tunisian women in their traditional costume.

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<sup>454</sup> As reported by Jesaja Weinberg, the head of the founding team of the Museum and its first director from 1978 to 1985. Quoted in Shenhav-Keller, "Invented Exhibits," 24, from "Aspect of Uniqueness," in *Beit Ha-Tefutzot: The First Ten Years*, eds. Yossi Avner and Geoffrey Vigoder (Tel Aviv: Beit HaTefutzot, 1988) [Hebrew], 21.





Image 8 - Rabbis at the entrance of El Ghriba synagogue, Tunisia, 1940's. Beit HaTefutzot, the Oster Visual Documentation Center. Courtesy of Charles Hadad, France.



Image 9 - Two Jewish girls in traditional clothes, Tunis, Tunisia, c1906 Photo: David Fairchild, USA (Beth Hatefustoth Photo Archive).

In the first one, a group of religious men is represented in traditional clothes and with a long beard in front of the El Ghriba synagogue. In the second one two Jewish girls are portrayed in a traditional attire, sitting on a sofa, probably in a private home. Both pictures can be

deemed as orientalist in their style.<sup>455</sup> In particular, the second one, is not contextualized in the museum and is presented as the typical image of two traditional Tunisian girls. There is no reference to the fact that, often times, this kind of pictures was staged and taken in a photographic studio as a souvenir, as it was customary at the time. Not explaining the context in which the picture was taken contributes in offering a stereotypical and Orientalized image of the Tunisian Jewish community.<sup>456</sup>

On the other hand, a series of pictures portraying the Tunisian Zionist youth movement is also included in the collection of the museum, as showed by the picture here below. In this case Tunisian Jews are presented wearing modern clothes, performing Zionist activities such as scouting, parading or singing in a choir.<sup>457</sup> The contrast is clear between the traditional and backwards representation given of non-Zionist Jews, and the modern one offered of Zionist Jews that, in such a way, were placed on the other pole of the Tunisian Jewish existence, the one looking at the Zionist enterprise as the only solution for the Jewish Diaspora.



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<sup>455</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

<sup>456</sup> Marianne Hirsh and Leo Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time: Reframing Difference* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).

<sup>457</sup> "Tunis," <https://dbs.bh.org.il/place/tunis> .

Image 10 - Isasac Luzon (center) during a morning parade at Hashomer Hatzahir summer camp, Tunisia, 1946 (Beth Hatefutsoth Photo Archive, courtesy of Menachem Luzon, Israel).

Regarding Polish Jews, the documentation and the presence in the old core exhibition was wider. However, the same “orientalizing” pattern used in the case of Tunisian Jews can be noticed to some extent in this case too. In fact, the representation of non-Zionist, religious Polish Jewish communities was equally type casted to give the idea of a primitive world. Here below an example of such a typecasting image, where an old Jew wearing traditional clothes and with a long beard is depicted in the streets of Zamosc.



Image 11 - Jews in the street, Zamosc, May 1941. Beit HaTefutzot, the Visual Documentation Center. Courtesy of Samuel Levin, Israel.

In the pictures here below are represented instead Zionist activists in Poland, with a group picture of the members of Kibbutz Tel Hai in

Zamosc and the gathering of a parade of a Zionist youth movement near Lodz, both taken in the 1930s.<sup>458</sup>



Image 12: Members of Kibbutz Tel Hai, Zamosc, July 20, 1934, Beit HaTefutzot, the Visual Documentation Center. Courtesy of Esther Hering, Israel.



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<sup>458</sup> In the mid 1930s the largest kibbutz movement was actually located in Poland, and most kibbutz members in Palestine began their socialization into kibbutz life in Poland well before reaching Palestine.

Cf. Rona Yona, "A kibbutz in the diaspora: The pioneer movement in Poland and the Klosova kibbutz," *The Journal of Israeli History* 31/1 (2012): 9-43; Yael Zerubavel, "The Politics of Interpretation: Tel Hai in Israeli Collective Memory," *AJS (Association for Jewish Studies) Review* 16 (1991): 133-160; Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

Image 13: Zionist youth movement parade on Lag ba-omer in Helnowek near Lodz. Poland, 1930's. Beit HaTefutzot, The Visual Documentation Center.

Both in the Tunisian and in the Polish case, the pictures representing traditional Jews portray very serious people, while, on the other side, pictures representing the pioneering efforts of both communities portray smiling and active people, as to put the two into contrast.<sup>459</sup> In both cases, Jewish life in the Diaspora was represented in the museum's collection as an historical phase of Jewish history, a rather negative one, putting all the emphasis on the last, and conclusive, event of Jewish history, the return to Zion.

The first core exhibit of the museum was thus created to display the epic narrative promoted by Zionism and shared by many Jews in the Diaspora, both in the past and in present times, i.e. that of a return to Zion. In so doing the founders' goal was to create an imagined community that would unite all the diasporas under the Zionist umbrella, rather than portraying and giving a voice to all the different Jewish diasporic communities, their cultures and their heritages.<sup>460</sup> Accordingly, the museum's permanent exhibition was conceived as a recreation of the Diaspora world through images, representations and storytelling, rather than through the exhibition of different objects. The researcher Shelly Shenkar-Keller defined it as an "invented exhibit", because, as opposed to most museums, the original core exhibition of the Beit HaTefutzot privileged "theme and message over the collection and exhibition of authentic and original objects."<sup>461</sup> This mode of exhibition, including large key exhibits such as painted walls, statues and models of reconstructed buildings was defined by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as an "in-situ displays [that] prefer the 'experience' [and] are inclined towards thematization and create a virtual world".<sup>462</sup> This choice, which was maintained throughout the years, was justified by the lack of original material

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<sup>459</sup> Hirsh and Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time*.

<sup>460</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso Books, 1983).

<sup>461</sup> Shenhav-Keller, "Invented Exhibits," 24.

<sup>462</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*.



of the most basic nature such as: “What is the nation? Who are its people? How did it get this way?”<sup>467</sup>

A partial answer to these questions can be found on the Museum’s website, where it is stated that the new enterprise wants to tell “the ongoing and extraordinary story of the Jewish people,” connecting them “to their roots and strengthen[ing] their personal and collective Jewish identity.”<sup>468</sup> The emphasis on the ongoing-ness of Jewish history, be it in the Diaspora or in Israel, shows how the Zionist narrative of a clear, and desirable, division between the Diaspora and life in Israel was left behind, in favor of a new and more inclusive Jewish identity, both within and outside Israel. Due to be launched in early 2020, the new display has been conceived in a very different way, featuring a collection of original materials and objects rather than just replicas, as it was in the old core exhibition. All these authentic objects are exhibited to represent material culture of the various Jewish Diasporas: including books, tools and objects, as well as art works.

The main ambition of the new Museum is to nurture a sense of belonging among Jewish visitors and to strengthen their Jewish identity, while serving as the central address for Jewish discourse, engagement and learning for Jewish individuals, families, communities and organizations from Israel and around the world.<sup>469</sup> And, in fact, the main aim of the curator, Orit Shaham Gover, is to combine together material culture artifacts reflecting given times and places and works of art in every section of the new exhibit, to put the past in dialogue with the present. Finally, the new museum will also serve as a place for the research documentation, collection and concentration of knowledge on issues related to the Jewish people throughout history. As the CEO of the Museum, Avinoam Armoni, stated when the project of renovation of the Museum started:

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<sup>467</sup> Curthoys, “How Australia’s Histories.”

<sup>468</sup> “About us”: <https://www.bh.org.il/about-us/about-beit-hatfutsot/>.

<sup>469</sup> “About us.”

*"We know that there is still thriving life in the Diaspora, meaning we need a different approach. [...] The transformation means we will no longer focus on the Diaspora part of the story, but we'll tell the Jewish story. It will start with Abraham and Sarah from the Bible, and there will be no end - it will continue to develop, as the story of the Jewish people is still unfolding... We are inviting our visitors - both Jewish and non-Jewish - to add something to the museum. We are designing a museum that is interactive, that will make room for visitors to leave a mark."<sup>470</sup>*

By saying that the Museum "needs a different approach", he implies that the concept at the basis of the previous museum and core exhibition became outdated and that the Zionist juxtaposition of Diaspora and Israel is no longer valid today.

This concept definitely leaves more space for the representation of different narratives, so far marginalized, that are going to be hosted in the renewed museum and core exhibition. One example of this is the temporary exhibition already on display in the hall of the museum entitled "Operation Moses: 30 years after".<sup>471</sup> By displaying the story of the absorption of ten Ethiopian immigrants and their families, from the 1984 till 2014, the exhibition puts under the spotlight the story of a community that is often left aside. The story in the exhibition is told from the vantage point of those who lived it, presenting lights and shadows of a complex immigration and integration story. Another example of the opening of the new museum to the cultural and artistic contribution of the different ethnic groups making up contemporary Israeli society is given also by the art exhibition

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<sup>470</sup> "Second life for Beit HaTefutzot Museum of the Jewish People," [https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/IsraelExperience/Pages/Beit\\_Hatfutsot\\_Museum-Jan\\_2012.aspx](https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/IsraelExperience/Pages/Beit_Hatfutsot_Museum-Jan_2012.aspx).

<sup>471</sup> "Operation Moses: 30 Years After,": <https://www.bh.org.il/event/operation-moses-30-years-2/>.



“United Colors of Judaica – Eliahou Eric Bokobza – Multiple Jewish Identities: A New Perspective,” quoted also in the introduction. The artist, born from a Tunisian family that made Aliyah in 1969 from France, grew up in Israel and, being in between the French and the Israeli culture, chose to evoke in his work the role of ethnicity, nationality and tradition in shaping Israeli culture. In particular speaking about the painting “The Family” (next page), the artist stated:

*“My parents moved to Paris from Tunis one year before I was born. I was never French, if we are speaking of citizenship, I am a Tunisian who arrived in Israel. The painting (The family) that I painted [...], also contains the Eastern (in Hebrew Mizrahim) elements that were so important to me to define as a part of the identity of my painting, but if you look at the boy, it is quite clear that he has much of the European boy, of the Diaspora boy who is not from here. [...] When my parents immigrated to Israel, from one side you can say that they moved from Europe to Israel, but from their point of view they were returning to the East (in Hebrew Mizrah). They left Tunis, they arrived in the West and when they immigrated to Israel, it was always very clear to me, through them, that this place is not Europe, what many people do not realize to this day.”<sup>472</sup>*

And indeed, in the painting (here below), not only is portrayed a woman wearing a traditional Tunisian Muslim attire (probably a servant to the family), but also half of the background repeats the cliché of a house with an Eastern architecture (dome) and an olive tree on the side, and the other half an eye (evil eye) that is

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<sup>472</sup> “Artists on Art: Eliahou Eric Bokobza - lecture at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AecZkTpy5I>.

traditionally found in North African and Middle Eastern traditions as a sign against bad luck. In the paintings of the artist, especially those of this series, are presented an amalgam of elements that represent the environment in which the painter grew up, which was “also Mizrahi but not only. It was also Western, through France, and somehow also Jewish, even if not predominantly Jewish.” Judaism is always represented in the paintings of Bokobza as a detail of a complex picture, rather than the main theme.

The exhibition exposed in the Beit HaTefutzot Museum between 2015 and 2016 was divided into three main sections: *La Famiglia* (the family) representing personal and family dramas; *Holidays* depicting Jewish festivals and *Lifecycle* reproducing a series of passage rites, such as the Bar Mitzvah. The incorporation of many different themes such as Judaism, ethnic identities, personal stories, migration speaks of a will of the author, but also of the museum hosting his exhibit, of reconciling all these elements in a secular Jewish identity.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> “About,” <http://ebokobza.com/about/>.



Image 14: Eliahu Eric Bokobza, "Family", Oil on canvas, 2000.<sup>474</sup>

Temporary exhibitions such as the latter anticipate the general atmosphere of the new museum, which will include a number of stories and narratives that were previously left out of the mainstream narrative. For example, those of other diaspora communities, notably the North and South American ones; those of Jewish women, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, Ethiopian Jews and other non-Ashkenazi Jewish populations. The new museum, in fact, will "not try to define who is a Jew and [...] will be open to anyone who wants to discover their roots, values and history".<sup>475</sup>

As for the core exhibit, the concept at its base it is also quite innovative: starting from the present time, it will take the visitor on a time travel into the life of past Jewish communities all around the world. The main idea is to represent a story in constant renewal and composed of multiple facets, adopting a pluralistic, inclusive

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<sup>474</sup> "Family," <http://ebokobza.com/family/>.

<sup>475</sup> Dan Pine, "Museum of the Diaspora."

approach. Here below we can see a simulation from the opening synopsis that will be built in the new core exhibition: a big circular world map including all Jewish Diasporas, and the different countries they come from or live in, till today.



Image 15 - Beit HaTefutzot website<sup>476</sup>

As opposed to the old one, the new exhibition will be marked by three central themes only: Narrative: the unique and ongoing story of the Jewish people; Identity: Jewish Peoplehood and Participation: You are part of the story.<sup>477</sup> These three themes aim respectively at showing: how Jews lived and live today in different places and countries; how do they connect around the world with other Jewish communities and the state of Israel and how did/do they express their Jewish identity in all these different context; and, finally, an arena where the visitors are asked to speak up and to explore their own connection to Jewish life and Judaism. This last theme is the one that the curatorial team willingly put as the unifying theme of the entire exhibition, to make it as inclusive and contemporary as possible, while keeping showcasing the Jewish past and history.

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<sup>476</sup> "About the New Core Exhibition," <https://www.bh.org.il/exhibitions/new-core-exhibition/>.

<sup>477</sup> "About the New Core Exhibition."



### Chapter 3. Holocaust museums – Yad Vashem

If the history of Jewish communities outside Israel has been displayed to different extents in national ethnographic museums, notably Beit HaTefutzot, a gap was left in representing one of the events that marked the most European Jewish history and Israeli identity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Holocaust.

Yad Vashem was the first national museum of any kind to be established in Israel, in 1953, only five years after the creation of the state, with the aim to portray an historical event of huge and tragic proportions for the Jewish people, but also, ideally, to present a unified collective memory of that event for the whole country and in front of the world. The law that sanctioned its creation was the ‘Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law 5713-1953<sup>478</sup>. The law’s aim was to commemorate, among others:

*“the six million members of the Jewish people who died a martyrs’ death at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators [...]; the communities, synagogues, movements and organizations, and the public, cultural educational, religious and benevolent institutions, which were destroyed in a heinous attempt to erase the name and culture of Israel; [...] the heroism of Jewish servicemen, and of underground fighters in towns, villages and forests, who staked their lives in the battle against the Nazi oppressors and their collaborators; the heroic stand of the besieged and fighters of the ghettos, who rose and kindled the flame of revolt to save the honor of their people; [...] the high-minded Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews.”<sup>479</sup>*

The aim of Yad Vashem was thus to perpetuate the memory of all the various aspects of the Holocaust, through documentation and testimonies, to ensure that the factual elements of that event would

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<sup>478</sup> “Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law 5713-1953,” <https://www.yadvashem.org/about/yad-vashem-law.html>; “The second Knesset, 217<sup>th</sup> session, May 12, 1953” [https://fs.knesset.gov.il/2/Plenum/2\\_ptm\\_250456.pdf](https://fs.knesset.gov.il/2/Plenum/2_ptm_250456.pdf).

<sup>479</sup> “The second Knesset, 217<sup>th</sup> session.”

be recorded for the generations to come.<sup>480</sup> Under this law it was thus created a nationally funded authority whose main task was not only to keep alive the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust, but also to integrate this traumatic event of gigantic proportions into the national identity and narrative of the newborn state of Israel. As stated in the text of the law itself:

*“[Yad Vashem should] establish memorial projects; collect, examine and publish testimonies of the Holocaust and of the heroism it called forth; to establish in Israel the day appointed by the Knesset as the memorial day for the Holocaust and its heroism, and to promote the joint remembrance of heroes and victims for the time to come.”<sup>481</sup>*

While certainly including both victims (e.g. *martyrs, victims*) and heroes (e.g. *underground fighters, fighters of the ghettos*), the commemoration practices of the first years interpreted the law as focusing significantly on the acts of heroism that occurred in that period and on those members of the Jewish people that actively fought against the Nazis, rather than on the victims that were considered as a unique shapeless mass. This reflects how, at least until Eichmann’s trial (1961), Israel’s establishment put forward in its narrative of the Holocaust the heroic side of it, which better fitted the Zionist ideology of a fighting Jew. c

In any case, the institutionalized national memory of the Holocaust perceived and represented it as a traumatic experience exclusive to European Jewry and the extensive research and writing about the topic has generally been confined to Eastern (European)

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<sup>480</sup> Anita Shapira, “The Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memories,” *Jewish Social Studies* 4/2 (1998): 44.

<sup>481</sup> “Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance”; “The second Knesset, 217<sup>th</sup> session.”

countries.<sup>482</sup> The debate about Holocaust and Mizrahim is a recent one, that I will explore in this chapter and in the following ones.

And in fact, the statesman who presented the Yad Vashem law was Ben-Zion Dinur, a scholar of Ukrainian origin. Dinur, a fervent Zionist, was interested in the study of collective memory and its role in the process of nation building even before thinking about the law. His ideas about memory and collective national identity came before all the studies that would then appear later on the subject. During the Knesset debate on the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Law – Yad Vashem, he stated in this regard:

*“...there can be no doubt that memory, in the life of an individual, is one’s self, because the individual self exists only to the extent that it integrates all its life’s events and experiences into a single continuum. The same is true of a nation’s memory. A nation’s self exists only to the extent that it has a memory, to the extent that it manages to integrate its past experiences into a single whole, and only when this condition is met, does it exist as a nation, as a single entity.”<sup>483</sup>*

This is interesting, first of all, because it shows an intentional plan of Dinur, and as a consequence of the law he proposed, to unite the memories of the Jewish people in their new homeland through the establishment of a memorial for all murdered Jews. Secondly, because with this law he created a decisive link between the European nature of the Holocaust, its memory, the state of Israel, and Jerusalem as the heart of the nation and the only place that could host that memory.<sup>484</sup> The Yad Vashem law thus integrated these understanding in the official Israeli national narrative, making

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<sup>482</sup> Batya Shimony, “On ‘Holocaust Envy’ in Mizrahi literature,” *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah* 25(2011): 3.

<sup>483</sup> Ben-Zion Dinur, *Knesset Minutes*, Vol. 14, Session 230, 18 May 1953, p. 1352.

<sup>484</sup> Dinur, *Knesset Minutes*, 1311-1314.



the Holocaust, once and for all, a fundamental part of the state's identity.

At first, one of the many memorial sites in Israel, competing with other Holocaust memorial sites, such as those in the kibbutzim of Yad Mordechai and Lochamei Hagetaot, gradually Yad Vashem became the main site in Israel for the commemoration of the Holocaust, both on a practical and on a symbolic level. This happened also thanks to its location on Mount Herzl. This site was already a national '*lieu de mémoire*', hosting a national military cemetery and the tombs of Theodor Herzl and of some of the nation's great leaders. The fact that the Holocaust was added to the list of the events that were remembered in that location not only defined it as a unique place for national collective memory and identity but also contributed to define it as the only legitimate place for Holocaust commemoration. This was an official claim over Holocaust memory, and a reply to all the different commemoration projects that were flourishing both inside, and most importantly, outside of the country, notably in the USA.<sup>485</sup>

At the beginning of the 1960s, the Yad Vashem museum presented a quite simple historical exhibition. Following, in 1973, a permanent historical-chronological exhibition was created, which was updated and changed over the years, until 2005 when the whole Yad Vashem complex underwent a general renovation and enlargement. In addition to the museum, this new institution included: a library, one of the largest digitized Holocaust archives, an International School for Holocaust Studies, an academic research center on the Holocaust and a publishing house dedicated to the publication of the research carried out by its researchers. Concerning the museum, the old exhibition was replaced with an extremely modern and sophisticated one, which portrays the story of the Holocaust exclusively from a Jewish perspective and in a chronological order. In addition to the chronological exhibition of Jewish history in Europe

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<sup>485</sup> Bar Doron, "Holocaust and Heroism in the Process of Establishing Yad Vashem (1942–1970)," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 30:3 (2016): 166-190.

– starting with the pre-war period, going through Nazi persecution and extermination of European Jewry, and ending with the liberation and the rehabilitation of Jewish life after the war - there are also a number of separate halls, focusing on different themes related to the Holocaust, that break the linear nature of the exposition. The narrative of the new exhibition, as opposed to the previous one, focuses more on the individual aspect of the Holocaust rather than on its collective one. By displaying a great amount of artifacts, works of art, original documents and videotaped testimonies of the stories of many survivors, the idea is to zoom in on individuals and families with the aim of breaking the mass number of victims into many individuals, in a way personalizing and making smaller such an enormous and traumatic event.<sup>486</sup> It is interesting to notice how both Yad Vashem and the Museum of Beit HaTefutzot, even though at different times, underwent a similar process of personalization and re-appropriation of the stories they told through the display of objects and individual or family histories. This was done in both cases with the aim to take subjects maybe too big or loaded to tackle and make them more approachable by including a series of interactive features and by telling individual stories the visitor could relate to.

Another interesting point to consider is how the narrative about the different Jewish communities involved in the Holocaust changed throughout time in the narrative told at Yad Vashem. Until the Yom Kippur war and the political upheaval of 1977 elections, the perspective proposed in Yad Vashem, but also in the two other main Holocaust museums in the country (Beit Lochamei haGetaot and Yad Mordechai), was exclusively European and Ashkenazi. Moreover, the narrative suggested started in Central/Western Europe before the Holocaust and ended with the creation of the State of Israel, perfectly fitting the Zionist narrative 'from Holocaust to rebirth', considering Israel as the endpoint of the Jewish national epos. The history of other Jewish communities that underwent Nazi

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<sup>486</sup> Amos Goldberg, "The 'Jewish narrative' in the Yad Vashem global Holocaust museum," *Journal of Genocide Research* 14/2(2012): 187-213.

occupation and persecution, such as the Tunisian and the Libyan one in North Africa or the Greek one, were minimized and not included in the Holocaust sections of the museum, but rather presented close to other sections dedicated to forced labor and to Nazi non-Jewish victims. This happened, according to historian Hanna Yablonka, for a set of reasons. First of all, the personnel responsible for the museum and the research institute was for the most part of European origin.<sup>487</sup> Secondly, especially during the first decades after the Holocaust, due to the far bigger number of European victims, narratives portraying the stories of other communities were left aside. The fact that the Holocaust, in practical terms, took place in Europe contributed to exclude other communities from the 'story' that was told at an official level during Holocaust remembrance ceremonies, leaving them out from one of the tenets of the Israeli ethos.<sup>488</sup> From their side, Sephardi and Oriental Jews were busy with the problems connected to integration: education, socio-economic issues, political representation and so on, and therefore issues such as history and collective memory were neglected, to tend to more urgent deals.

However, at the end of the 1970s, a change in the general cultural and political atmosphere in the country led to a gradual recognition of Oriental Jewry's place in the main narratives of Israeli history and society. For instance, in 1976 the Center for the Integration of Oriental Jewry's cultural heritage was established by the Ministry of Education. The main topics of this endeavor were Oriental Jewry contribution to Zionism, illegal immigration and the establishment of the state.

The Holocaust in relation to North Africa was once more pushed aside, until 1986, when the research institute of Yad Vashem started a campaign to address various organization representing North-

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<sup>487</sup> Hanna Yablonka, *Les Juifs d'Orient, Israel et la Shoah* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2016), 125-127.

<sup>488</sup> Haim Saadoun, "Stages in Jewish Historiography and Collective Memory," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), Ibook edition.

African Jewry in Israel asking for their help (also monetary) to register Jewish communities in North Africa before War World II, as they were doing already for the European ones, in view of the publication of *Pinkas Hakehilot: Encyclopedia of the Jewish Communities from Their Foundation Until After the Holocaust*.<sup>489</sup>

The fact that Yad Vashem opened the doors of Holocaust inclusion also to North African and Oriental Jewry is a sign not only of the will to include in the narrative of the Holocaust stories previously left untold; but also of a change in the role the Holocaust played in the creation of a more inclusive Israeli national narrative.<sup>490</sup> This process happened on a grassroots level as well as on a more institutional one, in accordance with the change of interest and awareness of the general public about the Holocaust and its relationship to Israel and its national identity, thus making it an event under which all Israelis would be gathered, regardless of their ethnicity.<sup>491</sup>

Things evolved even more with the establishment of the new Yad Vashem museum in 2005. After its renovation, the core exhibit was not anymore, the result of the work of exclusively European refugees. In the new core exhibition was included a space, if little, dedicated to North African Jewish communities and the Holocaust, as showed in the pictures here below.

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<sup>489</sup> Yad Vashem, *Pinkas Hakehilot: Encyclopedia of the Jewish Communities from Their Foundation Until After the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1997).

<sup>490</sup> Yablonka, *Les Juifs d'Orient*, 111-112.

<sup>491</sup> Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*.



Images 16 and 17 - Panels on “The Jews of North Africa” in Yad Vashem.  
(Photos courtesy of Dario Miccoli, 2017)

The panels deal mainly with the history and fate of North African communities during the war, in particular the Libyan and Tunisian ones. The tone used in the texts is similar to that used to describe what happened to European Jewish communities, bringing up the Zionist theme of the Holocaust as a unifying event for all Jews.<sup>492</sup> Historian Hanna Yablonka maintains that from the late 1980s throughout the 1990s the education system knowingly used the Holocaust as a unifying factor, a 'entry ticket' to the normative version of Israeli national narrative. This happened in particular with those communities that felt excluded the most from that narrative, such as Oriental Jews.<sup>493</sup>

Despite this, it was harder for Oriental Jews to acquire, on a practical level, the same status held by European Holocaust survivors in Israeli society. Many times, their stories were excluded from Israeli collective memory about the Holocaust, or told in a comparative framework, deemed as 'less tragic', 'less heroic' and, finally, less important than those of their European counterparts.<sup>494</sup>

Yad Vashem, despite its attempts of bringing together the stories and memories of the two groups under a common 'Holocaust umbrella', ended up in telling the story of one group (Mizrahim) according to the modes and paradigms of the dominant one (Ashkenazim).

### *3.1. Heritage centers and the Holocaust: an Ashkenazi (Polish?) monopoly*

In addition to Yad Vashem, a number of smaller Holocaust museums were created in the years immediately after the establishment of the state. I will here consider the four most prominent and visited ones: the museum in kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot in the north, the museum in kibbutz Yad Mordechai in the South, the Messuah Institute in kibbutz Tel Yitzhak and Beit Terezin

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<sup>492</sup> Yad Vashem, *the Holocaust History Museum catalogue* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 73.

<sup>493</sup> Yablonka, *Les Juifs d'Orient*, 191.

<sup>494</sup> Shimony, "On 'Holocaust Envy'," 8.

in kibbutz Givat Haim Ichud, both located in the central region of the country.

These institutions became part of the national framework of institutions in charge of telling and passing on the history and memory of the Holocaust. In particular, in the first two, Beit Lohamei Hagetaot and Yad Mordechai, history and historical memory are intertwined, showing the ways in which, the past is told and interpreted in the present. Accordingly, these institutions were established together with a research and education branch, so that their activities of research and transmission of the Holocaust would continue even after the withdrawal of the founding generations.

The first one, Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot, was established in 1949 in Western Galilee and with it the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum (officially known as Itzhak Katzenelson Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum).<sup>495</sup> This museum was founded before Yad Vashem, so it was actually the first Holocaust museum of the world, and the first to be created by Holocaust survivors, members of the Jewish underground and of veteran partisan units in the ghettos of Poland. The museum not only tells the story of the Holocaust, emphasizing the bravery and the courage of the fighters in the Warsaw ghetto, but also tries to give an outlook on the history of Jews in Poland before the war, more specifically in Warsaw and Lodz, and to portray the range of political organizations and youth movements active at the eve of the Holocaust. Among the permanent exhibitions, in fact, two of them are dedicated to the Jews of Poland, the history of Jewish Warsaw, and to the Ghetto Uprising. As stated on the website of the Museum, in these exhibitions are represented:

*"[...] the story of the life and standing of the founders of the Ghetto Fighters' House. Is indeed a specific case, but one that attests to the rule – of Polish*

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<sup>495</sup>"About the Ghetto Fighters' House," <https://www.gfh.org.il/eng>.

*Jewry in particular and European Jewry in general.  
A microcosm containing the entire story.”*<sup>496</sup>

The founders of the Museum, as reported here above, do believe that the story of the Polish Jewish community can be used as an example standing for all European Jewry, thus stating the paradigmatic character of Polish Jewry also when speaking about the Holocaust.

The exhibition portrays a story of life, before and during the war, and while in many cases the narrative about the Holocaust is more focused on the story of the annihilation, in the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum the exhibition focuses on the importance of understanding Jewish life before the war, to remember what was erased. At the heart of the Museum, there is the exhibition devoted to the Warsaw ghetto uprising, established by those same leaders of the Jewish underground who led it: Yitzhak 'Antek' Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin among others.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>496</sup>“Exhibitions: Jewish Warsaw,”  
[https://www.gfh.org.il/eng/Exhibitions/58/Jewish\\_Warsaw](https://www.gfh.org.il/eng/Exhibitions/58/Jewish_Warsaw).

<sup>497</sup> Yitzhak Zuckerman (December 13, 1915 – June 17, 1981), also known by the pseudonym "Antek", was one of the Polish leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. After the war he worked as part of the *Bricha* network, whose operatives smuggled Jewish refugees out of Eastern and Central Europe to Mandate Palestine. In 1947 he made himself Aliyah settling in what would soon be Israel. There he and his wife Zivia, along with other veterans of the ghetto undergrounds, founded the Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta'ot and the Ghetto Fighters' House (GFH) museum located on its grounds, commemorating those who struggled against the Nazis.

Zivia Lubetkin (1914–1976) was one of the leaders of the Jewish underground in Nazi-occupied Warsaw and the only woman on the High Command of the resistance group Jewish Fighting Organization. She survived the Holocaust in German-occupied Poland and immigrated to Mandate Palestine in 1946, and established with her husband Yitzhak Zuckerman and other fighters the Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta'ot and the Ghetto Fighters' House (GFH) museum.





Image 18 - Exhibition devoted to the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw ghetto at the Beit Lohamei Haghataot museum.

An entire section of the museum, Yad LaYeled (Memorial for the child), was created with the aim of familiarizing today's children with the life of their peers during the Holocaust, through real diaries and testimonies of youngsters who lived during that time.

In addition to the exhibitions, the museum also hosts a center for humanistic education created in 1995 with the support of the Ministry of Education and in cooperation with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C, an archive and a library. The groundbreaking approach of the center not only aims at educating about the Holocaust itself, but also to develop human sensitivity and moral judgment regarding the events that took place, while promoting liberal and democratic values.<sup>498</sup> Finally, kibbutz Lohamei Haghetaot hosts every year in the amphitheater right outside the Ghetto Fighters' House museum, the closing ceremony for the Holocaust Remembrance Day. The ceremony is broadcasted on public television and sees the participation of numerous state and civil society actors. Through different renovations and additions, the Ghetto Fighters' House museum continues with its activities to

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<sup>498</sup> "The Center for Humanistic Education," [https://www.gfh.org.il/eng/Center\\_for\\_Humanistic\\_Education](https://www.gfh.org.il/eng/Center_for_Humanistic_Education).

shape till today the public perception and idea new generations have of the Holocaust as an umbrella event touching all Jews in the world regardless of their ethnic origin.



Image 19 - Closing ceremony of the Holocaust Remembrance Day in the amphitheater of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum.

The second museum I am going to examine is that located in Kibbutz Yad Mordechai. The kibbutz itself was founded in the 1930s by members of the Shomer Hatzair on the shores close to Ashkelon in southern Israel and was named after the commander of the Warsaw ghetto uprising: Mordechai Anielewicz.<sup>499</sup> The museum in the kibbutz named "From the Shoah to the Revival" was established in 1968, at a time when, after the Eichmann trial (1961), private memories of the Holocaust were exposed and the survivors, with their stories, felt more and more part of the Israeli society.<sup>500</sup> The exhibitions in the museum deal with two of the most crucial events in the history of the Jewish people in modern times: the Holocaust and its rebirth in

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<sup>499</sup> Mordechai Anielewicz (1919 – 8 May 1943) was the leader of the Jewish Fighting Organization which led the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. His character was engraved as a symbol of courage and sacrifice, and to this day his image represents Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. A memorial in his honor was built in the kibbutz Yad Mordechai.

<sup>500</sup> Shapira, "The Holocaust," 54.

Israel. The museum tells the history of the Jewish people, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, from the beginning of the twentieth century until the establishment of the state of Israel.

In the section dedicated to the Holocaust, emphasis is placed on life in the Diaspora, in particular on Jewish life in Poland before the war, on the uprising that took place in the Warsaw ghetto and on Mordechai Anilevich's life. An entire section is dedicated to life in the Warsaw ghetto, including a scale reproduction (1:100) of the ghetto itself showing all the houses and streets in the ghetto before its destruction in 1943. The museum presents also a life-size reproduction of the bunker hosted on 18, Mila street. That bunker served as the headquarters of the Jewish Fighting Organization under the command of Mordechai Anilewicz and became a symbol of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. In the section dedicated to the revival, the focus is placed on the immigration of hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors to Mandatory Palestine, and to their fighting in the War of Independence in Yad Mordechai and in Israel's southern regions.



Image 20 - Reproduction of the bunker hosted on 18, Mila street – Museum Yad Mordechai

The narration within the museum is built so that at the lower floor is represented the life of the Jews in the Diaspora, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Warsaw ghetto uprising and the Holocaust; while

on the upper floors are represented the immigration to Israel and the War of Independence in the southern parts of the country.<sup>501</sup> The fact that visitors first have to walk down to visit the part dedicated to the Diaspora and the Holocaust, only to ascend to the middle section of the museum where the struggle for the immigration to Mandatory Palestine is told, to finally reach the last floor where the section on the War of Independence and the creation of the new state is hosted, has a powerful symbolic meaning.<sup>502</sup> The visitors are in fact taken to a journey from the destruction of the Holocaust and the Diaspora to a new life in a state that would be established by those same people who survived the Holocaust, as a sign of rebirth and revival.

Besides the museum, the kibbutz also hosts a number of memorial sites all over its premises dedicated to the commemoration of Jewish resistance against the Nazis and to the battles for the Independence of the country. Among them a cemetery hosting 26 graves of those who perished to liberate the kibbutz during the 1948 war.<sup>503</sup> Also this museum organizes educational programs, for students, army soldiers and adults willing to undertake memory trips to Poland, according to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education. The aim is not only to prepare individuals, but also to instruct guides that will later on lead those trips. The topics of the course range from Jewish life in Poland before the Holocaust, Jewish leadership and resistance during the war both in ghettos and in the camps (also in Poland) and how guides in the trips should conduct remembrance ceremonies when in Poland.<sup>504</sup> Here too the focus is on Poland and the link between the country and the Holocaust is made clear all the way through the course, restating again the importance of Polish

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<sup>501</sup> "Museum from the Shoah to the Revival," [http://www.y-m-museum.co.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=791364\\_museum&act=show&dbid=pages&dataid=info\\_miclol\\_miclol-004](http://www.y-m-museum.co.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=791364_museum&act=show&dbid=pages&dataid=info_miclol_miclol-004).

<sup>502</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*.

<sup>503</sup> "Museum from the Shoah to the Revival."

<sup>504</sup> Jackie Feldman, "Marking the Boundaries of the Enclave: Defining the Israeli Collective Through the Poland Experience," *Israel Studies* 7/2 (2002):84-114.

Jews and Poland itself in the definition of what is the Holocaust and, thus, in the definition of what is Israeli identity.

The third institution considered is the Massuah International Institute for the Study of the Holocaust which was established in 1972, in kibbutz Tel Yitzhak.<sup>505</sup> The kibbutz itself was established in 1938 and after the war accepted many Holocaust survivors, mainly from Poland, as new members. They started to work on Holocaust memory and remembrance already in the early 1960s and established the Institute in the early 1970s.<sup>506</sup> The Massuah Institute is designed to evoke a discussion on the significance and meaning of the Holocaust in contemporary societies and cultures. Along with the museum and the exhibitions about the Holocaust, the Eichmann trial and the memories of European Jewish communities who perished in the Holocaust, the Institute also comprises a number of archives, a library, dormitories, conference halls and an amphitheater, all dedicated to visitors, researchers and students. The exhibitions are designed to be interactive and are inspired by the concept of educational museum to fit school age visitors in particular.<sup>507</sup> Even if created mainly by Polish refugees and Holocaust survivors, the approach of the Massuah institute is international, gathering testimonies and artifacts from Jewish communities and survivors coming from all around Europe.

Thanks to its approach, the center encourages discussions on the connections between Holocaust history and memory and contemporary international and Israeli discourse, by promoting a series of educational activities built to reflect on the history of the Jewish people. The goal is to create a link between historical aspects, issues of culture and memory that have implications for our

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<sup>505</sup> "Massuah International Institute for Holocaust Studies," <http://www.massuah.org.il/eng> (last visited 06/08/2019).

<sup>506</sup> "Massuah International Institute for Holocaust Studies."

<sup>507</sup> The Constructivist approach focuses on the imparting of meaning to the topics displayed. The goal is to expose visitors to a broad spectrum of interpretations of the personal experience that they undergo when they visit the exhibition. Exhibitions of this kind challenge visitors and induce them to move beyond their familiar and entrenched patterns of thinking in a way that is compatible with the ability to create new associations. See "Educational Approach," <http://www.massuah.org.il/eng/Education>

societies, identities and life.<sup>508</sup> Like at the Ghetto Fighters' House, also in Massuah every year is held a memorial ceremony in the occasion of the Holocaust Remembrance Day. In this occasion, according to an official set of rules decided by the state, the ceremony is performed: units of the army take part together with representatives of the government and Holocaust survivors light up a torch and tell their story. Here again, as in the ceremonies held at the Ghetto Fighters' House or at Yad Vashem, the script is quite codified and there is no space for deviation or for the inclusion of narratives that do not comply with the normative one.



Image 21- Ceremony for the Holocaust Remembrance Day in the amphitheater of the Massuah museum and education center.

Finally, the last institution I will considered is Beit Terezin. This is a research and educational institution established in 1975 in kibbutz Givat Haim, in Central Israel, to gather the survivors and remember the Nazi victims of the Theresienstadt (Terezin) concentration camp.<sup>509</sup> One of the reasons that prompted the establishment of an institution specifically to remember Jews killed in the Theresienstadt camp was that, after the war, the communist government of Czechoslovakia prohibited any commemoration of the Holocaust. Beit Terezin was thus established by the Theresienstadt (Terezin) Martyrs Association (registered in 1966) for all those interested in carrying on the memory and the stories of Jews killed in the Theresienstadt camp. Moreover, many of the founding members of

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<sup>508</sup> "Educational Approach."

<sup>509</sup> "The Foundation Scroll," <https://bterezin.org.il/en/beit-theresienstadt/>.

Kibbutz Givat Haim itself were of German and Austrian origin, and many of their family members who remained in Europe were deported to the Theresienstadt camp.

The specificity of this institution, according to the testimony of one of the founders, lays in the fact that it is located in a central position in Israel which is easy to reach from anywhere in the country, so that even survivors from the camp that were not living in the kibbutz could easily access Beit Terezin.<sup>510</sup>

During the years the association and the museum related to it evolved, especially in its archives and historical research activities, and, in 2011, the state of Israel recognized Beit Terezin as an 'accredited museum', the third among Holocaust museums and centers recognized by the Ministry of Culture. As stated by the founding members of the association and of the museum, the main aim of these institutions is to:

*“build a house where life would persist... In the hope that those who come to unite with their memory could feel here something of the spirit of the ghetto, could understand what it means to maintain some sort of a cultural life in the shadow of death, to preserve the foundations of justice and honesty, of friendship and of helping others.[...] We did not want to erect a statue or monument which symbolizes the sufferings of the past without a bridge to the future.”<sup>511</sup>*

Accordingly, the exhibitions in the museum present the conditions of life in the ghetto, but also the efforts made by the Jewish leadership to educate and rescue children, in a context of deportation and persecution. The archives exhibit items from the ghetto period:

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<sup>510</sup> “The Foundation Scroll.”

<sup>511</sup> “Beit Terezin Museum,” <https://bterezin.org.il/en/museum/>.

paintings, art objects, personal items and documents, along with a list of the Jews who passed through the ghetto. The archive and library are open to the general public and the educational center offers activities for school students, soldiers and members of the security services, university students and adults. The establishment collaborates with entities from Israel and abroad and organizes each year a series of events such as Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies, concerts and master classes on memory and history.<sup>512</sup> The common aspect that connects the institutions presented in this section is their viewpoint which is exclusively European. In particular, two of them, the Beit Lohamei HaGhetaot and the Yad Mordechai museums, present the Holocaust as one of Israel's national founding events that legitimated Jewish sovereignty after 2,000 years of Diaspora.<sup>513</sup> The narrative they put forward starts with the Holocaust and ends with the creation of the state of Israel, reproducing the Zionist narrative of 'Holocaust and Redemption/Rebirth'. Due to the background of their founders, these two institutions inevitably carried on the Zionist narrative of the 'fighting Jews'.<sup>514</sup> This influenced the boundaries of public and private Holocaust commemoration in Israel, focusing primarily on the small minority who actively fought the Nazis.

As a consequence, until the late 1960s, the narrative of 'Holocaust and Heroism' was considered as the only acceptable one, excluding from the public discourse survivors who did not fight, leading to what was defined by Bar-On as the "conspiracy of silence".<sup>515</sup> The narrative presented by these two institutions not only excluded from its narration the Oriental Jewish communities, but also put on the

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<sup>512</sup> "Beit Terezin Events," <https://bterezin.org.il/en/events/future-events/>.

<sup>513</sup> Saul Friedlander, "Introduction," in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992): 1-21.

<sup>514</sup> Carol A. Kidron, "Embracing the lived memory of genocide: Holocaust survivor and descendant renegade memory work at the House of Being," *American Ethnologist* 37/3 (2010): 429-451.

<sup>515</sup> Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

Dan Bar-On et al., "Multigenerational Perspectives for Understanding the Development Sequelae of Trauma across Generations," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 22 (1998): 315-338.



background those Jews, the majority, that in Europe did not try to fight the Nazis.

The other two institutions, The Massuah Institute and the Beit Terezin, were created at a later stage (respectively in 1972 and 1975), when Holocaust memory in Israel had already gone through some adaptations after the various trials that took place during the 1950s and the 1960s.<sup>516</sup> For this reason they provided the public with a more inclusive narrative of the Holocaust, one that not only included the stories of those who did not fight, but also one that considered the Holocaust as an international phenomenon, especially in the case of the Massuah institute.

A difference can also be recognized in the ethnic profile of the founders of these museums, three museums out of four were established by Polish Holocaust survivors and or partisans. In some cases, such as in the case of the Beit Lochamei haGhetaot Museum, the nationality of the founders is barely mentioned. However, the exhibitions in the museum are dedicated mainly to Polish Judaism and Zionist youth associations active in Poland before the Holocaust. In the case of the museum located in Kibbutz Yad Mordechai and of the Messuah Institute, the majority of the founders came from Poland as well and were members of different Zionist movements. Among those who established the Institute itself there were also members of Hanoar Hazioni, coming from Western Poland. Accordingly, most of the employees of these institutions were of European origin, many of them Polish.<sup>517</sup> The only case where the nationality of the founders was explicitly mentioned was that of the Beit Terezin museum and association, where most of the founding members were from Bohemia (today's Czech Republic), Germany, Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands<sup>518</sup>.

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<sup>516</sup> Hanna Yablonka, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Kastner and Eichmann Trials," *Israel Studies* 8/3 (2003): 1-24;

Shapira, "The Holocaust."

<sup>517</sup> Yablonka, *Les Juifs d'Orient*, 127.

<sup>518</sup> The Concentration camp (or ghetto) of Theresienstadt had a special nature, it was conceived as a model ghetto, to serve the Nazi propaganda efforts. In spite the difficulties, the fact that the ghetto was self-administered by a Jewish council

In fact, when it came to Polish Jews, ethnicity was rarely mentioned as a meaningful factor, pointing at the fact that, once again Polishness in Israel was associated to Ashkenaziness par excellence. This made having Polish ancestry the norm, that eventually became invisible, to which every other group should conform, the term of comparison for all other stories and narratives.

The fact that these institutions, especially Beit Lohamei Haghetat museum and the Yad Mordechai museum, had a major role in shaping Holocaust memory and its public representation in Israel, is quite meaningful. Thanks to these museums, the link between Polishness and the Holocaust became something normative. Turning once more this ethnic trait into something closely associated with Israeliness.

It can thus be maintained that, as it happened with the Zionist elite that established the state, even in the framework of Holocaust memory, Polish Jewish narrative was considered as the normative one. Especially in the first 15 to 20 years after the creation of the state, the Holocaust was remembered and represented mainly by Polish actors and through a Polish lens, that was invisible for most people, thanks to its being hegemonic. In hindsight, it can be maintained that, even if included in the Holocaust narrative of 'destruction and rebirth', Beit Lochamei HaGetaot and the Yad Mordechai Museum, were the only museums dedicated to telling the story of Polish Judaism before the Holocaust in Israel.

### *3.2 Alternative Holocaust commemoration institutions*

After having examined in the previous chapters more institutionalized and traditional forms of Holocaust remembrance, I am going to consider in this paragraph alternative forms of

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of elders allowed up to a certain point in time to maintain certain services such as health, food distribution, work organization, education for the youth, and cultural and sport activities for all the inhabitants of the ghetto. Thanks to this better condition the camp was not always considered as bad as others, and even if in the postwar period, a few of the SS perpetrators and Czech guards were put on trial, the ghetto and its memory were generally forgotten by the Soviet authorities.

Holocaust commemoration that emerged in the framework of a more open public discussion about the Holocaust and its role in shaping the Israeli cultural and memorial spheres.

These new forms of commemoration, that emerged from the 1980s onwards, wanted to include those voices and experiences that were silenced because not entirely complying with the hegemonic Zionist narrative. This coincided with a period when Holocaust memory, used so far to strengthen and legitimize the existence state, started to be criticized. As a consequence, the existing hegemonic narrative about the Holocaust began to be questioned and re-examined. In particular, the focus moved onto examining which narratives were left behind in the creation of such narrative. These questions led to the creation of a different kind of Holocaust remembrance institutions. Usually established by grassroots organizations, the main aim of these institutions was to counter the overreaching state narrative about the Holocaust. As we will see later on, similar museums were created also by groups of immigrants from Islamic countries to counter the state narrative on their immigration and cultural heritage and to build a different kind of collective memory about it.<sup>519</sup>

The first institution of this kind I am going to analyze is “The House of Being” (Beit Lihot in Hebrew) and it was established in 1999 in Holon by Zipi Kichler, a retired schoolteacher and daughter of German Holocaust survivors.

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<sup>519</sup> Katriel, *Performing the Past*.



Image 22 - Memorial wall in the shape of a scroll in a garden outside the House of Being in Holon. The monument is dedicated to the memory of relatives of House members who perished in the Holocaust. This wall was built as a way to keep alive generational ties, and a living memory.

The House was established with the support of Holon's municipality in a former kindergarten and, in fact, is part of the network of community associations in the city and was initially conceived as a domestic environment where aging Holocaust survivors of the neighborhood could spend their time in. However, as Zipi declared in an interview, she did not want to create yet another Holocaust survivors club, she wanted to create:

*"[...] a center where they could tell what they were going through, with my help, not feeling alone. I mean, not telling horror stories. If a survivor tells when he saw his mother last time, that's enough."<sup>520</sup>*

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<sup>520</sup> "Tsiipi Kichler receives the lifetime achievements awards in Holon: They forgot about me in the House of Being," <https://www.hashikma-holon.co.il/news/17459>.

And indeed, the House is quite a peculiar place: partly a museum, partly a memory institution, partly a house for the elderly Holocaust survivors of the neighborhood to spend their time. The House of Being includes an exhibition mainly of pictures brought by the survivors, a library, but also spaces for social gatherings, a television, a piano and a small kitchen. The main aim of Zipi was to create a place which was different from all the other Holocaust commemoration centers and institutions, she wanted to create a *lieux de mémoire* detached from the mainstream Holocaust narrative about 'Holocaust, heroism and rebirth', as opposed to the 'sheep to the slaughter' narrative<sup>521</sup>. Herself the daughter of Holocaust survivor parents, and the first baby to be born in the Bergen Belsen camp after liberation, Zipi wanted 'the House of Being' to be a place where memories about the Holocaust were preserved in a different way, as she said:

*"My parents were not heroes, they were not in rebel or partisan groups, they went from camp to camp as a sheep to slaughter. I thought that for most of my childhood, and I thought to myself at least they stayed alive."*<sup>522</sup>

Accordingly, as soon as she established the House, she started to register all the Holocaust survivors in the municipality – from the 800 registered till that day, she reached more than 3000 people – and started, with the help of local students, to hand them "certificates of love", signed by the mayor of the city, and marked their courageous return to life. The certificates were a way for Zipi to award the heroism of the survivors who 'simply' survived, without fighting back, thus revising the concept of 'heroism' and reformulating the hegemonic narrative, to include in it also those survivors who were

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<sup>521</sup> Kidron, "Embracing the lived memory," 433.

<sup>522</sup> "Tsipi Kichler receives the lifetime achievements."

not classified as 'heroes' before. As she said in an interview with Carol Kidron:

*"What about the survivor who lay in the pit? Does she get loved, respected? So, I've given her and the other 3,000 Holon survivors . . . honorary certificates of recognition. I want to hug them, when they visit, and testify they're loved and embraced. Your family, you embrace. I want them to have fun here, to yell, sing, and be angry."<sup>523</sup>*

Her main goal was to create a loving community around the survivors who were still alive and their relatives, second and third generations, to counter her own personal experience as a kid, when she "did not have a social life" because of the status of her parents.<sup>524</sup>

The House is thus conceived to be as a homey place where everyone can feel at home. To this cozy feeling contributed also the exhibition section of this house-museum which was set up during the years by gathering pictures from all the survivors who joined the institution. The peculiarity of the exhibition is that, except for a few items directly referring to the Holocaust and the camps (an oil-painted picture of a train entering a camp, and the bust of a ghetto partisan), all the displayed objects, mainly pictures of people, do not reference in any way to destruction and suffering, simply displaying images of prewar life in Eastern European Jewish communities. In a second room, that works as a library and that contains a few more Holocaust artifacts (a camp uniform, a yellow star and a scarf from a camp), the focus is shifted more to Holocaust memory and indeed there is a wide array of Holocaust literature mainly used by the children and the educators visiting the House.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Kidron, "Embracing the lived memory," 433.

<sup>524</sup> "Tsipi Kichler receives the lifetime achievements."

<sup>525</sup> Kidron, "Embracing the lived memory," 433- 436.

Zipi's pedagogic technique about the Holocaust consist more in individual and individualized encounters, where visitors can meet a 'humanized' Holocaust survivor, rather than a larger than life figure, as it usually happens during state ceremonies. The emotional part plays a big role in Zipi's idea of how Holocaust memory should be performed even, and most of all, in the public sphere. The use Zipi made of humor, for instance, allowed Holocaust descendants to explore the contradictions between their familial lived experience of genocide and the "dead memory" of national commemoration. With its activities the House of Being tried to find a balance between mainstream national memory work and its own commemoration practices, more ludic and inclusive. During Holocaust Memorial Day in particular, the house tries to bring together traditional commemorative practices and its own activities with the aim of reinvigorating the commemorative landscape and making it open to all kinds and modes of narration.<sup>526</sup>

The House of Being serves thus multiple functions: a center for aging survivors, a heritage museum of prewar Jewish Europe and a Holocaust museum. The experience of the visitors is 'mixed' and there is no clear separation, as in other museums, between pre-war/Holocaust/post-war and Israel narratives. All is gathered in a relatively small place and mixed together with little boundaries. With time, and thanks to its peculiar nature, the House became the pride of the municipality, gathering national, governmental and private support, both on a political and a financial level. This recognition allowed the house to enter in the bigger circuit of Holocaust commemoration, getting a wider media coverage and thus attracting many more visitors, including school trips, army trips and

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<sup>526</sup> As reported by Kidron in her article the commemoration starts with more traditional kind of practices to such as the lighting of torches and the reading of the name of those who died, to continue with a more informal kind of ceremony where the families of the survivors and the other visitors are invited to listen not only to stories told by the survivors themselves, but also by their families, while visiting the premises of the House/museum. Finally, the grandchildren of the survivors bridging the gap between past and present, telling their experiences in the trips to Poland and promising to carry that memory on in the future. Kidron, "Embracing the lived memory," 437-438.

government officials. However, this came to a cost, and Zipi had to accommodate, at least to some extent, her commemoration practices with the national ones, and to make the narratives and representations of the Holocaust she gave, more mainstream. Some of her fierce critiques towards the state Zionist narrative about the Holocaust had to be toned down. After she retired from managing the House, Zipi said that it became something else from the place she had created at the beginning and that it did not fulfill anymore the role of disrupting the mainstream narrative about the Holocaust that it had when it was established. She said:

*"Today, the House of Being does not fulfill the mission I set it out for anymore. The place has become a club, all the events and donations there, that's nice, but today the institution has lost its value and the identity by which I established it."<sup>527</sup>*

Despite Zipi's opinion on the fact that the House lost its 'soul', a group of volunteers, many of them survivors' sons and daughters, continue to run the House and to organize a number of activities such as lecturing and guiding visitors and running workshops and educational activities. The younger generations (grandchildren) set up a Facebook page for the House and are in charge of it.<sup>528</sup> This intergenerational involvement in the activities of the House of Being is a sign of how different generations are invested in carrying on this project and the memory of their grandparents.

With the same idea of bringing together different generations and of giving a different experience from national Holocaust remembrance ceremonies, some years later, in 2011 the initiative of "Memories in the living room" (in Hebrew *Zikaron baSalon*) came to life. This new idea consisted in the organization of many separate events to be held in living rooms of private houses on the national Holocaust

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<sup>527</sup>"Tsipi Kichler receives the lifetime achievements."

<sup>528</sup> "The House of Being for Holocaust consciousness and learning," <https://www.facebook.com/beitlihiot/>.



Memorial Day.<sup>529</sup> As stated by Adi Altschuler, the initiator of the project:

*“the idea was born from the understanding that the connection between today's society and the memories of the Holocaust, has significantly deteriorated. Alongside formal events, Zikaron BaSalon offers a new, meaningful and intimate way to commemorate this day and address its implications through discussions at home among family, friends and guests. It is a unique and authentic tradition of people gathering together to open their hearts to the stories of the survivors, sing, think, read, talk and most importantly- listen.”*<sup>530</sup>

Altschuler, a social entrepreneur, started this movement as a reaction to a personal experience of hers: when in 2010 she almost forgot about Holocaust Remembrance Day.<sup>531</sup> She later took part in a Holocaust remembrance ceremony, and, seeing that the audience was mostly of people above 50 years old, she realized that the younger generations in particular were becoming more and more detached from that mode of remembering.<sup>532</sup> So she created Zikaron BaSalon to provide an alternative and intimate framework to commemorate and discuss about the Holocaust in a way that was different from the usual commemorations practices.

Before this initiative, Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies were held in public places, usually amphitheatres and arenas, and followed quite a fixed pattern. First, a solemn discourse of

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<sup>529</sup> “Homepage,” <https://www.zikaronbasalon.com>; “Zikaron BaSalon – English page,” <https://www.facebook.com/ZikaronBaSalonEN/>; “Zikaron BaSalon – Hebrew page,” <https://www.facebook.com/ZikaronBaSalon/>.

<sup>530</sup> “About,” <https://www.zikaronbasalon.org/about>.

<sup>531</sup> “Adi Altschuler, A Biography.” <http://www.tedxjerusalem.com/speaker/adialtschuler/>

<sup>532</sup> “Aza’a lemifgashim alternativim lezikaron haShoah,” <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4216611,00.html>

commemoration was held by a representative of the state, followed by the testimonies of survivors, the reading of a list of names with a video playing on the background showing Holocaust pictures and video testimonies, to close with two minutes of silence. These ceremonies, however, were one-sided and quite staged: the interaction between participants and the survivors was limited, as it was the time to discuss about the role of Holocaust in today's Israeli society. this new format instead allowed to discuss about the Holocaust and its role in a freer atmosphere, not just commemorating its victims.



Image 23 - picture of a gathering of the Zikaron baSalon in Tel Aviv

One of the guests of that first event, Lior Reichart, who later on became an organizer himself, said:

*"I feel that most Israelis don't understand how much the Holocaust is a significant part of our personalities and how it affects the political discussion in Israel. The narrative is usually really narrow on this day: We see lots of ceremonies, but there's no real conversation or debate about how it*

*affects us today. With Zikaron baSalon, he says, that's beginning to change.*"<sup>533</sup>

This initiative was established upon a shared understanding of the importance of Holocaust Remembrance Day. Its intention was to change the way 'things were done', a codified mode of action that with time passing ended up assuming a dogmatic character, losing at the same time of meaning for those participating; especially the younger ones.<sup>534</sup> This new mode of performing Holocaust commemoration, on one hand took into consideration the importance of the Holocaust in the creation of today's Israeli identity, while, on the other, understanding that a new mode of communication was necessary, as the old one was becoming more and more distant from the younger generations. <sup>535</sup> Zikaron BaSalon thus called for an active participation of all those involved, requiring from them of thinking actively about what remembering the Holocaust meant for them.

And, in fact, it resulted that teenagers, in particular, appreciate the dialogic format of these events, mentioning the importance of dialogue and discussion, that seldom happens during public official commemorations or at school, where the structure is rigid, and debate is not permitted.<sup>536</sup> A young participant stated:

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<sup>533</sup> Prushner, "Building Communities."

<sup>534</sup> The Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies are performances that, to a certain extent, reveal an interaction between the 'doing' and 'how things should be done' or a given system of beliefs. In the case of Holocaust remembrance, the weight of this system of beliefs is quite heavy on the 'doing' or ceremonies held in this specific occasion. See: Vivian M. Patraka, *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>535</sup> Jackie Feldman, *Above the Death Pits Beneath the Flag: Youth Voyages to Poland and the Performance of Israeli National Identity* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010).

<sup>536</sup> Steir Livny, "Remembrance in the Living Room," 8-9.

Barak Ravid, "Eifo Atem Osim et Yom Hashoa?" [Where are you on Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day?]. Maariv Lanoar, May 5, 2014 [Hebrew]. <http://www.mako.co.il/maariv-lanoar-magazine/Article81d90aeb4b7451006.htm>

*“When it becomes personal, the responses are more profound and deep.”<sup>537</sup>*

Social media and the web were used to kickstart this initiative. Hosts and participants are, in fact, required to sign up via the project Facebook page or through its website. In line with the intention of keeping these events as informal as possible, there is no unified format to them. However, a flexible framework is provided, so that people can use it in different ways and adapt it to the needs of their specific event.<sup>538</sup>

Each meeting lasts between two or three hours, and is divided into three different moments: testimony, expression and discussion.<sup>539</sup> The first part, when the guest is talking can be filmed while the others are not filmed, to leave participants more freedom of expression and engagement, and the feeling that they are in a protected and intimate environment. With time, Altschuler’s social initiative proved to be very successful, first in Israel and then all around the world, reaching more than 66 different countries in 2018 and laying the groundwork for a new way to remember the Holocaust. In 2012, Zikaron baSalon took place in 20 homes in Israel, and since then the initiative has spread exponentially. In 2015 150,000 people took part in 1,500 events all around the country, and by 2016 Zikaron baSalon had grown to half a million meetings in Israel and abroad, to grow to 750,000 people in 2017.

According to historians Popescu and Shult’s concept of new performative Holocaust commemoration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these events can be considered as a civic led memorial practice, where common people take on an active role in commemoration, becoming

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<sup>537</sup> Salhevet Rubin, “Zikaron b’salon: Na Yesh B’eerev Zikaron Srati sh’tofes Teutza?” [Remembrance in the Living Room: Why is it so Successful?]. Walla, April 16, 2015. [Hebrew]. <http://judaism.walla.co.il/item/2846760>.

<sup>538</sup> Zikaron baSalon held at Tel Aviv University in 2018. “Shmuel Rosemberg – Zikaron baSalon 2018,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FNLeWOUvfQ>.

themselves performers of memory.<sup>540</sup> Cultural studies researcher Steir-Livny maintains that the success of the Zikaron baSalon format is due to the creation of a mode of commemoration that is more fitting to the way new generations perceive themselves and get involved in the political and cultural structure of society.<sup>541</sup> This new mode of interaction, where all can partake in a discussion about a topic, exchanging knowledge and opinions, shows how social media have influenced the format of this event, engendering a shift from an exclusively top-down mode of commemoration, to a more horizontal and shared one. In this case, social media provided individuals not only with a new mode of participating in the commemoration of the Holocaust, but also with a way of creating new memories, where everyone feels empowered and have the chance to express his/her own opinion and discuss about it.

In this case, social media were used to bring people together in real life and to change the format of an event (Holocaust commemoration) through the creation of a community where everybody could participate, including those groups that were excluded thus far from the creation of a narrative about the event such as the Mizrahim. This happened by undermining the official performativity of classic commemorative formats, enabling new ways for people to engage with the topic of Holocaust and Holocaust remembrance.

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<sup>540</sup> Diana I. Popescu and Tanja Schult, "Performative Holocaust Commemoration in the 21st century," *Holocaust Studies* (2019): published online. DOI: [10.1080/17504902.2019.1578452](https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1578452)

<sup>541</sup>Steir Livny, "Remembrance in the Living Room," 11.

#### *Chapter 4. Ashkenazi Jewry: the case of ethnic museums and associations*

After having considered Holocaust museums as a possible case for Polish Jewish ethnic museums, or as one of the few places where Polishness was in some way displayed in Israel, in this chapter I am going to analyze the case of ethnic museums, and organizations, representing other Ashkenazi communities in Israel. These institutions make for an interesting case because they introduced in the Israeli public discourse European narratives different from the hegemonic Zionist one. This made Ashkenazi-ness visible from an ethnic point of view, contributing to its de-monopolization and opening the way for more Ashkenazi narratives to emerge.<sup>542</sup> These museums, however, are still a few, if compared to their Mizrahi/Oriental counterpart, and do not represent yet those communities, such as the Polish one, or if we consider the language spoken, the Polish/Yiddish speaking one that were dominant in pre-state years. This is yet another sign of how Polish-ness was strictly identified with a more general Ashkenazi Israeli identity, therefore canceling somehow the need to preserve a supposed ethnic specificity, as it was in the case of Mizrahi Jews.

Ethnographer Tamar Katriel analyses two of such museums presenting the stories of the two different Central European Jewish groups that established them. On one side, the German-speaking Jewish communities located in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic and, on the other, the Hungarian-speaking Jewish communities located in Hungary, Transylvania and Slovakia. Both museums are situated in Northern Israel, respectively: one close to Nahariya and the other one in Safed. The fact that these institutions defined the scope of their action according to a linguistic boundary, rather than to a spatial one, creates an “imagined community” that

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<sup>542</sup> Katriel, *Performing the Past*. Orna Sasson-Levy and Avi Shoshana, “Passing as (Non) Ethnic: The Israeli Version of Acting White,” *Sociological Inquiry* 83 (2013): 448-472.

is marked by cultural and linguistic, rather than by geopolitical criteria.<sup>543</sup>

The German-Speaking Jewry Heritage Museum, or the 'Jeckes Museum' was founded in 1968 by Israel Shiloni, and was situated in the Nahariya Municipality's building, until 1991, when it was moved to the Tefen Industrial Park. In 2004, a collaboration contract was signed between the museum administration and the administration of the Association of Israelis of Central European Origin, and one year later the new museum was inaugurated.<sup>544</sup> The museum deals with the history of the German-speaking Jews of Central Europe until WWII and with the history of their immigration to Israel and their contribution to the development of the country. The museum displays different artifacts, texts, photographs and films divided in different thematic sections. The topic of the Holocaust is present but does not play a fundamental role in telling the story of this community, which is rather centered on its culture.



Image 24 - One of the halls of the the 'Jeckes Museum' at the Tefen Industrial park.

The second museum, the Memorial Museum of the Hungarian Speaking Jewry was founded in 1986 and opened to the public in

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<sup>543</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>544</sup> See: "Jekes Museum," [http://www.omuseums.org.il/eng/mmt\\_yakkes/Jeckes\\_Museum](http://www.omuseums.org.il/eng/mmt_yakkes/Jeckes_Museum).

1990, in Safed. The Museum, based on a non-profit Association, has been operated since its beginnings by two of its thirty founding members: Hava and Yosef Lustig, living in Safed.<sup>545</sup> In this case too, the museum focuses on the history of the Hungarian community before WWII, by displaying a series of objects and artifacts, including a model of the Dohany Great Synagogue in Budapest and a wide variety of Judaica. The Holocaust here too is mentioned in a marginal way to leave space to the prewar history of the community. These museums can be considered as ethnographic in their style and represent various aspects of the everyday life of the communities living within these two specific language-areas. By highlighting the cultural link with a language and a way of life located in the Diaspora, while at the same time portraying the Zionist ideology and motivation that pushed their founders to the Land of Israel, these museums engage in a problematic way with the Zionist injunction to forget any diasporic past. In the museums, not only is represented the life of these communities in the private as well as in the public sphere, but also their level of integration in the societies they lived in, that varied greatly, from assimilation to complete separation. The story of these communities in Europe was inevitably influenced by the Holocaust and, in fact, a substantial part of these communities sought refuge in Israel because of Nazi persecution. This is documented both in the museums' exhibitions and in their publications, where it is stated that most Jews coming from those regions were not pushed towards Israel by a Zionist passion, but rather by their need to find a refuge. They became Zionist only when they found themselves in Israel, which they realized it was a country to build and to make their own. The narratives presented are, as a consequence, somehow contrasting, portraying on one side, the will to retain one's culture and heritage of origin, and, on the other, the will to integrate at best into a country that would become their new homeland.

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<sup>545</sup> See: "Memorial Museum of Hungarian Speaking Jewry," <http://www.hjm.org.il/?leftframe=menueng.html&mainframe=/main.aspx/En>.



As in the case of museums and cultural centers created by Jews coming from the MENA region, that I will analyze later on, here too the story presented is marked by nostalgia and a sense of loss.<sup>546</sup> Along with the migratory routes, these museums display also the story of the first years after the arrival of these communities in Israel, along with the economic and cultural difficulties they encountered. A big space is given to the story of these immigrants' acculturation, providing an overview on the activities and professions they took on in Israel, and their influence and contribution to the cultural and economic life of the country. Especially immigrants from German speaking countries were, in general, highly qualified and, after integrating pretty quickly in the new society, they contributed significantly to its development and advancement in many fields. Having a place dedicated to telling the story of the immigration and integration of the first generation, helps giving a sense of continuity to the community, favoring intergenerational encounters. By connecting the experience of the Diaspora with that of the State of Israel, these museums are not only sites of public recognition of the existence of different communities and heritages in Israel, they also became sites where new "Israeli" versions of those cultures are performed, recalled and brought to life again in an up-to-date version.

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<sup>546</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books 2001).



*Chapter 5. Oriental Jewry: the case of ethnic museums and associations*

Concerning Oriental and more specifically Tunisian Jewry in Israel a number of museums, heritage centers and associations were established to tell the stories of entire communities that were left aside, in the wider cultural and political debate that opposed Mizrahim and Ashkenazim.<sup>547</sup>

Contrarily to the discourse carried out in settlement museums, such as Yad Mordechai for instance, these museums depict and bring forward the Jewish experience in the Diaspora as something positive that, at times, is missed and regarded with nostalgia. The reconstruction in detail of the life and culture of diasporic communities before their immigration to Israel, reaffirming particular religious traditions and historical paths, allows to produce a discourse of self-respect and of recognition of these communities' identity and memories, within a society that, especially at their arrival, discriminated against them. These *lieux de mémoire*, the majority of which today is officially recognized by the Ministry of Culture, are a sign of the ongoing relevance of these communities to the contemporary social, cultural and political scene in Israel.<sup>548</sup> Moreover, by reestablishing a link between Jews and the Diaspora, these institutions create a link between the 'here' of Israel and the 'there' of the Diaspora, abandoning the divisive narrative carried on for a long time in official and Zionist settlement museums.<sup>549</sup>

The fact that immigrants from the MENA region managed to keep alive their cultural heritage through these institutions, while at the same time keeping their commitment to the Zionist ideal of a Jewish

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<sup>547</sup> Esther Glitzenstein, "Our Dowry: Identity and Memory among Iraqi Immigrants in Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38 (2002): 335–354; Esther Shelly-Newman, *Our Lives are But Stories: Narratives of Tunisian Israeli Women* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002); Piera, Rossetto. *Mémoires des Diaspora, diaspora des mémoires. Juifs de Libye entre Israël et l'Italie, des 1948 à nos jours*, Tesi di dottorato, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia e École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2015.

<sup>548</sup> Nora, "Between Memory and History."

<sup>549</sup> Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora," 11.

national state, made these places extraordinary tools for integration and recognition. By portraying the stories of many pioneers from the MENA region, ethnic museums opened the way for a wider understanding of Zionism, coupled for instance with its existence in the Diaspora or with religion, in a state and a culture that negated for a long time these possibilities.

A good example of this is represented by the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center of Or-Yehuda.<sup>550</sup> Established in 1973 its main aim is to preserve the history and traditions of the Jewish community from Iraq, making sure to pass on this cultural heritage to future generations, who will be in turn responsible of its preservation and transmission. As declared by the General Director of the Center, Aliza Dayan-Hamama:

*“I consider as one of my greatest challenges bringing in younger people and encouraging the middle and younger generations to participate in the Center’s wide range of activities. I want our younger community members and their families to enlarge and deepen their understanding of Babylonian Jewish history and culture, thereby helping to preserve the legacy of our parents and grandparents.”<sup>551</sup>*

To this end the center fosters research, preservation and publication activities regarding the history, the culture and the folklore of Iraqi Jewry.<sup>552</sup> Close to the Center was opened in 1988

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<sup>550</sup> “About us,” <https://www.bjhcenglish.com/about-us>.

<sup>551</sup> “About us.”

<sup>552</sup> “The by-law contains a list of tasks pertaining to construction, collection, preservation, commemoration, and exhibition, as is customary in memorial institutions: 1. To establish a center to perpetuate the heritage of Iraqi Jewry on the basis of its social, cultural, and literary values in the generations and eras since the Jewish people were exiled from the Land of Israel to Babylonia; 2. To collect various archival material, manuscripts, and publications that shed light on the lives and customs of Iraqi Jews and the perpetuation of their values; 3. To construct houses, booths, galleries, a general scholarly library, lecture and meeting halls, places for objects of folklore, reading rooms, sports facilities, and so on; 4. To conduct cultural, educational, academic, and sports activities; 5. To encourage courses and research activity in scholarly, societal, and social fields in

the Museum of Babylonian Jewry that hosts a permanent exhibition about more than 2,600 years of history of Babylonian Jewry, that, through many different sections dedicated to history (Ancient Times, Diaspora, Absorption in Israel), culture (Music, Jewelry, Marriage traditions), architecture (Synagogue, a Jewish Babylonian Home), tells the story of this centuries-old community.



Image 25 - Homepage of the website of the Museum of Babylonian Jewry<sup>553</sup>

What is interesting about this center, as pointed out by historian Esther Glitzenstein, is the fact that its founders were some sort of “Westernized Mizrahim”, who later on became part of the Israeli middle class.<sup>554</sup> In her article Glitzenstein explains how, only those who were educated and relatively Westernized before coming to Israel, therefore the elites, were able to settle in the central part of the country, avoiding being moved to its geographical periphery. These Mizrahim managed to access governmental positions, and leading positions in political parties, the army and the private sector as well. Soon after their arrival they began to contribute in the shaping of the Israeli middle class. Their relatively privileged

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the various disciplines, especially concerning the past, values, spiritual assets, mutual-aid projects, and community organizations of Iraqi Jewry.” In Glitzenstein, “Our Dowry,” 166-167.

<sup>553</sup> “Homepage,” <https://www.bjhcenglish.com/>.

<sup>554</sup> Glitzenstein, “Our Dowry,” 167.

position, especially if compared to that of lower-class Oriental Jews who were resettled in the country periphery, was still not satisfactory for them. Even if to a lesser extent, they felt discriminated against since their arrival in Israel, they felt treated as ‘others’ by the Zionist European establishment, because of their non-European origin, and as a consequence their achievements in the new society did not meet their expectations. These immigrants considered to have sacrificed their economic and social status when leaving their home country for Israel. Against this background, the establishment of ethnic museums and cultural institutions around the beginning of the 1970s was initiated by the second-generation, in this case of Iraqi immigrants, as a way to keep alive in the mind and memories of future generations the culture of their parents and grandparents and as a way for Israeli society to acknowledge and appreciate it.<sup>555</sup>

### *5.1 The case of Tunisian Jewry in Israel*

A similar pattern is recognizable also in the integration of the Tunisian Jewish community in Israel, I am now going to analyze. Also in the case of Tunisian Jewry, part of those who immigrated to Israel, especially in the early years, were ‘westernized’, having been immersed in French culture.

The difference between the Tunisian case and others is that the Tunisian Jewish community in Israel may be the only group among those hailing from North Africa, that did not manage to create and maintain a heritage center or ethnic museum of its own. In the following paragraph I am going to outline the major reasons of why this happened along with a list of the bigger Tunisian cultural associations established in the 1980s and of the current situation regarding Tunisian associationism.

The first institution to be established, at the beginning of the 1980s, was a museum dedicated to Jewish Tunisian heritage in Lod. A

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<sup>555</sup> Glitzenstein, “Our Dowry.”

literary scholar dr. Zvi Malachi and his wife Michal Saraf, of Tunisian origin, established the Haberman Institute for Literary Studies, a research and publishing institute in the status of a non-profit association that has been working in Lod since 1983. The basis for the Institute's library came from the personal library of prof. Haberman, who was a scholar of poetry and the history of Jewish book. The purpose of the Institute was to collect books, manuscripts, documents, poetry, *haggadot* and other material related to the literary heritage of North African and Middle Eastern Jewry and to conduct academic research about these topics.

Attached to the institute, and operated by it, there was, and still is, the Museum of Jewish Heritage – Center for Oriental Jewish Culture (in Hebrew: המוזיאון למורשת עדות ישראל - מכון הברמן למחקרי ספרות).<sup>556</sup>

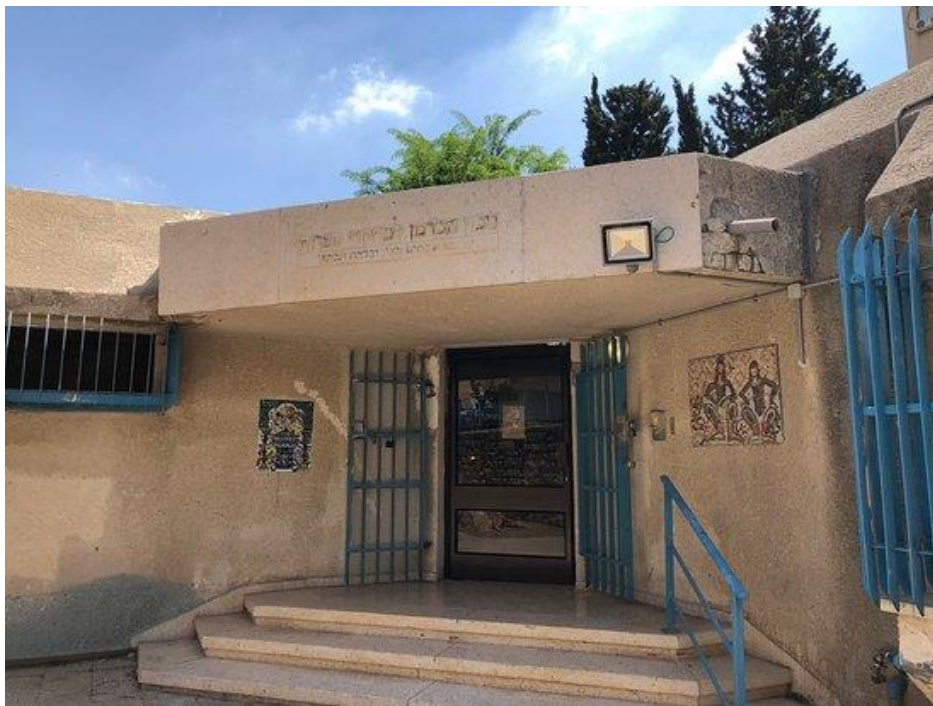


Image 26 - entrance of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – Center for Oriental Jewish Culture in Lod.

The museum gathers quite a substantial number of Judaica and traditional objects related to the life and culture of Oriental Jewry, in

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<sup>556</sup> "Haberman Museum for the Heritage of Israel's ethnic groups," <https://www.facebook.com/Habermanmuseum/>.

particular: traditional clothing, jewelry, models of synagogues, housewares, decorative objects, carpets, embroidered pictures, paintings, a collection of more than a thousand Passover Haggadot and more. The museum started as an institution consecrated to the preservation of the cultural and material heritage of Tunisian Jewry, considered the origins of its first director, Michal Sarfat. However, the fact that the funding came in part from the municipality of Lod and in part from the Ministry of Culture, led the institution to become a research center and a museum dedicated to Oriental Jewry more in general.<sup>557</sup> The Museum thus deals with a large number of Jewish communities in addition to those coming from the MENA region, such as Ethiopian, Indian and Caucasian Jewry (Bukhara and Georgia). However, its main focus remains on North African Jewry, and on Tunisian one in particular. The Museum's collection consists of a wide array of material objects such as books, newspapers, pictures and many print items from North Africa, including a large selection of post-Holocaust prints and numerous essays written in North Africa about the Holocaust. Among the written texts there are many lamentations and various prayers and texts such as the Hitler Haggadah and the Hitler Scroll, about the Nazi occupation of North Africa and Tunisia.

A large model of the Great Synagogue in Tunis is exhibited in the museum together with a system for reproducing prayers recorded there. Moreover, traditional Tunisian customs are displayed through a series of traditional gowns and clothes and the celebration of typically Tunisian holidays. For instance, every year the 'Seudat Yitro' celebration is held in the museum, gathering for a night the Tunisian community of the city.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

<sup>558</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

*Seudat Yitro* or "the celebration of the boys", is a celebration that occurs on the Thursday evening of the week when Yitro's parashah is being read (notably during the month of Shvat). The origin of this holiday can be found both in written sources and oral traditions, and its celebration consists of a rich meal where all the family and relatives are invited. Cf. "Seoudat Ytro ou Choudat Ytrou, La fete des Garçons, Coutume des Juifs de Tunisie," <https://harissa.com/news/article/seoudat-ytro-ou-ch-oudat-ytrou-la-fete-des-garcons-coutume-des-juifs-de-tunisie>.





Image 27 - reproduction of the Great Synagogue in Tunis. Museum of Jewish Heritage – Center for Oriental Jewish Culture in Lod.<sup>559</sup>



Image 28 - traditional Tunisian women's marriage gowns. Museum of Jewish Heritage – Center for Oriental Jewish Culture in Lod.<sup>560</sup>  
 This museum constitutes the first case of a long history of attempts to establish an association representing Tunisian Jewry in Israel and

<sup>559</sup> “Haberman Museum for the Heritage.”

<sup>560</sup> “Haberman Museum for the Heritage.”

a physical place of reference where to gather material and non-material traces of Tunisian culture in Israel.

Ten years later, in 1994, there was another attempt to establish such an institution, when a group of 26 founding members, led by Shaman Harari, founded the association '*Amit*' or Association for the preservation of the Heritage of Tunisian Jewry.<sup>184</sup> This non-profit association was founded in Netanya by a group of Tunisian immigrants, many of whom spent some time in France before arriving in Israel, on a plot of land donated by the municipality.<sup>561</sup> The main aims of *Amit* were to establish a synagogue for the preservation of Tunisian Jewry religious heritage, together with a research center to promote awareness and study of Tunisian Jewry's tradition and heritage. Finally, the creation of a community center which would act as a meeting place for different generations and the establishment of a museum.<sup>562</sup>

As one of the founding members of the association, Victor did his best to ensure a long life to the organization that, contrarily to many other institutions that broke apart only a few years after their creation, is still existing.<sup>563</sup> The association, however, because of internal power fights and lack of funds, has not been very active and, almost 25 years later, did not manage to establish the network of institutions it set to create. The existing community center is operated and used mainly by elderly members of the community, and the activities linked to the museum and to the research center are minimal.<sup>564</sup> And indeed, according to the Ministry of Justice NGOs' register, the activities for the establishment of a community center and a synagogue by *Amit* are still ongoing.<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> In Hebrew *Amutat Leshimur Moreshet Yehudei Tunisia* or Association for the Preservation of the Heritage of Tunisian Jewry.

<sup>561</sup> Netanya is a city in the Northern Central District of Israel and is the capital of the surrounding Sharon plain. Located 30 km north of Tel Aviv, is one of the cities with the biggest number of French-speaking Israelis, including a good number of immigrants from North Africa.

<sup>562</sup> "Amit," <https://www.guidestar.org.il/organization/580242394>.

<sup>563</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

<sup>564</sup> The museum and the research center comprise mainly of a library and are not open to the public but only by appointment. Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017 (my translation).

<sup>565</sup> "Amit."

Victor reported that, at the inauguration ceremony of Amit's synagogue, the MK Aharon Uzan, himself of Tunisian origin, said that every month associations of Tunisian Jews asked him to participate to the inauguration of Tunisian associations, all over the country.<sup>566</sup> He explained why he thinks this happened:

*“there are too many associations and they get on each other's way all the time. There is a scattering of the resources which are already scarce. Another issue, in fact, lays in locating the resources to allow these institutions to carry on their activities. Amit is, to this day, the only Tunisian association in Israel that managed to get funds to build a Synagogue, a museum and a community center.”<sup>567</sup>*

This observation remains relevant until today and in fact, the current situation of Tunisian associationism in Israel still mirrors quite accurately the one described above by Victor and Mr. Hazan, with many little associations that instead of joining their forces (and funds) are fighting each other around how to represente Tunisianess and Tunisian cultural heritage in Israel.

Around the same time Amit was created, another organization for the preservation of Tunisian Jewish cultural heritage, named Shavit or Center for the Preservation of Tunisian Heritage, was established in the southern region of the country, in Beer Sheva. The association was chaired by Yossi Bariah, member of the Zionist religious movement of the Bnei Akiva, who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s.<sup>568</sup> After years of active political career at the local level, in

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<sup>566</sup> Member of the Knesset (MK) Aharon Uzan born in Moknine (South Tunisia) and made Aliyah in 1949, after attending a French college in Sousse and moving to France afterwards. He was one of the founding members of Moshav Gilat and in 1965 he was elected to the Knesset and appointed as a Deputy Minister of Agriculture in 1966. He then became Minister of Agriculture in 1974, and Minister of Immigrant Absorption in 1981. Nava Yardeni, *Les Tunisiaéliens, les Juifs de Tunisie en Israël* (Jerusalem : éditions Elkana, 2010).

<sup>567</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

<sup>568</sup> Yossi Bariah (1937-2018) was born in Tunis studied there at the Alliance school and was a member in the Bnei Akiva Zionist religious youth movement.

the last period of his life, Bariah dedicated himself to the preservation of Tunisian Jewish memory and heritage in Israel, with a specific focus on the World War II period, the Holocaust and the reparations due to the survivors from Tunisia. This association too received some land from the municipality to start the association. However, because of internal disagreements the association split, causing a division of funds and consequently a less effective action in the preservation of Tunisian heritage, since they did not manage to establish a heritage center.<sup>569</sup>

Last in the count of the associations to preserve Tunisian cultural heritage there is the 'World cultural heritage center of Tunisian Judaism in Jerusalem: *Elgriba*'. Named after the Tunisian island of Djerba and headed by dr. Ephraim Chazan, a scholar of Tunisian Jewish rabbinical and secular literature.<sup>570</sup> As in the case of the associations Amit and Shavit, the main objective of '*Elgriba*' was to establish a cultural center and a synagogue for the preservation of Tunisian Jewish heritage and its transmission to future generations. The construction of its cultural center began in the early 2000s but was interrupted due to a lack of funding, and to this day the synagogue, the cultural center and the museum remain incomplete. In the website of the organization (pictured here below) is shown a

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When he was 18, he immigrated to Israel with his family and settled first in Moshav Noam, in the Lachish region, and then in Kfar Yona. See "Hu haiah melah Haaretz: halach le'olamo Yosi,"

<http://mynetbeersheva.co.il/%D7%97%D7%93%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%94%D7%95%D7%90-%D7%94%D7%99%D7%94-%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97-%D7%94%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%A5-%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%9A-%D7%9C%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%95-%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A1%D7%99-%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%97-%D7%94%D7%90%D7%99%D7%A9-%D7%A9%D7%97%D7%9C%D7%9D-%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%94%D7%A0%D7%A6%D7%97%D7%AA-%D7%99%D7%94%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%94-321829/2>

<sup>569</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017 (my translation).

<sup>570</sup> Djerba is an island situated in the gulf of Gabès in the south-east of Tunisia. In this island the Jewish presence is very old, about 2,500 years, and 'ElGriba' is the main synagogue located in the village of Hara Seghira. The synagogue is the oldest in Tunisia and is a renowned site for Jewish pilgrimages both from North Africa and Israel. In fact, according to the tradition the synagogue is the site where many Jewish saints (tzaddiqim) are buried.

*maquette* of the cultural center and museum which were to be realized in Jerusalem and which, to this day, still do not exist.<sup>571</sup>



Image 29 - Webpage of the association 'World cultural heritage center of Tunisian Judaism in Jerusalem: *Elgriba*'.

It is fair to assume, from the testimonies gathered, that the lack of a unique association representing Tunisian Jewry and its cultural heritage in Israel is due to a set of reasons. Firstly, the fact that there is no general agreement on how Tunisian heritage should be preserved in Israel led to a dispersion of the forces of the community that is still ongoing till today. Secondly, all the organizations that existed thus far were, in general, fairly small and did not collaborate with one another to create a bigger more significant institution. Finally, due to the dispersion of the funding and sponsors available to many different entities, the creation of an operating association became very difficult. For this reason, many Tunisian associations developed mostly online, with a countless number of webpages and Facebook groups dedicated to the heritage of Tunisian Jews.<sup>572</sup>

The landscape of associations dealing with the heritage of Tunisian Jewry in Israel was, as a consequence, very fragmented and the

<sup>571</sup> "World cultural heritage center of Tunisian Judaism in Jerusalem: *Elgriba*," <http://elghribajerusalem.com/?lang=fr>.

<sup>572</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

need to create a more inclusive organization that would unite all the small associations eventually emerged. Therefore, in 2012, under the auspices of dr. Ephraim Chazan, chair of the 'Elgriba' association, "The World Federation of Tunisian Jewry in Israel" was established.<sup>573</sup> The association was chaired by dr. Miriam Guez Avigal, daughter of Tunisian immigrants in Israel and renowned scholar and activist in the field of Tunisian Jewry.<sup>574</sup> Before becoming the chair of the 'Federation', Miriam Guez-Avigal was the president of the women's section of the 'Elgriba' association. This section called '*Conseil général des femmes de la Ghriba Jérusalem*' (General committee of Jerusalem's Ghriba women) was the most active part of the organization, and, while embracing the general values and goals of the main organization, it also encouraged Tunisian women to carry out academic research specifically on the subject of Tunisian Jewish women's heritage, pushing young generations into genealogical research. Guez- Avigal is also a scholar and the chair of an enlarged committee for the integration of Oriental Jewish heritage within Israeli culture. She is therefore invested not only in the preservation of Tunisian Jewish cultural heritage, but also in its diffusion and inclusion within Israeli society at large. As she stated speaking of her work:

*"The Oriental Jews (Mizrahim) have a rich cultural and historical continuum that has been so far absent [from Israeli culture]. In my view, the time has come to present a faithful account of Jewish history in the*

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<sup>573</sup> "Hadaf hareshmi : Hafederazia ha'olamit shel yahadut Tunisia belsrael," <https://www.facebook.com/Federation.mondiale.judaisme.tunisien.enIsrael/>  
« Fédération Mondiale des Juifs de Tunisie en Israël »  
<http://tunesisrael.org/wp1/>

<sup>574</sup> Miriam Gez-Avigal is a researcher in the field of Tunisian Jewish women, by exploring, preserving and making their heritage public. She recorded, in collaboration with students, thousands of hours of conversations with the women of the community living in Israel and Tunisia, thus establishing an archive documenting the heritage of Tunisian Jewry. Her research focuses on Tunisian women's culture, in areas such as poetry, fiction, proverbs, customs and clothing. She also studied Tunisian men's culture, the way in which they learned Torah, Bible reading, Hebrew language tradition among Tunisian Jews, community leaders, synagogue leadership, religious and secular poetry, customs, practices, and more. See "About me," <http://www.gez-avigal.com/>.

*MENA region as well. To that end, emphasis should be placed on recognizing the cultural and spiritual heritage of Oriental and Sephardi Jewry, while emphasizing the commonalities and fostering their sentiment of belonging to the people of Israel and its country. This will be achieved through the integration of Mizrahi culture into the Israeli public sphere, its education system, academia and research. I believe this is a necessary step to consolidate Israeli society as a whole.”<sup>575</sup>*

This statement is fundamental in the understanding of the role this new association assumes upon itself, which is not only of preservation of the Tunisian heritage but also of integration of the “Mizrahi culture” in the Israeli one, as stated in the organization charter: *“The Federation will engage in a dialogue with institutions of higher education, research institutes, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and other authorities dealing with the preservation of cultures and heritage and their transmission to the next generation, in order to bring the cultural heritage of Tunisian Jews into all areas of knowledge and school textbooks.”<sup>576</sup>* It is worthwhile noting the use of the term Mizrahi here is done as a political statement of the fact that, not only the dichotomy Ashkenazi/Mizrahi is still alive within Israeli society, but also that it is being addressed, at least to some extent, by activists and political representatives, such as Guez-Avigal, at a more official level, involving the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Another member of the ‘Conseil général des femmes’ who contributed with Guez-Avigal to the creation of the ‘Federation’ is Hanna Pérez-Cohen. She is a first-generation Israeli Tunisian who specialized in the study of the cult of female Jewish saints in Tunisia. In particular she studies the Ghribas (ancient synagogues), the

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<sup>575</sup> “About me.”

Interview of the author with Miriam Guez- Avigal, Petach Tikva, 30/03/2017.

<sup>576</sup> “Hadaf hareshmi: Hafederazia.”

pilgrimages related to them and how this tradition was 'imported' from Southern Tunisia to Southern Israel.<sup>577</sup> Her first trips to Tunisia were for research purposes, to study the cult of the female Saint Lakhtar, and only later on, in 2000, she organized a heritage trip for her family, when she returned to Nabeul with her mother and brother, to find the places of her childhood.<sup>578</sup>

These two women, who dedicated their professional lives to the preservation of Tunisian cultural heritage in Israel through their scholarship and their research, are also actively involved in Israel's civil society promoting, through grassroots associations, the preservation of Tunisian cultural heritage and its integration in the Israeli culture and identity. It is precisely with this aim that Miriam Guez-Avigal was elected as president of the "The World Federation of Tunisian Jewry in Israel" and Hanna Perez-Cohen followed her as part of the organizational committee.

The main aim of the 'Federation' is thus to act as an umbrella organization, gathering all the small existing organizations for the preservation of Tunisian cultural heritage advancing "*the Tunisian community in Israel, and in the research, documentation and preservation of the Tunisian cultural heritage.*"<sup>579</sup> Concerning its umbrella function the organization's charter states that the 'Federation' "*should consider itself as representing all Tunisian Jews in Israel and around the world, and in every respect its policies will be derived from this principle.*" For this reason, state authorities should: "*regard the Federation as a fundamental element of the [Tunisian] community, as the leader of its struggle and as a representative of the entire community, and to provide it with the legal and budgetary tools to fulfill this task.*"<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> The Ghribas (Tunisian-Arabic for "foreign") are ancient synagogues linked to mysterious female figures, seen by the lower class of Tunisian Jewish society as saints. The Ghribas, like the sanctuaries of the great rabbis and Kabbalists, attracted many Jewish pilgrims. The Ghriba in Djerba, the most popular, currently attracts thousands of pilgrims to Tunisia's every year. The veneration of these holy figures and those of the revered rabbis as well, followed the immigration of Jews from Tunisia to Israel.

<sup>578</sup> Interview of the author with Hanna, Jerusalem 27/03/17.

<sup>579</sup> "Hadaf hareshmi: Hafederazia."

<sup>580</sup> "Hadaf hareshmi: Hafederazia."



In accordance with its aim to develop awareness both in Tunisian-Israeli youth, and in the Israeli society at large, about the role different cultures play in Israeli society, the 'Federation' is very active on a grassroots level and organizes many social activities both for the members of the community, and for a larger public as well. As stated in their charter; "*The Federation will be the defining factor in strengthening the image of the [Tunisian] community in Israeli society in the spirit of Judaism, by promoting actions such as: advancing the future generation by assisting them in higher education institutions; promoting actions of public ethics; helping those in need, and giving respect and an appropriate treatment to the disadvantaged populations. To this end, the organization will find proactive involvement in various issues relevant to the Israeli society at large and will work together with other bodies to promote values relevant to the Israeli tradition.*"<sup>581</sup>

The Federation posits as its main aim the preservation and a patrimonialization of Tunisian cultural heritage and of the heritages of Jews of Oriental and North African descent that remained so far under the radar through the creation of grassroots organizations, centers and museums and their activities. To this end, the Federation organizes each year a series of different events to engage the community of Tunisian origin from all over the country and to keep alive Tunisian heritage and pass it onto the next generations. One of these events which saw an extraordinary participation, was the event for the inauguration of the association held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2017 at the Concert Hall of the city of Petach Tikva. I participated as a guest of Hanna Pérez-Cohen who was in charge of the organization of the event. The auditorium was full to its maximum capacity (800 people).

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<sup>581</sup> "Hadaf hareshmi: Hafederazia."



Image 30 - Concert Hall in Petah Tikva the night of the inauguration of the 'Federation'; below people pinning on a map of Tunisia their city of origin. Photo taken by the author.

In the auditorium hall a series of stands were organized, all related to Tunisian culture, food and heritage. One of them hosted a map of Tunisia and guests were encouraged to pin down their city of origin on the map (see picture below), another one was selling typical Tunisian food such as fricassee, whilst a third one was selling books, religious on one side and secular, about Tunisian art and history, on the other.<sup>582</sup> All the books were about Tunisian Jewry, its history and traditions, among them that of the cult of saints, typical of North African Judaism.

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<sup>582</sup> Typical Tunisian fried, doughy rolls stuffed with flaky tuna, hard-boiled eggs, a smear of *harissa* (hot chili pepper paste used liberally in North Africa) and preserved lemons.



Image 31 -people pinning on a map of Tunisia their city of origin. Photo taken by the author.

Before the beginning of the evening a speech was held by state representatives to welcome the creation of the association and to underline its relevance in the landscape of contemporary Israeli culture. Of particular relevance was the presence of the Minister of Culture and Sport, Miri Regev, that recognized the importance and the role of such organizations in the cultural and social landscape of Israeli society.

The whole event comprised a series of performances from artists (actors and singers) of Tunisian origin such as Corinne Allal<sup>583</sup> and

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<sup>583</sup>Corinne (or Korin) Allal (born 15 March 1955 in Tunisia) is an Israeli singer-songwriter, guitarist and producer. Her family immigrated to Israel in 1963, settling first in Netanya, and later in Herzliya. She began playing guitar at age 12. After her military service, Allal appeared as a backing vocalist and guitarist on many popular Israeli rock albums during the second half of the 1970s. By 1981 she was fronting the punk band Lipstick. Her solo career began in 1984 with the release of her self-titled debut album. She has enjoyed so far, a successful career as a recording artist and producer. She came out as a lesbian in 2001 during an

Yoni Roeh playing modern music, or Tomer Cohen playing traditional Tunisian music accompanied by the 'Malouf Orchestra', an ensemble established under the auspices of the World Federation of Tunisian Jewry itself.



Image 32 - Leaflet of the evening “Bonsoir Tunisie” organized for the inauguration of the association The World Federation of Tunisian Jewry in Israel.

After this first event, the association periodically organized every year a number of events related to Tunisian tradition and memory, both in Israel and in Tunisia itself. For instance, in the occasion of the Tunisian holidays of ‘Rosh hodesh banot’, of the ‘Bchicha’ or ‘Rosh hodesh Nissan’ the Federation organized each time a specific event with music and typical food for the people attending.<sup>584</sup> As we can see from the some of the leaflets here below each event was sponsored by the Israeli government and held in a different location. By organizing each event in a different location, the Federation

interview prior to the release of her album "Taninanak" and is active in campaigning for LGBT equality in Israel.

<sup>584</sup> “Roch Hodech Nissan ou la Soirée de la Bchicha par le dr Victor Hayoun,” <https://harissa.com/news/article/roch-hodech-nissan-ou-la-soir%C3%A9e-de-la-bchicha-par-le-dr-victor-hayoun>

wanted to make it more inclusive by allowing to people from all over the country to participate.

הפדרציה העולמית של יהדות תוניסיה בישראל  
Federation Mondiale Juive Tunisienne en Israël

המשרד להשכלה  
העליונה

מדינת נתיבות

**ראש חודש לבנות**  
לפי מסורת יהודי תוניסיה  
**והענקת תעודת הוקרה**  
**ליקירת העדה התוניסאית**

**גר שישי של חנוכה**  
ביום שלישי כ"ט כסלו תשע"ז 17.12.2017  
בשעה 17:00  
במתנ"ס נתיבות, שדרות ירושלים 6 נתיבות

בנוכח  
**השרה לשוויון חברתי, ח"כ גילה גמליאל**  
מנכ"ל העירייה, מר משה מימון  
י"ר הסדרציה, ד"ר מרים גז-אביגיל

בתכנית  
קבלת פנים, הדלקת נרות חנוכה בניגון תוניסאי,  
ביכוד, יריד ספרים והרצאת אורח

**מופע מוסיקלי**  
**בליווי תזמורת המאלוף**  
ניהול מוסיקלי תומר כהן

עם האמנים:  
**תומר כהן מורן נחזי רובי חן**

כרטיסים: 60 ₪ למרצים והזמנות:  
רח'י צ'רמזי 050-4548846 | רבקה חיים 050-3539791 | ארלם לבן 050-7450688  
יעקב טרבליסי 054-2345956 | משה גבסי 052-8077761 | מל"ח כפרים 054-7713480  
הסכת האירוע: יעקב טרבליסי 054-2345956 | אבי כהן 052-3964299

Image 33 - the leaflet for the celebration with a concert evening of the “Rosh hodesh banot”, taking place at Netivot’s community center. At this event too, a number of famous Tunisian artists performed, included Tomer Cohen, always present at the events of the ‘Federation’.



Image 34 - The leaflet of the seminar held in the King Solomon Hotel in Jerusalem for the end of the week where the Tunisian holiday of "Seudat Yitro" is celebrated.

For the evening of the 'Bchicha' of 2019, a concert was organized again at the Concert Hall in Petach Tikva. The event was attended by senior members of the Tunisian community in Israel, by a delegation of Tunisian Jews from around the world (mainly France) and by a delegation of Jews from Tunisia who gathered to participate to the evening together. Here too, many artists performed, among them: Avraham Barda - a senior artist of the Barda family, very recognized within the Tunisian community in Israel - singing both in Hebrew and Arabic, and Tomer Cohen, singing in Hebrew, Arabic and French. In the last few years, Petach Tikva became a place of reference for Tunisian Jewry in Israel, especially thanks to the activities of the Federation and to the yearly gatherings held in its Concert Hall that are becoming a fixed

appointment.<sup>585</sup> The fact that the 'Federation' has no fixed headquarters and that every event is held in a different venue, on one side it contributes to the dissemination of its activities and to its inclusiveness. On the other however, the lack of fixed headquarters prevents the association from developing a cultural center of its own, and eventually, a museum.

In addition to the activities mentioned above, there are two more important activities that the 'Federation' promotes on a yearly basis. The first one consists in organizing heritage trips to Tunisia for Israeli Jews of Tunisian origin. Usually these trips are scheduled in occasion of the yearly pilgrimage to the Ghriba and have the aim of keeping Tunisian tradition and history in Israel alive by involving younger generations in these trips.<sup>586</sup> It must be acknowledged that the success in involving younger members of the community has been thus far quite limited. Here below we can see one of the promotional leaflets for the trips to Tunisia.

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<sup>585</sup>"Festival Lailat Bsisah Behichal Petach Tikva," <http://www.habama.co.il/Pages/Description.aspx?Subj=3&Area=1&ArticleId=31292>.

<sup>586</sup> The ancient El Ghriba Synagogue, is located on the island of Djerba in Tunisia. It is situated in the Jewish village of Hara Seghira and it is the oldest synagogue in Tunisia. Moreover, besides being the center of the island's Jewish life, it is also a site of pilgrimage, one of the legends associated with its founding claims that either a stone or a door from Solomon's Temple or the Second Temple is incorporated in the building. The pilgrimage takes place every year on the 33rd day of the Counting of the Omer, in between Pesach and Shavuot. On the 14th of Iyar, the festivities begin, in remembrance of rabbi Meir Baal HaNess, and last until the Lag BaOmer on the 18th of Iyar, in remembrance of rabbi Simeon bar Yochai (regionally known as rabbi Shimon). Cf. Paul Sebag, *Histoire des juifs de Tunisie des origines à nos jours* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1991).



Image 35 - Leaflet for the heritage trips to Tunisia in occasion of the pilgrimage to the Ghriba synagogue.

As marked in the leaflet the trip has been escorted and guided by dr. Miriam Guez-Avigal, president of the 'Federation' and scholar of Tunisian Jewry and by Hanna Pérez Cohen, member of the 'Federation' herself, who accompanied too various groups, starting in 1996, even before the establishment of the 'Federation', within the framework of the 'Conseil général des femmes de la Ghriba Jérusalem'.<sup>587</sup>

The second very significant activity that the Federation organizes, in collaboration with the other main Tunisian associations, such as Shavit in Beer Sheva, ElGhriba in Jerusalem and Amit in Netanya, is the annual ceremony for the commemoration of Tunisian victims in the Holocaust in Yad Vashem. This initiative started in 2009 and occurs ever since on December 6<sup>th</sup> every year.<sup>588</sup>

<sup>587</sup> Interview of the author with Hanna, Jerusalem 27/03/17.

<sup>588</sup> "Annual rally and commemoration of the Jews of Tunisia who perished in the Holocaust, on the 70<sup>th</sup> years anniversary from the beginning of the persecution of Tunisian Jews," <https://www.yadvashem.org/he/events/06-december-2012.html> (Hebrew).



The commemoration day includes a series of talks and a musical performance, in addition to a memorial service held in the Tent of Remembrance in Yad Vashem, where all the names of Tunisian Jews who perished in the Holocaust, both in Tunisia and in Europe, are read out loud.



Image 36 - Concert from the commemoration ceremony held in Yad Vashem on December 6, 2017.



Image 37 - memorial service in the tent of Remembrance

This activity, in accordance with the founding principles of the Federation, was created with the goal to introduce Tunisian history in the Israeli public sphere and making it part of the Israeli collective memory. In particular, the topic of the Holocaust, at the base of Israeli identity and monopolized for a long time as an Ashkenazi/European event, is being reclaimed by Tunisian memory activists as one of the keys to include Tunisian history and heritage in the Israeli mainstream narrative. The way the ceremony was organized, while including some Tunisian elements such as the concert, was structured following a quite formal framework for Holocaust remembrance ceremonies (e.g. conference, reading of the names out loud, ceremony etc.).<sup>589</sup>

For the heads of the organizations and the Tunisian community at large it was important to establish a separate day to remember the Holocaust in North Africa and to acknowledge that, even if in smaller proportions, also North African Jews were targeted by the Nazi regime and included in the final solution.<sup>590</sup> The recognition of this fact and the existence of the ceremony itself were promoted, among others by Victor<sup>591</sup>, a second generation historian of Tunisian origin who dedicated the last ten years of his life researching the numbers and names behind Nazi persecutions and killings in Tunisia. He recently presented the results of his studies at the Dahan Center of Bar-Ilan University, explaining that his study proved that the number of Tunisian Jews that perished during the Holocaust is way higher than what was believed to be in the past. He said:

*“I realized there was no scientific historical research on the Holocaust of Tunisian Jews, so I decided to study the issue myself and now I have been working*

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<sup>589</sup> Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 91.

<sup>590</sup> Yablonka, *Les Juifs d'Orient*, 115-130.

<sup>591</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

*on it for the past 12 years. Until 2006, we knew about only 400 victims among Jews of Tunisian origin. In 2012, the number went up to 488, and today that number is close to 700. This number sums up not only the people killed in labor camps in Tunisia, which was actually the smallest number; but also, those killed outside those camps in different ways and those who were deported to and from Europe to the death camps, mainly Auschwitz.”<sup>592</sup>*

He claims that the importance of his work lies mainly in the fact that it gives recognition and public resonance to a history and a narrative, that of Oriental Jews, that were not, until very recently, part of the public discourse in Israel. In fact, up until the 1970s, North African Jews, while still identifying themselves with the Holocaust through a sense of common destiny shared by the Jewish people, were not included in a common national narrative about it and the experience of North African Jews was excluded both from public and private commemorations.<sup>593</sup> This not only prevented Israeli society from commemorating, and thus, including their story in the country's collective memory; but also led North African Jews themselves to believe that they were not a legitimate part of that narrative, considered and portrayed as a European-only story.

This 'silencing' of memory can be observed in the first museums dedicated in Israel to Holocaust memory and history, where the history and narrative of Oriental communities were completely absent. This happened both in the case of grassroots institutions, established by private groups of citizens, in most cases themselves Holocaust survivors of European origin, and, most significantly, in the case of institutional museums, such as Yad VaShem. In the first few decades of statehood, Israeli collective memory was solely

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<sup>592</sup> Interview of the author with Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

<sup>593</sup> Yablonka, *Les Juifs d'Orient*, 115-130.

concentrated on the commemoration of the annihilation of European Judaism. This can be explained by the fact that, as showed in the previous chapters, those who promoted and created the new narratives of the state were quite a narrow group exclusively of European origin, many of them Holocaust survivors themselves<sup>594</sup>. Not only that, but in more than one occasion, Oriental Jews, and Tunisian Jews more specifically, were willingly excluded from the narrative about the Holocaust, as it was being created in Israel. This happened, for instance, during Eichmann's trial (1961), when the Holocaust became the main topic in the national debate and in defining national identity. North African Jews wanted to be included in this debate, and for this reason, a group of Tunisian Jews sent a letter to Gideon Hausner, the head prosecutor, notifying him the absence of Tunisia from the list of the countries where Nazis were persecuting and killing Jews, so that they could be included in the list. After a series of plights, eventually, Tunisia was not included in the list of the countries, and Oriental Jews were only marginally integrated in the process through the testimony of a Greek Jew, who acted as a sort of spokesperson for all the Oriental communities.<sup>595</sup> This exclusion of Tunisian and Libyan Jewry, from the process, and thus from the collective memory of the Holocaust marked, at the time, a rupture between two different collective memories of the Holocaust that were developing: that of the European survivors and that of those hailing from North Africa.<sup>596</sup>

These memories would be re-united only much later, when North African Jews demands for their own place in the creation of the Israeli intellectual and cultural narrative, through a reevaluation of their own cultural heritage, led to an increasing insistence on the inclusion of Holocaust in North Africa as part of the Israeli narrative about that event. These instances were part of a wider change in

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<sup>594</sup> Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 9.

<sup>595</sup> Yablonka, *Les Juifs d'Orient*, 98.

<sup>596</sup> Tunisia and Libya were the only two countries in North Africa where Jews were directly persecuted by the Nazi-Fascist forces. In Tunisia by the same Nazis that were occupying the country and in Libya by the Italian fascist government at first, and then directly by the Nazis who were fighting the Allies

Holocaust awareness and thus commemoration, that started in the 1990s, along with an international movement that went in the same direction.<sup>597</sup>

This movement would result, at the beginning of the years 2000, in an inclusion of North African Holocaust narratives not only in the sphere of private memories, but also in that of public ones. More specifically in the year 2002, for the first time, the Massuah institute for the study of the Holocaust included in an exhibition meant to tell the story of the Holocaust through the Eichmann trial, the stories and testimonies of North African communities.<sup>598</sup> Following, in 2005, also the new Yad Vashem History Museum included the plights of North African Jewry during WWII in its exhibition.<sup>599</sup>

Another sign of the inclusion of the narrative of North African Jewry in the wider national Israeli narrative, about the Holocaust, and finally about national identity is the participation of Oriental Jews to alternative ceremonies of Holocaust remembrance such as *Zikaron Basalon*. This project attracted men and women, younger and older participants, of all ethnic origins, religious, political orientation and social class, spreading outside private living rooms to reach schools, social clubs, women's shelters and other locations, connecting people through all those different spectrums. The flexible character of *Zikaron BaSalon* allowed to include in Holocaust remembrance events those groups that were usually under-represented such as Jews of Oriental origin. An example is given by Yigal Alomit, whom I interviewed. He immigrated to Israel in 1952 and therefore was in Tunisia during the period of Nazi occupation. In the last 10 years he

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<sup>597</sup> Rubin Suleiman, "Paradigms."

<sup>598</sup> The Massuah Institute for the Study of the Holocaust was established in 1972 by members of Hanaoar Hazioni and Akiva youth movements at Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak. The Massuah Institute is a museum and an international seminar center designed to evoke discourse on the significance of the Holocaust in our contemporary society and culture. The Massuah Institute's campus comprises the central school for teaching the Holocaust, which conducts seminars for young people, members of the security forces, and teachers from Israel and abroad. See: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-massuah-institute-for-the-study-of-the-holocaust> (last visited 06/08/2019).

<sup>599</sup> "The Jews of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia," <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/the-jews-of-algeria-morocco-and-tunisia.html>.

participated every year to Zikaron baSalon events in his city, Jerusalem, where he used to tell his experience in Tunisia before and during Nazi occupation.<sup>600</sup> These grassroots events led to a display of the diverse destinies Jews went through during the war, allowing for the inclusion of said narratives under the wider label of Israeliness.<sup>601</sup> At the same time, a more official inclusion of North African Jews' narrative in the field Holocaust studies started to take place, along with official commemoration ceremonies in Yad Vashem.<sup>602</sup>

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Historian Ann Curthoys defined museums as: "a major form of public communication about history, a place for telling new generations about the struggles, achievements and disasters of the past."<sup>603</sup> She believed that, reproducing a shared collective identity, museums face a challenge in fairly representing "diverse and conflicting historical understandings."<sup>604</sup>

The creation of a number of museums and associations dedicated to the preservation of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups in Israel speaks about a more open attitude that has developed in the last few decades, in the public sphere, regarding the different cultural heritages composing the country's identity. In particular, ethnic museums and cultural centers both for European and for Oriental Jews, became places where smaller communities and minorities could showcase and display their own memories, and,

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<sup>600</sup> Interview of the author with Yigal, Jerusalem - 12/11/2018.

"Zikaron basalon - Yigal Chalamit mesaper al hayalduto bazel hakibush hanazi beTunisia – Erev Yom HaShoah 11.04.2018,"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITVkpEMggj0>.

<sup>601</sup> Rubin Suleiman, "Paradigms." Susan Gilson Miller, "Sephardim and Holocaust Historiography," in in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), Ibook edition.

<sup>602</sup> Saadoun, "Stages in Jewish Historiography and Collective Memory".

<sup>603</sup> Anne Curthoys, "How Australia's Histories Influence the Present," *Paper presented at the Plenary Session, ICOM International Meeting*, October 1998, Melbourne, Australia.

<sup>604</sup> Curthoys, "How Australia's Histories."

thus, version of history, boosting the sense of community and pride, and shaping their role within the national narrative.

The state, once the main agent when it came to memorialization practices, has today lost its monopoly on how memory should be performed and on the choice of what is to be included in it; losing, as a consequence, its exclusive ownership on the formation of national and group identities, as proven by the success of events such as the Zikaron BaSalon initiative. Thanks to the internet, anyone can have access to an unlimited range of memorialization options and reach a much wider public, virtually becoming an *entrepreneur de mémoire*.<sup>605</sup>

The relationship between official and grassroots national narrative in Israel is still under discussion and the influence of the establishment on it is still a significant one. However, the processes depicted in these pages speaks of a change in the way national narrative in Israel is being thought and talked about, to make space for voices and groups that were previously left unheard.

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<sup>605</sup> Michael Pollak, "Mémoire, oubli, silence," in *Une identité blessée. Études de sociologie et d'histoire*, ed. Michael Pollak (Paris: Métailié, 1993), 15-39.  
Sarah Gensburger, "Entrepreneurs de mémoire et configuration française," in *Les Justes de France, Politiques Publiques de la Mémoire*, Sarah Gensburger (Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2010), 51-71.

## Conclusions

At the beginning of this dissertation, we started asking the questions of how Israeli Jewish identities have been built over time and space and what role ethnic stratification played in their creation. With my research, I tried to question the paradox of a society that was created to unify the Jewish people under a unique ethnic umbrella, only to find itself divided along those same lines, later on. Jewishness has been used, on one side, as a unifying factor (Biblical narrative, Jewish law and tradition) and, on the other, as a line of demarcation (different Jewish communities in the Diaspora). This brought me to analyze how references from the past have been reworked in the present to establish what it means to be “ethnically Jewish” in Israel today<sup>606</sup>.

We have seen how, throughout the years, two elements played a pivotal role in the creation of an Israeli public narrative: ethnicity and the memory of the Holocaust. These two elements, crossing one another, both in the private and in the public sphere, became essential factors of today’s Israeli identity.<sup>607</sup>

I considered in my work two specific ethnic subgroups: Israelis of Tunisian and of Polish descent and I presented them as examples of the ethnic categorization carried out in Israel between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. As it emerged from the interviews, the review of literature and art and literary production, ethnicity remained a structuring factor of Israeli society until today, more than class, gender and age.<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> See Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman, *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns* (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2004), in particular parts I and II.

<sup>607</sup> Omer Bartov, “Recentering the Holocaust (Again),” in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), Ibook edition.

<sup>608</sup> The relevance of the intra-Jewish ethnic issue has been recently brought under the spotlight again by the riots of Ethiopian immigrants, protesting against discriminations clearly based on ethnic grounds. The protests were held in July 2019 by Israelis of Ethiopian origin in response to the death of the 18-year-old Solomon Tekla at the hands of a police officer in Kiryat Haim. This was the most recent of a series of protests initiated by the Ethiopian community in Israel against what they perceive to be as a systemic discrimination, due to their skin color. For



The categories that were used to implement this intra-Jewish ethnic division were those of European Jews (Ashkenazi) and Oriental Jews (Sephardi or Mizrahi later on, in Israel). These categories, although used before, in the accepted meaning they have in Israel today are the product of the large-scale immigration of the 1950s. In that period, the newborn state had to absorb a massive number of Jewish refugees coming from Europe on one side, and Middle East and North Africa on the other.<sup>609</sup> Looking at Jews coming from the MENA region as 'powerless' and at European Jews as 'powerful', the opposition Ashkenazim/Mizrahim did not reflect the historical and sociological complexity of the two groups, mixing together in one big category, that of Mizrahim very different groups of people: such as Westernized Jews living in Tunisia and Moroccan Jews coming from the Atlas Mountains. Quickly these ethnic categories were associated with power positions within Israeli society, flattening out differences and overlooking the plurality of Middle Eastern and North African identities, as well as their roles in shaping the ethnic discourse in Israel. On the other hand, the Holocaust, and the Zionist narrative of destruction and rebirth related to it, was used as a means of unification for the different ethnicities in the country. As historian Omer Bartov maintained, a dynamic of victimization linked to the genocide of European Jewry, became widespread among many Israelis, disregarding of their ancestry.<sup>610</sup> The Holocaust was thus used as an umbrella event under which the state tried to group Israelis of all ethnicities, as an 'entry ticket' to Israeliness.

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more see: "Ethiopian-Israelis protest for 3rd day after fatal police shooting," last modified July 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/03/world/middleeast/ethiopia-israel-police-shooting.html>, and Shalva Weil, "Religion, Blood and the Equality of Rights: the Case of Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 4 (1997): 412-497.

<sup>609</sup> See Eliezer, Ben- Rafael, *The Emergence of Ethnicity: Cultural groups and Social Conflict in Israel* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982).

Uziel O., Schmelz, Sergio, Della Pergola et al. (eds.), *Ethnic Differences among Israeli Jews: A New Look* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990).

<sup>610</sup> Bartov, "Recentring."

Against this background, I tried to analyze the use that was made of memory in reproducing ethnic divisions, on the private and on the public level. Similarly, I interrogated myself on the role of cultural heritage and on the references to the past that it mobilizes.

I observed the evolution that occurred throughout time in the way ethnic identities were represented in Israel: from a uniform Zionist narrative to a more nuanced version of what it meant to be Israeli.

In the case of Ashkenazi Jews, when speaking about representing national heritage, the European one was considered the norm, especially in the public sphere, and was almost the only one to be represented as valid in terms of national culture, along with the Zionist narrative of return to the Land of Israel and of ingathering of the Jewish diasporas. As reported by Dalit:

*I am sure you read that Israel was established as a Western country and whoever had a different culture should not show it, one should be 'tzabar,' you should have the culture that was consolidated in Israel without any reference to the Sephardi culture. And that's how I grew up you know... it's something I am not inventing for you; it has been written in books. I basically went out [of the house] and behaved as a Polish little girl.<sup>611</sup>*

Polish Jews, who were among the founders of the state, got to build the foundations of its national narrative and memory, basing it on their own culture, which thus became the invisible norm. On the other hand, Mizrahim were considered as the 'different' and culturally inferior and were forced to conform to the Ashkenazi norm, putting aside a centuries old tradition.

However, throughout time there were different turning points that changed the representation of these ethnic categories, both in the private and in the public sphere. On one side, the Eichmann trial

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<sup>611</sup> Interview of the author with Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

(1961) represented a turning point in the representation of Ashkenaziness in Israel. Throughout time it evolved from a heroic narrative of few people who fought against the Nazis to a more personalized one, that included also individual accounts that emphasized the human side of that event, as opposed to the heroic and Zionist images associated with it thus far, allowing for a different understanding of Ashkenaziness.<sup>612</sup>

On the other side, the elections of 1977 and the fall from grace of the Mapai party, allowed for an emergence in the public discourse of Oriental Jews' narratives in Israel, at a moment when voices different from the Socialist Zionist one, started to be heard in the Israeli public discourse. Around this period, in fact, Jews of Oriental origin started to enter the political scene in a more significant number, acting in the interest of their own communities. In the Tunisian case, memory and the transmission of cultural heritage went from being more private and familial, to become more public with the creation of ethnic associations and museums starting from the early 1980s, when an opening of Israeli society to different narratives gave more space also to non-hegemonic narratives, such as the Mizrahi one. As the president of the World Federation of Tunisian Jewry, Miriam Guez-Avigal, reported:

*"The Oriental Jews (Mizrahim) have a rich cultural and historical continuum that has been so far absent [from Israeli culture]. In my view, the time has come to present a faithful account of Jewish history in the MENA region as well. To that end, emphasis should be placed on recognizing the cultural and spiritual heritage of Oriental and Sephardi Jewry, while emphasizing the commonalities and fostering their sentiment of belonging to the people of Israel and its country. This will be achieved through the*

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<sup>612</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Paradigms and Differences," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), Ibook edition.

*integration of Mizrahi culture into the Israeli public sphere, its education system, academia and research.”*<sup>613</sup>

At the same time, Ashkenazi ethnicity passed from being invisible but hegemonic to be more visible, almost becoming one of the many ethnicities making up Israeli society. The creation of a number of different ethnic museums showed the will to engage in a problematic way with Zionism and to preserve and carry on different cultural heritages that would otherwise be lost, as we have seen in the case of The German-Speaking Jewry Heritage Museum (the ‘Jeckes Museum’) or of the Memorial Museum of the Hungarian Speaking Jewry.

Moreover, during the last two decades a number of initiatives paved the way for alternative and more inclusive ways of understanding Israeliness and creating a national Israeli narrative. For example: the renovation of the Beit HaTfutzot museum will provide a new representation both of life in the Diaspora and of its communities. As opposed to the previous narrative that stigmatized all communities in the Diaspora, Oriental ones in particular, in this new museum space will be given to all communities in Israel to tell their story from their point of view.

Another very successful means that allowed for a wider inclusion in the memorial discourse of many different voices is the use of food and culinary traditions to open the door for new ways of conceiving being Israeli today. Food and cookery allowed to preserve and bring to light traditions, both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, that were put aside during the Zionist hegemony of the first years of statehood. Food in particular was used as an ‘easy’ mean to integrate different ethnic groups in Israel, allowing for the inclusion of given traits of some groups, namely Mizrahi ones, into Israeli society, without discussing more political aspects such as their economic or social integration.

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<sup>613</sup> “About me.”

Interview of the author with Miriam Guez- Avigal, Petach Tikva, 30/03/2017

Another example of this integration can be found in the creation of new and alternative ways of relating to Holocaust memory. A series of initiatives, such as *Zikaron baSalon*, were established as a way of remembering the Holocaust, while at the same time creating a sense of community by including not only different ethnicities, namely north African Jews, in the narrative of an event such as the Holocaust, but also encouraging the participation of youth, less interested in matters of memory, to a more informal and engaging event. As reported by one of the participants:

*"I feel that most Israelis don't understand how much the Holocaust is a significant part of our personalities and how it affects the political discussion in Israel. The narrative is usually really narrow on this day: We see lots of ceremonies, but there's no real conversation or debate about how it affects us today. With Zikaron baSalon, he says, that's beginning to change."*<sup>614</sup>

In conclusion, even though the Ashkenazi narrative is still present within Israeli society and, in many cases, is still hegemonic, some space has been made for different narratives. The extent to which these narratives are being accepted in the Israeli memoryscape<sup>615</sup> and national narrative depends on the topic and on the group considered. In some cases, these 'different' narratives are being remodeled to match a previous hegemonic one, as it happened in the case of many official Holocaust remembrance ceremonies. In some others, especially when less political elements are at stake, for instance food and culinary traditions different heritages are being re-valued and accepted in mainstream Israeli culture. Even though

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<sup>614</sup> Prushner, "Building Communities."

<sup>615</sup> Slawomir Kapralski, "Amnesia, Nostalgia and Reconstruction: Shifting Modes of Memory in Poland's Jewish Spaces," in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica T. Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015) 149-169.

there is still a lot of steps to be done, in particular concerning the economic and social spheres, today's Israeli society seems, in many ways, more willing and able to welcome different narratives and versions of the past, in the public as well as in the private sphere.



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## Appendix 1 -List of interviews

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>Date and Place</i>	<i>Language</i>
1	Sylvie	Tunisian	19/03/17 Petach Tikva	French
2	Ilana	Polish	26/03/17 Tel Aviv	English
3	Hanna	Tunisian	27/03/17 Jerusalem	French
4	Dalit	Polish	28/03/17, Tel Aviv	English
5	Miriam	Tunisian	30/03/17 Petach Tikva	Hebrew
6	Orna	Polish	18/04/17 Jerusalem	Hebrew and Italian
7	Mishi	Polish	20/04/17 Jerusalem	English
8	Tami	Polish	04/05/17 Jerusalem	Hebrew
9	Chani	Polish	15/05/17 Tel Aviv	English
10	Elad	Polish	22/10/17 Rehovot	English
11	Rivka	Polish	22/10/17 Rehovot	Hebrew
12	David	Tunisian	30/10/17 Petach Tikva	Hebrew
13	Anat	Polish	10/11/17 Tel Aviv	Hebrew
14	Amichai	Polish	11/11/17 Tel Aviv	Hebrew and English
15	Yonatan	Polish	14/11/17 Tel Aviv	English
16	Claude	Tunisian	15/11/17, Tel Aviv	French
17	Lizette	Tunisian	15/11/18 Jerusalem	French
18	Yael	Polish	16/11/17 Tel Aviv	English
19	Hanna	Polish	17/11/17 Tel Aviv	Hebrew
20	Victor	Tunisian	20/11/17 Natanya	French
21	Chaia	Polish	22/11/17 Tel Aviv	Hebrew
22	Shani	Tunisian	05/12/17 Tel Aviv	Hebrew
23	Rina	Tunisian	13/09/18 Tel Aviv	French and Hebrew
24	Yuval	Polish	14/09/18 Ramat Gan	Hebrew
25	Chen	Tunisian	20/09/18 Tel Aviv	Hebrew
26	Yigal	Tunisian	12/11/18 Jerusalem	French
27	Alisa	Tunisian	12/11/18 Jerusalem	French
28	Lizette	Tunisian	15/11/18 Jerusalem	French
29	Giuliana	Tunisian	15/11/18 Jerusalem	French and Italian
30	Renato	Tunisian	09/12/18 Ra'anana	Italian, Hebrew and French





## *Appendix 2 – Transcript of One Interview*

Interview with Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

After an introduction where I presented myself and the general aim of my research, I asked the interviewee to talk about her life.

Q: Can you tell me about your life story and your heritage?

A: I was born in Israel. My dad was born in Israel, but his parents were Polish (Lvov-Cracow) and my mom was Tunisian, from the south, she came to Israel at 12 years old. She grew up in the 30's in between Haifa and Akkro where the 90% of the population was ashkenazi, German and Polish.

Q: What can you tell me about your Tunisian heritage?

A: The only thing Tunisian that was left was food, cooking and holiday traditions (part of the Haggadah shel Pesach was read according to the Tunisian tune). I don't think she knows Judeo-Arabic. She grew up in a small town that was really mostly Europeans who settled there, and there was a big central train station and there were European technicians and engineers who came there so she grew up with a mixture of French, Italian and very little Judeo-Arabic. She came to Israel with her parents at the age of twelve and then she got right away the Hebrew in Israel, there was a follow-up from her brothers and sisters but nothing from the parents, because they would not do that (speak Arabic).

Also, I already talked a little bit to you about this, and I am sure it is something that you read: at that time, you wouldn't say: "I'm Tunisian". Moroccan yes they would say "I'm Moroccan", but not Tunisians, not Iraqis, other than the Moroccans who weren't afraid of talking about their heritage and showing it, other Sephardi were worried and kind of hiding at that time, because there was conscious and unconscious discriminations, social, employment, anything... the culture of the young Israeli society was Ashkenazi, and if you want to integrate you cannot say: "I have some kind of..." and I have

seen it from my own experience when kids knew my mom was Tunisian they wouldn't make friend with me anymore. Because that was the atmosphere back then, and it came from above, the government, the leaders, I am sure you read that Israel was established as a western country and whoever had a different culture should not show it, one should be tzabar, you should have the culture that was consolidated in Israel without any reference to the Sephardi culture. And that's how I grew up you know it's something I am not inventing for you; it has been written in books. I basically went out (of the house) and behaved as a Polish little girl, honestly and I feel bad about it because it was only at university when I did the last year, the master, then I started to ask more questions. Until then I thought that the Tunisians were kind of primitives, they were not as cultured as the Europeans, what I got (from the Tunisian side) is a part of myself, part of my heritage, but I did not get to share it, and again it's nothing that was talked about, it was said (that society was Ashkenazi shaped), it was taken for granted, it was the society.

So I feel bad that I didn't check and that I didn't learn about this tradition before, because when I got to talk to and interview women from my family it was almost too late, they were in their seventies or eighties and one aunt died before I got to interview her.

This was what happened in the place where I grew up, if you asked someone from Tiberias, they may tell you something else, because there there was a community, and my cousins can speak some Judeo-Arabic/Tunisian, in other places, in towns in the south, in the Negev, Beer-Sheva. It could be interesting for you to look for people in Natanya, Tiberias, Ashdod, where there are a lot of Tunisians and they are mixed (with other Mizrachim) and its more of a community. Another thing I found during my interview is that two people living so close to my parents, one of them is a mom of someone who was in my brother's class, we never knew they were Tunisians, for 30 years, because people never talked about that. Moroccan you knew that, by the behavior, by the way they say I am a proud Moroccan,

but not Tunisians, they wouldn't say that. We were taught not to display our "Tunisianness" in a way.

Q: Did you ever thought of traveling to Tunisia, to see where your mom comes from?

A: It's too late now, because I wouldn't go with this regime now. You know, if I were a kid, and Bourguiba was there, or maybe Ben Ali, but now that I am researching everything is almost too late, so I am trying to gather the last people remaining around me, I would like to go very much.

I remember that my uncle, went once to this little village they grew up, it was nice it looked more like a French or Italian village and he came back and he was shocked that there is nothing there left, it's all ruins, no statues, there were nice statues, no flower pots outside the houses, nothing.

I don't know... if I go there, I'm sure I wouldn't see what was then.

Q: Yes, I am sure... I also talked to another lady from Tunisia, she came to Israel, probably she's the age of your mom, and she told me she went back to Tunisia during Ben Ali's regime, and that she found out that everything was totally different from how it was, but that she found people, she went there with her mom almost 20 year ago now, and that she found people that remembered her family, what her father was doing, his job, and she was moved by the fact that people remembered. And Local people when they found out that they were Jewish, they started using Jewish blessings and words.

After this may I ask you something about your Polish heritage?

A: You know I haven't got much... most of the heritage I got is the food my mom cooked... my (Tunisian) mom, she cooked Polish food with some Tunisian spice (chuckles). As for the language my grandmother came here when she was. 11 years old and my grandfather was 20, before WWII. So I've heard a little bit of Polish, my mother used to speak Polish with them, and I got a few words, but nothing more than that, it was mostly Hebrew, and that's one

more thing that may be interesting for you... at that time it was “you come to Israel, you speak Hebrew”. It’s not like now, that Russian want to cultivate and keep their culture, so they talk Russian with the kids and make sure they go to Russian schools. Ethiopians they speak Ethiopian with the kids, at the time you speak Hebrew! You don’t look different! You look Israeli, you speak, you behave as one (whatever it means). If you want to speak (Tunisian, Yiddish ...) inside the house, when other kids are not speaking, it’s ok, but no more than that. I hear a lot of people saying, “it’s so bad that I lost my Yiddish because I was ashamed to talk Yiddish”, and it was the same for me with Polish. I heard my dad speaking Polish to them, but since they were from so many years in Israel Hebrew became their first language, so, except from maybe two three words, I didn’t get much. Also I didn’t get anything about the heritage, other than a little bit of the food, because it was at that time that you don’t talk about what was there in Europe, not when they grew up and not what happened to their families, you don’t talk you don’t ask. And this is different, something else from the Tunisian. The Tunisian it was a matter that the culture here (in Israel) it was more European, but the Europeans, and I mean anyone from Eastern Europe, their kids grew up and they didn’t know what happened to their parents and only as they grew up they learned to research, so my dad, a few years before he died he started researching, there was no internet then, and we started founding stuff and this is when I heard the first time that the family is there, and he got information, he didn’t have time to finish it so.... My husband he’s also from... I mean his parents are also from... they are Polish... from Galicia, and their story is similar to that of my grandparents. So only now, a few years ago, we started looking for information on the internet, and started to find about out what happened to those who were left there. But nothing as a... I don’t even know a Polish tradition, what a Polish tradition is... I know about my grandparents...they were divorced, so my grandmother lived in a kibbutz and that’s the culture that I got... she remarried, she lived in a Kibbutz, and that’s how I know

her... your know... this happened before I was born. My grandfather lived in Bat Yam, he remarried too, and lived in Bat Yam...

Q: So in the first place you weren't supposed to ask, both about your Tunisian and Polish heritage, and also most of your family came to Israel very early... and there is no one in your family researching the Polish side of your family... I mean continuing your father's research...

A: Yes we are continuing, my husband more, and we got a lot of information, but as we said, you're not supposed to ask questions, when you're a kid you're not asking questions, because there is this generational respect or gap... that you respect your grandparents, you don't even think about that, as a kid they don't talk about it, so you don't know what to ask... anyway yes we're doing research, we found... you know I didn't know anything about what was there... and only, and that's an interesting story, about two years ago we found out that a family that I was, when we came to the US, in 1992, when I was for a year or two babysitting the kids, and it turned out that the family I was working for, their dad is my grandmother's cousin. And we found that out only through the research that we did. It was great, I babysat their girls for a long time. But the thing is you didn't know anything. You know everything about the Holocaust but you're not asking questions.

Q: So, you've never been to Poland either? not you nor none of your relatives?

A: No I am planning to go, I want to do a root trip with my husband, I have two older boys 22 and 19, and both, we were for a few years in Israel, went to the Poland trip, and by the time that they went, we already had some information about our families. They went to different cities and since they're going to the concentration camps, and they went to Cracow and they already had the address of my grandfather, and they got to go and see the building, which is still there. And that was something very special for them and for the

other kids. I want to go very much but when we will go, I want to do a larger trip.

Q: so you have grown up kids, did you ever talked to them about your Tunisian/Polish heritage?

A: You know, I don't know what Polish heritage may be. My dad was born in Israel and my husband's parent were born in Israel both of them. So, the food is... whatever is food related... it is very similar to the Israeli one, what my mother is preparing for Passover, except for a few special Tunisian dishes, and what the other grandmother is preparing. So... I don't know how many kids really have a Polish heritage... I don't know, it's an interesting question, I never thought about it, there is no Yiddish, or a few words here and there top.

The only thing that the boys did and now also my girls is doing, is that they studied French, because my mom first language was French, so they were happy to talk with her in French. Other than that, is kind of Israeli you know? It is all one (culture)... Maybe the melting pot did succeed in a way...maybe... because I can't think of anything specifically Polish... you know maybe that "fiddler on the roof" ... but maybe it's Russian..... in any case you don't see it anymore. I don't know what's Polish culture...

Q: Not even people who immigrated to Israel at an older age?

A: I think.... I see it with the Tunisians too, with young and old interviewees alike who came to Israel, that most of those who came to Israel wanted to have a new country, they wanted to keep some of the culture, but they wanted to feel part of the society. So, along time they lost some of it (their previous country's culture).

You know... If you want to get into Israel, you should conform to the Ashkenazi culture.



## Appendix 3 – Résumé de la thèse en français



Figure 1 – « Yom Ha'atzmaut » (2013) 90 x 110 cm et « Bar Mitzvah » (2014) 140x110 d'Eliahou Eric Bokobza. Huile et acrylique sur toile.

Les deux tableaux ci-dessus représentent un jeune homme dans deux situations différentes, l'une publique et l'autre privée. Dans le premier cas, il célèbre le jour de l'indépendance d'Israël<sup>616</sup>, tandis que dans le deuxième il fête sa bar-mitsvah.<sup>617</sup>

Sur la première image, le protagoniste semble désorienté, tenant simplement un drapeau israélien, le regard perdu, alors que des guirlandes représentant les couleurs nationales d'Israël, des soldats combattants et un char d'assaut sont suspendues au-dessus de sa tête, symbolisant une atmosphère de fête. Sur le fond, différents thèmes renvoient chacun à des images typiquement israéliennes : la mer, un paysage urbain et rural et une référence à l'étoile de

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<sup>616</sup> (En hébreu Yom Ha'atzmaut) Journée commémorant la déclaration d'indépendance d'Israël, annoncée en 1948, le 5 du mois juif de l'Iyar (14 mai 1948). Cette journée est marquée par une série de célébrations et de cérémonies officielles et non officielles et a joué un rôle important dans la création de l'identité nationale israélienne. Voir Note alla francese o inglese ? Avner Ben Amos, Israël, la Fabrique de l'Identité Nationale (Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2010).

<sup>617</sup> Cérémonie religieuse juive pour les garçons (pour les filles : bat-mitzvah) qui marque l'arrivée à l'âge adulte et signifie devenir un membre à part entière de la communauté juive, responsable de ses propres actions.



David. Même dans un contexte complètement laïque, comme la fête de l'indépendance (Yom Ha'atzmaut en hébreu), il y a une référence à la religion représentée par la kippa que porte le garçon, bien que peinte dans les couleurs nationales.

La deuxième image montre le même garçon célébrant sa bar-mitsvah. Les images ne donnent que peu d'indices sur le caractère juif de la cérémonie : la petite poupée sur le gâteau porte effectivement un rouleau de la Torah et une kippa, mais pour le reste l'atmosphère rappelle une fête des années 70, avec une touche orientale apportée par la danseuse du ventre, ce qui laisse également entrevoir la maturation sexuelle de l'adolescence, marquée par la cérémonie elle-même.<sup>618</sup>

Ces peintures font partie d'une exposition intitulée « United Colors of Judaica - Eliahou Eric Bokobza - Multiple Jewish Identities : A New Perspective », exposée au musée Beit HaTefutzot de Tel-Aviv, entre 2015 et 2016.<sup>619</sup> Les thèmes qu'elles évoquent, à savoir les aspects ethniques, religieux et culturels des identités juives en Israël, suscitent un ensemble de questions qui sont au cœur de ma recherche. Celle-ci se focalise sur plusieurs sujets, en particulier comment les identités juives israéliennes se sont construites dans le temps et dans l'espace, quel est le rôle de la stratification ethnique dans leur création et pourquoi l'ethnicité joue encore un rôle si fort en Israël. Mon objectif est de questionner le paradoxe d'une société qui a été créée pour unifier le peuple juif sous un même concept ethnique/religieux, et qui s'est retrouvée, aujourd'hui, divisée selon les mêmes lignes ethniques qu'elle a tenté d'effacer.<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> «United Colors of Judaica – Eliahou Eric Bokobza,» Dernière modification le 6 août 2019.

<https://bh.org.il/event/united-colors-of-judaica-eliahou-eric-bokobza-multiple-jewish-identities-a-new-perspective/>.

<sup>619</sup> L'artiste, Eric Bokobza, est né à Paris de parents tunisiens, et a émigré en Israël avec sa famille en 1969. Voir la note 1 ci-dessus.

<sup>620</sup> Le dernier exemple à ce propos est la Loi fondamentale connue sous le nom de loi sur l'État-nation du peuple juif, adoptée le 18 juillet 2018 par le Parlement israélien, la Knesset. Cette loi précise la nature de l'État d'Israël en tant qu'État-nation du peuple juif. Cette loi, largement symbolique, a été vivement critiquée par ? et la Cour suprême est actuellement en train de l'examiner afin d'établir si elle est ou non inconstitutionnelle. Comme il a été déclaré par une agence de presse diffusée par la Knesset : « La loi consacre, pour la première fois, Israël comme « la maison nationale du peuple juif » dans ses lois fondamentales. Elle

L' épineuse question d'une judéité partagée qui a été utilisée à la fois comme un facteur d'unification (récit biblique, loi et tradition juives) et comme une ligne de démarcation (différentes communautés juives de la diaspora), m'a poussée à questionner la façon dont les références du passé ont été retravaillées à l'époque contemporaine pour établir ce que signifie être « ethniquement juif » en Israël aujourd'hui.<sup>621</sup> Indépendamment de toutes les politiques menées par l'État et ses institutions pour assimiler les nouveaux immigrants, l'ethnicité reste jusqu'à aujourd'hui un facteur structurant de la société israélienne, plus que la classe, le sexe et l'âge.<sup>622</sup>

Historiquement, la classification ethnique des groupes juifs se référait principalement à des communautés spécifiques (Juifs de Boukhara, Juifs persans, Juifs de Livourne, Juifs de Silésie, etc.), et les termes Ashkénaze et Mizrahi/Séfarade étaient utilisés pour désigner des communautés juives appartenant à de vastes zones géographiques : la première située en Europe centrale et orientale, et la seconde dans la péninsule ibérique, élargie par la suite pour inclure l'Afrique du Nord, l'Anatolie, le Levant et le Moyen-Orient.<sup>623</sup> Comment se fait-il donc qu'en Israël, ces catégories soient

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déclare également que Jérusalem est la capitale d'Israël, fixe l'hébreu comme langue officielle et le calendrier hébreu comme calendrier officiel de l'État, [...] ». Pour en savoir plus, voir : “Knesset passes Jewish Nation-State bill into law,” dernière modification le 19 juillet 2018, [https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/Pr13979\\_pg.aspx](https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/Pr13979_pg.aspx).

<sup>621</sup> Voir Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman, *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns* (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2004), en particulier parties I et II.

<sup>622</sup> L'importance de la question ethnique intra-juive a été récemment remise en évidence par les émeutes des immigrants éthiopiens, qui ont protesté contre des discriminations clairement fondées sur des raisons ethniques. Les manifestations ont été organisées en juillet 2019 par des Israéliens d'origine éthiopienne en réaction à la mort de Solomon Teka, 18 ans, aux mains d'un officier de police à Kiryat Haim. Il s'agissait de la plus récente d'une série de protestations initiées par la communauté éthiopienne en Israël contre ce qu'elle perçoit comme une discrimination systémique, due à la couleur de sa peau. Pour plus d'informations, voir : “Ethiopian-Israelis protest for 3rd day after fatal police shooting,” dernier accès le 3 juillet 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/03/world/middleeast/ethiopia-israel-police-shooting.html>, et Shalva Weil, “Religion, Blood and the Equality of Rights: the Case of Ethiopian Jews in Israel,” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 4 (1997): 412-497.

<sup>623</sup> Harvey E. Goldberg, “From Sephardi to Mizrahi and Back Again: Changing Meanings of ‘Sephardi’ in its Social Environments,” *Jewish Social Studies* 15 (2008): 165 -188.

devenues des termes génériques pour « l'Ouest » et « l'Est », produisant des différences de pouvoir, et donc des hiérarchies sociales, qui sont encore pertinentes aujourd'hui ? La classification Ashkénaze, Mizrahi/Séfarade, telle qu'elle est utilisée dans l'État d'Israël contemporain, est le produit de l'immigration à grande échelle des années 1950, lorsque l'État naissant a dû faire face à l'arrivée massive des immigrants et réfugiés venant d'Europe d'un côté, et d'Asie de l'autre.<sup>624</sup> Rapidement, ces catégories ethniques ont été associées à des positions de pouvoir au sein de la société israélienne, aplanissant les différences et négligeant la pluralité des identités des immigrants, ainsi que leur rôle dans le façonnage du discours ethnique en Israël.<sup>625</sup>

Dans mon travail, je vais donc examiner les structures du pouvoir derrière ces termes, qui ont conduit, d'une part, à la création d'une division intra-juive en Israël et, d'autre part, à une situation où les manifestations de pluralisme et de diversité ont été ignorées et négligées, au profit de cette division dichotomique. Les identités ethniques sont donc le produit de modèles socio-historiques spécifiques, qui influençaient et modifiaient les relations de pouvoir entre les différents groupes, et entre ces mêmes groupes et l'État.<sup>626</sup> Dans ce contexte, j'analyserai le rôle joué par la mémoire dans la reproduction de ces identités et divisions ethniques, tant au niveau

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<sup>624</sup> *Edah* (He : communauté pl : *Edot*) : définit en hébreu moderne les différentes origines ethniques des diverses communautés qui composent la société israélienne. Pour en savoir plus sur l'ethnicité en Israël, voir Eliezer, Ben- Rafael, *The Emergence of Ethnicity: Cultural groups and Social Conflict in Israel* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982); Uziel O., Schmelz, Sergio, Della Pergola et al. (eds.), *Ethnic Differences among Israeli Jews: A New Look* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990).

<sup>625</sup> L'opposition Ashkénazim/Mizrahim ne reflète pas la complexité historique et sociologique des deux groupes considérés et, en étiquetant les Juifs de la région MENA comme « impuissants » et les Juifs européens comme « puissants », elle a rassemblé dans une même catégorie (Mizrahim) des gens très différents : par exemple les Juifs européens vivant en Égypte et les Juifs marocains venant des montagnes de l'Atlas. Dans le chapitre suivant, nous allons approfondir la question de l'ethnicité et du pouvoir en Israël. Pour un aperçu de la genèse du débat, voir Harvey E. Goldberg and Chen Bram, "Sephardic/ Mizrahi/Arab-Jews: Reflections on critical sociology and the Study of Middle Eastern Jewries within the Context of Israeli Society," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 22 (2007): 230.

<sup>626</sup> Michael, Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Rogers, Brubaker et al., "Ethnicity as Cognition," *Theory and Society* 33 (2004): 31-64.

privé que public. De même, je m'interrogerai sur le rôle du patrimoine culturel transmis par les familles, et sur les références au passé que cette transmission mobilise. Comment la génération actuelle de jeunes Israéliens se situe-t-elle par rapport à l'ethnicité ? Utilisent-ils encore les catégories Ashkénazes et Mizrahim, alors même que leurs familles sont en Israël depuis plus d'une génération et que, dans de nombreux cas, ils sont nés de couples mixtes ?<sup>627</sup>

Ces questions doivent être placées dans un contexte, celui de la société israélienne contemporaine, en constante évolution et en même temps étroitement influencée par son histoire et son passé, où l'identité nationale a été créée en s'appuyant sur un seul récit maître, le sionisme, laissant les autres en marge.

C'est pour cette raison qu'analyser les identités israéliennes sous l'angle de la mémoire est particulièrement utile. C'est en effet à travers la mémoire que des histoires oubliées ou restées inédites, vivantes seulement dans la mémoire de ceux qui les ont vécues, peuvent être révélées à nouveau. Ce qui a été omis du récit national, n'a pas été oublié et a continué à vivre dans les souvenirs familiaux et de groupe, pour être récupéré plus tard.

En examinant les processus de commémoration de ces deux groupes, en questionnant leur pratiques individuelles et collectives, on essaiera de comprendre comment leurs identités et leurs récits se sont formés et sous quelle forme ils ont circulé au sein de la société israélienne, tout en éclairant les relations existantes entre les différents groupes ethniques juifs dans le pays.<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>627</sup> Barbara S. Okun, "Insight into Ethnic Flux: Marriage Patterns among Jews of Mixed Ancestry in Israel," *Demography* 41 (2004), 173–187;

<sup>628</sup> John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–26.

On ethnic divisions see Fredrik, Barth. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, Inc., 1969); Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups Culture in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2/1 (1979): 1–20. And in Israel: Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations," 54 (2013): 399–423; Sammy Smooha, "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State," *Nations and Nationalism*, 8/4 (2002): 475 – 503; Oren, Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

Pour ce faire, nous allons considérer à la fois la sphère privée et la sphère publique. Pour la première, nous examinerons la transmission des souvenirs au sein des familles et entre générations, à travers les histoires et les traditions familiales, notamment la célébration des fêtes et les traditions culinaires (Partie I). Pour la seconde, nous étudierons comment la mise en récit des souvenirs et des représentations identitaires dans la sphère publique (musées, centres patrimoniaux et cérémonies publiques) a évolué au fil du temps (Partie II).<sup>629</sup>

*Remettre en question la fracture ashkénaze-mizrahi par une  
analyse comparative*

Dans mon analyse, je considérerai deux sous-groupes ethniques, les Israéliens d'origine tunisienne et polonaise, en tant qu'exemples de la catégorisation ethnique Ashkénazim/Mizrahim mise en place en Israël dans les années 1950. En créant une division binaire, ce processus a rendu de plus en plus courant l'étiquetage des individus et des groupes en fonction de leur pays d'origine, plutôt que de leur communauté d'appartenance, regroupant ainsi des personnes provenant de milieux très différents (par exemple, dans le cas des Juifs marocains, des habitants de Casablanca et de ceux des montagnes de l'Atlas).

Cette classification, créée par le gouvernement, a été adoptée également par les responsables de l'immigration, et, plus tard, par le Bureau central des statistiques (CBS), qui en regroupant les personnes selon leur pays d'origine, a contribué à réifier cette division arbitraire entre les Juifs d'origine Européenne et ceux provenant de la région Afrique du Nord- Moyen Orient.<sup>630</sup> Ces

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<sup>629</sup> Piera, Rossetto. *Mémoires des Diaspora, diaspora des mémoires. Juifs de Libye entre Israël et l'Italie, des 1948 à nos jours*, Thèse de doctorat, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia et École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2015.

<sup>630</sup> Cette classification s'est rapidement transformée, en passant de « pays d'origine » à « continent d'origine » et en devenant un élément de base dans

catégories étaient en tous points des approximations des réalités sociales existantes et n'ont pas été remises en question par la suite. Ainsi, les chercheurs israéliens en sciences sociales, à quelques exceptions près, n'ont pas eux non plus contesté cette organisation.<sup>631</sup>

Dans le cas que nous allons considérer, les Juifs d'origine polonaise et tunisienne ont été regroupés, respectivement, dans les deux grandes catégories des Ashkenazim et Mizrahim, sans considérer leur hétérogénéité par rapport à ces catégories. L'examen de ces deux groupes spécifiques permettra donc de passer d'une perspective unique à des points de vue multiples, en allant du particulier au général et vice-versa.

La comparaison de deux groupes différents nécessite une explication sur la méthode de comparaison adoptée. Il convient donc de noter que le choix des entités à comparer et de la manière de les comparer est toujours une question sensible, et, en définitive, politique.<sup>632</sup>

Selon la sociologue Cécile Vigour, « l'important est de retenir que comparer, c'est à la fois assimiler et différencier, par rapport à un critère. »<sup>633</sup> Dans ce cas, la comparaison sera « latérale », c'est-à-dire qu'un certain nombre de cas (deux) seront placés côte à côte.<sup>634</sup> Considérer ces deux groupes me permettra d'interroger les cas

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l'analyse démographique et sociologique de l'immigration en Israël. Dans le cas de l'Afrique du Nord, le Maroc, l'Algérie et la Tunisie sont toujours regroupés dans les comptes démographiques, ce qui rend difficile la distinction entre la démographie de ces trois pays. Voir Goldberg et al., "Sephardic/ Mizrahi/Arab-Jews," 230, and "Publications: Immigration- Statistical Data of Israel, 2018 - n.69," dernière modification le 10 septembre 2018,

<https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/publications/Pages/2018/Immigration-Statistical-Abstract-of-%20Israel-2018-No-69.ssp>

<sup>631</sup> Efrat Rosen-Lapidot, "De' francophonisme in Israel: Bizertine Jews, Tunisian Jews," in *Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places*, ed. André Levy and Alex Weingrod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 270–295. Cela nous pousse à remettre encore plus en question cette classification nation/continent qui est adoptée encore aujourd'hui tant au niveau officiel que dans le discours courant.

<sup>632</sup> Andrea Mubi Brighenti and Nicholas DeMaria Harney, "Introduction," *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* 2(2019): 127.

<sup>633</sup> Cécile, Vigour, *La comparaison dans les sciences sociales. Pratiques et méthodes* (Paris : La Découverte, 2005) 6-7.

<sup>634</sup> Matei Candea, *Comparison in Anthropology: The Impossible Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

particuliers « en [les] constituant comme une "instance particulière du possible" [...] afin d'en extraire des propriétés générales ou invariantes qui ne peuvent être découvertes que par cet interrogatoire. »<sup>635</sup> Israéliens d'origine polonaise et tunisienne représentent donc deux cas du paradoxe que nous avons souligné au début, celui d'une division ethnique qui s'est créée au moment de la création de l'État, où la judaïcité a été utilisée à la fois comme un facteur d'unification et de division.

Mais pourquoi ces deux cas-là justement sont-ils intéressants ? Le cas des Israéliens d'origine polonaise nous permettra de comprendre pourquoi un groupe d'immigrants qui a joué un rôle si fondamental dans la définition de l'identité et de la culture israéliennes, et parmi lesquels on trouve les pères fondateurs du Yishuv<sup>636</sup>, a été si peu étudié d'un point de vue académique et est resté absent du débat public également jusqu'à très récemment.

Pour différentes raisons, le cas des Israéliens d'origine tunisienne a été inclus dans la catégorie générale des Mizrahim sans trop y accorder d'attention. Cela s'explique en partie par le petit nombre de Juifs tunisiens qui ont émigré en Israël, comparé à d'autres groupes originaires d'Afrique du Nord et du Moyen-Orient (par exemple, les Juifs marocains ou irakiens), et par leur rôle mineur dans la définition de la « Mizrahité » en Israël ; et en partie par le fait que leur intégration était réputée plus facile grâce à l'éducation occidentale (française) reçue par beaucoup d'entre eux et à leur activisme au sein des mouvements sionistes en Tunisie. Toutefois, la principale raison pour laquelle j'ai inclus le cas tunisien dans mon étude est que les Tunisiens en Israël se sont, en général, opposés à une classification excessivement large, et ont remodelé leur identité sur la base de leur communauté d'origine spécifique (par

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<sup>635</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 233. Quoted in Mubi Brighenti et al., "Introduction," 128.

<sup>636</sup> À cet égard, voir l'exposition "From Poland we came... the contribution of Polish Jewry in building and developing the state of Israel," dirigée par Batya Brutin, Ewa Wegrzyn and Katarzyna Odrzywolek, exposée lors de la 6e conférence annuelle de l'EAIS « Israel Identities: Past, Present and Future » - 10-12 September 2017 – Université de Wrocław, Pologne.

exemple Djerba, Tunis, Sfax), plutôt que par rapport au fait d'être « Tunisiens », « Nord-africains » ou « Mizrahi ».637 Enfin, tant les Tunisiens que les Polonais ont une relation particulière avec un des piliers de l'identité israélienne : l'Holocauste. Les premiers, presque un cas unique en Afrique du Nord, ayant été touchés par l'occupation et les persécutions nazies ; et les seconds, en particulier ceux qui ont survécu à l'Holocauste, représentants d'une version du judaïsme diasporique que le nouvel État d'Israël tentait d'effacer.

En conclusion, je soutiens que ces deux cas, avec leurs spécificités, m'aideront à comprendre comment les deux pôles ethniques qu'ils représentent (l'ashkénazité et la mizrahité) ont été créés et maintenus à travers le temps et comment le recours aux divisions binaires a aplani les différences dans l'histoire des Juifs du Moyen-Orient et d'Europe en Israël. De plus, à travers l'analyse de ces deux cas, nous pourrions explorer comment la construction du passé et la création d'un récit national unique, par un processus d'invention, d'appropriation, d'exclusion et de réception, ont affecté les relations de pouvoir au sein des deux groupes considérés et comment ces catégories influencent encore aujourd'hui les interactions au sein de la société israélienne.

### *Le terrain*

Les sources que j'ai prises en compte pour mon travail de recherche sont à la fois primaires et secondaires. Les sources primaires consistent en des entretiens approfondis menés par l'auteur et en des périodes d'observation participante à des événements publics et communautaires organisés au sein d'associations culturelles et de musées ethniques en Israël. Cette étude visant à analyser l'identité et la mémoire collective s'appuie sur des méthodes

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<sup>637</sup> Pour une étude sur la façon dont les Juifs tunisiens en France ont adopté une identité communautaire plutôt que nationale voir Efrat Rosen-Lapidot, "De' francophonisme in Israel," 270–295.



qualitatives, qui permettent d'examiner la réalité sociale du point de vue subjectif des individus qui la vivent.<sup>638</sup>

Pour comprendre comment l'identité israélienne a été construite au fil du temps, et l'influence que les catégories ethniques ont eue sur elle, nous avons réalisé 30 entretiens approfondis : 15 avec des Israéliens d'origine polonaise et 15 avec des Israéliens d'origine tunisienne.<sup>639</sup> Comme critère d'appartenance, nous avons utilisé l'auto-identification à l'un des deux héritages culturels ou le fait qu'un des proches des interviewés (parents, grands-parents) ait émigré en Israël depuis la Pologne ou la Tunisie.

L'échantillon des personnes interviewés, sélectionnées à travers la méthode de la boule de neige, était varié. Ces personnes venaient de tout le pays et appartenaient à différentes classes sociales. La transmission générationnelle étant au cœur de mon travail, j'ai interviewé des personnes de différentes tranches d'âge, parfois appartenant à la même famille, de 19 à 90 ans. Cela m'a permis d'acquérir une perspective transgénérationnelle et d'évaluer comment la perception identitaire des Israéliens d'origine tunisienne ou polonaise a évolué au fil du temps. Les entretiens ont été menés par l'auteur lors de différents périodes de terrain en Israël entre mars 2017 et mars 2019. Le fait que je ne sois pas juive et que je n'aie aucun lien personnel avec Israël, la Tunisie ou la Pologne a limité mes recherches et a déterminé, dans une certaine mesure, la perception que mes interlocuteurs avaient de moi. Souvent, les personnes interrogées étaient curieuses de connaître les raisons qui me poussaient à poursuivre une telle entreprise. La plupart d'entre elles ont été surprises de mon choix de sujet, étant moi-même complètement déconnectée de celui-ci. Parfois, cela m'a coûté

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<sup>638</sup> Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." In *Interpretive Social Science*, ed. Paul Rabinow et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 33-81.

<sup>639</sup> Tous les entretiens sont anonymes afin de protéger la vie privée des personnes interrogées, sauf en cas d'autorisation explicite. Je remercie toutes les personnes qui ont accepté de me rencontrer, et sans qui ce projet n'aurait pas été possible. Voir l'annexe 1 pour la liste des entretiens.

l'accès à certaines personnes ; la plupart du temps, cela les a rendues curieuses de ma démarche.

Les entretiens ont été réalisés en anglais, en hébreu, en français ou en italien selon la disposition de la personne interrogée. Parfois dans un mélange de plusieurs langues. Chaque entretien s'ouvrait avec la demande de raconter son parcours, y compris l'histoire de sa famille, de son arrivée en Israël, son intégration dans le pays et du rôle joué par l'ethnicité dans ce processus, chaque fois de manière fluide selon l'inclination des personnes interrogées. Le but principal des entretiens était de laisser les personnes interrogées s'exprimer librement sur ce que signifiait pour elles être Israélien d'origine tunisienne ou polonaise, et quel sens avaient pour elles les catégories Ashkénaze et Mizrahi. Tous les entretiens ont été enregistrés et transcrits. L'analyse a été réalisée en lisant chaque entretien, en extrayant les thèmes principaux et en les plaçant dans le contexte du développement des identités ethniques en Israël.<sup>640</sup>

Je suis consciente que mon travail traite d'un segment très spécifique de la population israélienne, et qu'il est limité par le nombre d'entretiens réalisés et par leur approche qualitative. Pour cette raison les entretiens ont été enrichis d'un important corpus de sources secondaires comprenant une série de témoignages personnels issus de différentes archives, de journaux intimes et de productions artistiques de différentes sortes. En outre, des sources matérielles provenant des archives d'associations culturelles et de citoyens, d'articles de journaux et de magazines, de sites web et de pages Facebook traitant du patrimoine culturel et de la mémoire des deux groupes traités ont également été incorporées dans le corpus. Enfin, la plupart des personnes interrogées étaient laïques ou adeptes du judaïsme religieux-national ; notre échantillon ne comprenait en fait pas de juifs ultra-orthodoxes, une population particulièrement difficile à atteindre. Enfin, il s'agit d'une étude sur la

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<sup>640</sup> Slawomir Kapralski, "Amnesia, Nostalgia and Reconstruction: Shifting Modes of Memory in Poland's Jewish Spaces," in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica T. Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 149 – 150.

population juive en Israël, et pour cette raison, toutes les autres ethnies n'ont pas été incluses ici.

*Le discours ethnique en Israël : l'invisibilité de l'ashkénazité*

Avant d'entrer dans le vif du sujet, l'objectif de cette partie introductive est de donner un aperçu historique du processus qui a conduit à la création du récit et de l'identité nationaux israéliens. On s'intéressera en particulier à la manière dont les différentes vagues migratoires qui ont précédé et suivi la création de l'État ont été reçues et intégrées et à la nature ethnique de ce processus, pour se concentrer ensuite sur le cas spécifique des Israéliens d'origine polonaise et tunisienne.

Malgré les nombreux changements qu'Israël a connu depuis sa création, tant d'un point de vue économique que politique, certaines prémisses sur sa composition démographique et ses frontières culturelles et sociales restent vraies. Selon le sociologue Israélien Baruch Kimmerling, Israël reste une société d'immigrés et un État relativement fort, tant au niveau national qu'international, fondé sur deux codes culturels profonds, partagés, en principe, par tous ses citoyens juifs : sa judaïcité et l'armée.<sup>641</sup> Cependant, deux phénomènes contradictoires ont remis en cause cet équilibre. Le premier consistait en l'effondrement, à la fin des années 1970, de l'hégémonie sioniste dû à de nombreuses divisions idéologiques au sein du parti socialiste. Le second consiste à la fois en la persistance d'un État fort en termes des réglementations concernant la vie commune des citoyens, et en un afflux continu de nouveaux immigrants dans le pays.<sup>642</sup>

En l'absence d'une politique précise favorisant le multiculturalisme, l'identité israélienne a subi un processus de redéfinition continu de ses frontières sociales et de ses institutions, conduisant à l'émergence d'une pluralité culturelle et sociale à mesure que de

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<sup>641</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society and the Military* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), I.

<sup>642</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *The End of Ashkenazi Hegemony* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 2001) [Hebrew].

nouveaux groupes d'immigrants arrivaient dans le pays et cherchaient leur propre espace. Cela a abouti à une situation où le débat sur l'identité israélienne a continuellement remodelé la direction politique du pays, ses politiques sociales, culturelles et, par conséquent, son identité collective.

Mais quel est le noyau commun autour duquel l'identité nationale et la mémoire culturelle israéliennes ont été construites ? C'est à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle en Europe de l'Est, dans un contexte d'assimilation et de sécularisation du judaïsme, que l'idéologie sioniste a été conçue par Théodore Herzl.<sup>643</sup> Au cœur de cette idéologie se trouve une version nationaliste, européenne et éclairée du judaïsme du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. La création d'un État juif était alors considérée comme la seule solution possible suite à une longue histoire de persécution et de discrimination des Juifs. Le mouvement sioniste a donc commencé à produire un ensemble de thèses et de pratiques qui serviraient de base à la création d'un État juif, avec son propre récit, sa propre identité et sa propre mémoire nationale.<sup>644</sup> En suivant la tradition nationaliste européenne du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, le sionisme a donc interprété l'histoire juive selon une orientation téléologique, en s'établissant comme une continuation de l'« âge d'or » de l'antiquité juive, avec l'objectif de retourner en Terre d'Israël et d'obtenir ainsi la rédemption nationale.<sup>645</sup>

Ce projet s'est finalement révélé être un succès lorsque, en 1948, l'État d'Israël fut créé. Le nouvel État comptait une population juive d'environ 600 000 personnes et, au cours de la décennie suivante, alors qu'il se transformait en un État doté d'un gouvernement et

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<sup>643</sup> Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State. An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question* (New York, Dover Publications, 1989). Anita Shapira, *Israel, A History* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 3-64.

<sup>644</sup> Les idées sionistes ont commencé à apparaître à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, alors que de petits groupes de Juifs européens étaient convaincus que l'intégration promise à la suite des Lumières ne se réaliserait pas. S'inspirant d'autres mouvements nationalistes en Europe, les sionistes pensaient que les Juifs ne pourraient pas vivre librement en s'assimilant aux sociétés européennes et, au contraire, ont encouragé la création et le soutien d'un État national juif en Palestine, considérée comme la terre d'origine du peuple Juif.

<sup>645</sup> Pour plus de détails sur la construction sioniste du passé et de ses mythes, voir Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

d'une économie indépendants, Israël a accueilli plus d'un million d'immigrants, provenant de plus de 20 pays d'origine, ce qui a presque triplé sa population.<sup>646</sup> Il est vite apparu que le nouvel État n'était pas du tout préparé à l'arrivée d'un nombre aussi massif de personnes. Les premiers immigrants à arriver furent les survivants de l'Holocauste venant des camps de déplacés en Europe. Après eux vinrent les rescapés des communautés bulgares, polonaises et roumaines, qui, juste après la fin de la guerre, furent autorisées à partir pour Israël et saisirent cette opportunité. Pendant ce temps, au Moyen-Orient et en Afrique du Nord, les relations entre juifs et musulmans devenaient de plus en plus tendues en raison de la création de l'État juif. Cela a provoqué, dans les années 1950, une immigration massive vers Israël des communautés juives de la région en changeant définitivement la connotation européenne de l'État israélien et en le forçant à assimiler un nombre important de personnes venant d'un milieu culturel et d'une tradition religieuse très différents. Pour relever le défi de former une seule nation à partir des groupes si divers, l'establishment sioniste a créé une image normative de la nation, basée sur un système de valeurs hébreu/juif/sioniste qui serait en mesure de fournir des principes et des symboles pour structurer la nouvelle société israélienne.<sup>647</sup> Dans ce contexte, l'idée du retour à la patrie était essentielle. C'est pour cette raison que les pères fondateurs d'Israël ont emprunté une mémoire collective religieusement préservée, celle de Sion, et l'ont réajustée pour l'adapter au caractère laïque du sionisme.<sup>648</sup> Ainsi, une réinterprétation sioniste du passé biblique a été incorporée dans l'habitus et dans le récit national d'Israël, créant ce que la sociologue

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<sup>646</sup> Aziza Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State Engineer Segregation? On the Placement of Jewish Immigrants in Development Towns in the 1950s," *Social Forces* 84/1 (2005): 116-117. Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 222- 246.

<sup>647</sup> Sur la distinction entre juif, hébreu et israélien, voir Motti Regev, "To Have a Culture of Our Own: on Israeliness and its Variants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23/2 (2000): 223-247. Yael Zerubavel, "The 'Mythological Sabra' and Jewish Past: Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identities," *Israel Studies* 7/2 (2002): 115-144. Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 133- 153.

<sup>648</sup> Dans ce contexte, Sion se veut synonyme de Jérusalem et de la Terre d'Israël dans son ensemble, considérée dans une dimension eschatologique comme le lieu de retour de tout le peuple juif. Voir Kimmerling, *Invention*.

polonaise Zubrzycki définit comme le « sensorium national » : un ensemble de pratiques diverses, cristallisées dans la culture matérielle et incarnées dans différentes représentations, qui contribue à rendre concrète l'idée abstraite de la nation pour des sujets individuels.<sup>649</sup> Les politiques des premières décennies de l'État étaient donc fondées sur la négation de l'existence d'une stratification ethnique et culturelle au sein du peuple juif, en faveur de la création d'une nation sans divisions.<sup>650</sup> Le principe du *kibboutz galuyot* - le rassemblement des exilés, associé à la doctrine du melting-pot a permis à la population du nouvel État juif de coexister, créant ainsi une « nouvelle persona israélienne uniforme. »<sup>651</sup>

Dans le cadre de ce récit unificateur, les historiens ont identifié deux principaux projets sionistes interdépendants qui auraient façonné l'État d'Israël pendant longtemps : le projet de rendre le nouvel État complètement juif, en produisant une division entre Juifs et Arabes et en établissant une domination sociale et culturelle juive, et le projet de rendre l'État d'Israël occidental et moderne.<sup>652</sup> En particulier, la réalisation de ce dernier a créé un clivage ashkénaze/mizrachi basé sur les différences perçues entre les immigrants considérés comme représentatifs de l'idéal occidental sioniste, venant pour la plupart d'Europe, et ceux originaires des pays du Moyen-Orient et d'Afrique du Nord, représentatifs d'un Orient rétrograde.

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<sup>649</sup> Geneviève Zubrzycki, "History and the National Sensorium: Making Sense of Polish Mythology," *Qualitative Sociology* 34 (2011): 22.

<sup>650</sup> Concernant l'ethnicité au sein des groupes juifs, voir Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups Culture in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2/1 (1979): 1-20; Stephen Sharot, "Jewish and other National and Ethnic Identities of Israeli Jews," in *National Variations in Jewish Identity: Implications for Jewish Education*, ed. Steven M. Cohen et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 299; Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile Within Sovereignty: Toward a Critique of the 'Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture, Part I," *Theory and Criticism* 4 (1993):23-55; [Hebrew]; Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29/1(1999):5-20.

<sup>651</sup> Kimmerling, *Invention*, 97.

*Kibboutz galuyot* : (en hébreu : rassemblement des exilés) est une idée centrale de l'idéologie sioniste, et plus tard, de l'État d'Israël lui-même, plaidant pour le rassemblement en Terre d'Israël de tous les Juifs en diaspora.

<sup>652</sup> Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 239-240; Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35.

Cette dichotomie, créée par les fonctionnaires de l'État, et reproduite aussi par les sciences sociales (par exemple par Eisenstadt), a rapidement été intégrée au discours courant israélien, qui considérait comme la norme une société divisée en deux groupes séparés et homogènes : les « Orientaux » (Mizrahim) et les « Européens » (Ashkenazim).<sup>653</sup> La société israélienne était donc caractérisée par la dichotomie nationale entre Juifs et Arabes d'un côté, et de l'autre par la dichotomie ethnique créée artificiellement entre Ashkénazes et Mizrahim.

Des recherches ont montré que ces deux groupes ont été réifiés par des projets et des politiques d'État, comme les politiques d'attribution des terres, qui ont poussé les nouveaux immigrants (Juifs Orientaux pour la plupart) vers les régions plus périphériques du pays ; ou par les programmes d'intégration scolaire, qui ont encouragé les Juifs traditionalistes (Orientaux pour la plupart) à abandonner leurs pratiques religieuses au profit de pratiques plus laïques, et prétendument plus modernes.<sup>654</sup>

Cette stratification ethnique se reflète également dans le domaine politique, puisque les partis de gauche comme de droite voyaient dans ces nouveaux immigrants une source de votes, plaçant ainsi entre leurs mains le pouvoir électoral. Et en effet, c'est à la fin des années 1970 que le parti socialiste, après 29 ans au pouvoir, perdit les élections face au bloc de droite dirigé par Menachem Begin, qui avait réussi à recueillir les voix des communautés d'origine orientale.<sup>655</sup>

### *Ashkenazim et Mizrahim : catégories sociales abstraites ou*

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<sup>653</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "The Oriental Jews in Palestine (A Report on a Preliminary Study in Culture-Contacts)," *Jewish Social Studies* 12 (1950), 199-222.

<sup>654</sup> Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim"; Aziza Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel," *American Sociological Review* 68/4 (2003): 481-510; Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: a Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>655</sup> "Israeli elections 1977," <https://en.idi.org.il/israeli-elections-and-parties/elections/1977/>; Asher Arian (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 1977* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1980); Don Peretz, "The Earthquake: Israel's Ninth Knesset Elections," *Middle East Journal* 31(1977), 251-266.

### réalité ?

Mais pourquoi l'ethnicité est-elle devenue le principal critère pour définir les communautés juives en Israël ? Pour répondre à cette question, il faut introduire les termes « Ashkénazité » et « Mizrahité ». Ces deux catégories, bien que liées aux concepts de « ashkénaze » et « sépharade » ne leur correspondent pas. Ces deux termes définissent en réalité des catégories sociales et des dynamiques de pouvoir qui se sont établies avec l'État d'Israël lui-même, entre les groupes sociaux plutôt qu'entre les individus. Ashkénazité et Mizrahité sont donc les catégories ethniques locales et contemporaines, communément associées dans le premier cas à la culture occidentale et à un statut social d'élite, et dans le second à une culture orientale, sous-développée et prémoderne.<sup>656</sup> Mais comment ces deux catégories ont-elles été créées en premier lieu, et pourquoi celles-ci et pas d'autres ?

L'ethnicité, en tant qu'axe d'inégalité sociale, a été ancrée dans la société israélienne dès le début. Malgré une grande hétérogénéité des conditions sociales et économiques parmi les immigrants, une structure sociale binaire est apparue, dans laquelle les Ashkénazes, en général, avaient un pouvoir politique, des compétences professionnelles et un niveau d'éducation supérieurs à ceux des immigrants de pays musulmans, connus sous le nom de Mizrahim<sup>657</sup>. Cela a conduit à une répartition inégale des ressources, et finalement à un statut socio-économique inférieur pour un grand nombre de Juifs orientaux, ancrant ainsi une dynamique de classe dans ce qui était à l'origine une différenciation

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<sup>656</sup> La traduction des termes hébreux « Ashkenaziyut » et « Mizrahiyut » par les termes « Ashkénazité » vise à préserver la signification de toute une catégorie sociale par opposition aux individus. Pour une analyse plus approfondie des usages de ces termes, voir Orna Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations: Evolving Ethnic Perceptions Among Dominant Groups," *The Sociological Quarterly* 54 (2013): 399-423; Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim"; Ruth Halperin-Kaddari and Yaacov Yadgar, "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality among Jews in Israel," *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development* (Juin 2010), [http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/\(httpPublications\)/52D5E8193068EB78C1257753002B4E68?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/(httpPublications)/52D5E8193068EB78C1257753002B4E68?OpenDocument)

<sup>657</sup> Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State Engineer Segregation?"; Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim".



ethnique.<sup>658</sup>

Une telle catégorisation, issue du clivage colonial et orientaliste entre Est et Ouest, Chrétien et Musulman, a rassemblé des immigrants d'origines culturelles et sociales très différentes (tels que Marocains, Égyptiens, Turcs etc.), en corrélant l'affiliation ethnique à un statut socio-économique donné.<sup>659</sup> Un tel processus de différenciation ethnique, selon une opposition Est/Ouest, repose, selon Khazzoom, sur le lien qui subsiste entre l'orientalisme européen et le monde juif.<sup>660</sup> Elle soutient qu'au cours des deux derniers siècles de diaspora, les Juifs et la culture juive ont subi un processus d'orientalisation à travers lequel les Juifs européens ont appris à considérer leur propre tradition comme orientale, et donc inférieure, développant de ce fait un dévouement intense envers l'Occident et sa prétendue supériorité culturelle.<sup>661</sup> De nombreux chercheurs ont soutenu cette thèse en maintenant que les élites politiques et intellectuelles européennes en Israël ont en effet appliqué un paradigme orientaliste sur les immigrants originaires d'Afrique du Nord et du Moyen Orient. Utilisant une dichotomie déjà existante créée en Europe, celle d'Est versus Ouest, ils ont introduit une construction binaire de l'ethnicité en Israël qui permettait de ne pas tenir compte de l'hétérogénéité des immigrants, en les classant en deux catégories homogènes : les Ashkénazes et les Mizrahim. La langue a joué un rôle clé dans ce processus de classification, en permettant d'établir ce qui représentait la norme (l'Ashkénazité, représentante de la culture Européenne/occidentale) et ce qui en

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<sup>658</sup> Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism".

Dvorah Yanow, "From What Edah are You? Israeli and American Meanings of 'Race-Ethnicity' in Social Policy Practices," *Israel Affairs* 5 (1998):183-199.

<sup>659</sup> Moshe Semyonov and Noah Lewin-Epstein, "Wealth Inequality: Ethnic Disparities in the Israeli Society," *Social Forces* 89/3 (2011): 935-960.

<sup>660</sup> Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism," 483. Hanna Herzog, "Ethnicity as a Product of Political Negotiation: The case of Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7/4 (1984): 517-533;

Shlomo Swirski, *Israel: The Oriental Majority* (London: Zed Books, 1989)

<sup>661</sup> Dans un tel système, une opposition est posée entre l'Occident et l'Orient, en s'y appuyant pour construire l'Orient comme inférieur, pour « le dominer, le restructurer et avoir autorité sur lui ». Le processus d'orientalisation est relationnel : non seulement parce qu'une catégorie en implique une autre, mais aussi parce que la construction de l'Orient est la façon dont l'Est se produit lui-même. Cf. Said, *Orientalism*, 1-28.

différait (la Mizrahité représentante de la culture orientale/arabe), et donc ce qui était légitime de ce qui ne l'était pas. En fait, ce n'est pas l'existence réelle de différences ethniques qui explique l'émergence de cette discrimination, mais la manière dont ces identités ethniques ont été représentées et reproduites dans le contexte de la nouvelle société israélienne, notamment à travers le langage.

Cependant, l'idée d'une division intra-juive contrastait fortement avec l'ethos égalitaire à la base de l'idéologie sioniste, qui niait « la possibilité d'inégalités raciales ou ethniques entre les Juifs ». <sup>662</sup> L'assimilation culturelle (communément appelée « melting-pot ») était considérée comme une pierre angulaire de la nouvelle collectivité et une étape fondamentale pour la création d'une nation israélienne homogène. Pour s'intégrer pleinement dans la nouvelle société, les immigrants devaient adopter la culture israélienne, considérée comme meilleure et plus « avancée », en abandonnant leur « ancienne » culture sans regarder en arrière. <sup>663</sup> De l'autre côté, pour légitimer ce nouvel ordre social, les Juifs européens ont lié inextricablement leur ethnicité et leur culture à l'identité nationale israélienne, créant ainsi un lien fort entre les deux.

L'ethnicité ashkénaze (Ashkénazité), avec le temps, a donc été perçue comme moins saillante (*marked*) grâce à son identification avec l'identité israélienne normative. <sup>664</sup> La nature non marquée (*unmarked*) de l'ethnicité dominante et la normalisation de sa situation privilégiée ont donc permis au groupe dominant de formuler un ensemble de conceptions ethniques et raciales qui tendaient à justifier le déni de l'ethnicité en tant que force sociale significative. <sup>665</sup> L'inégalité ethnique a donc été attribuée à la

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<sup>662</sup> Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations"

<sup>663</sup> Ashley W. Doane, "Dominant Group Ethnic Identity in the United States: the Role of 'Hidden' Ethnicity in Intergroup Relations," *The Sociological Quarterly* 38 (1997): 385.

<sup>664</sup> Wayne Brekhus, "A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting our Focus," *Sociological Theory* 16/1 (1998): 34-51.

<sup>665</sup> Doane, "Dominant Group Ethnic Identity in the United States."

« déficience culturelle » du groupe dominé, plutôt qu'à une inégalité structurelle.

En conséquence, la plupart des études menées dans les années 1990, jusqu'aux années 2000, ne traitaient que de la catégorie visible définie comme « mizrahité », sans toucher à la catégorie non marquée, et apparemment invisible, de l' « ashkénazité ». <sup>666</sup> Orna Sasson Levy est l'une des premières sociologues à s'être penchée sur le concept d'ethnicité du groupe dominant en Israël. Dans son travail, elle a pris comme modèle les études américaines sur la blanchité, en déduisant que, comme la blanchité aux États-Unis, l'ashkénazité en Israël est le « marqueur non marqué » - identifié avec un universalisme « neutre », tout en servant de critère principal par rapport auquel tous les autres groupes sont identifiés. <sup>667</sup>

La catégorisation ethnique ashkénaze/mizrahi définie ici reste pertinente et utilisée jusqu'à aujourd'hui dans le discours public israélien. <sup>668</sup> Elle a subi quelques adaptations pour inclure de nouveaux groupes d'immigrants qui ont rejoint le pays par la suite (Juifs d'URSS et Juifs éthiopiens), mais la corrélation initiale entre ethnicité et statut socio-économique n'a pas été modifiée. <sup>669</sup> On

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<sup>666</sup> Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism"; Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim"; Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jew*; Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs, Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 1993);

<sup>667</sup> Orna Sasson-Levy and Avi Shoshana, "Passing as (Non) Ethnic: The Israeli Version of Acting White," *Sociological Inquiry* 83 (2013): 448-472; Orna Sasson-Levy, "A Different Kind of Whiteness: Marking and Unmarking of Social Boundaries in the Construction of Hegemonic Ethnicity," *The Sociological Forum* 28/1(2013): 27-50; Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations".

<sup>668</sup> Pour la présence dans le discours public de l'ethnicité et des catégorisations ethniques, voir Almog Behar, "What is Mizrahiness? Seeking answers through questions," last modified September 26, 2013, <https://enghaokets.wordpress.com/2013/09/26/what-is-mizrahiness-seeking-answers-through-questions/>; Naama Katiee, "But you are not really Mizrahi: Rewriting an Erased Identity," last modified September 15, 2013, <https://enghaokets.wordpress.com/2013/09/15/but-youre-not-really-mizrahi-rewriting-an-erased-identity/>; Tal Kra-Oz, "Israeli TV Series examines the lives of Mizrahim," last modified September 13, 2013, <https://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/145059/israeli-tv-series-examines-the-lives-of-mizrahim>; Yitzhak Laor, "Wiped out," dernière modification 28 septembre 2001, <https://www.haaretz.com/life/books/1.5414278>

<sup>669</sup> Pour en savoir plus sur l'intégration des Juifs de l'ancienne URSS et de l'Éthiopie, voir Larissa Remennick, "What Does Immigration Mean? Social Insertion of Russian Immigrants in Israel," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 4/1 (2003): 23-49; Shalva Weil, "Religion, Blood and the Equality of Rights: The Case of Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *International Journal*

peut donc observer comment la société israélienne n'a pas été structurée selon le model du *melting pot*, mais plutôt selon une hiérarchie où les concepts de modernité et d'occident, strictement liés au concept d'ashkénazité, étaient dominants. Et en effet, ce n'est que très récemment que le lien entre ethnicité et identité nationale en Israël a été analysé de manière plus approfondie, avec une série d'études sur l'ashkénazité comme exemple d'ethnicité du groupe dominant en Israël.<sup>670</sup>

### *Partie I : Générations, mémoire et patrimoine culturel*

L'objectif de cette première partie de la thèse est d'analyser la transmission des mémoires et l'utilisation de l'héritage culturel au sein des familles, en tant qu'instruments de création et de préservation des identités de groupe et des frontières ethniques au sein d'une nouvelle société.<sup>671</sup>

Dans le cadre de mon travail, j'examinerai deux des facteurs qui déterminent le rôle du patrimoine culturel dans la sphère publique et privée : transmission et usage. La transmission est un processus que l'anthropologue Trepas entend comme « faire passer quelque chose (de quelqu'un) à quelqu'un d'autre ».<sup>672</sup> Cela se produit par un transfert de représentations, pratiques, émotions et traditions dans le présent, et concerne à la fois des objets (patrimoine matériel) et des pratiques culturelles (patrimoine immatériel).<sup>673</sup>

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on *Minority and Group Rights* 4/3-4 (1996): <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718119620907256> et Uri Ben-Eliezer, "Multicultural Society and Everyday Cultural Racism: Second Generation of Ethiopian Jews in Israel's 'Crisis of Modernization'," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31/5 (2008): 935-961.

<sup>670</sup> Sasson-Levy, "Ethnic Generations"; Kimmerling. *The End of Ashkenazi Hegemony*.

<sup>671</sup> Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartman, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1998); Michèle Lamont, and Virág Molnár, "The Study of Boundaries Across the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002):167-95.

<sup>672</sup> Marie Trepas, "Transmettre : un point de vue sémantique," *Ethnologie française* 30/3 (2000) : 361-367.

<sup>673</sup> Voir Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social memory studies: from "collective memory" to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998):105-140. Laurier Turgeon, "Spirit of Place: Evolving Heritage Concepts and Practices." In *The Spirit of Place. Between Tangible and Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurier Turgeron, (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009) 33-47.

L'importance de ce mécanisme de transmission/utilisation réside dans le fait qu'en l'analysant, il est possible de comprendre et d'interroger la construction de la réalité dans laquelle nous vivons et les dynamiques sociales qui l'ont influencée.<sup>674</sup> En effet, le choix des informations à transmettre et l'usage qui en sera fait impliquent un processus décisionnel.

Comme on peut l'imaginer, dans le processus de constitution de l'héritage d'un groupe, la mémoire joue un rôle crucial, constituant le lien entre le présent et le passé et un moyen de perpétuer les identités de ce même groupe. En effet, même si le patrimoine et la mémoire sont vécus également à un niveau individuel, c'est par l'interaction sociale (familiale, nationale etc.) que le patrimoine prend pleinement vie.<sup>675</sup>

Un certain nombre d'études consacrées au concept de mémoire peuvent aider à comprendre sa fonction sociale et les conditions de sa production.<sup>676</sup> Comme cela s'est produit pour le concept de patrimoine culturel, le concept de mémoire a lui aussi évolué, passant d'une conception statique à une notion de processus, en constante évolution, et remplissant différentes fonctions à différents moments, et qui ne se limite pas à un transfert statique du passé dans le présent.<sup>677</sup> Afin de comprendre comment fonctionnent les processus de mémoire, dans cette première partie de la thèse, je vais limiter mon analyse à l'institution sociale de la famille et à sa

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<sup>674</sup> David Berliner, « Anthropologie et transmission », *Terrain* 55 (2010) : 4–19.

<sup>675</sup> James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Aleida Assmann, "Four Formats of Memory: From Individual to Collective Constructions of the Past." in *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German-Speaking World Since 1950*, ed. Christian Emden and David Robin Midgley, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002) 19-37; Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (eds.), *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>676</sup> Pour une compréhension plus approfondie du concept de mémoire dans les sciences sociales et de son lien avec le collectif, voir : Marie-Claire Lavabre, « Usages et Mésusages de la Notion de Mémoire », *Critique Internationale* 7 (2000) : 48-57 et Marie-Claire Lavabre, « Paradigmes de la Mémoire », *Transcontinentales* 5 (2007) : 139-147.

<sup>677</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit 1* (Paris : Le Seuil, 2014) Kindle edition.

relation avec la mémoire, qui passe inévitablement par des transferts intergénérationnels.

J'ai décidé de développer mon analyse en suivant deux points principaux, à savoir : les souvenirs et les histoires familiales, en y incluant les souvenirs de l'Holocauste et la nourriture et les traditions alimentaires. En partant de là, mon objectif était de comprendre comment les individus appartenant aux deux groupes ont donné un sens à leur histoire de vie et à leur identité ethnique par rapport à l'ordre discursif collectif auquel ils se sont trouvés confrontés à leur arrivée en Israël. L'individu est ainsi abordé dans son propre rapport à l'histoire, ce qui m'a permis d'analyser à une échelle plus petite des phénomènes plus vastes tels que la migration, l'intégration en Israël et la catégorisation ethnique qui en a découlé.<sup>678</sup>

En examinant les récits individuels, j'essaierai de voir comment les deux groupes considérés, israéliens d'origine polonaise et d'origine tunisienne, ont négocié leur identité par rapport à leur expérience migratoire et au discours collectif sur l'ethnicité et l'identité nationale qu'ils ont rencontré en Israël. Ces récits, en se concentrant sur des histoires personnelles, introduisent un certain degré de subjectivité dans l'histoire officielle, encourageant la reconstitution de trajectoires plus individuelles, tout en gardant à l'esprit leur interdépendance avec une dynamique de groupe plus large.<sup>679</sup> Finalement, une analyse menée à travers les générations permettra de mieux comprendre la pertinence de ces mêmes identités ethniques en Israël aujourd'hui.<sup>680</sup>

Dans le cas d'Israël, le récit national adopté dès le début était un récit sioniste, qui considérait la création d'un État comme point de départ d'une nouvelle histoire pour le peuple juif, déterminant ainsi son identité et les frontières de sa communauté socio-historique.<sup>681</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> Florence Haegel et Marie-Claire Lavabre, *Destins ordinaires. Identité singulière et mémoire partagée* (Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2010), 85.

<sup>679</sup> Aleida Assman, *Ricordare*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 154.

<sup>680</sup> Les entretiens utilisés dans ce chapitre font partie de la série d'entretiens que l'auteur a réalisés au cours de son travail sur le terrain en Israël de 2014 à 2018. Toutefois, le cas échéant, des entretiens réalisés par d'autres chercheurs peuvent être cités.

<sup>681</sup> Valensi, *Fables de la mémoire*, 443.

L'ethnicité, surtout dans les premiers temps, n'était pas incluse dans les paramètres constituant la nouvelle identité nationale, principalement parce que le groupe des pères fondateurs et des idéologues sionistes était assez homogène de ce point de vue. C'est pour cette raison que j'utilise dans mon travail des récits individuels, pour tenter de reconstruire un passé aux facettes multiples, en dissonance, parfois, avec « le » récit national.<sup>682</sup> Par la transmission d'expériences, de traditions et de souvenirs, l'individu participe donc au maintien de la mémoire collective du groupe auquel il appartient, que ce soit la famille, un groupe religieux ou ethnique.<sup>683</sup> L'importance de ces récits repose finalement sur l'acceptation et la fusion des mémoires individuelles dans la mémoire collective de la nation. Grâce à ce système, plusieurs versions du passé sont intégrées dans la mémoire collective nationale et continuent à vivre, en perpétuant l'héritage de groupes différents de celui qui est hégémonique.<sup>684</sup>

Par conséquent, on a essayé d'analyser la relation que les deux groupes considérés, Israéliens d'origine polonaise et tunisienne, avaient avec leur passé et leur histoire, par rapport à la nouvelle identité qu'ils ont dû se construire une fois arrivés en Israël. Quels éléments ont été transmis, lesquels ont été laissés de côté et pourquoi ? Quelle a été l'influence sur leurs mémoires et identités des changements historiques majeurs auxquels les deux groupes ont été confrontés ?

La famille étant une dimension fondamentale dans la transmission de la mémoire et du patrimoine culturel, je me suis d'abord concentrée sur les relations entre générations, en particulier entre la première et la deuxième génération.<sup>685</sup> Dans les paragraphes

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<sup>682</sup> Daniel Bertaux, *Les récits de vie*, Paris : Nathan, 1997.

<sup>683</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006).

<sup>684</sup> Emanuela Trevisan Semi and Piera Rossetto, "Introduction: Memory and Forgetting among Jews from the Arab-Muslim Countries. Contested Narratives of a Shared Past," *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History, Journal of Fondazione CEDEC* 4(2012).

<sup>685</sup> Marianne Hirsh, "The generation of postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29/1 (2008): 103 – 128.

suyvants, j'examinerai en particulier la relation que les Israéliens d'origine polonaise et tunisienne avaient, et ont aujourd'hui, avec l'héritage culturel polonais et tunisien de leurs parents et grands-parents.

### *Israéliens d'origine polonaise*

En ce qui concerne les Israéliens d'origine polonaise, plusieurs aspects ont caractérisé leur relation avec l'héritage polonais. Il ressort des entretiens que les principaux aspects sont liés aux traditions familiales, notamment culinaires, à la mémoire de l'Holocauste et à l'utilisation de la langue yiddish.

La grande majorité des Juifs qui ont rejoint la Palestine depuis la Pologne au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle étaient de jeunes hommes et femmes sans famille, fervents sionistes. Ces jeunes pionniers n'ont guère apporté avec eux leur héritage culturel polonais : la plupart d'entre eux, du fait de leur jeune âge (15-20 ans) avaient eu par conséquent moins de temps pour se socialiser et construire leur identité en Pologne, leur principal lien avec leur pays d'origine étant leur famille qui y était restée.

Ainsi, Dalit, une femme d'une cinquantaine d'années, dont le père est d'origine polonaise et la mère tunisienne, interrogée sur l'histoire de sa vie et son héritage, évoquait surtout le côté tunisien de sa famille, la façon dont elle le percevait quand elle était enfant dans les années 60 et celle dont elle le perçoit aujourd'hui. Elle avait une idée beaucoup plus vague de la culture et de l'histoire du côté polonais de sa famille. Elle m'a expliqué que son père était né en Israël de parents polonais qui y avaient émigré à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Son père était déjà de la deuxième génération et ne lui a transmis qu'une très petite partie de son héritage polonais. Elle m'a dit :

*Vous savez, je ne sais pas ce que peut être l'héritage polonais pour moi. Mon père est né en Israël et les parents de mon mari sont nés en Israël*



*tous les deux. Donc, la cuisine est... tout ce qui est lié à la cuisine... elle est très similaire à la cuisine israélienne, ce que ma mère préparait pour Pessah, à l'exception de quelques plats tunisiens spéciaux, c'est ce que l'autre grand-mère (polonaise) préparait. [...] Je ne peux pas penser à quelque chose de spécifiquement polonais... vous savez... peut-être ce « violoniste sur le toit » ... mais peut-être que c'est russe... en tout cas vous ne le voyez plus. Je ne sais pas ce qu'est la culture polonaise...<sup>686</sup>*

Elle a affirmé s'intéresser davantage au côté tunisien de son histoire familiale et de son héritage. Lorsqu'elle essayait de définir ce que signifiait pour elle être de culture polonaise en Israël, elle était toujours assez vague et a fini par l'associer à la culture israélienne en général, montrant ainsi le caractère invisible et « acquis » que la culture polonaise, associée à l'askénazité, a revêtu dans l'Israël contemporain. Cependant, elle était consciente de la hiérarchie sociale existant entre les deux différentes composantes ethniques de sa famille et associait, dans son processus de réflexion, l'héritage polonais au concept d'ashkénazité et à une position plus élevée dans la hiérarchie sociale :

*[...] Je suis sûre que vous avez lu qu'Israël a été établi comme un pays occidental et que quiconque avait une culture différente ne devrait pas la montrer, on devrait être « tzabar », vous devriez avoir la culture qui a été consolidée en Israël sans aucune référence à la culture sépharade [...].<sup>687</sup>*

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<sup>686</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

<sup>687</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

La fluidité dans l'association des termes polonais et ashkénaze, et en réalité l'interchangeabilité des deux termes dans le discours de Dalit, dénote encore une fois l'identification qui existe jusqu'à aujourd'hui en Israël entre les concepts de polonais et d'ashkénaze.

Un autre facteur qui a contribué à distancier encore plus les juifs originaires de Pologne de leur culture d'origine fut la tragédie de l'Holocauste. Cet événement, en détruisant des familles et des communautés entières, a brisé les liens entre les Juifs qui avaient émigré en Palestine et ceux qui sont restés en Pologne. Cela a eu un impact énorme sur la famille en tant qu'unité sociale, entraînant la perte de l'héritage et des souvenirs de générations entières. Cet évènement a poussé les Juifs du Yishuv et les survivants à renier tout lien restant avec le pays et sa culture, contribuant ainsi à renforcer leur engagement en faveur de la création d'une nouvelle culture juive en Israël, détachée de celle en diaspora. La mémoire et la transmission du patrimoine familial ont été brutalement interrompues et même ceux qui avaient survécu refoulèrent pendant longtemps les souvenirs de leur vie avant l'Holocauste, afin de pouvoir reconstruire une nouvelle vie en Israël ou ailleurs.

À cet égard, l'intégration des survivants de l'Holocauste et des réfugiés a été un processus difficile, en raison des conditions difficiles auxquelles tous les nouveaux immigrants étaient confrontés et de l'attitude méprisante de nombreux pionniers envers les Juifs de la diaspora, qui leur donnait un sentiment de ressentiment et d'isolement. Il est intéressant de noter l'ambiguïté de l'attribut de « polonaité ». Si avant la création de l'État, il était lié à des caractéristiques considérées comme positives, telles que : être occidental, cultivé et moderne, après la création du pays et l'arrivée des survivants de l'Holocauste en Israël, cet attribut a été rétrogradé et lié à des caractéristiques négatives telles que la faiblesse et la vie dans la diaspora.<sup>688</sup>

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<sup>688</sup> Dalia Ofer, "Holocaust survivors as immigrants: the case of Israel and the Cyprus," *Modern Judaism* 16 (1996),1-23.

Parallèlement, le discours public sur l'Holocauste, mené principalement à l'origine par des acteurs étatiques, fut inclus parmi les piliers fondateurs de l'État d'Israël et de son identité. Ce récit a été fortement simplifié, et les rares événements de résistance active contre les nazis (par exemple le soulèvement du ghetto de Varsovie) ont été mis en avant au détriment de l'expérience vécue par la majorité des Juifs pendant l'Holocauste.<sup>689</sup> En ce sens, la relation entre la mémoire privée et la mémoire publique n'a pas été synchronisée pendant longtemps, et les mémoires privées des survivants des camps n'étaient pas considérées comme utiles pour la légitimation de l'État d'Israël.<sup>690</sup>

Ce n'est donc que dans les années 1960, avec le procès d'Eichmann (1961), que les souvenirs individuels des survivants ont pu refaire surface dans le discours public en Israël.<sup>691</sup> Cependant, ce n'est que quelques décennies plus tard que les expériences individuelles de survivants de l'Holocauste ont été intégrées dans la mémoire collective et dans l'identité israélienne de manière plus directe et plus explicite. Selon l'historienne Anita Shapira, cela s'est produit dans les années 1980 pour deux raisons principales. Premièrement, parce qu'à cette époque-là, l'hégémonie sioniste allait s'affaiblir de plus en plus, laissant la place à des voix différentes et à des récits plus variés.<sup>692</sup> Deuxièmement, l'identité nationale israélienne s'était suffisamment développée et établie pour pouvoir mieux examiner son passé et pour faire face à des héritages culturels qui n'étaient pas strictement conformes à la norme. Immigrants de toutes origines, y compris des pays d'Europe de l'Est, commencèrent donc à protester sur la façon dont ils étaient

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<sup>689</sup> Shapira, "The Holocaust," 49; Segev, 1949, 155;

<sup>690</sup> Sur l'utilisation de l'Holocauste comme outil de légitimation de l'existence de l'État d'Israël, voir Goldkorn, *L'asino del Messia*, 111: "La Shoah est différente : c'est la catastrophe de l'Occident [...]. C'est pour ça que la reconstruction de l'Occident implique la création de l'État juif. Sans Israël, il n'y a pas d'Occident. » (Ma traduction de l'italien).

<sup>691</sup> Hanna Yablonka, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Kastner and Eichmann Trials," *Israel Studies* 8/3 (2003): 1-24;

<sup>692</sup> Shapira, "The Holocaust", Segev, 1949.

poussés dans un nouveau moule standard, israélien, sans attention, ni respect, pour leurs cultures et héritages antérieurs.

Cette répression initiale des souvenirs et des récits, en particulier liés à l'Holocauste, a également eu des répercussions sur les mécanismes de transmission intergénérationnelle des souvenirs, rendant parfois la communication plus facile entre les grands-parents et les petits-enfants, qu'entre les grands-parents et leurs propres fils et filles. Comme Tami en a fait l'expérience dans sa propre famille :

*Aujourd'hui, grâce aux enfants, ma mère nous raconte beaucoup d'histoires sur sa vie avant et pendant l'Holocauste. Qu'elle venait d'une famille très cultivée, par exemple. Mais elle ne se souvient pas de beaucoup de choses de son enfance, elle ne se souvient que de certaines choses. Aujourd'hui, seule ma mère raconte des histoires. L'année dernière, mon père m'a raconté pour la première fois tout ce qui s'est passé, ce qu'il a vécu pendant la guerre.<sup>693</sup>*

Le fait que les enfants des survivants de l'Holocauste étaient divisés entre deux mondes – le monde diasporique de leurs parents qui avait été détruit par l'Holocauste, et le nouveau monde israélien, plein de vitalité et lié à la terre – a compliqué pour eux la conservation de tout type d'héritage culturel polonais, à la fois matériel (photos, journaux intimes, etc.) et immatériel (traditions culinaires et langue, qu'elles soient polonaises ou yiddish) car ils voulaient s'intégrer pleinement dans la nouvelle société. De toute façon, l'effort de mémoire de la génération de leurs parents était majoritairement orienté vers la commémoration des victimes de l'Holocauste.

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<sup>693</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Tami, Jerusalem 04/05/2017.

Les entretiens ont montré que la deuxième génération, généralement née en Israël, est celle qui montre le plus grand intérêt dans la résolution d'un passé problématique, à travers la recherche historique et la création d'une sorte de relation personnelle avec ce passé, malgré la réticence des survivants à parler de ce qu'ils ont vécu. Par contre, les membres des générations suivantes (troisième et quatrième) affichent des sentiments contradictoires vis-à-vis du passé et de l'héritage culturel de leur famille. D'un côté, ils sont occupés à construire leur propre identité dans le présent, leur histoire de vie est « en construction » et n'a pas encore pris sa forme définitive, ce qui rend plus difficile pour eux de se rattacher à un passé lointain qui n'a que peu de rapport avec leur vie quotidienne. De l'autre, ils ressentent une tension entre l'intérêt et l'amour qu'ils ont pour leurs grands-parents et leurs histoires et leur volonté de continuer à mener leur vie. Néanmoins, en vieillissant, il semble que l'intérêt pour leur passé et leur propre histoire familiale devienne plus présent, imposé aussi par la disparition de la génération de leurs grands-parents et avec celle-ci d'une grande partie de l'histoire de l'Europe et d'Israël.

Dans ce contexte, un aspect intéressant en rapport avec le patrimoine culturel polonais en Israël aujourd'hui est la cuisine. Comme cela arrive souvent dans un contexte migratoire, les immigrants polonais en Israël ont apporté avec eux certaines traditions culinaires.<sup>694</sup> Si dans les premières années d'existence de l'État la cuisine juive-polonaise et la cuisine israélienne étaient inextricablement liées, un mouvement a émergé aujourd'hui pour retrouver une version plus authentique de la cuisine polonaise telle qu'elle a été apportée en Israël par les juifs polonais qui ont émigré dans les années 1960, en amenant avec eux une culture polonaise moins liée à la tradition juive.

En effet, il existe actuellement en Israël un petit groupe d'intellectuels et d'artistes d'origine polonaise, appartenant pour la plupart à la quatrième génération, qui tentent de redécouvrir la

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<sup>694</sup> Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 48.

cuisine polonaise et de la présenter sous un nouvel angle, en changeant l'idée stéréotypée que les Israéliens avaient de la nourriture polonaise comme « terne et sans saveur ».<sup>695</sup> Le travail de la journaliste culinaire israélienne Ronit Vered en est un bon exemple. En collaboration avec l'Institut polonais de Haïfa et de Tel Aviv, elle a organisé pendant deux années consécutives (2014-15) la semaine culinaire polonaise lors de laquelle plusieurs chefs ont contribué à recréer des plats de la cuisine polonaise contemporaine. Un deuxième cas intéressant dans le renouvellement de l'image de la Pologne et de sa cuisine en Israël, est constitué par l'ouvrage intitulé *Polish : Polin, Ochel, Achshav* (Polish : Pologne, nourriture, aujourd'hui).<sup>696</sup> L'objectif de ce livre est de mettre en avant la cuisine polonaise contemporaine et les personnes qui la font. L'accent est mis sur la nourriture, mais le livre révèle également une image plus large, composée d'histoires personnelles d'artistes juifs polonais et israéliens - cuisiniers, entrepreneurs du secteur alimentaire, artistes, designers, photographes et chercheurs. Certains d'entre eux vivent en Pologne, tandis que d'autres ont visité le pays pour la première fois pour leur travail sur ce livre, et en raison du lien de leur famille avec celui-ci. Ce projet est également né de la conscience des auteurs de l'écart entre la perception israélienne dominante de la nourriture (et de la culture) polonaise comme « terne et grise », et la richesse de la réalité culinaire et culturelle de la Pologne contemporaine. Comme l'explique Arieh Rozen, l'éditeur du livre :

*C'est une tentative d'élargir la perspective sur la Pologne, et d'offrir une vision plus complexe du pays, rapprochant ainsi les deux cultures.*<sup>697</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> "Israel's Polish culinary week in Tel Aviv," dernière modification le 23 avril 2015, dernière consultation : 02/06/2019) :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnVttDfgZGs>

<sup>696</sup> Arieh Rozen, *Polish: Polin, Ochel, Achshav* (Tel Aviv: Asia publishing, 2016) [Hébreu].

<sup>697</sup> "Polish = Polin, Ochel, Achshav," dernière modification le 9 décembre 2016, <https://www.monitour.co.il/%d7%a4%d7%95%d7%9c%d7%99%d7%a9->

Jusqu'à très récemment, l'image de la Pologne dans la société israélienne était influencée par le rôle joué par le pays dans l'Holocauste et de ce fait par les stéréotypes sur l'antisémitisme en Pologne. Le succès des deux initiatives, le festival et le livre, démontre l'intérêt croissant du public israélien en général, et des israéliens d'origine polonaise en particulier, pour la culture polonaise, même détachée de sa composante juive. En conclusion, on pourrait dire que, en particulier au cours de la dernière décennie, la préservation de la mémoire et de l'héritage culturel polonais a connu un renouveau en Israël, indépendamment des activités liées à la mémoire de l'Holocauste. Cela s'inscrit dans un processus d'acceptation en cours au sein de la société israélienne. On peut voir comment, lors de la dernière décennie, l'héritage polonais a été redécouvert en Israël, grâce aux jeunes générations qui ont mis en avant ce qui, pendant longtemps, avait été dissimulé en tant qu'élément de l'héritage ashkénaze hégémonique.

### *Israéliens d'origine tunisienne*

En ce qui concerne les Israéliens d'origine tunisienne, comme dans le cas polonais, plusieurs aspects ont caractérisé leur relation avec l'héritage tunisien. Il ressort des entretiens que les principaux aspects sont liés, dans ce cas aussi, aux traditions familiales, notamment culinaires, à la célébration des fêtes typiquement Judéo-tunisiennes et à l'utilisation de la langue française et arabe.

Par rapport à d'autres pays d'Afrique du Nord, l'idéologie sioniste était répandue et bien ancrée en Tunisie, et l'émigration vers la Terre d'Israël est devenue de plus en plus une véritable option pour les Juifs tunisiens déçus par le traitement que le gouvernement français leur avait réservé pendant la guerre, la Tunisie étant sous contrôle allemand, comme d'autres régions de France. En outre, la situation économique et politique précaire de la région après la fin

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[%d7%a4%d7%95%d7%9c%d7%99%d7%9f-%d7%90%d7%95%d7%9b%d7%9c%d7%a2%d7%9b%d7%a9%d7%99%d7%95/](#)

de la guerre et la montée du nationalisme arabe convainquirent de nombreux Juifs tunisiens de faire Aliyah juste après la fin de la guerre et la création de l'État d'Israël (1945-1948).

Le rôle joué par ces premières vagues migratoires, bien que peu nombreuses, a été considérable, en tant que précurseurs de l'immigration et de l'intégration tunisiennes en Israël. Le fait que la plupart de ces immigrants aient choisi le kibboutz montre leur motivation idéologique : ils considéraient les difficultés qu'ils rencontraient comme un moyen de s'intégrer avec succès dans le nouveau Yishuv. En outre, la majorité de ces pionniers tunisiens parlait la langue hébraïque, et possédait un bon niveau d'éducation et de formation professionnelle, des facteurs essentiels pour une bonne intégration. Et en effet, un nombre important d'entre eux appartenaient à la haute bourgeoisie constituée de professionnels formés dans des institutions françaises ou italiennes en Tunisie et en Europe. Le fait d'avoir reçu une éducation « occidentalisée » les a aidés à surmonter le fossé culturel que beaucoup d'immigrants des vagues suivantes, avec des moyens et un capital social moindres, allaient rencontrer. Comme l'a expliqué Renato, l'une des personnes interrogées :

*La majorité des Tunisiens qui sont venus en Israël après nous... la situation était complètement différente, leurs conditions étaient bien pires. Même nous, qui sommes allés dans un kibboutz, nous avons noté une certaine différence culturelle entre les Ashkénazes et les Séfarades... disons que ceux qui sont venus après nous n'ont pas été accueillis de la meilleure façon... mais à l'époque nous ne savions rien de tout cela, nous étions assez isolés dans le kibboutz... nous n'avons vraiment participé à rien de tout cela... <sup>698</sup>*

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<sup>698</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Renato, Ra'anana 09/12/2018.



Il faut noter qu'il est important pour lui d'expliquer qu'ils n'étaient pas au courant du traitement réservé à la deuxième vague d'immigrants tunisiens et, en général, aux immigrants provenant des pays arabes des années 1950. Même en remarquant une certaine différence culturelle entre les ashkenazim et les séfarades, Renato observe davantage une différence entre les Tunisiens occidentalisés et instruits et ceux qui étaient de culture arabe. Renato ne s'est jamais identifié à la culture arabe, ni au groupe qui a été défini plus tard comme les Mizrahim en Israël. Il s'est plutôt identifié comme sioniste avec une culture française ou italienne.

La deuxième vague de Juifs tunisiens arriva en Israël entre 1949 et 1950, une vague migratoire que les historiens appellent la « grande Aliyah ». <sup>699</sup> La majorité des immigrants arrivés en 1950 et dans les années suivantes provenaient de pays arabes, dépassant pour la première fois la majorité européenne/Ashkénaze dans le pays. Il s'agissait d'un type de migration différent à bien des égards : la classe socio-économique moyenne des immigrants était plus basse et les raisons qui les poussaient à quitter le pays étaient très différentes : moins idéologiques et plus pratiques. Même s'ils étaient exposés dans une certaine mesure à l'idéologie sioniste, comme la plupart des Juifs tunisiens, ces nouveaux immigrants n'étaient pas porteurs de l'idéal pionnier sioniste. Les principales considérations qui les poussaient à quitter la Tunisie étaient d'ordre religieux, économique et politique. À leur arrivée, la plupart d'entre eux était envoyés dans le camp d'absorption de *Shaar Aliya*, le plus grand et, pendant un certain temps le seul, camp d'absorption, en Israël. <sup>700</sup> Après des contrôles médicaux et l'enregistrement en tant que citoyens israéliens, ils étaient réinstallés dans d'autres camps d'absorption (*ma'abarot*), qui devinrent plus tard des villes de

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<sup>699</sup> Shapira, *Israel*, 222.

<sup>700</sup> *Sha'ar Aliyah* (en hébreu, porte de l'immigration ou porte de l'Aliyah) était le principal camp d'absorption après la création de l'État. Comme dans le cas d'Atlit, le camp était un camp militaire britannique. Voir Rhona Seidelman, "Encounters in an Israeli Line: Sha'ar Aliyah, March 1950," *AJS Perspectives* (2014): <http://perspectives.ajsnet.org/the-peoples-issue/encounters-in-an-israeli-line-shaar-ha-aliyah-march-1950/>. Consulté le 10 juillet 2019; et Shapira, *Israel*, 225-226.

développement (*ayarot pituach*).<sup>701</sup> Ces nouvelles villes faisaient partie d'un plan de développement pour l'ensemble du pays en vue de le peupler, poussant la majorité des nouveaux immigrants vers les régions du pays les moins peuplées, en particulier à ses frontières nord et sud.<sup>702</sup> Cette stratégie, dite « du bateau à la colonie », a été mise en œuvre principalement par l'Agence juive et le gouvernement israélien.<sup>703</sup>

Ces immigrants, plutôt que d'être considérés comme des pionniers sionistes comme cela s'était produit avec toutes les vagues précédentes, étaient vus comme des acteurs passifs, incapables de décider par eux-mêmes et faciles à diriger selon un plan social et politique plus large. Par conséquent, ils étaient déplacés vers ces endroits sans être informés au préalable du lieu et de la raison de leur transfert :

*[Ils nous ont dit] Nous vous emmènerons dans un endroit où vous aurez un revenu pour subvenir aux besoins de vos enfants. Nous ne savions pas. Nous n'avions aucune idée de ce qui nous attendait. J'ai dit : où allez-vous nous laisser, où allez-vous nous déposer ? C'est le désert là ! Nous ne descendrons pas (du bus). Je pensais que c'était la fin du monde. Je ne savais pas du tout ce qu'il se passait.*<sup>704</sup>

Ce témoignage nous permet de comprendre que la plupart des personnes transférées dans ces villes n'étaient pas conscientes de ce qu'elles allaient affronter. Beaucoup de ces immigrants pensaient qu'ils seraient relocalisés près des grandes villes, mais ils étaient plutôt installés dans des endroits très similaires à ceux d'où ils

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<sup>701</sup> Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State;"

<sup>702</sup> Parfois appelé "le plan Sharon" du nom d'Arieh Sharon, architecte et urbaniste pendant les premières années de l'État israélien. Il a été l'auteur du premier plan national d'Israël, qui portait sur la population des régions du Néguev et de la Galilée. Voir Shapira, *Israel*, 231- 232.

<sup>703</sup> William Berthomière, "Croissance urbaine et immigration : le cas des villes de développement en Israël," *L'information Géographique* 67/2 (2003) : 134-150.

<sup>704</sup> "Salah, po ze Eretz Israel."

venaient, les régions intérieures de la Tunisie ou du Maroc. Le fait que la majorité de ces immigrants parlaient une langue différente et qu'ils venaient d'une culture complètement différente, la culture arabe, était considéré par Ben Gourion et l'establishment sioniste comme quelque chose à régler et à mettre de côté en faveur de la nouvelle culture israélienne. Dans ce contexte, les immigrants tunisiens, comme beaucoup d'autres, ont essayé, après un premier moment de choc, de préserver certains aspects de leur culture d'origine, en particulier ceux qui étaient liés à la célébration des fêtes juives traditionnelles tunisiennes et aux traditions culinaires.

Dans de nombreux cas, ce qui se produisit fut un processus d'adaptation culturelle, ou de « syncrétisme » tel que défini par la chercheuse Rahel Sharabi, où « les croyances et les mœurs de différentes traditions sont réunies dans un processus où différentes traditions et formes de religion se rencontrent pour parvenir à une synthèse ».<sup>705</sup> Dans ce cas, la culture dominante, celle des sionistes ashkénazes, a influencé le groupe dominé, celui des immigrants venant de pays musulmans. Dans ce processus de négociation identitaire, les Juifs tunisiens ont cherché, et réussi, à préserver les traditions tunisiennes, qui se caractérisaient davantage par des habitudes et des croyances que par une orthodoxie religieuse. L'une des traditions les plus importantes qui a été maintenue vivante est celle de la *hillula*, un pèlerinage sur les tombes des *tzaddikim* juifs.<sup>706</sup> En outre, la célébration de certaines fêtes exclusivement tunisiennes a été introduite en Israël par la communauté et transmise aux générations suivantes. En particulier trois célébrations : *Le Rosh hodesh el-Banat*, *le Rosh hodesh Nissan* ou « soirée de la *Bchicha* » et le *Tseudat Yitro* ont été mentionnées par

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<sup>705</sup> Rachel Sharabi, *Syncretism and adaptation: the encounter between a traditional community and a socialist society* (Tel Aviv: Ts'erikover, 2002), 17-22 (Hebrew).

<sup>706</sup> Hillula (Heb: הילולא) est une tradition juive consistant dans le pèlerinage sur les tombes des *tzaddakim* (vertueux) à l'anniversaire de leur mort, et en la commémoration de cette mort par une célébration festive avec la lecture de textes religieux. Voir André Levy, « To Morocco and Back: Tourism and Pilgrimage among Moroccan-Born Israeli », in *Grasping Land, Space and Place in the Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience*, ed. Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 25-46.

toutes les personnes interrogées comme étant les fêtes typiquement tunisiennes qui sont conservées vivantes et célébrées jusqu'à aujourd'hui en Israël. Une autre facette de l'intégration tunisienne dans la nouvelle société était l'identité politique. Au début surtout, mais aussi ces derniers temps, l'engagement politique a été utilisé comme un moyen de promotion personnelle et sociale.

Cela était le cas aussi pour la troisième vague d'immigration venue de Tunisie, qui est arrivée en Israël après la guerre des Six jours (1967). Par rapport aux vagues précédentes, l'accueil de ces immigrants a été très différent. Ils ont pu s'installer dans un pays déjà relativement bien établi et, pour la plupart, sont arrivés de France, étape intermédiaire de leur parcours migratoire, où ils ont acquis une meilleure éducation, et donc un capital social plus élevé, à utiliser en Israël. Beaucoup de ces immigrants, tout en s'identifiant à la culture française, considérée comme supérieure parce qu'occidentale, n'ont pas abandonné leurs traditions et leur héritage culturel tunisiens, choisissant ainsi de renégocier leur identité entre les cultures.

*Je suis né à Tunis et la colonisation française m'a appris à être français, je suis donc devenu français en Tunisie. Quand j'étais à Paris, en tant que Juif, je suis devenu Israélien, surtout après la guerre de '67, et les tendances antisionistes qui sont nées de cette guerre et du mouvement étudiant de '68. Finalement, en Israël, je suis devenu tunisien<sup>707</sup>*

Cela peut être considéré comme une synthèse de la relation fluctuante que les Juifs tunisiens entretiennent avec leurs identités multiples et les héritages qui leur sont associés, à la fois tunisien, français et israélien. Cette relation a évolué au fil du temps, renégociant ses limites en fonction de l'environnement social et politique auquel les Juifs tunisiens étaient confrontés en Israël.

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<sup>707</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Claude, Tel Aviv 15/11/17.

C'est dans ce contexte que nous pouvons analyser la façon dont les troisième et quatrième générations se rapportent à leur héritage culturel. Comme dans le cas polonais, la plupart des jeunes d'origine tunisienne sont moins intéressés par leur passé et par l'héritage culturel de leur famille, qu'ils considèrent comme quelque peu détaché de leur vie quotidienne. La plupart des jeunes interrogés ont répondu aux questions sur leur identité en disant qu'ils se considèrent tout d'abord des Israéliens, reconnaissant seulement ensuite leur origine tunisienne et leur lien avec cet héritage. Ainsi, Shani, une jeune femme de 30 ans de Beer Sheva, a déclaré :

*Je suis moitié tunisienne et moitié yéménite... [mais en fin de compte] je suis israélienne, je suis née en Israël et ici il s'agit d'un tout, de recevoir de chaque [culture], de goûter chaque cuisine... donc je ne me sens pas attachée à ... à la culture tunisienne en particulier... je me sens attachée à être juive, à la Bible, à la vie juive ici en Israël.<sup>708</sup>*

Toutefois, contrairement aux jeunes d'origine polonaise, dont le patrimoine culturel a été homogénéisé avec celui d'Israël déjà au cours des générations précédentes, les jeunes d'origine tunisienne restent, d'une certaine manière, plus conscients de leur origine tunisienne et de l'héritage de leur parents et grands-parents. Cela s'est produit notamment à travers la transmission des traditions culinaires, musicales et de la langue, non seulement l'arabe, mais aussi, dans de nombreux cas, le français.

En se focalisant sur la tradition culinaire tunisienne, le fait qu'il existe encore de nombreuses personnes de la première et de la deuxième génération vivantes et capables de transmettre leur savoir a permis sa transmission aux générations suivantes. Par exemple, même quelqu'un de très jeune comme Chen, une jeune femme de 25 ans

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<sup>708</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Shani de Beer Sheva, à l'université de Tel Aviv 05/12/17.

que j'ai eu la chance d'interviewer à Tel-Aviv, avait des connaissances assez précises en matière de traditions culinaires tunisiennes et a dressé pour moi une liste exhaustive des plats qu'elle consomme régulièrement avec sa famille. La cuisine est en effet considérée comme la principale porte d'entrée du patrimoine culturel tunisien, en favorisant sa transmission entre les générations.

En conclusion, dans cette première partie de mon travail, j'ai considéré la transmission et l'utilisation des mémoires et du patrimoine culturel dans la sphère privée, en considérant les Israéliens d'origine polonaise et tunisienne comme une étude de cas spécifique de deux instances plus générales au sein de la société israélienne : l'ashkénazité et la mizrahité. Dans les deux cas, j'ai analysé la manière dont ces deux groupes se sont confrontés et ont remis en question leur passé, en refaçonnant leurs récits et leur identité selon leurs propres perceptions et selon les nouvelles catégories de la société israélienne. En particulier, les membres de la deuxième génération, tant dans le cas tunisien que dans le cas polonais, tentèrent de changer le cours de leur histoire familiale en modifiant leur propre comportement en réaction à celui de leurs parents. Ces réactions, associées à la tentative de développer leur propre personnalité et une approche indépendante de ce qui est arrivé à leurs parents, leur ont permis de construire leur vie tout en maintenant une interaction continue entre leur présent et le passé de leurs parents.

En ce qui concerne les jeunes générations, elles sont encore dans le processus de négociation de leur identité par rapport à leur histoire de vie et à l'héritage de leur famille. Toutefois, la réalité à laquelle ces jeunes sont confrontés est bien différente de celle de leurs parents ou grands-parents. Ils vivent dans un pays développé et moderne, exposés à une situation complètement différente de celle à laquelle les Israéliens devaient faire face il y a seulement cinquante ans. Il est donc clair que la préoccupation de ces jeunes pour le passé prend un sens différent, car ils cherchent une

signification à leur propre vie, tout en se référant à ce qui s'est passé deux générations auparavant. Travailler sur la mémoire signifie donc essayer de comprendre comment les membres de ces deux groupes ont reconstruit leur propre biographie dans le contexte actuel en examinant (plutôt qu'en ignorant) les expériences et les réactions des générations précédentes.<sup>709</sup> Comme nous l'avons vu dans les entretiens, il n'y a pas de relation simple entre récit de vie et histoire et la relation entre ces deux éléments peut prendre de voies différentes en fonction des expériences personnelles et du moment historique.

### *Partie II - Mise en récit publique*

Après avoir examiné, dans la partie précédente, la transmission et l'utilisation de la mémoire dans la sphère privée, je poursuivrai, dans cette deuxième section, l'analyse de ce qui s'est passé dans la sphère publique. La question abordée ici est la suivante : quelles sont les versions du passé qui sont conservées, mises en scène et transmises dans la sphère publique ? Dans le cas spécifique d'Israël, il est intéressant de comprendre quels récits et quelles voix ethniques ont trouvé une place à la fois dans le paysage muséal, officiel et reconnu par l'État, et non officiel, notamment sous la forme de centres culturels et communautaires.<sup>710</sup>

Selon Aleida Assman, la mémoire a un côté actif et un côté passif. Alors que « les institutions de mémoire active préservent le passé comme présent, les institutions de mémoire passive préservent le passé comme passé. »<sup>711</sup> Cela signifie que, dans le premier cas, la mémoire circule activement et s'affiche pour s'adapter au temps présent et le réinterpréter (actif=canon), tandis que dans le second cas, elle est simplement stockée et utilisée comme archive pour savoir ce qui s'est passé dans le passé (passif=archive).<sup>712</sup> Dans le

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<sup>709</sup> Bar-On, *Fear and Hope*, 139.

<sup>710</sup> Harth Dietrich, "The Invention of Cultural Memory" in *Cultural Memory Studies, An International Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll et Ansgar Nünning (Berlin : Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 85-96.

<sup>711</sup> Assman, "Canon and Archive," 98.

<sup>712</sup> Assman, "Canon and Archive," 98.

cas de la société israélienne, les deux types de mémoire culturelle, active et passive, sont importants et nous donnent la possibilité de comprendre comment l'identité de cette société est née et s'est développée au fil du temps, en analysant la façon dont ses souvenirs ont été transmis et mis en scène. Un certain nombre d'institutions, telles que le système éducatif ou l'armée, sont chargées de cette tâche, et les musées sont parmi ceux qui ont un rôle fondamental dans la préservation et le développement de la mémoire culturelle et collective, façonnant ainsi l'identité d'une nation.<sup>713</sup>

Les musées sont donc non seulement des lieux de production culturelle mais aussi de reproduction des identités ethniques et nationales, de prise de conscience, de négociation et de discussion dans la sphère publique. Et en effet, ils sont utilisés par les politiques de reconnaissance comme des atouts permettant à chaque groupe de poursuivre sa propre histoire et sa propre culture. Les musées sont donc considérés comme une scène où les différents patrimoines culturels d'un pays sont affichés et peuvent se rencontrer. Le but de ces institutions est avant tout de présenter l'identité d'un groupe donné (nationale, ethnique etc.), en fournissant le contexte historique de son existence. Dans le cas des nations, les musées sont devenus de plus en plus des lieux utilisés non seulement par l'État pour présenter son récit au public, mais aussi par les petites communautés et les minorités pour représenter leurs propres souvenirs, et donc leur version de l'histoire, renforçant ainsi leur sentiment de communauté et de fierté.<sup>714</sup>

Tout en essayant de comprendre comment l'historiographie et le récit national israéliens ont été construits dans la sphère publique, il est impossible de ne pas remarquer le rôle que le récit sioniste a occupé dans la construction de l'identité du pays. L'Holocauste en

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<sup>713</sup> Tamar Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora in Israeli Vernacular Museums," in *Memory and Ethnicity: Ethnic Museums in Israel and the Diaspora*, ed. Emanuela Trevisan Semi, Dario Miccoli and Tudor Parfitt (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2013) 1.

<sup>714</sup> Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Curator* 14/1 (1971), 11-24.



particulier a joué un rôle clé dans ce récit, constituant l'événement majeur qui a symbolisé la souffrance et la persécution des Juifs dans la diaspora et, en lien avec les concepts de renaissance, de sacrifice et d'héroïsme, a été intégré dans le récit sioniste comme l'une des principales raisons de la création de l'État d'Israël. Ce récit a été pendant longtemps le seul à être représenté dans les musées et dans le discours public. La situation a changé à partir des années 1970 lorsque le parti socialiste au pouvoir a perdu les élections et le récit sioniste hégémonique a commencé à être remis en cause.<sup>715</sup>

### *Musées ethniques et associations ethniques en Israël*

Au cours des deux dernières décennies, l'utilisation des musées et des centres patrimoniaux comme bâtisseurs d'identités collectives a proliféré à l'échelle mondiale.<sup>716</sup> Ces institutions sont l'expression non seulement du récit de l'État, mais aussi de l'héritage des minorités et des communautés marginalisées, surtout dans le cas des centres patrimoniaux.<sup>717</sup>

Selon l'anthropologue Tamar Katriel, il existe en Israël une scène muséale très vivante, surtout en ce qui concerne les centres du patrimoine et les musées ethniques.<sup>718</sup> Avec environ 9 millions d'habitants en 2019, l'État d'Israël compte plus de 200 musées dans

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<sup>715</sup> Ce changement de gouvernement a marqué une étape importante dans l'histoire politique et sociale de l'État, en faisant remonter à la surface des tensions et des questions jusqu'alors passées sous silence. Voir "Israeli elections 1977": <https://en.idi.org.il/israeli-elections-and-parties/elections/1977/>; Asher Arian, *The Elections in Israel 1977* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1980); Don Peretz, "The Earthquake: Israel's Ninth Knesset Elections," *Middle East Journal*, 31/ 3 (1977), 251–266.

<sup>716</sup> Sharon J. Macdonald, "Museum, National, Postnational and Transnational Identities," in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Bettina Messias Carbonell (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 273-286.

<sup>717</sup> Comme le souligne Tamar Katriel dans sa contribution à l'ouvrage *Memory and Ethnicity*, les musées et les centres du patrimoine sont des acteurs clés de ce que Charles Taylor a défini comme « la politique de la reconnaissance ». Il soutient que les identités sont également façonnées par la reconnaissance, ou l'absence de reconnaissance. « La non-reconnaissance ou la mauvaise reconnaissance peut causer du tort, peut être une forme d'oppression, emprisonnant quelqu'un dans un mode d'être faux, déformé et réduit ». Le besoin de reconnaissance est défini par Taylor comme l'une des « forces motrices de la politique ».

Cf. Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora," 1 et Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26.

<sup>718</sup> Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora," 1

les domaines de l'art, de l'archéologie, de l'histoire de la Terre d'Israël et du peuple juif, de la nature, de la science et de la technologie.<sup>719</sup> Toutefois, seuls 61 de ces 200 musées sont reconnus par le ministère de la culture et des sports en vertu de la loi sur les musées de 1983 et, par conséquent, sont soutenus financièrement par ce dernier.

Les principales questions qui se dégagent de ces données sont les suivantes : pourquoi le nombre de ces petits musées très spécifiques a-t-il augmenté ? Et pourquoi certains groupes ethniques ont-ils leur propre musée tandis que d'autres n'en ont pas ? Cela nous pousse à réfléchir à nouveau sur les questions de reconnaissance et de légitimation, en particulier de la part de l'État. Les musées offrent une plateforme publique pour afficher et façonner les identités nationales et ethniques et présenter une version spécifique du passé.<sup>720</sup> En particulier, la représentation de l'ethnicité dans la sphère publique a subi de nombreux changements au cours des années, reflétant un panorama ethnique et social israélien en constante évolution.<sup>721</sup> Par exemple, le réveil des identités ethniques dans les années 1980 en Israël s'est également manifesté par la constitution d'un certain nombre de musées (ethniques).

Dans mes recherches, j'ai considéré deux grands musées d'État : l'un consacré aux communautés ethniques de la diaspora juive, le Musée du peuple juif à Beit HaTefutzot, et l'autre dédié à la mémoire de ceux qui ont péri durant l'Holocauste et à leurs histoires : Yad Vashem.

Le premier, le musée Beit HaTefutzot, a été créé il y a près de 50 ans et proposait une version assez stéréotypée de l'histoire et

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<sup>719</sup> "Central Bureau of Statistics Homepage," dernière modification : décembre 2019, <https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/pages/default.aspx>

<sup>720</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>721</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1969); Shlomo Deshen, "Political Ethnicity and Cultural Ethnicity in Israel during the 1960s," in *Urban Ethnicity*, ed. Abner Cohen (London: Tavistock, 1974), 281–309; Hanna Herzog, "Ethnicity as a product of political negotiation: the case of Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7 (4) (1984): 517–533.



création est la loi 5713-1953 (Yad Vashem) sur la commémoration des martyrs et des héros.<sup>725</sup> L'objectif du musée était donc de perpétuer la mémoire des différents aspects de l'Holocauste, par le biais de la documentation et des témoignages qui y étaient conservés, afin de garantir leur transmission aux générations futures.<sup>726</sup>

Dans tous les cas, l'Holocauste était représenté dans la mémoire nationale comme une expérience traumatisante exclusive au judaïsme européen et les recherches sur le sujet ont généralement été confinées aux pays de l'Est (Europe) jusqu'à très récemment, où le débat a été étendu aussi aux juifs orientaux.<sup>727</sup>

Au début des années 1960, le musée de Yad Vashem présentait une exposition historique assez simple, qui a été remplacée, en 1973, par une exposition historico-chronologique permanente. Cette exposition a été mise à jour et modifiée au fil des années, jusqu'en 2005, lorsque l'ensemble du complexe de Yad Vashem a fait l'objet d'une rénovation générale et d'un agrandissement. Outre le musée, cette nouvelle institution comprend : une bibliothèque, l'une des plus grandes archives numérisées sur l'Holocauste, une école internationale pour les études sur l'Holocauste, un centre de recherche universitaire sur l'Holocauste et une maison d'édition dédiée à la publication des recherches effectuées par ses chercheurs.

Le récit présenté par la nouvelle exposition, contrairement à la précédente, se concentre davantage sur l'aspect individuel de l'Holocauste que sur son aspect collectif. Il est intéressant de noter que Yad Vashem et le Musée de Beit haTefutzot ont tous deux, à des époques différentes, subi un processus similaire d'individualisation et de réappropriation des récits racontés à travers

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<sup>725</sup> "Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law 5713-1953," <https://www.yadvashem.org/about/yad-vashem-law.html>; "The second Knesset, 217<sup>th</sup> session, May 12, 1953" [https://fs.knesset.gov.il/2/Plenum/2\\_ptm\\_250456.pdf](https://fs.knesset.gov.il/2/Plenum/2_ptm_250456.pdf).

<sup>726</sup> Anita Shapira, "The Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memories," *Jewish Social Studies* 4/2 (1998): 44.

<sup>727</sup> Batya Shimony, "On 'Holocaust Envy' in Mizrahi literature," *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah* 25(2011): 3.

l'exposition d'objets et d'histoires individuelles ou familiales. L'objectif était d'aborder des sujets peut-être trop pesants et de les rendre plus accessibles par le biais d'histoires individuelles auxquelles le visiteur pouvait s'identifier.

En plus de Yad Vashem, un certain nombre de petits musées de l'Holocauste ont été créés dans les années qui ont suivi la création de l'État. Dans mon travail J'ai considéré les quatre institutions les plus importantes et les plus visitées : le musée du kibboutz Lohamei Hagetaot au nord du pays, le musée du kibboutz Yad Mordechai au sud du pays, l'Institut du Messuah au kibboutz Tel Yitzhak et Beit Terezin au kibboutz Givat Haim Ichud, tous deux situés dans la région centrale du pays.

Ces institutions ont été intégrées dans le cadre national des institutions chargées de raconter et de transmettre l'histoire et la mémoire de l'Holocauste. En particulier, dans les deux premiers cas – Beit Lohamei Hagetaot et Yad Mordecha – histoire et mémoire historique sont entrelacées, révélant la manière dont le passé est raconté et interprété dans le présent. En conséquence, un département dédié à la recherche et à l'éducation a été associé à ces institutions pour garantir une continuité dans le travail de transmission de la mémoire de la Shoah, même après le départ des générations fondatrices.

Toutes les institutions présentées dans cette section ont pour point commun leur point de vue, exclusivement européen. Deux d'entre elles notamment, les musées Beit Lohamei HaGhetaot et Yad Mordechai, présentent l'Holocauste comme l'un des événements légitimateurs à la base de la création de l'État d'Israël après 2 000 ans de diaspora. Le récit qu'ils proposent commence avec l'Holocauste et se termine avec la création de l'État d'Israël, en reproduisant le récit sioniste de « Holocauste et rédemption/renaissance ».

En raison du passé de leurs fondateurs, ces deux institutions ont inévitablement poursuivi le récit sioniste des « Juifs combattants »,

ceux qui se sont opposés au régime nazi.<sup>728</sup> Cela a influencé les modalités de la commémoration publique et privée de l'Holocauste en Israël, en se concentrant principalement, pendant longtemps, sur la commémoration de la petite minorité qui avait activement combattu les nazis. Le récit présenté par ces deux institutions a non seulement exclu de sa narration les communautés juives orientales, mais a aussi relégué à l'arrière-plan la majorité des Juifs d'Europe qui n'avaient pas opposé une résistance active aux nazis.

Les deux autres institutions, l'Institut Massuah et Beit Terezin, ont été créées à un stade ultérieur (respectivement en 1972 et 1975), alors que la mémoire de l'Holocauste en Israël avait déjà subi quelques adaptations après les procès qui avaient eu lieu au cours des années 1950 et 1960 contre les criminels nazis.<sup>729</sup> Pour cette raison, ils ont pu fournir au public un récit de l'Holocauste plus complet, qui incluait les histoires de ceux qui n'avaient pas combattu contre les nazis, et qui considérait l'Holocauste comme un phénomène international, en particulier dans le cas de l'institut Massuah.

Une autre différence entre ces institutions se situe dans le profil ethnique des fondateurs. En effet, trois musées sur quatre ont été créés par des survivants de l'Holocauste et/ou des partisans juifs d'origine polonaise. Dans certains cas, comme dans celui du musée de Beit Lochamei haGhetaot, la nationalité des fondateurs est à peine mentionnée. Cependant, les expositions du musée sont principalement consacrées au judaïsme polonais et aux associations de jeunes sionistes actifs en Pologne avant l'Holocauste. En réalité, lorsqu'il s'agit des Juifs polonais, l'ethnicité est rarement mentionnée comme un facteur significatif, ce qui

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<sup>728</sup> Carol A. Kidron, "Embracing the lived memory of genocide: Holocaust survivor and descendant renegade memory work at the House of Being," *American Ethnologist* 37/3 (2010): 429–451.

<sup>729</sup> Hanna Yablonka, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Kastner and Eichmann Trials," *Israel Studies* 8/3 (2003): 1-24; Shapira, "The Holocaust."

montre, une fois de plus, le caractère peu marqué de l'ethnicité polonaise, associé tout simplement à l'ashkénazité en Israël.

Le fait que ces institutions, en particulier le musée Beit Lohamei Haghetaot et le musée Yad Mordechai, aient joué un rôle majeur dans la formation de la mémoire de l'Holocauste et de sa représentation dans la sphère publique en Israël est tout à fait significatif. Grâce à ces musées, le lien entre la « polonaisité » et l'Holocauste est devenu normatif, transformant une fois de plus ce trait ethnique en un élément non saillant et étroitement lié à l'identité israélienne normative.

On peut donc soutenir que, même dans le cadre de la mémoire de l'Holocauste, le récit juif polonais a été considéré comme le récit normatif. Rétrospectivement, on peut affirmer que, même s'ils ont été classés dans le récit de destruction et renaissance de l'Holocauste, le Beit Lochamei HaGetaot et le musée Yad Mordechai, en particulier, étaient les seuls musées en Israël consacrés à l'histoire du judaïsme polonais avant l'Holocauste.

Par la suite, j'ai également examiné dans mon travail d'autres formes de commémoration de l'Holocauste qui sont apparues à partir des années 1980, dans le cadre d'un débat public plus ouvert sur l'Holocauste et sur son rôle dans la formation du récit national et de la mémoire israéliens.

Ces nouvelles formes de commémoration avaient pour objectif de mettre en avant des voix et des expériences qui, jusqu'à cette époque, avaient été réduites au silence, n'étant pas entièrement conformes au récit hégémonique sioniste. Cela a coïncidé avec une période de réexamen et de remise en débat de l'Holocauste et de sa commémoration. L'accent a été mis notamment sur des récits qui avaient été laissés de côté jusqu'alors. Cela a conduit à la création d'un nouveau type d'institutions de commémoration de l'Holocauste. Généralement mises en place par des organisations locales, elles avaient pour objectif principal de fournir une version alternative au récit étatique de l'Holocauste.<sup>730</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> Katriel, *Performing the Past*.

La première institution de ce type que je vais analyser est « La Maison de l'être » (Beit Lihiot en hébreu) créée en 1999 à Holon par Zipi Kichler, professeure à la retraite et fille de survivants allemands de l'Holocauste. La Maison a été créée avec le soutien de la municipalité de Holon dans une ancienne école maternelle et fait partie du réseau des associations communautaires de la ville.

La Maison a été initialement conçue comme un musée, une institution de mémoire et une maison pour les personnes âgées survivantes de l'Holocauste dans le quartier. L'objectif principal de Zipi était d'inventer un lieu différent de toutes les autres institutions de commémoration de l'Holocauste ; elle voulait créer un lieu de mémoire détaché du récit principal de l'Holocauste comme « héroïsme et renaissance », par opposition au récit des « moutons menés à l'abattoir ».731

Bien que Zipi elle-même estime que la Maison a perdu son « âme » au fil du temps, un groupe de bénévoles, dont beaucoup sont des fils et des filles de survivants, continue à gérer la Maison et à organiser un certain nombre d'activités telles que des conférences et des visites guidées pour les visiteurs, ainsi que des ateliers et des activités éducatives. Les jeunes générations ont créé et gèrent une page Facebook pour la Maison.<sup>732</sup> Cette implication intergénérationnelle dans les activités de la « Maison de l'Être » est un signe de l'investissement des différentes générations dans la poursuite de ce projet et dans la préservation de la mémoire de leurs grands-parents.

Dans cette même idée de réunir différentes générations et d'offrir une expérience nouvelle de la commémoration de l'Holocauste, quelques années plus tard, en 2011, l'initiative « Des souvenirs dans le salon » (en hébreu Zikaron baSalon) est née grâce à Adi Altschuler, une jeune entrepreneuse sociale. L'idée consistait à organiser de nombreux événements distincts dans les salons de maisons privées à l'occasion de la Journée nationale de

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<sup>731</sup> Kidron, "Embracing the lived memory," 433.

<sup>732</sup> "The House of Being for Holocaust consciousness and learning," <https://www.facebook.com/beitlihiot/>.



commémoration de l'Holocauste.<sup>733</sup> Les réseaux sociaux et le web ont été utilisés pour lancer cette initiative. Les hôtes et les participants sont en effet tenus de s'inscrire via la page Facebook du projet ou via son site web. Conformément à l'intention de l'organisatrice de maintenir ces événements aussi informels que possible, ils n'ont pas de format uniforme. Toutefois, une structure flexible est prévue et peut être utilisée de différentes manières et adaptée aux besoins d'un événement spécifique. Lors de ces réunions intimes, les participants accueillent des survivants de l'Holocauste chez eux et écoutent leurs histoires, puis se reconnectent à la mémoire de l'Holocauste, qu'ils examinent par rapport à la société actuelle à travers des débats ouverts.<sup>734</sup>

Selon la théorie des historiens Popescu et Shult sur les nouvelles commémorations performatives de l'Holocauste au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, ces événements peuvent être considérés comme une pratique de commémoration dirigée par les citoyens, où les gens ordinaires adoptent un rôle actif dans la commémoration, devenant eux-mêmes des interprètes de la mémoire.<sup>735</sup> La chercheuse en études culturelles Steir-Livny soutient que le succès du format Zikaron baSalon est dû à la création d'un mode de commémoration plus adapté à la façon dont les nouvelles générations se perçoivent et s'impliquent dans la structure politique et culturelle de la société.<sup>736</sup> Zipi Kichler et Adi Altschuler peuvent toutes deux être classées parmi les entrepreneurs de mémoire : des personnes qui ont commencé à créer leurs propres musées, centres culturels et initiatives pour représenter le passé de manière plus inclusive.

Le phénomène des entrepreneurs de mémoire est également apparu dans le cas des Juifs orientaux qui, à la fin des années 1980,

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<sup>733</sup> "Homepage," <https://www.zikaronbasalon.com>; "Zikaron BaSalon – English page," <https://www.facebook.com/ZikaronBaSalonEN/>; "Zikaron BaSalon – Hebrew page," <https://www.facebook.com/ZikaronBaSalon/>.

<sup>734</sup> Zikaron baSalon held at Tel Aviv University in 2018. "Shmuel Rosenberg – Zikaron baSalon 2018," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FNLeWOUvfQ>.

<sup>735</sup> Diana I. Popescu and Tanja Schult, "Performative Holocaust Commemoration in the 21st century," *Holocaust Studies* (2019): published online. DOI: [10.1080/17504902.2019.1578452](https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1578452)

<sup>736</sup> Steir Livny, "Remembrance in the Living Room," 11.

ont commencé à acquérir un pouvoir politique et à exiger la reconnaissance par l'État de leur patrimoine culturel, plaçant la question de la représentation au centre du débat sur la culture et les musées israéliens et commençant à créer leurs propres institutions de mémoire.<sup>737</sup>

Ces musées, tout en gardant la tradition juive comme point commun, ont montré les différences entre les cultures des diverses communautés au sein de la société israélienne, brouillant les frontières entre les différentes catégories de musées, comme le musée traditionnel et le musée ethnographique.<sup>738</sup>

Généralement, ces petites institutions sont actives dans la représentation d'un groupe ethnique spécifique et de son héritage, mettant en avant le débat sur la relation entre l'identité israélienne et les différents héritages de la diaspora. En conséquence, le cadre du récit hégémonique sioniste a été élargi et remis en question au fil du temps, en incluant dans le débat public des voix représentant d'autres pans de la société israélienne. Il en a découlé une « ethnicisation » de la scène muséale israélienne, reflétant à la fois une reconfiguration des hiérarchies ethniques dans la société et une reconsidération du rôle joué par les diasporas juives dans la création de la société et de la culture israéliennes.<sup>739</sup>

Cela s'est produit en premier lieu avec les musées représentant l'histoire des différentes communautés orientales en Israël. Un certain nombre de musées, de centres culturels et d'associations ont donc été créés pour raconter l'histoire de communautés entières, qui avait été laissées de côté.<sup>740</sup> Contrairement au discours tenu dans les grands musées d'État, ces musées

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<sup>737</sup> Yaron Tsur, "Israeli historiography and the ethnic problem," in *Making Israel*, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 231-277.

<sup>738</sup> Kark and Peri, "Museums and Multiculturalism."

<sup>739</sup> Katriel, "Homeland and Diaspora," 2.

<sup>740</sup> Esther Glitzenstein, "Our Dowry: Identity and Memory among Iraqi Immigrants in Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38 (2002): 335-354; Esther Shelly-Newman, *Our Lives are But Stories: Narratives of Tunisian Israeli Women* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002); Piera, Rossetto. *Mémoires des Diaspora, diaspora des mémoires. Juifs de Libye entre Israël et l'Italie, des 1948 à nos jours*, Thèse de doctorat, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia et École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2015.

dépeignent et mettent en avant l'expérience juive dans la diaspora comme quelque chose de positif qui, parfois, passe inaperçu et est considéré avec nostalgie. La reconstitution détaillée de la vie et de la culture des communautés diasporiques avant leur immigration en Israël, réaffirmant des traditions religieuses et des parcours historiques particuliers, a permis de produire un discours de respect de soi et de reconnaissance de sa propre identité et des souvenirs de ces communautés, au sein d'une société qui, en particulier à leur arrivée, les a discriminées. Ces lieux de mémoire, dont la majorité est aujourd'hui officiellement reconnue par le ministère de la culture, sont un signe de la pertinence de ces communautés sur la scène sociale, culturelle et politique contemporaine en Israël.<sup>741</sup> Le fait que les immigrants provenant d'Afrique du Nord et du Moyen Orient aient réussi à maintenir vivant leur héritage culturel grâce à ces institutions, tout en conservant leur engagement envers l'idéal sioniste d'un État national juif, a fait de ces lieux d'extraordinaires outils d'intégration et de reconnaissance. En présentant les histoires de nombreux pionniers originaires des communautés orientales, les musées ethniques ont ouvert la voie à une compréhension plus large du sionisme, associé par exemple à son existence dans la diaspora, ou de la religion, dans un État et une culture qui ont longtemps nié ces possibilités.

Le Centre du patrimoine juif babylonien d'Or-Yehuda en constitue un bon exemple.<sup>742</sup> Créé en 1973, son principal objectif est de préserver l'histoire et les traditions de la communauté juive d'Irak, en veillant à transmettre ce patrimoine culturel aux générations futures, qui seront à leur tour responsables de sa préservation et de sa transmission. À cette fin, le centre encourage les activités de recherche, de préservation et de publication relatives à l'histoire, la culture et le folklore des Juifs irakiens.<sup>743</sup> Près du centre a été

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<sup>741</sup> Nora, "Between Memory and History."

<sup>742</sup> "About us," <https://www.bjhcenglish.com/about-us>.

<sup>743</sup> "Le règlement contient une liste de tâches relatives à la construction, la collecte, la préservation, la commémoration et l'exposition, comme il est d'usage dans les institutions commémoratives : 1. Créer un centre pour perpétuer l'héritage des Juifs irakiens sur la base de leurs valeurs sociales, culturelles et

ouvert, en 1988, le Musée des Juifs de Babylone qui accueille une exposition permanente sur plus de 2 600 ans d'histoire de cette communauté. Ce qui est intéressant dans ce centre, comme le souligne l'historienne Esther Glitzenstein, c'est le fait que ses fondateurs étaient une sorte de « Mizrahim occidentalisés », qui plus tard ont intégré la classe moyenne israélienne.<sup>744</sup>

Un modèle similaire a été suivi également pour l'intégration de la communauté tunisienne en Israël. Dans ce cas, une partie de ceux qui avaient immigré en Israël, surtout lors des premières vagues, étaient « occidentalisés », ayant été élevés dans la culture française. La différence entre le cas tunisien et les autres est que la communauté juive tunisienne en Israël est apparemment le seul groupe originaire d'Afrique du Nord qui n'a pas réussi à créer et à maintenir un centre culturel ou un musée ethnique exclusivement tunisien.

La première institution à avoir été créée, au début des années 1980, était un musée consacré au patrimoine juif tunisien à Lod. Le musée avait été conçu à l'origine comme une institution consacrée à la préservation du patrimoine culturel et matériel du judaïsme tunisien. Cependant, le fait que le financement provenait en partie de la municipalité de Lod et en partie du ministère de la culture a conduit l'institution à devenir un centre de recherche et un musée dédié au judaïsme oriental en général, avec un accent sur le judaïsme nord-africain, et sur le judaïsme tunisien en particulier.<sup>745</sup>

Ce musée constitue la première instance d'une longue histoire de tentatives de créer une association représentant le judaïsme

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littéraires au cours des générations et des époques qui ont suivi l'exil du peuple juif de la Terre d'Israël à Babylone ; 2. Rassembler divers documents d'archives, manuscrits et publications qui éclairent la vie et les coutumes des Juifs irakiens et la perpétuation de leurs valeurs ; 3. Construire des maisons, des stands, des galeries, une bibliothèque universitaire générale, des salles de conférence et de réunion, des lieux pour les objets du folklore, des salles de lecture, des installations sportives, etc. 4. Mener des activités culturelles, éducatives, universitaires et sportives ; 5. Encourager les cours et les activités de recherche dans les domaines universitaire, social et sociétal dans les différentes disciplines, notamment en ce qui concerne le passé, les valeurs, les biens spirituels, les projets d'entraide et les organisations communautaires des Juifs irakiens" voir Glitzenstein, "Our Dowry," 166-167.

<sup>744</sup> Glitzenstein, "Our Dowry," 167.

<sup>745</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

tunisien en Israël, un lieu de référence physique où rassembler les traces matérielles et non matérielles de la culture tunisienne en Israël. Cette première expérience a été suivie par trois autres tentatives de création d'une association représentant les Juifs tunisiens en Israël : « Amit » ou Association pour la préservation du patrimoine des Juifs tunisiens ;<sup>746</sup> Shavit ou Centre pour la préservation du patrimoine tunisien ; et « Elgriba : Centre du patrimoine culturel mondial du judaïsme tunisien à Jérusalem ».

On peut supposer, d'après les témoignages recueillis, que l'absence d'une association unique représentant le judaïsme tunisien et son patrimoine culturel en Israël est due à un ensemble de raisons. Premièrement, le fait qu'il n'y ait pas d'accord général sur la manière dont le patrimoine tunisien doit être préservé et représenté en Israël a conduit à une dispersion des forces (également du point de vue financier) de la communauté jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Deuxièmement, toutes les organisations existantes étaient, en général, assez petites et ne collaboraient pas entre elles pour créer une institution plus grande et influente. Enfin, en raison de la dispersion des financements entre les nombreuses entités différentes, la création d'une association-cadre est devenue très difficile.<sup>747</sup>

Le paysage des associations s'occupant du patrimoine du judaïsme tunisien en Israël était, à la fin des années 2000, très fragmenté, et la nécessité de créer une organisation plus inclusive qui réunirait toutes les petites associations a fini par apparaître. C'est pour cette raison que la « Fédération mondiale du judaïsme tunisien en Israël » a été créée en 2012.<sup>748</sup> L'association était présidée par le Dr Miriam Guez Avigal, fille d'immigrants tunisiens en Israël, universitaire et militante de renom dans le domaine du judaïsme tunisien.<sup>749</sup> Selon

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<sup>746</sup> En hébreu *Amutat Leshimur Moreshet Yehudei Tunisia* ou Association pour la préservation du patrimoine du judaïsme tunisien.

<sup>747</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Victor, Natanya 20/11/2017.

<sup>748</sup> "Hadaf hareshmi : Hafederazia ha'olamit shel yahadut Tunisia belsrael," <https://www.facebook.com/Federation.mondiale.judaisme.tunisien.enisrael/>

« Fédération Mondiale des Juifs de Tunisie en Israël »  
<http://tunesisrael.org/wp1/>

<sup>749</sup> Miriam Gez-Avigal est une chercheuse dans le domaine de l'histoire des femmes juives tunisiennes, qui étudie, préserve et rend public leur patrimoine. Elle a enregistré, en collaboration avec des étudiants, des milliers d'heures de

la charte de la nouvelle association, elle allait non seulement assumer un rôle de préservation de l'héritage tunisien, mais aussi d'intégration de la « culture Mizrahi » dans la culture israélienne. L'objectif principal de la « Fédération » était donc d'agir comme une organisation cadre, rassemblant toutes les petites organisations existantes pour la préservation du patrimoine culturel tunisien en faisant progresser « la communauté tunisienne en Israël, et la recherche, la documentation et la préservation du patrimoine culturel tunisien ».750

Parmi les activités menées par la Fédération figure la cérémonie annuelle de commémoration des victimes tunisiennes de l'Holocauste à Yad Vashem. Cette initiative a débuté en 2009 et se tient depuis le 6 décembre de chaque année.751

Cette activité, en accord avec les principes fondateurs de la Fédération, a été créée dans le but d'introduire l'histoire tunisienne dans la sphère publique israélienne et de l'inscrire dans sa mémoire collective. Le thème de l'Holocauste notamment, à la base de l'identité israélienne et monopolisé depuis longtemps comme un événement ashkénaze et européen, a été récupéré par les militants de la mémoire tunisienne comme l'une des clés de l'inclusion de l'histoire et du patrimoine tunisiens dans le récit national israélien. La création d'un certain nombre de musées et d'associations consacrés à la préservation du patrimoine culturel des différents groupes ethniques en Israël témoigne d'une attitude plus ouverte qui s'est développée au cours des dernières décennies.

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conversations avec les femmes de la communauté vivant en Israël et en Tunisie, et établi ainsi une archive qui documente l'héritage du judaïsme tunisien. Ses recherches se concentrent sur la culture des femmes tunisiennes, dans des domaines tels que la poésie, la fiction, les proverbes, les coutumes et les vêtements. Elle a également étudié la culture des hommes tunisiens, la manière dont ils ont appris la Torah, la lecture de la Bible, la tradition de la langue hébraïque chez les Juifs tunisiens, les chefs de communauté, la direction des synagogues, la poésie religieuse et laïque, les coutumes, les pratiques, etc. Voir "About me," <http://www.gez-avigal.com/>.

<sup>750</sup> "Hadaf hareshmi: Hafederazia."

<sup>751</sup> "Annual rally and commemoration of the Jews of Tunisia who perished in the Holocaust, on the 70<sup>th</sup> years anniversary from the beginning of the persecution of Tunisian Jews," <https://www.yadvashem.org/he/events/06-december-2012.html> (Hebrew).

En particulier, les musées ethniques et les centres culturels, tant pour les Juifs européens que pour les Juifs orientaux, sont devenus des lieux où les petites communautés et les minorités pouvaient présenter leurs propres souvenirs, et donc leur version de l'histoire, renforçant ainsi le sentiment de communauté et de fierté, et façonnant leur rôle au sein du récit national.

L'État, autrefois le principal agent en matière de commémoration, a aujourd'hui perdu son monopole sur les modalités de production de la mémoire et sur le choix de ce qui doit y être inclus ; il a perdu, par conséquent, sa propriété exclusive sur la formation des identités nationales et de groupe, comme le prouve le succès d'événements tels que l'initiative Zikaron BaSalon. Grâce à l'internet, chacun a accès à une gamme illimitée d'options de commémoration, pouvant toucher un public beaucoup plus large et devenant ainsi un entrepreneur de mémoire.<sup>752</sup> La relation entre le récit national hégémonique et ceux des minorités est toujours en discussion et l'influence de l'establishment sur ce récit est toujours importante. Cependant, les processus décrits dans cette partie de mon travail évoquent un changement dans la façon de penser et de parler du récit national en Israël, pour faire place à des voix et des groupes qui étaient auparavant laissés de côté.

### *Conclusions*

Au début de cette thèse, nous nous sommes interrogée sur la manière dont les identités juives israéliennes se sont construites dans le temps et dans l'espace, et sur le rôle que la stratification ethnique a joué dans leur création. Avec ma recherche, j'ai essayé de remettre en question le paradoxe d'une société qui a été créée pour unifier le peuple juif sous un concept ethnique unique, pour se retrouver plus tard divisée selon ces mêmes lignes. La judaïcité a été utilisée, d'une part, comme un facteur d'unification (récit biblique,

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<sup>752</sup> Michael Pollak, "Mémoire, oubli, silence," in *Une identité blessée. Études de sociologie et d'histoire*, ed. Michael Pollak (Paris : Métailié, 1993), 15-39.  
Sarah Gensburger, "Entrepreneurs de mémoire et configuration française," in *Les Justes de France, Politiques Publiques de la Mémoire*, Sarah Gensburger (Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2010), 51-71.

loi et tradition juives) et, d'autre part, comme une ligne de démarcation (différentes communautés juives de la diaspora). Cela m'a amenée à analyser comment les références au passé ont été retravaillées à l'époque contemporaine pour établir ce que signifie être « ethniquement juif » en Israël aujourd'hui.<sup>753</sup>

On a vu comment, au fil des ans, deux éléments ont joué un rôle central dans la création d'un récit public israélien : l'ethnicité et la mémoire de l'Holocauste. Ces deux éléments, qui s'entrecroisent, tant dans la sphère privée que publique, sont devenus des composantes essentielles de l'identité israélienne contemporaine.<sup>754</sup>

Dans mon travail, j'ai considéré deux sous-groupes ethniques spécifiques : les Israéliens d'origine tunisienne et d'origine polonaise et je les ai présentés comme des exemples de la catégorisation ethnique effectuée en Israël entre les Ashkénazes et les Mizrahim. Comme il ressort des entretiens, de l'examen de la littérature et de la production artistique et littéraire observée, l'ethnicité reste un facteur structurant de la société israélienne jusqu'à aujourd'hui, plus que la classe sociale, le sexe et l'âge.<sup>755</sup>

Comme nous l'avons dit auparavant, les catégories de ashkénazes (Juifs européens) et de mizrahi (séfarades ou Juifs orientaux) dans le sens qu'elles ont acquis aujourd'hui en Israël, sont le produit de

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<sup>753</sup> See Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman, *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns* (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2004), en particulier les parties I et II.

<sup>754</sup> Omer Bartov, "Recentering the Holocaust (Again)," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), lbook edition.

<sup>755</sup> L'importance de la question ethnique intra-juive a été récemment remise en évidence par les émeutes des immigrants éthiopiens, qui ont protesté contre des discriminations clairement fondées sur des raisons ethniques. Les manifestations ont été organisées en juillet 2019 par des Israéliens d'origine éthiopienne en réaction à la mort de Solomon Tekla, 18 ans, aux mains d'un officier de police à Kiryat Haim. Il s'agissait de la plus récente d'une série de protestations initiées par la communauté éthiopienne en Israël contre ce qu'elle perçoit comme une discrimination systémique, due à la couleur de sa peau. Pour plus d'informations, voir : "Ethiopian-Israelis protest for 3rd day after fatal police shooting," last modified July 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/03/world/middleeast/ethiopia-israel-police-shooting.html>, and Shalva Weil, "Religion, Blood and the Equality of Rights: the Case of Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 4 (1997): 412-497.



l'immigration à grande échelle des années 1950. Rapidement, ces catégories ethniques ont été associées à des positions de pouvoir au sein de la société israélienne, en ne reflétant pas la complexité historique et sociologique des deux groupes considérés, ainsi que leur rôle dans la formation du discours ethnique en Israël.<sup>756</sup>

Concernant l'Holocauste et le récit sioniste de destruction et de renaissance qui lui est associé, il a été utilisé comme un moyen d'unification des différentes ethnies du pays. Comme l'historien Omer Bartov l'a soutenu, une dynamique de victimisation liée au génocide des Juifs européens s'est répandue parmi de nombreux Israéliens, indépendamment de leurs origines.<sup>757</sup> L'Holocauste a donc été utilisé comme un événement cadre sous lequel l'État a tenté de regrouper les Israéliens de toutes les ethnies, en en faisant un « ticket d'entrée » vers l'« Israélianité ».

Dans ce contexte, j'ai essayé d'analyser l'utilisation qui a été faite de la mémoire pour reproduire les divisions ethniques, tant au niveau privé que public. De même, je me suis interrogée sur le rôle du patrimoine culturel et sur les références au passé qu'il mobilise. J'ai observé l'évolution qui s'est produite au fil du temps dans la manière dont les identités ethniques étaient représentées en Israël : d'un récit sioniste uniforme à une version plus nuancée de ce que signifie être Israélien.

Dans le cas des Juifs ashkénazes, lorsqu'il s'agit de définir l'héritage culturel, une culture d'ascendance européenne et occidentale est considérée comme la norme, surtout dans la sphère publique, et est presque la seule à être représentée comme valable en termes de culture nationale, au même titre que le récit sioniste du retour en Terre d'Israël et du rassemblement des diasporas juives. Comme le rapporte Dalit :

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<sup>756</sup> Voir Eliezer, Ben- Rafael, *The Emergence of Ethnicity: Cultural groups and Social Conflict in Israel* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982).

Uziel O., Schmelz, Sergio, Della Pergola et al. (eds.), *Ethnic Differences among Israeli Jews: A New Look* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990).

<sup>757</sup> Bartov, "Recentring."

*Je suis sûr que vous avez lu qu'Israël a été créé en tant que pays occidental et que quiconque avait une culture différente ne devait pas la montrer, on devait être "tzabar", vous deviez avoir la culture qui a été consolidée en Israël sans aucune référence à la culture sépharade. Et c'est comme ça que j'ai grandi, vous savez... c'est quelque chose que je n'invente pas pour vous ; cela a été écrit dans des livres. Je suis simplement sortie [de la maison] et je me suis comportée comme une petite fille polonaise. <sup>758</sup>*

Les juifs polonais, qui ont été parmi les fondateurs de l'État, ont pu construire les bases du récit et de la mémoire nationaux, en les fondant sur leur propre culture d'origine européenne. En l'assimilant à la nouvelle culture israélienne, ils ont fait de ce récit occidentalisé la norme invisible de la culture en Israël. D'autre part, la culture et l'héritage orientaux, classés dans la catégorie de Mizrahi, étaient considérés comme « différents » et culturellement inférieurs, et contraints de se conformer à la norme ashkénaze, en mettant de côté une tradition vieille de plusieurs siècles.

Cependant, au fil du temps, différents tournants historiques ont modifié la représentation de ces catégories ethniques, tant dans la sphère privée que dans la sphère publique. D'une part, le procès Eichmann (1961) a représenté un tournant dans la représentation de l'Holocauste et, par conséquent, de l'Ashekenazité en Israël. Passer d'un récit héroïque à un récit plus personnalisé et humanisant, comprenant différentes histoires, a permis une compréhension différente de l'ethnicité des groupes d'origine européenne en montrant leurs spécificités et en les rendant visibles

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<sup>758</sup> Entretien de l'auteur avec Dalit, Tel Aviv 28/03/17.

comme groupes ethniques eux-mêmes, plutôt que comme le modèle, invisible, de la culture israélienne.<sup>759</sup>

D'autre part, les élections de 1977 et la chute du parti dominant Mapaï ont permis l'émergence des récits des Juifs orientaux en Israël, à un moment où des voix différentes de celle des socialistes sionistes ont commencé à se faire entendre dans le discours public israélien. Pendant cette période en effet, les Juifs d'origine orientale ont commencé à accéder à la scène politique en nombre plus important, agissant dans l'intérêt de leurs propres communautés. Dans le cas des Juifs tunisiens, la mémoire et la transmission du patrimoine culturel sont passées d'un caractère plus privé et familial à une forme plus publique avec la création d'associations ethniques et de musées à partir du début des années 80, lorsque l'ouverture de la société israélienne à différents récits a offert plus de place également aux récits non hégémoniques, tels que celui des Mizrahim. Comme l'a rapporté la présidente de la Fédération mondiale du judaïsme tunisien, Miriam Guez-Avigal :

*Les Juifs orientaux (Mizrahim) ont un riche continuum culturel et historique qui a été jusqu'à présent absent [de la culture israélienne]. À mon avis, le temps est venu de présenter un compte rendu fidèle de l'histoire juive dans la région de l'Afrique du Nord. À cette fin, il convient de mettre l'accent sur la reconnaissance du patrimoine culturel et spirituel des Juifs orientaux et sépharades, tout en soulignant les points communs et en favorisant leur sentiment d'appartenance au peuple d'Israël et à son pays. Cela se fera par l'intégration de la culture mizrahi dans la sphère*

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<sup>759</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Paradigms and Differences," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), Ibook edition.

*publique israélienne, son système éducatif, son université et sa recherche.*<sup>760</sup>

Dans le même temps, l'ethnie ashkénaze est passée d'une invisibilité hégémonique à plus de visibilité, devenant presque l'une des nombreuses ethnies composant la société israélienne. La création d'un certain nombre de musées ethniques présentant l'héritage culturel de différentes communautés d'origine européenne a montré la volonté d'interroger le sionisme, en préservant et perpétuant différents héritages culturels qui, autrement, seraient perdus, comme nous l'avons vu dans le cas du Musée du patrimoine juif germanophone (le « Musée des Jeckes ») ou du Musée mémorial du judaïsme de langue hongroise.

De plus, au cours des deux dernières décennies, un certain nombre d'initiatives ont ouvert la voie à des manières alternatives et plus inclusives de comprendre l'« Israélianité » et le récit national israélien. Par exemple, la rénovation du musée de Beit HaTefutzot offrira une nouvelle représentation de la vie dans la diaspora, de ses communautés et de leur histoire. Contrairement au récit précédent qui stigmatisait toutes les communautés de la diaspora, en particulier les communautés orientales, dans ce nouveau musée, un espace sera accordé à toutes les communautés d'Israël pour qu'elles puissent raconter leur histoire de leur point de vue.

Un autre moyen très efficace, qui a permis une plus large inclusion dans le discours commémoratif de voix différentes, est l'utilisation de la nourriture et des traditions culinaires pour accueillir de nouvelles façons de concevoir l'identité israélienne aujourd'hui. La nourriture et la cuisine ont permis de préserver et de mettre en lumière des traditions, tant ashkénazes que mizrahi, qui avaient été mises de côté pendant l'hégémonie sioniste des premières années de l'État. La nourriture a notamment été utilisée comme un moyen « facile » d'intégrer différents groupes ethniques en Israël,

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<sup>760</sup> "About me."

Entretien de l'auteur avec Miriam Guez- Avigal, Petach Tikwa, 30/03/2017

permettant l'inclusion de certains groupes, notamment les Mizrahi, dans la société israélienne, sans discuter d'aspects plus politiques tels que leur intégration économique ou sociale.

La création de nouveaux modes alternatifs de commémoration de l'Holocauste, est encore un autre exemple de cette tentative d'intégration. Une série d'initiatives, telles que Zikaron baSalon, ont été mises en place afin de se souvenir de l'Holocauste, tout en créant un sentiment de communauté en incluant non seulement différentes ethnies, notamment les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord, dans le récit d'un événement tel que l'Holocauste, mais aussi en encourageant la participation des jeunes, moins intéressés par les questions de mémoire, à un événement plus informel et plus engageant. Comme l'a rapporté l'un des participants :

*J'ai le sentiment que la plupart des Israéliens ne comprennent pas à quel point l'Holocauste constitue une partie importante de nos personnalités et comment il affecte la discussion politique en Israël. Le récit est généralement très circonscrit ce jour-là : Nous voyons beaucoup de cérémonies, mais il n'y a pas de véritable conversation ou débat sur la façon dont cela nous affecte aujourd'hui. Avec Zikaron baSalon, cela commence à changer.<sup>761</sup>*

En conclusion, même si le récit ashkénaze est toujours présent au sein de la société israélienne et, dans de nombreux cas, est toujours hégémonique, une certaine place a été faite aux différents récits. La mesure dans laquelle ces récits sont acceptés dans le paysage mémoriel et le récit national israélien dépend du sujet et du groupe considéré.<sup>762</sup> Dans certains cas, ces récits « différents » sont

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<sup>761</sup> Prushner, "Building Communities."

<sup>762</sup> Slawomir Kapralski, "Amnesia, Nostalgia and Reconstruction: Shifting Modes of Memory in Poland's Jewish Spaces," in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*,

remodelés pour correspondre à un récit hégémonique préexistant, comme cela s'est produit dans le cas de nombreuses cérémonies officielles de commémoration de l'Holocauste. Dans d'autres cas, notamment lorsque des éléments moins politiques sont en jeu, par exemple dans le cas des traditions alimentaires et culinaires, les différents héritages sont réévalués et acceptés dans la culture israélienne dominante. Même s'il reste beaucoup à faire, notamment dans les domaines économique et social, la société israélienne actuelle semble, à bien des égards, plus disposée et plus apte à accueillir différents récits et versions du passé, tant dans la sphère publique que dans la sphère privée.

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ed. Erica T. Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015) 149-169.



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

## DEPOSITO ELETTRONICO DELLA TESI DI DOTTORATO

### DICHIARAZIONE SOSTITUTIVA DELL'ATTO DI NOTORIETA'

(Art. 47 D.P.R. 445 del 28/12/2000 e relative modifiche)

Io sottoscritto .....

nat ... a Padova ..... (prov. PD ) il 31/10/1989 .....

residente a Padova in via Luigi Padrin n. 5 .....

Matricola (se posseduta) 823331 ..... Autore della tesi di dottorato dal titolo:

.....  
.....  
.....

Dottorato di ricerca in Studi sull'Asia e Africa .....

(in cotutela con Université Paris Nanterre .....) .....

Ciclo XXXI .....

Anno di conseguimento del titolo 2020 .....

### DICHIARO

di essere a conoscenza:

- 1) del fatto che in caso di dichiarazioni mendaci, oltre alle sanzioni previste dal codice penale e dalle Leggi speciali per l'ipotesi di falsità in atti ed uso di atti falsi, decado fin dall'inizio e senza necessità di nessuna formalità dai benefici conseguenti al provvedimento emanato sulla base di tali dichiarazioni;
- 2) dell'obbligo per l'Università di provvedere, per via telematica, al deposito di legge delle tesi di dottorato presso le Biblioteche Nazionali Centrali di Roma e di Firenze al fine di assicurarne la conservazione e la consultabilità da parte di terzi;
- 3) che l'Università si riserva i diritti di riproduzione per scopi didattici, con citazione della fonte;
- 4) del fatto che il testo integrale della tesi di dottorato di cui alla presente dichiarazione viene archiviato e reso consultabile via internet attraverso l'Archivio Istituzionale ad Accesso Aperto dell'Università Ca' Foscari, oltre che attraverso i cataloghi delle Biblioteche Nazionali Centrali di Roma e Firenze;
- 5) del fatto che, ai sensi e per gli effetti di cui al D.Lgs. n. 196/2003, i dati personali raccolti saranno trattati, anche con strumenti informatici, esclusivamente nell'ambito del procedimento per il quale la presentazione viene resa;
- 6) del fatto che la copia della tesi in formato elettronico depositato nell'Archivio Istituzionale ad Accesso Aperto è del tutto corrispondente alla tesi in formato cartaceo, controfirmata dal tutor, consegnata presso la segreteria didattica del dipartimento di riferimento del corso di dottorato ai fini del deposito presso l'Archivio di Ateneo, e che di conseguenza va esclusa qualsiasi responsabilità dell'Ateneo stesso per quanto riguarda eventuali errori, imprecisioni o omissioni nei contenuti della tesi;
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Data Tel Aviv, 16/05/2020

Firma

## AUTORIZZO

- l'Università a riprodurre ai fini dell'immissione in rete e a comunicare al pubblico tramite servizio on line entro l'Archivio Istituzionale ad Accesso Aperto il testo integrale della tesi depositata;
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## DICHIARO

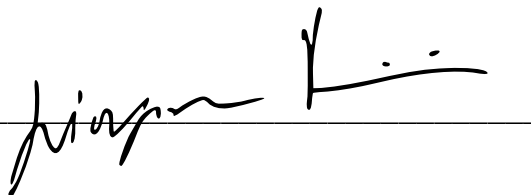
- 1) che il contenuto e l'organizzazione della tesi è opera originale da me realizzata e non infrange in alcun modo il diritto d'autore né gli obblighi connessi alla salvaguardia di diritti morali od economici di altri autori o di altri aventi diritto, sia per testi, immagini, foto, tabelle, o altre parti di cui la tesi è composta, né compromette in alcun modo i diritti di terzi relativi alla sicurezza dei dati personali;
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- dichiaro di aver autoarchiviato la copia integrale della tesi in formato elettronico nell'Archivio Istituzionale ad Accesso Aperto dell'Università Ca' Foscari;
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Data Tel Aviv, 16/05/2020

Firma



La presente dichiarazione è sottoscritta dall'interessato in presenza del dipendente addetto, ovvero sottoscritta e inviata, unitamente a copia fotostatica non autenticata di un documento di identità del dichiarante, all'ufficio competente via fax, ovvero tramite un incaricato, oppure a mezzo posta

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Ai sensi dell'art. 13 del D.Lgs. n. 196/03 si informa che il titolare del trattamento dei dati forniti è l'Università Ca' Foscari - Venezia.

I dati sono acquisiti e trattati esclusivamente per l'espletamento delle finalità istituzionali d'Ateneo; l'eventuale rifiuto di fornire i propri dati personali potrebbe comportare il mancato espletamento degli adempimenti necessari e delle procedure amministrative di gestione delle carriere studenti. Sono comunque riconosciuti i diritti di cui all'art. 7 D. Lgs. n. 196/03.



## Estratto per riassunto della tesi di dottorato

L'estratto (max. 1000 battute) deve essere redatto sia in lingua italiana che in lingua inglese e nella lingua straniera eventualmente indicata dal Collegio dei docenti.

L'estratto va firmato e rilegato come ultimo foglio della tesi.

Studente: Giorgia Foscarini

Matricola: 823331

Dottorato: Dottorato in studi sull'Asia e Africa

Ciclo: XXXI

**Titolo della tesi:** Collective memory and cultural identity: a comparative study of the politics of memory and identity among Israelis of Polish and Tunisian descent.

Abstract:

IT

Lo scopo principale di questo lavoro è quello di studiare l'evoluzione dell'identità israeliana nel tempo, dalla fondazione dello stato fino ad oggi, prendendone in considerazione l'aspetto etnico e l'influenza che quest'ultimo ha avuto sullo sviluppo della suddetta identità, nella sfera privata come in quella pubblica. Come caso di studio, verranno considerati due gruppi in particolare: gli israeliani di origine polacca e quelli di origine tunisina. Le domande alle quali il mio lavoro cercherà di trovare una risposta sono: come sono state costruite le identità ebraiche israeliane nel tempo e nello spazio? Qual è il ruolo della stratificazione etnica nella loro creazione e perché l'etnia gioca ancora un ruolo centrale nell'Israele contemporaneo? Il mio obiettivo è quello di mettere in discussione il paradosso di una ebraicità condivisa che è stata usata sia come fattore unificante (narrazione biblica, legge e tradizione ebraica), sia come linea di demarcazione (diverse comunità ebraiche nella diaspora), e che mi ha spinto a chiedermi come i riferimenti del passato siano stati rielaborati nel presente per stabilire cosa significhi essere "eticamente ebrei" in Israele oggi.

EN

The main aim of this thesis is to study how the identities and memories of Israelis of Ashkenazi and Mizrahi descent in Israel have been created and developed throughout time, up until today. As a case-study, two specific ethnic groups will be considered: Israelis of Polish and of Tunisian descent. The questions my work will try to answer are: how Israeli Jewish identities have been built over time and space? What is the role ethnic stratification played in their creation and why ethnicity still plays a central role in today's Israel? My aim is to question the paradox of a shared Jewishness that has been used both as a unifying factor (Biblical narrative, Jewish law and tradition), and as a line of demarcation (different Jewish communities in the Diaspora), pushed me to ask questions about how

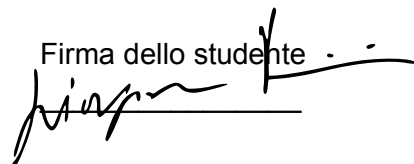
<sup>1</sup> Il titolo deve essere quello definitivo, uguale a quello che risulta stampato sulla copertina dell'elaborato consegnato.

references from the past have been reworked in the present to establish what does it mean to be "ethnically Jewish" in Israel today.

FR

L'objectif principal de cette thèse est d'étudier comment les identités et les mémoires des Israéliens d'origine ashkénaze et mizrahi en Israël ont été créées et développées à travers le temps, jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Comme étude de cas, deux groupes ethniques spécifiques seront considérés : les Israéliens d'origine polonaise et les Israéliens d'origine tunisienne. Les questions auxquelles mon travail tentera de répondre sont les suivantes : comment les identités juives israéliennes se sont-elles construites dans le temps et dans l'espace ? Quel est le rôle de la stratification ethnique dans leur création et pourquoi l'ethnicité joue encore un rôle central dans l'Israël d'aujourd'hui ? Mon objectif est de questionner le paradoxe d'une judéité partagée qui a été utilisée à la fois comme facteur d'unification (récit biblique, loi et tradition juives) et comme ligne de démarcation (différentes communautés juives de la diaspora), ce qui m'a poussé à me demander comment les références du passé ont été retravaillées dans le présent pour établir ce que signifie être "ethniquement juif" en Israël aujourd'hui.

Firma dello studente . . .

A handwritten signature in black ink, written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be the name 'Liam'.