

# Immigrant Dispersal in Settler Societies: Mizrahim and Russians in Israel Under the Press of Hegemony

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*Immigrants in settler societies contribute to state- and nation-building projects by settling small-size peripheral towns. This process benefits the dominant groups and promotes their economic and national interests, but at the same time establishes the inferior position of the immigrants and prevents them from gaining power. Changes in immigrant absorption and dispersal policy, which aim to reflect a tolerance towards the immigrants' demands, do not necessarily change the immigrants' social and geographical position. This paper claims that these changes are only semantic ones, aimed at concealing the real objective of the immigrant's settlement process: promotion of the dominant group's interests. The latter employs a Gramscian approach of hegemony in order to gain the consent of the great masses of the population, including the immigrants themselves. In order to verify this argument, this paper traces the immigrant absorption and dispersal policy of Israel since 1948, and focuses on the form of settlement of Mizrahim and Russians in peripheral development towns. The paper uses two surveys taken in the development towns, and official documents of the State of Israel.*

*Keywords: Settler society, nation-building, immigrant dispersal, development towns, hegemony, Mizrahim, Russian Jews, ethno-class relationships.*

During the last three decades, nation-states have experienced radical transformations in all social spheres. Some scholars propose that these mutations are not random, but rather provide evidence that nation-states are undergoing a transition from their modernized nation-state phase to a globalized civil-society phase. This study suggests that some of the changes in social spheres are only illusory or semantic transformations and, in fact, the nation-state, mainly the so-called 'settler society', aims at maintaining its own authority on behalf of its dominant group, by using the concept of hegemony. In order to verify this hypothesis, this study traces policies of immigrant absorption in Israel during its 50 years of independence and concentrates on the geographical consequences of these policies. Particularly, this study demonstrates how different approaches to immigrant absorption channeled the marginal segments of two waves of immigration into small-size peripheral towns and thus perpetuated the towns' marginality. These practices preserve the inequality of the geographical distribution of power and wealth, the ethnic and class stratification and the domination of the nation-state/center, in contrast to the concepts of globalized civil-society. The main question is what kind of resources enable the state to gain

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extensive public support for such a policy, even including that of the immigrants themselves?

The two waves of immigration, which are involved in this case, are that of the Mizrahim (lit. "Eastern") and that from the former U.S.S.R. (here referred to for convenience sake as "Russians"). The paper specifically focuses on those Mizrahim and Russians who live in peripheral development towns. The term 'Mizrahim' (Mizrahi in singular) means Orientals and specifies Jewish immigrants who came to Israel during the 1950s from Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The term 'development towns' refers to small-size urban settlements in Israel's frontier areas, which were established in the 1950s, and are still inhabited mostly by Mizrahim. These development towns are also inhabited by the Russians, who compose the second major wave of immigration. These are Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union who immigrated to Israel during the 1990s. Twenty-two percent of the Russian immigrants have settled in the development towns (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998), where they constitute the minority group.

Accordingly, the paper discusses theories on immigrant absorption policies in migrant societies. The paper concentrates mainly on 'settler societies' and the importance of Gramsci's (1971) concept of 'hegemony' in such societies. Furthermore, it discusses Israel's attempt to absorb and settle immigrants, both Mizrahim and Russians, in the development towns and tries to clarify what the immigrants' own opinions are regarding the outcomes of this process. It concludes with a discussion of immigrant absorption in small peripheral towns, and its effects on the nation-building project. Results of research, which includes two surveys on the linkage between immigrant absorption policies and social and ethnic relations, support this discussion. The first survey, in which six development towns were surveyed, examines the long-term impact of public policy on Mizrahi residents of Israel's development towns. It traces the influences of place, economic development, culture, social networks, and political orientations on the evolution of collective identity in the towns and its relation to the concept of hegemony. Each town differs from the others in terms of size and distance from the central region, and they represent the variety of the Israeli development towns. The second survey, in which just one development town was surveyed, traces the impact of the arrival of the Russians in the town in the early 1990s on the Mizrahi collective identity. All these methods will allow us to evaluate the impact of the immigrant absorption policy on peripheral immigrant groups in settler societies and to evaluate the ability of the center to preserve its hegemony. But first, the paper will present a theoretical note on settler societies, the concept of hegemony in such societies and settlement in peripheral towns.

## A THEORETICAL NOTE

Nation-states regulate the drift of immigrants into their boundaries through a formal definition of desired and undesired immigrants. Some states institute an

immigrant absorption policy to encourage a specified group of people to immigrate to their territory. Some of these states grant citizenship, and in rare cases even economic benefits, to the desired group. Granting citizenship to immigrants has been considered the most effective way for equal inclusion, since membership in a democratic state is marked by the citizenship status. Nevertheless, immigration presents nation-states with two related problems: excluding the immigrants (that is denying them citizenship) may create divided societies, marked by inequality and conflict (Casteles and Miller, 1998), while failing to incorporate the immigrants as citizens may undermine the myth of the nation-state's homogeneity, and may emphasize social diversity. This issue suggests an additional problem: inclusion by granting citizenship cannot guaranty social inclusion (Soysal, 1994), primarily when state institutions permit unequal treatment in other aspects (Smith, 1990). Such practices are common in settler societies, which, as this paper argues, use the geographical space to conceal the failure of the social inclusion, but at the same time give immigrants the illusion they are part of the nation and have an important share in the state and nation-building project.

Settler society is a conceptual framework that in this paper illustrates the contact between the Mizrahim, the Russians and the rest of the Israeli society. Mainly, this framework is a distinct type of nationalism, bound up with racial/ethnic and class relations (Yiftachel, 2000a). Settler societies are defined as societies in which Europeans have settled, have become, and remain politically dominant over indigenous peoples. Later immigrants, who are unevenly incorporated by the Europeans into 'the nation', form a relatively weak group in comparison to the Europeans, but a powerful group with regard to the indigenous people (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). Consequently, a heterogeneous society emerges in class, ethnic and racial terms, which tends to preserve and intensify the ethnic-class stratification during the periods of nation-building and state-building (Yiftachel, 2000b).

Sometimes, settler societies use immigrants to settle frontier and peripheral regions. Alongside the aim of achieving economic and demographic goals, the settlement process achieves three additional important ones: 1. it supports the nation-building project by providing essential spiritual and physical (territorial) values; 2. it helps the European group to dominate the land resources of indigenous peoples; and, 3. it distances the immigrants from the centers of authority and economic wealth. In this way, the project of settling the frontiers (pursued by the immigrants in the name of national interest) is a fundamental mechanism for the preservation of class and ethnic stratification for the national core's particular interests (see also Yiftachel and Meir, 1998. With regard to cultural aspects, see Shapiro, 1997, and with regard to economic implications, see Shafir, 1989; Peled, 1990).

A social process of exploitation and differentiation (as is the process in settler societies, in which an ethnic group of people is marked by the dominant group and is excluded from centers of authority) is a source of creation and construction of a group's marginal identity (Young, 1995). This identity is based on ethnic belonging, shared position in class terms and, in the long run, also a sense of belonging to the

place in which the people were settled. In the course of time and under certain circumstances, this identity becomes a basis for (ethnic) group mobilization and protest, which center on the demand for recognition (Taylor, 1995), in what is today called 'identity politics'.

One form of settling frontier regions is by constructing new small-size and medium-size towns. This policy is considered to have economic and social merit. Economically, new towns are supposed to become centers for regional growth, to mobilize diverse employment resources, decrease unemployment rates, and increase the gross regional product. Socially, new towns must provide diversified services of education, culture, health and housing, according to the specific needs of the town's population (Golany, 1976). New towns are supposed to provide better opportunities for class and ethnic integration, in order to minimize the inhabitants' desire to abandon the towns (Gans, 1973). Attainment of these merits demands a coordinated implementation of housing, employment, social services, and regional planning (Phillips and Yeh, 1987). Coordinated implementation of this kind has been rarely achieved. New towns usually become places of backwardness, settled by disadvantaged ethnic minority groups, who are low on the socio-economic scale and have limited low-income employment (Harvey, 1993).

What kind of resources enable the state to disperse the immigrants into disadvantaged peripheral towns and correspondingly to gain the glorious objective of frontier settlement? Here the Gramscian concept of hegemony has a meaningful role. Hegemony, by Gramsci, is a sociopolitical order in which one concept, belief or way of life is dominant and diffused all over the society. Hegemony is an important element of direction and control. It is manifested through consensual means, which arise when individuals willingly assimilate the world view of the dominant group. Consent is given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant group (Buci-Glucksmann, 1982). This consent is historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function. The state in this order has an important function—to "raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of the productive force for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling class" (Gramsci, 1971:258). According to this definition, the 'best' hegemonic belief is one that is never challenged and is considered to be axiomatic—a common-sensical 'given' belief. This does not mean that each hegemonic belief is constant. Hegemony is constantly readjusted and re-negotiated and it can never be taken for granted. Under some political circumstances, compromises must always be made (Sassoon, 1982). The meaning of these compromises is "that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such compromise cannot touch the essential" (Gramsci, 1971:161).

However, the great mass of the population has its own conception of the world, which exists most of the time as subculture (Slowe, 1990). In the long run, it will try to change the former hegemonic situation, spreading its own conception, as well as

its own counter-hegemony. This means establishing a movement with its own intellectuals, newspapers, and cultural and political organizations that enable it to weaken the hegemony of the dominant group and to begin building its own political culture within the spaces of the old society (Strinati, 1995).

Until this kind of process can arise, in settler societies—and mainly in those having territorial conflicts with indigenous groups or neighboring states—hegemony becomes an instrument enabling the dominant group to permit absorption of desired immigrants into the nation, and to disperse them into small-size peripheral towns, in the same regions where the conflict is taking place. As long as the conflict goes on, these policies gain the great mass of population's consent, including that of the immigrants. These policies perpetuate the marginality of the immigrants, but, correspondingly, include the immigrants as part of the nation-building project and therefore part of the nation. In this way, certain policies regarding nation- and state-building become 'common-sense' practices. These practices are readjusted and re-negotiated constantly, changing its implementation, but not its essential base that supports the privileges and interests of the dominant group.

In Israel during its 50 years of independence, the practices of immigrant absorption and settlement have been re-adjusted as the political (mainly the territorial conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab states in the Middle East) and cultural atmosphere has changed. But even when these practices have been adjusted, the consequences have tended to privilege the dominant group. This claim is the focus of the paper.

## IMMIGRANT ABSORPTION POLICY AND SETTLEMENT IN ISRAEL

Recognizing the shared fate and the joint struggle for the existence of the Jewish people...the Government will act with determination to increase [Jewish] immigration from all countries [...] and create social and economic conditions for a speedy and successful integration of [Jewish] immigrants [...] The Government will put immigration and absorption at the top of its priorities [...] The Government will work to bridge the gaps between new immigrants and veteran residents, and will create conditions to facilitate their smooth and successful integration into Israeli society. The Government will work [...] to prevent calumny and slander against immigrant groups or individuals on the basis of their origin [...] (State of Israel, 1996).

Quoted above are excerpts from the Israeli government's guideline platform in 1996, which reflect quite similar guidelines of all the previous governments since Israel became independent in 1948. Unlike most countries receiving immigrants, in Israel (as in Germany) the immigration system is nationalistic (ethnic) (Ram, 1993; Al-Haj, 1992), since the Israeli society, according to concepts in the Zionist movement, is based upon the assumptions of Jewish unity and sameness between nationality

and religion. This system is also supported both through the consent of the great majority of the Jews in Israel and by the Law of Return (1950) and the Citizenship Law (1952) which offer citizenship to Jewish immigrants immediately upon their arrival, guaranteeing them the full legal, civil, and political rights enjoyed by all veteran residents.

However, despite the attempt to incorporate Jewish immigrants through granting them citizenship, Israeli society is ethnically divided (Smootha, 1978). It is divided mainly into Jews and Palestinians, where the Jews are the dominant group, defining the state as the Jewish State, and themselves as 'the nation'. This dominant group is also subdivided into 'Ashkenazim' (also called 'Western' Jews) of European and American descent and Mizrahim (Easterns) of North African and Middle Eastern descent. Most of the Ashkenazim immigrated to Israel in the pre-state period and value themselves as the 'founders' or as the 'pioneers' (Lewis, 1985). Most of the Mizrahim arrived in Israel in the first decade of the state. Following this analysis, calling the Israeli society a 'settler society' suggests that the Palestinians are the indigenous group; the Ashkenazim, the dominant group; and the Mizrahim, the immigrant group (Yiftachel, 2000b; Abdo and Yuval-Davis, 1995).

As a settler society, the immigrant absorption policy focused on two central methods, which were activated correspondingly: 'ingathering of the exiles' and 'Judaization-dispersal'. These two methods were regarded as hegemonic ideas, derived from the Zionist meta-narrative. The 'ingathering of the exiles' concept is the Israeli version of the American 'single melting pot' approach, but it was directed only at the Jews (Shuval and Leshem, 1998). The 'Judaization-dispersal' idea was designed to establish Jewish control over the entire Israeli territory and mainly in the Negev and Galilee regions where the part of the Palestinian population which remained after the 1948 War of Independence was the majority (Yiftachel, 2000b). This policy was also intended to block the potential return of the 1948 Palestinian war refugees to their homes and villages (Morris, 1987).

As hegemonic ideas, both have been modified since the 1950s. The 'ingathering of the exiles' has been transformed from a culturally homogeneous, to a diversified, multi-culture policy, because the notion of a single melting pot conflicts with democratic ideologies which theoretically advance a mutual tolerance of differences (Shuval and Leshem, 1998; Kimmerling, 1998). It should be emphasized that the determination in the 1950s to achieve 'cultural homogeneity' was, in fact, cultural imperialism, wherein the veterans (mainly Ashkenazim) tried to construct a common national identity by enforcing their cultural experience on the Mizrahim (Shohat, 1997). However, xenophobia limited the effectiveness of constructing cultural homogeneity.

'Judaization-dispersal' has been changed from a compelled dispersal in the 1950s into a devious dispersal in the 1990s, where the geographical distribution of construction and accommodation costs dominate the mechanism of dispersal (Hasson, 1992). The implementation of these changing policies on the Mizrahim and on the Russian immigrants is briefly presented below.

## MIZRAHIM IN DEVELOPMENT TOWNS

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 brought with it a large wave of Jewish immigrants from 42 different countries. Most of them came from Muslim countries in Asia and North Africa and were known as Mizrahim (Orientals). This wave of immigration changed Israel's demographic composition dramatically, transforming the State from one in which 75 percent of Jews were of European descent in 1948, to one in which, by 1967, Mizrahi Jews constituted a majority—55 percent of the total Jewish population. By the end of 1953, within four-and-a-half years of the declaration of statehood, Israel's Jewish population had doubled; at the close of 1956, it had tripled (Lissak, 1999). At the same time, the wave of immigration transformed the state—in 1948, 76 percent of the total population were Jews; by 1961, this had become 89 percent (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998).

The corresponding implementation of the immigrant absorption policy—'ingathering of the exiles' and 'Judaization-dispersal'—served mainly the interest of the dominant veteran European-Ashkenazi group in preserving its hegemony in the Israeli society (Yiftachel, 2000a) and its position in the socioeconomic structure (Swirski, 1989). It also facilitated the secular, modern and western concepts of the Zionist movement in the Middle Eastern region, where the majority were non-European-Mizrahim and Palestinians (Shohat, 1997). 'Ingathering of the exiles' and 'Judaization-dispersal' enabled the Palestinian minority to be excluded from the Israeli-Jewish nation, and to perpetuate the Mizrahim in an inferior position within this nation, because the Mizrahim—whose cultural customs were similar to those of the Arabs—were viewed as a threat to Israel's attempt to construct a unified national identity (Shapiro, 1997). Moreover, the implementation of the 'Judaization-dispersal' idea partially contradicted the aims of the 'ingathering of the exiles', since it stressed the geographical segregation of the different ethnic groups which make up Israeli society (Yiftachel and Tzfadia, 1999; Spilerman and Habib, 1976; Cohen, 1970).

The concept of 'Judaization-dispersal' has been implemented through 'physical planning' which calls for the dispersal of new immigrants into 28 new development towns in peripheral (Northern and Southern) regions. The planning process divided the state territory into four regions and set goals for population growth within each region. According to the planning principles, the Northern region was supposed to increase its Jewish population by 460 percent, the Southern region by 1,650 percent, the Central region by 150 percent, and the Jerusalem region by 280 percent (Sharon, 1951; Cohen, 1970; Yiftachel, 2000a). The establishment of the development towns in these regions has created social and geographical segregation in the Israeli society, mainly because most Mizrahi immigrants were assigned to the development towns. Most of the Mizrahim who settled in these towns were never offered a choice. As indicated by the survey, in six development towns, 60 percent of the first generation population had been brought directly from the airport or the harbor. Throughout the years, economic backwardness, deprivation and frustration began to characterize these towns. The Mizrahi immigrants, who were coercively settled in the development

towns, were discriminated against in terms of employment by training them for blue-collar jobs (Swirski, 1989). Paradoxically, the 'ingathering of the exiles' policy led to a situation of superiority of one ethnic group over the other, caused by xenophobia and the desire of the veteran group to maintain its domination and to privilege its own interest.<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of new towns, which differed greatly from other parts of the Israeli society in terms of the inhabitants' origins and occupations, evoked a local Mizrahi identity (Spilerman and Habib, 1976). This identity became significant by developing local cultural symbols, which increased the inhabitants' affinity and loyalty to the towns. These phenomena emphasize the localization and local identity which have crystallized over the years (Ben-Zadok, 1993; Ben-Ari and Bilu, 1987). The local identity has been fortified by ethnic and class identity, which is trapped at the margins of the Israeli-Jewish society. On the one hand, the Mizrahim are part of the Jewish nation in Israel; on the other, their cultural customs were rejected by the hegemonic culture, and they were displaced into an inferior position within the Jewish nation.

This inferior position of the Mizrahim in the development towns has hardly affected their sense of belonging to the nation. According to the survey, 60 percent of them define themselves as 'Israeli-Jews', 8.7 percent as 'Israelis', and only 9.8 percent define themselves as 'Israeli-Mizrahim'. The term 'Israeli-Jews' is the common definition of being part of the national entity. It is also the most common definition among the Jews in Israel (Smootha, 1992), and it indicates the success of the creation of the Jewish nation in Israel. Moreover, most of the Mizrahim in the development towns (68 percent) claim that the State of Israel should increase the Judaization dispersal, and 5.5 percent believe that it should continue as is. Such attitudes clarify the idea of trapped identity: the Mizrahim tend to support the hegemonic idea that left them behind, because the position they find themselves in gives them no choice but to support those in control and their ideology.<sup>2</sup> Into this homogenous ethnic society in peripheral towns, a large number of immigrant Jews from the former Soviet Union (also known as 'Russians') arrived during the early 1990s. The absorption method of these immigrants is the focus of the next section.

#### TRANSFORMING THE ABSORPTION METHODS: THE "RUSSIANS" IN DEVELOPMENT TOWNS

Between 1989 and 1997, 685,000 Jewish immigrants arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998). This wave of immigration represents the largest group of immigrants from one country of origin since 1948. Twenty-two percent of them have been absorbed in development towns. As a group, the immigrants from the former Soviet Union are highly educated. About 60 percent of Russian immigrants in the workforce are members of the academic, scientific, and white-collar professions, as compared to 28 percent of veteran Israeli workers

(Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998). Potentially, these immigrants could contribute a great deal to the advancement of the Israeli economy and to the reduction of the geographical inequality by drawing the development towns out of economic distress (Lipshitz, 1991).

Actual problems of security and the ambition to improve its standard of living were the main motivations behind the wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s to Israel (DellaPergola, 1998; Horowitz, 1996). These immigrants found an Israeli society of the 1990s which was less collectivist than that of the 1950s. Capitalistic policies had become more dominant, and centralist planning less significant. Individualism was becoming a basic value in Israeli social and cultural life. These ideas underpin the importance of cultural and social integration, and highlight the importance of a pluralistic social structure. This process enables the entrance of altered values, as long as these values do not contradict the hegemonic order (Kimmerling, 1998).

This change in the Israeli society redefines the concept of 'ingathering of the exiles'. In the 1950s, this concept had emphasized mainly cultural dimensions, which were associated with the single melting-pot idea. In the 1990s, the concept emphasized mainly territorial dimensions—ingathering Jews in the land of Israel, but not necessarily immigrant-veteran assimilation. In other words, the Israeli society of the 1990s was familiarized with the legitimacy of persistence of ethnic enclaves. Moreover, the difficulties of absorbing mass immigration devalued the importance of cultural absorption. Instead, emphasis was put on immigrant absorption within the employment and housing fields (Hacohen, 1994).

The second method of immigrant absorption policy in Israel, 'Judaization-dispersal', has also been reformed in the 1990s. When the first Russian immigrants arrived in Israel in 1989, planners and geographers proposed different types of spatial absorption. The disagreements were over whether the immigrants should be concentrated or dispersed to the peripheral regions.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the Israeli government made a pragmatic decision on a new method of absorption, known as 'direct absorption'. The 'direct absorption' concept and practice is embedded in the private housing market arena and permits immigrants the freedom to choose their regional preference (Hacohen, 1994). But, as will be shown below, this is only a 'semi' or apparent freedom. Instead of allocating immigrants to particular geographical regions (as was the practice in the 1950s) and giving them housing in government housing projects, direct absorption gives each immigrant family a first year budget for renting an apartment immediately upon arrival, wherever the family may choose. This budget is part of an 'absorption basket' which also contains a predefined cash allowance, services and other privileges.

The freedom to choose location, with its embeddedness in the private housing market, contributed to preservation of the prevailing pattern of population dispersal, in which the majority of the Jewish population lives in the coastal area, and the minority—mainly low-income Mizrahim and Israeli Palestinians—lives in the peripheral regions (Lipshitz, 1991). The housing rental grants were not sufficient for rental

in the coastal area, but were only enough for rental in the peripheral regions, mainly in the development towns. On the other hand, a high rate of unemployment, and a limited range of employment opportunities characterized the peripheral regions. Accordingly, the more qualified and educated immigrants chose final destinations at geographical locations which had a better chance of offering employment suited to their qualifications, paid better and covered their higher accommodation expenses. The less qualified and less educated immigrants chose their geographical region according to accommodation costs only and therefore settled mainly in development towns (Hasson, 1992). As such, it can be stated that the first component that channeled Russian immigrants into development towns, and revived the 'Judaization-dispersal' policy, was that of accommodation costs within the free housing market.

The second factor that revived the concept of 'Judaization-dispersal' was the governmental response to the housing crisis. Despite the rapid inrush of immigrants in 1989, the Israeli government had believed that the private market could handle the housing problem (Doron and Karger, 1993). In addition, there arose a conflict between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Construction and Housing regarding absorption—should the approach be one of 'economics first' or 'housing first'. This debate delayed the resolution of the absorption crisis (Alterman, 1995). Although there were a few thousand available apartments, mainly in development towns (Krakover and Stern, 1992), the planners reached the conclusion that these apartments would be insufficient to meet the housing requirements of all the immigrants, and that homeless people as well as veteran Israeli citizens might need to occupy them. This consideration finally led the Israeli government to give priority to resolving the housing crisis and to suspend the handling of almost all other economic problems. The government moved from total dependence on the private market to direct large-scale construction. This modification was achieved by making more public lands available for new large-scale construction and by guaranteeing the developers that the government would purchase all unsold apartments. Most of these public lands were in the remoter parts of the Negev and the Galilee, mainly in development towns. The result was that thousands of new apartments were constructed in those areas. In 1989, just before the mass of Russian immigrants began to arrive in Israel, a total of 1,265 new apartments had been constructed in development towns. In 1991, this number rose to 11,031 and in 1992, to 17,469. The average annual rate of new apartment construction per 1,000 residents from 1991 to 1993 was 11 on the national level and 26 in the development towns.<sup>4</sup>

However, building thousands of apartments in development towns did not increase their ability to attract a large population. Their high unemployment rates and low wages remained major problems. Lack of local demand for housing left many vacant apartments. Some of the new immigrants, on the other hand, looking for cheap accommodation, were offered these apartments. Some of them were non-skilled workers, seniors, and so forth. Most of the educated and skilled immigrants turned to the big metropolis (Efrat, 1991; Hasson, 1992). This process preserved the old spatial organization (Lipshitz, 1997), in which the power and knowledge were

concentrated in the central region, and the development towns remained dependent upon it. On the other hand, the fact that each development town absorbed thousands of immigrants (some towns nearly doubled their population) caused extreme changes in their ethnic composition. The Mizrahim living in the development towns, which had already developed a local identity, were suddenly exposed to a different ethnic group at the onset of the absorption process. The implication of this juxtaposition is a subject for another paper.

However, in spite of the imbalanced dispersal of the Russians, they tend to support the Judaization-dispersal policy. The Russian political party, *Israel Ba'aliya*, an indicator of the Russians' ability to transform their size into political power (Kimmerling, 1998), wrote in its platform:

Israel Ba'aliya operatively participates in the social-, state- and nation-building process...the settlement movement is a Zionist principle, and the party supports it with no restrictions [...] There is no doubt that the security problem will remain [...] We cannot guarantee the survival of the state of Israel and its Jewish nature in the Middle East unless we are able to gather most of the Jewish people in Israel (Israel Ba'aliya Platform, 1999).

Obviously, it took the Russians less than a decade to adopt the Zionist hegemonic idea and to regard themselves as part of the Jewish-Israeli nation. It demonstrates again the might of Gramsci's concept of hegemony in settler societies, having territorial conflict with indigenous peoples.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Most settler societies make use of their legitimate rights to control immigration to their territories in order to protect the welfare system, the labor market, the schools, and mainly the economic and political interests of its dominant group. Most of these societies, such as Canada, define the 'desired' immigrants on an economic or professional basis, assuming that such immigrants may contribute a great deal to the state's economic welfare and may easily assimilate into the host society (Smith, 1993). Other settler societies, like Israel, may encourage immigration of co-ethnic, co-religious or co-national peoples without specifying the immigrants' economic and professional background. Such immigrants are considered to promote the nation-building project, which actually means enforcing the domination of the dominant group and perpetuating the indigenous group's subordinate position by enlarging the dominant group's size. Does this mean that the dominant group is ready to sacrifice its own economic interests in order to advance the nation-building project by absorbing desirable immigrants in ethnic and religious terms? Obviously, the answer is no. Settler societies tend to absorb immigrants both for the national interests

and the founders' particular interests. In order to accomplish these two goals the society sets in motion two practices: incorporating co-ethnic or co-religious immigrants into the nation by granting them full legal rights, and dispersing these immigrants within the territory of the state, where the potentially 'profitable' immigrants, in economic terms, are directed to the central region, while the potentially 'unprofitable' ones are directed to peripheral regions.

A policy of geographical dispersal of immigrants according to their predicted contribution to economic growth does not mean that only the skilled immigrants are useful: economically, low-skilled or unskilled immigrants are in high demand for low-income jobs, concentrated mostly in peripheral regions; politically, these immigrants constitute a reservoir for settling peripheral regions, where the indigenous group constitutes the majority. It helps to keep immigrants under control, implanting within them the belief that they are associated with the nation and state-building project. It also limits the spatial spread of the indigenous group. Hence, the geographical dispersal of immigrants increases social and geographical inequality and social division. It also enhances the social inclusion of one part of society and the social exclusion of another, which emphasizes the center/periphery relationships and the ethnic-class stratification. The central question is what kind of mechanism enables the creation of a divided society, where ethnic and class inequality is the ritual? Furthermore, what mechanism enables the ruling class to gain the immigrants' consent to a process that perpetuates their marginality within the host society? Here, as I noted before, the Gramscian concept of hegemony has a crucial role.

Hegemony in settler societies relates mainly to the dominance of a European group ('founders') and of immigrants over the indigenous group, but it also refers to the dominance of the European group over the immigrants. The key word in the second type of dominance (Europeans over immigrants) is cultural, for it suggests that it is the European culture, with all the beliefs, values and norms, which defines the 'appropriate' society (Strinati, 1995). Immigrants who find European culture difficult to adopt might be excluded from the centers of power and wealth, even when the official statements of those who hold power express commitment to equal inclusion and creation of "social and economic conditions for a speedy and successful integration" (State of Israel, 1996). Clearly, such exclusion also has a geographical expression.

Hegemony becomes an instrument enabling the dominant European group to permit absorption of 'desired' immigrants into the nation, and to disperse the 'unprofitable margins' of this wave of immigration into small-size peripheral towns as part of the nation and state building project. These policies gain the consent of the great mass of population, including the immigrants themselves, to a certain way of life which, in fact, perpetuates the marginality of these immigrants but correspondingly includes them in the nation. If we go back to the absorption and dispersal of the Mizrahim, it is noticeable that the Mizrahim still support the policy that created the towns: according to the survey of the six development towns, 62 percent of the Mizrahim believe that building the development towns in the 1950s was essential and very important to national security (which is a hidden phrase for the Judaization

project). Even today, in spite of the marginality of the towns, the Mizrahim who live there feel that the development towns are a good place to live (60 percent), and they find the towns secure and friendly places. But they still complain that they are discriminated against (71 percent), and that the Mizrahim receive less than they deserve (57 percent). Therefore most of them would like to live in other places (64 percent). These findings are meaningful, given that most of the Mizrahim in the development towns were forced to live there just after immigrating to Israel.

These findings have a double meaning: the power of the hegemonic idea is instrumental in convincing the immigrants that the settlement process is important for the nation-building project, even when the immigrants barely gain from it. But in the long run, the consent of the immigrants dissolves, and they start to undermine the importance of the settlement concept. This undermining starts when many Mizrahim, mainly those who could afford it do so, have left the towns, and many of those who stay would like to live elsewhere.

Furthermore, when the Russian immigrants arrived in these towns in the early 1990s, the Mizrahim started to question the absorption logic, since the former constituted a threat of competition over the economic resources available to the Mizrahim in the development towns, such as employment, housing and welfare services. They also became a threat regarding political resources, mainly in the towns' local government and for the local Mizrahi cultural domination (Tzfadia, 2000). Theoretically, this kind of competition over resources between new immigrants and veteran residents is a source for protest activities which aim to stop the immigrants' settlement in certain places (Olzak, 1992). It is also a source of the desire to split the labor market in a way that advances one ethnic group over the other in economic terms. That was not the case in the development towns when the Russians arrived: although most of the Mizrahim in the development towns (according to the survey) felt that the Russians made no contribution to the towns, and that the Russians were the reason for the high unemployment rate and for the housing shortage, there was almost no protest against the Russians. The most common kind of protest referred to the Russians' relation to the Jewish people, since an unknown but not insignificant percentage of the immigrants are not actually Jewish. In this kind of protest, the Mizrahim became the goalkeeper of the national border, carrying the mission of defending the Zionist hegemonic idea.<sup>5</sup>

Using the nationality excuse, that is the hegemonic excuse, is the only avenue available for immigrants to undermine the hegemonic idea. This might sound somewhat paradoxical: how can the hegemonic idea be harnessed in order to contradict itself? It is simple in our case. The hegemonic idea of Judaizing the Israeli/Palestine territory by settling Jewish immigrants in remote regions is based upon the assumption of unifying the religious and national meanings of Judaism. If the immigrants are no longer Jews, than it becomes 'legitimate' to challenge their arrival in Israel by using the hegemonic logic. This ritual emphasizes the powerful role of hegemony in settler societies, when the immigrants are using it for their own interests.

Therefore, and returning to the beginning of this paper, the radical transformations in the social spheres, such as immigrant absorption in settler societies, are not evidence that nation-states are undergoing a transition from their modernized nation-state phase to a globalized civil-society phase, rather they are evidence that the discourses regarding the nation-state are becoming more critical. These discourses oblige the state to maintain its authority by using sophisticated policies, such as hegemony, thus concealing its role in creating social and ethnic inequality.

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## NOTES

1. For a discussion of the impact of the 'Judaization-dispersal' policy on the Mizrahim in development towns, refer to Yiftachel, 2000a, 2000b; Yiftachel and Tzfadia, 1999.

2. For detailed research on the influence of place, economic development, culture and social network on the evolution of collective 'trapped' identity see, Yiftachel and Tzfadia, 1999.

3. See, Gonen (1990) for more details on doubts concerning spatial absorption.

4. For more details on the housing policies, see, Eldor and Evens, 1992; Fialkoff, 1992; Golani et al., 1992.

5. This issue is further elaborated upon in *The Jerusalem Post*, 23–24.11.1999.

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