Chapter 7

Israel: An Immigrant Society

Moshe Semyonov and Anastasia Gorodzeisky

Introduction

Israel has long been viewed as the prototype of an immigrant society, a society inhabited mostly by Jewish immigrants and by sons and daughters of these immigrants. The Jewish immigrants arrived in Israel throughout the last century from a wide variety of countries and compose the overwhelming majority of the state's population. In addition to the majority group population, Israel is inhabited by two sizable non-Jewish minority groups: Israeli Arabs and global labour migrants. Israeli Arabs have been living in the region for generations and can thus be viewed as indigenous to the region. They are citizens of the state. Labour migrants have been arriving in Israel only in recent decades. They are neither citizens of Israel, nor can they become citizens or permanent residents. Their arrival in Israel can be understood within the context of the recent and ever increasing trend of global labour migration

Arabs constituted a numerical majority of the region's population at the time that Jews began immigrating to the country to re-establish their homeland in Palestine. (Jews had begun immigrating to Palestine in sizable numbers toward the end of the nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth.) Arab populations living in Palestine were mostly traditional-rural, with little exposure to modern culture. After establishment of the State of Israel and following the War of Independence, Arabs became a subordinate minority group, in terms not only of numbers but also of their social, economic, and political status in the state. Currently, Arabs, the overwhelming majority of whom are of the Muslim faith, comprise roughly 20 percent of the citizens of Israel. Although they are citizens and as such can fully participate in the country's political system, they

International Perspectives: Integration and Inclusion, ed. J. Frideres and J. Biles. Montreal and Kingston: Queen's Policy Studies Series, McGill-Queen's University Press.

are highly segregated from the Jewish majority population and, when compared to Jews, are disadvantaged in terms of attainment of social and occupational positions and economic rewards (e.g., Lewin-Epstien and Semyonov 1993). Since Arabs are not an immigrant population, they and their relative status in Israel are not discussed in detail in this chapter.

The second major non-Jewish group residing in Israel is composed of labour migrants, often referred to in Israeli society as "foreign workers." Labour migrants began arriving in the country, for all practical purposes, only in recent decades, mostly to replace Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza who used to participate in the Israeli economy before the Intifada. According to estimates provided by various official sources, this group accounts for about 8 percent of the Israeli labour force. It is further estimated that half of the "foreign workers" population are living and working in Israel without legal work permits and are therefore considered to be undocumented migrants (often referred to as "illegal workers"). Their presence in Israel should be understood within the framework of the growing trend of global labour migration with globalization. Indeed, contemporary Israel should be viewed and understood as not only a society of Jewish immigrants but also as a multi-ethnic society inhabited by multiple groups of immigrants alongside an indigenous Arab population. That is, Israel should be understood as a society inhabited by Jewish immigrants who arrived from practically every corner on the globe, as well as by Arabs who have lived in the region for generations, and by labour migrants who recently arrived in the country.

In what follows we first explain the unique meaning of immigration in the context of Israeli society; second, we provide descriptive overview of the immigration flows to Israel throughout the last hundred years; third, we discuss the emergence of a new group of global migrants, their presence in the country, and the implications of their presence for Israeli society; fourth, we describe the impact that immigration has had on patterns of social and economic inequality in Israeli society and ; fifth, we evaluate the role of the state in incorporating immigrants in its social and economic systems.

The Meaning of Immigration in Israel

By 2009, the population of Israel accounted for almost 7.5 million residents. Three-quarters of these are Jews; 20 percent are Arabs (the overwhelming majority Muslims, the rest Christians and Druze); the remainder are non-Jewish immigrants, including labour migrants. By way of comparison, in 1948, when the state was established, the Jewish population residing in Israel amounted to only 600,000 persons and the Arab population amounted to 156,000 persons. When these numbers are put in historical perspective, it becomes apparent that within six decades the Jewish

population of Israel increased dramatically. That is, within sixty years, the Jewish population increased almost tenfold, and more than half of the growth of the Jewish population can be attributed to immigration inflows (Della Pergola 1998). Currently, one-third of the Jewish population of Israel is first generation immigrants and one-third is second generation. The proportion of immigrants in Israeli society is considerably higher than in other traditional immigrant societies such as the United States, Canada, or Australia, and dramatically higher than the new immigrant receiving countries of Western Europe such as Germany, France or the United Kingdom (ibid.). In fact, the proportion of the immigrant populations in Israel is highest in the world.

Immigration not only accounted for the dramatic increase in the size of the Jewish population but has also changed the ethnic composition of Israeli society, making its population much more heterogeneous. That is, immigration has brought to Israel Jews from practically every corner of the world. Over the years Israel became home to Jews from Eastern and Western European countries such as Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, Hungary, France, Romania, and the Former Soviet Union; from the United States and Canada, Argentina, Mexico and Chile in the Americas; from Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and India in Asia; from Egypt, Morocco, Libya, and Tunis in North Africa and Ethiopia in East Africa; and from Australia, South Africa, New Zealand in Oceania. Immigration has shaped the population composition of Israeli society as well as its collective identity and its patterns of social and economic inequality.

Jewish immigration to Israel is different from most other immigrant societies. It is not viewed as an economic migration but as a "returning Diaspora" (e.g., Semyonov and Lewin-Epstein 2003). Since Israel is considered the homeland of the Jewish people, every Jew has the right to immigrate there. Therefore, immigrants are referred to not as immigrants but as *olim*, a term with a positive connotation, meaning ascending or going up. Likewise, immigration is referred to as *aliya*. Following this logic, Israel applies a system *of jus sanguineous* for inclusion of Jewish immigrants in society, while excluding non-Jewish immigrants. This system is clearly evident in the Law of Return (1950) and the Law of Nationality (1952). According to these laws, every Jew and family members of Jewish immigrants has the right to settle in Israel and to be awarded Israeli citizenship upon arrival. The state not only enables Jewish immigrants and family members to make Israel their home but also provides generous financial and institutional support to ease their transition from their country of origin and to facilitate their integration into society during their first years in the new country.

Indeed, the State of Israel and the Israeli public have established a social contract with the immigrants; they are fully committed to the successful integration of immigrants into society; they grant immigrants with immediate and unconditional acceptance to their new society. The state

not only provides support to immigrants to smooth their integration into society but in many cases actively encourages immigration of Jews from widespread diasporas. In many cases, Israel has not only admitted Jewish immigrants but actually sponsored rescue operations around the world to bring Jews under threats to survival to safety in the "homeland." Immigration has played a major role in the development of Israeli society and as such has become a major component of its collective identity.

The Flow of Immigrants to Israel: Historical Perspective

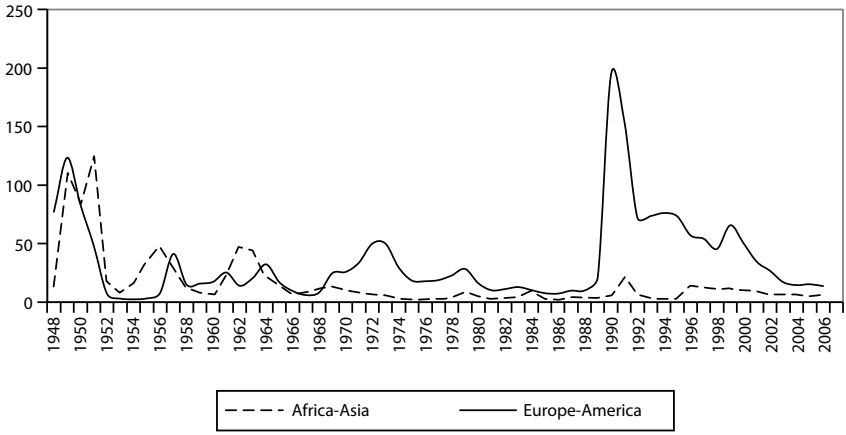
Jewish immigration to Israel can be best understood within a series of major flows or currents of immigrants that have taken place from the turn of the twentieth century to the present. Here we adopt the five periods typology identified and offered by Amit and Semyonov (2008):

1. Immigration in the pre-statehood era (ca.1900–48)
2. Mass immigration after the establishment of the State of Israel (1948–52)
3. Sporadic immigration during the following three decades (1952–89)
4. Mass immigration (mostly) from the former Soviet Union following its downfall (1989–95)
5. Sporadic immigration from variety (mostly Western) countries (1995–present)

As noted, immigration flows have shaped the size and composition of the population of Israel. Two major geo-cultural (or ethnic) groups are commonly distinguished within the Jewish population: Jews of European or American origin (mostly Ashkenazim) and Jews of Asian or North-African descent (mostly Sephardim). The two groups are of roughly equal size but the former group is, on average, characterized by higher social and economic characteristics (including education, occupational positions, earnings, and wealth and place of residence) than the latter. Much of those disparities were formed and shaped by immigration and can be attributed, at least in part, to circumstances associated with immigration to Israel.

Figure 1 displays the size of immigrants flows to Israel from 1948 (when official statistics had become available for the first time) to the present. Two major peaks can be observed. The first took place immediately after statehood when the newly established state received a mass of immigrants that arrived both from Europe and from Asian and North African countries within a very short time interval. The second peak occurred after the downfall of the Former Soviet Union (1989) when a mass of nearly one million immigrants left the Soviet Republics in order to make Israel their new home.

FIGURE 1
Number of Jewish Immigrants to Israel per Year by Continent of Origin (in Thousands)



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel (1996, 2007).

The first Jewish immigrants arrived in Israel (then Palestine) toward the end of the nineteenth century, mostly from Central and Eastern Europe, with the primary goal of establishing a Zionist state as a homeland for the Jewish people. Indeed, this was an ideological immigration joined by almost half a million Jews throughout the five decades preceding the establishment of the state. The pre-state immigrants established new Jewish communities and economic, social, civic, and political institutions. By 1948, early immigrants of European origin were in control of the newly established state's institutions and occupied positions of status, power, and prestige.

Immediately after its establishment, Israel was faced with almost a million Jewish immigrants, most of them, for all practical purposes, refugees. These immigrants can be divided into two major geo-cultural groups of roughly equal size. The first group was composed of survivors of the Holocaust in Europe, the second group of refugees from the Muslim countries in Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. To appreciate the scope and problematic nature of this wave, one must consider that within a period of five years, following a bloody war of independence, 600,000 Jewish residents of the newly established state had to absorb 900,000 new immigrants. The combination of limited and scarce resources (of both the state and the immigrants) coupled with the heterogeneous nature of this influx made the absorption process very difficult. The state had to control, direct, and navigate the process by finding housing and jobs for the new immigrants, establishing new localities in the periphery of the state, and training and retraining many immigrants for life in their new country.

The three decades that followed were characterized by much more scattered and sporadic immigration and smaller numbers of immigrants. During this third period, immigration was influenced more by "push" than "pull" factors. That is, immigrants were influenced more by social, political, or economic events or crises in their country of origin than by the social and economic situation in Israel. For example, when the Former Soviet Union changed its immigration policies in the 1970s and became less restrictive, a stream of immigrants from the former Soviet republics began arriving in Israel. The uprising in Hungary brought a stream of Hungarian Jews; likewise, during the Iranian revolution, an increased number of Iranian Jews had made Israel their country of destination. Political unrest in South Africa, Argentina, and Romania brought greater numbers of immigrants from those countries. However, when compared to the previous periods, the stream of immigration during this third immigration period was relatively low. Hence, the integration process could be carried out under less pressure than in earlier periods and with many more resources.

A turning point for immigration to Israel came in 1989. Following the economic and political crisis in the Soviet Union leading to its eventual downfall, a massive number of immigrants from all Soviet Republics had begun leaving their old homes searching for new ones. Although Israel was not the only country of destination, it undoubtedly became the primary viable destination for most Soviet Jews and their family members (an estimated one-quarter of Soviet immigrants were not Jewish). If we take into consideration that Israel, a country of 4.5 million residents, was faced with almost million Soviet immigrants within less than a decade, we can understand the massive scope of this immigration wave. Some 400,000 Soviet immigrants arrived in Israel between 1989 and 1991, and 300,000 additional immigrants arrived over the next four years. Currently, Soviet immigrants comprise approximately 20 percent of Israel's Jewish population. They are characterized by high levels of education (two-thirds came with some academic education) and by professional and scientific training. Yet, and despite considerable government support, many experienced considerable hardships in finding employment suiting their human capital resources and occupational skills. Consequently, many experienced considerable downward mobility upon arrival in Israel (e.g., Raijman and Semyonov 1995). Although recent studies reveal that with the passage of time these immigrants have experienced some upward occupational and economic mobility, many still lag far behind Israeli-born in the attainment of occupational positions and earnings (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2011).

During the influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, a relatively large number of Ethiopian Jews (approximately 100,000 persons) immigrated to the country. In fact, many were airlifted to Israel by state

authorities in two major rescue operations. The Ethiopians, unlike the immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) were characterized by low levels of formal education and were unequipped with occupational skills needed for success in a modern economic system. Consequently, many Ethiopian immigrants continue to face serious difficulties and disadvantages in attaining jobs and economic rewards in the Israeli labour market (Raijman 2009; Offer 2004; Bank of Israel 2007).

By 1995 the stream of immigrants from the FSU had, for all practical purposes, come to its end, with only 50,000 immigrants arriving in the decade between 1995 and 2006. Most recent immigrants have arrived from economically prosperous places such as United States, Canada, and France as well as Argentina, and most are academically educated and hold professional occupations. That is, unlike many of the previous immigrants (many of whom can be viewed as refugees with Israel their one and only viable destination), these immigrants can choose among several destination countries along with the option of staying in their country of origin. They choose Israel mostly on the basis of Zionist ideological grounds and for religious reasons – mainly to live among Jews in the homeland of the Jewish people. If they are economically and socially unsuccessful in Israel, they have the option of returning to their country of origin. However, they appear to integrate and see success and are likely to make Israel their homeland (Raiman 2009; Amit and Chachashvili 2007).

Global Labour Migrants

Labour migrants in Israel should be viewed as part of the growing phenomenon of global labour migration. In recent decades, labour migrants from relatively poor countries have begun leaving their homes in search of economic opportunities in more developed countries in order to improve the quality of life and standard of living of family members in the homeland (Massey et al. 1998; Semyonov and Gorodzeisky 2008). Israel has become a destination and home to many labour migrants. Similar to "guest workers" in many other societies, labour migrants in Israel (often referred to as "foreign workers") are used as cheap labour to fill low-status, low-paying jobs that the native population is reluctant to take and perform. Currently the number of foreign workers in Israel is estimated around 200,000. Half are believed to be undocumented, and most reside in the run-down neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv. They arrive in Israel from a variety of countries including several African countries, Latin America, Thailand, the Philippines, China, Turkey, and Romania.

Israel began relying on migrant non-citizen labour following the 1967 Six-Day War. Immediately after the war, Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip began finding employment in the Israeli labour

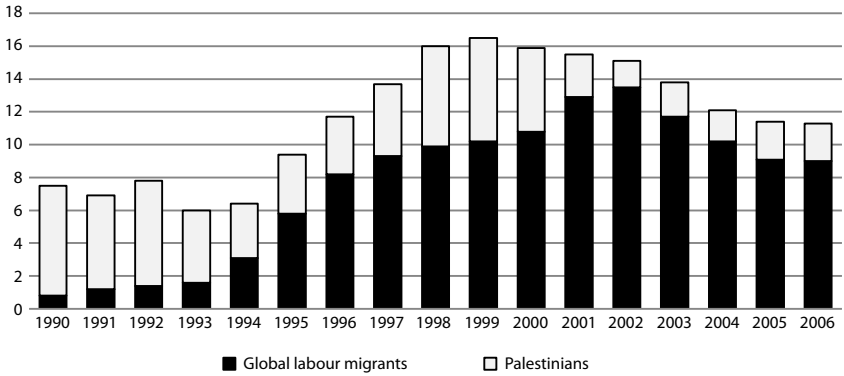
market. Daily workers who commuted from their place of residence in the morning and returned home at night, they were recruited mostly for employment in construction, agriculture, and service sectors, mostly in blue-collar menial jobs. Their earnings were considerably lower than those of Jewish workers in the same jobs, yet considerably higher than the earnings they could possibly attain in the labour market in the West Bank or Gaza. The number of the Palestinian workers in Israel grew rapidly, by 1987 reaching over 150,000 persons and composing approximately 10 percent of the Israeli labour force (Semyonov and Lewin-Epstein 1987).

Following the first Intifada (the Palestinian uprising in 1987), Palestinians became an unreliable source of labour. Frequent border closings, curfews, and violent events made commuting between Israel and the West Bank or Gaza very difficult. Employers exerted pressure on the Israeli government to replace Palestinians workers with other foreign workers. The government responded (Bartram 1998) by issuing permits for the recruitment of temporary guest workers from other countries. Romanians and Turks were recruited for the construction industry (currently Chinese workers are taking their place), and Thais were hired on agricultural sites. Filipinos came in as caretakers, and many Africans and Latin Americans (mostly undocumented) found jobs as domestic help. The number of work permits and subsequently the number of foreign workers in Israel grew steadily. In 1987 the Ministry of Labour issued only 2,500 permits; by 1993 the number increased to 9,950; in1996 it exceeded 100,000. Along with the documented workers (those having a work permit), an increasing number of labour migrants without permits began arriving, coming mostly from Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.

Figure 2 clearly shows that the decrease in Palestinian workers commuting to Israel on a daily basis coincides with the rise in the number of global migrants. In the early 1990s the proportion of Palestinian workers in the Israeli labour force was considerably larger than that of the foreign workers; by 1994 the two groups of non-citizen workers reached parity. By the mid-1990s the relative proportion of the foreign workers had systematically increased; in 2000 the proportion of foreign workers reached 10 percent while the proportion of Palestinian workers declined to approximately 2 percent. The data presented suggest that Palestinian workers had been replaced by global labour migrants in the Israeli labour market.

The data displayed in Table 1 pertain to the distribution of foreign workers in Israel according to country of origin and sector of employment (Raijman 2009). Labour migrants from Thailand and China worked mostly in agriculture; labour migrants from Philippines (but recently also from India, Sri Lanka and Bulgaria) worked as domestic help; labour migrants from Romania, the former Soviet Union, Turkey, and China were invited to work in the construction industry.

FIGURE 2
Percentage of Global Labour Migrants and Palestinian Workers in the Israeli Labour Force, 1990–2006



Source: Israel Ministry of Labor and Welfare (2001); Bank of Israel (2007).

TABLE 1
Distribution of Foreign Workers with a Permit in Israel by Sector of Employment and Country of Origin, 2002

Sector of Employment	*Number of Migrants*	*Percent*	*Country of Origin*
Agriculture	30,000	27.0	Thailand, China
Construction	32,000	28.9	Romania, FSU, China, Turkey
Industry	5,000	4.5	Romania, FSU, Latin America
Domestic help/caretaking	40,000	36.0	Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Bulgaria
Restaurants	3,000	2.7	Philippines, China, Thailand
Hotels	1,000	0.9	Africa, FSU

Source: Raijman (2009).

Immigration and Socio-Economic Inequality

The immigration flows to Israel affected not only the ethnic composition of Israeli population but also patterns of socio-economic inequalities among the sub-populations. For the purpose of the present discussion, we identify three main axes (or dimensions) of inequality in Israeli society. We contend here that these axes have been shaped mostly by immigration flows: The three-axes have been formed on basis of citizenship (citizens versus non-citizens), the Jewish-Arab split, and ethnic or geo-cultural

cleavage within the Jewish population (i.e., between Jews of European or American origin and Jews of Asian or African origin).

The sharpest and most pronounced cleavage in Israeli society lies between citizens (whether Jews or Arabs) and non-citizens (foreign workers). The cleavage is evident in terms of social and economic status in society but mostly in terms of access to rights and privileges that the Israeli welfare system provides. In other words, labour migrants who have arrived in Israel (especially in recent years) have almost no chance of becoming citizens of the state and having equal access to social, political, and economic rights and privileges to which other citizens (whether Jews or Arabs) are entitled. They are highly segregated in terms of occupational positions. Placed at the bottom of the Israeli labour market, they take menial low-status, low-paying jobs that Israeli citizens are reluctant to take. Nowadays labour migrants are highly concentrated in three major industries: construction, agriculture, and domestic services, including care taking. Specifically, about 28 percent of labour migrants holding work permits are employed in construction, about 27 percent in agriculture, and around 40 percent employed in domestic service.

The occupational distribution of the labour migrants in Israel does not reflect their educational credentials nor the occupations they held in country of origin prior to arrival in Israel. For example, although the educational level of labour migrants from Latin-America and Africa is relatively high (average number of schooling years is about 12), and although 34 percent of labour migrants from Africa and about 15 percent of those from Latin America held professional or technician occupations in their country of origin, the overwhelming majority of these immigrants (82 percent among Africans and 75 percent among Latin Americans) work in domestic help (i.e., house-cleaning). The gap between occupational status in a country of origin and in Israel reflects the high occupational cost associated with migration (Raijman 2009). However, labour migrants are willing to accept this occupational cost because the wages they receive in Israel are considerably higher that those they could at home. Considerable portions of the earnings that labour migrants make in the destinations countries are remitted to combat poverty and improve standard of living of family members left behind at home (see, for example, Semyonov and Gorodzeisky 2008 for Filipino overseas workers).

Similar to the situation in many other societies, labour migrants in Israel suffer from the worst working conditions in the country; their wages are considerably lower than those of Israeli citizens, in many cases below minimum wage; they seldom receive employment benefits or have access to the Israeli welfare system. Most live in the poorest neighbourhoods (primarily in South Tel Aviv); the undocumented workers are under a constant threat of deportation. In sum, foreign labour migrants in Israel can be viewed as the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sub-population in every aspect of social stratification.

The second axis of socio-economic inequality in Israel is based on the distinction between Jews and non-Jews (mostly between Jews and Arabs). According to this distinction, Jews form the super-ordinate group and Arabs are the subordinate disadvantaged group. In general, the disadvantages of the Arab population in Israel are largely understood within the context of the Jewish-Arab conflict and the definition of Israel as the homeland for the Jewish people (Al-Haj and Rosenfeld 1988; Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov 1993). Since Jewish immigrants are considered "returning diasporas," they benefit (as compared to Arabs) from priority in access to employment opportunities, housing, and a variety of state services.

The last axis of inequality formed by immigration flows to Israel is based on the distinction between two major ethnic or geo-cultural groups within the Jewish population (i.e., between Jews that arrived from Europe or America – mostly Ashkenazim – and Jews that arrived from Central Asia and North Africa – mostly Sephardim). Socio-economic disparities between these two major ethnic groups have long been attributed to geo-cultural differences and particularly to patterns of immigration flows to the country (e.g., Ben Rafael 1982). Four distinct ethnic sub-populations of immigrants are now recognized in Israeli society: Jews of European and American origin (Ashkenazim); Jews of Asian and African origin (Sephardim) who arrived prior to 1989; immigrants from the former republics of the Soviet Union who arrived after the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1989 (most of European origin), and Ethiopian immigrants who arrived in the late 1980s and early '90s. The socio-economic status of these four sub-groups is often linked to the circumstances associated with their arrival in the country.

Most of the immigrants in pre-statehood era came to Israel from Eastern and Central European countries, thus they were in a better position than any other group to occupy the most desirable positions in the social, economic, and political system of the new state. Shortly after statehood (1948), Israel began absorbing a large influx of immigrants (mostly refugees) from Muslim countries in Central Asia and North Africa along with European survivors of the Holocaust. Within a five-year period, Israel's population almost tripled. At the same time the state, with very little resources, had to supply housing, jobs, food, and services to many of the new immigrants and help absorb them into society. Many were housed in temporary tent communities and many, especially immigrants of Asian or North African origin, were directed to newly established communities and rural villages in the periphery of the country where occupational, economic, and educational opportunities were more limited and scarce than in the centre. These immigrants were characterized by large families, traditional orientation, and few connections to those who controlled resources. Consequently they experienced greater difficulties and greater hardships in integrating and adjusting to the Israeli social and economic system than immigrants of European origin. In fact, whereas Jews of

European or American origins were able to close socio-economic gaps with native born Jews, immigrants of Asian or African origins were less successful in doing so (e.g., Semyonov 1996).

Even today, more than 60 years after the establishment of the state, immigrants of Asian and North African origins are still disadvantaged in terms of attainment of socio-economic rewards (e.g. Cohen, Haberfeld, and Kristal 2007; Haberfeld and Cohen 2007). First and second generation immigrants from European and American countries have been placed at the top of the Israeli stratification ladder; they have achieved the highest occupational status and earn the highest salaries. First and second generation immigrants from Asian and African countries have achieved lower occupational status and earned lower salaries than either first or second generation of immigrants from European and American countries (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2011). For example, in 2004–06 the average occupational status (on a 100 point scale) of European-American origin men was 56 and 60 points (for first and second generation immigrants, respectively), while the occupation status of Asian-African origin men was 40 and 43 points (for first and second generation immigrants, respectively).

New immigrants who arrived in Israel after 1989 from the Former Soviet Union faced considerable hardships in finding high-paying and high-status positions matching their educational credentials and occupational skills and hence experienced downward occupational mobility (Raijman and Semyonov 1998). However, FSU immigrants did not enter the Israeli labour market at the bottom of occupation hierarchy. Even shortly after arrival, their occupational positions were of higher status than that of first and second generation of Asian-African Jews (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2011). Yet taking into consideration the very high level of education among FSU immigrants (14.7 and 14.8 years of schooling in average for men and women, respectively), they are still disadvantaged in attainment of both occupational status and earnings as compared to other Jewish groups. That is, FSU immigrants have been less successful than comparable Jews who arrived to Israel before 1989 in converting education to occupational positions. Moreover, the earnings disadvantage of FSU immigrants is substantial as compared to earlier immigrants even after controlling for occupational distribution, especially when compared to European-Americans. For example, around 2005, the earnings of FSU immigrants who arrived in Israel in 1990–91 was 30 percent lower than earning of comparable groups who arrived to Israel in previous immigration waves (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2011). Although intermediate assessments indicate that FSU immigrants are improving their relative occupational status and earnings, they are still lagging behind other groups of Jewish immigrants; according to an estimation provided by Haberfeld and Cohen (2007) it will take more than 30 years for them to close the socio-economic gap with previous immigrants.

Ethiopian immigrants arrived in Israel in the late 1980s and early '90s (most were rescued from a developing–poor country under difficult and severe conditions). They are placed at the bottom of social stratification ladder and face considerable hardships in integrating into the Israeli society. Their educational level is the lowest in Israel. For example, in 1995 the average years of formal schooling among Ethiopian immigrants was only 3.3 years; by 2005 their average level of formal years of education had increased, but only up to an average of 7 years; it is still considerably lower than average level of years of formal education in the population (13.7 years). The increase in years of formal education reflects, to a great extent, exposure of young Ethiopian immigrants (and second-generation immigrants) to the Israeli educational system. The odds for participating in labour market activity among Ethiopians are also considerably lower than that for all other Jewish sub-populations (Raijman 2009). These odds remain low even after controlling for differences in levels of education. It has been suggested that Ethiopian immigrants are not only disadvantaged bytheir low level of human-capital resources and skills that are inadequate for the Israeli economy but also by the discrimination they face in the Israeli labour market (e.g., Offer 2004). Currently, only 16 percent of Ethiopian men and 18 percent of Ethiopian women hold professional, technicial, and managerial occupations as compared to 44 percent of the Israeli population. Moreover, average monthly earnings among Ethiopian immigrants amount to only about 50 percent of the average monthly earnings of the Israeli population (Raijman 2009). Indeed, Ethiopian immigrants are most vulnerable population among Jewish population in Israel in terms of socio-economic inequality.

The Role of the State

Israel views itself as the homeland of the Jewish people and thus is committed ideologically and institutionally to the successful integration of Jewish immigrants into society. The state has established a ministry and a series of organizations, agencies, and institutions to support immigrant integration. Although the scope, amount, and type of state support have changed over the years, in financial terms it is quite substantial. This support frequently includes travel and relocation funds, Hebrew courses, housing loans and allowances, tax exemptions, training and retraining programs, and assistance in finding a job.

Throughout most of its history, the state has also been intensively involved in shaping the opportunity structure and immigration policies to facilitate a smooth incorporation of immigrants into society. Although state involvement is aimed at supporting and helping immigrants, it can also lead to a dependency of immigrants on the state system and

institutions. In many cases, state actions directed at supporting immigrants' incorporation have had long-term detrimental consequences for the social and economic status of immigrants. Perhaps the most apparent consequence are associated with immigrants from North Africa who arrived in the 1950s (i.e., during the period of mass immigration after the establishment of the State of Israel). This period was characterized by scarce societal resources and by high level of state control on the ways that these resources were allocated (e.g., Semyonov and Lewin-Epstein 2003). During this period the state had to furnish housing and create jobs for the new immigrants. At the same time it launched a policy of population dispersion and established new development towns with labour intensive industriesin the peripheral regions of the country to provide housing and jobs to the new immigrants. New immigrants, especially those from North African countries, were directed and channelled in disproportional numbers to these newly created peripheral towns. Consequently, the new immigrants from North Africa were not only introduced to an inferior opportunity structure in the social and geographical periphery of the country but also became extremely dependent on state agencies. Even today North African immigrants and their sons and daughters are overrepresented in the peripheral areas of the state where economic and educational opportunities are limited and housing values are low. This seems to be one of the reasons why second and third generation immigrants from North Africa are still lagging far behind Jews of European and American origin in every aspect of socio-economic stratification.

Absorption and support policies implemented by the state have changed over the years to fit changes in composition and scope of immigrant populations. In the fourth period of immigration – the second mass migration, mostly from the Former Soviet Union between 1989 and 1995 – the state launched a new policy of absorption: direct absorption. According to this policy, resources were given directly to immigrants with a low level of state control. Immigrants from the FSU received a "basket of absorption" – cash and services – and could choose among various strategies and modes of incorporation with state support. The "basket of absorption" included a lump sum of money of approximately $10,000 (depending on the size of family), housing subsidies, language instructions, job retraining programs, tax exemption, and free academic education for qualified students (Doron and Kargar 1993). Immigrants could choose where to live, whether to buy apartment or to rent one, and when and where to enter the labour market. Although Soviet immigrants experienced downward occupational mobility upon arrival in Israel, intermediate assessments indicate improvement in their socio-economic status and achievements, especially among younger immigrants. This policy has continued for all practical purposes into the fifth period of immigration (1995–present) in which immigrants from Western and economically developed countries

arrive in Israel. Nevertheless, at the same time that the policy of "direct absorption" was implemented, immigrants from Ethiopia also arrived in Israel. Since Ethiopians immigrants were viewed as a "weak" population, state involvement in the every aspect of their incorporation process was much more intensive, and the support was more generous. Despite these state strategies, this group of immigrants continues to experience severe difficulties in their socio-economic incorporation into Israeli society (e.g., Offer 2004, 2007; Kaplan and Salamon 2004).

Whereas the state of Israel provides considerable support to Jewish immigrants, it does not welcome non-Jewish labour migrants. More specifically, contrary to the immediate and unconditional acceptance and support granted to Jewish immigrants, the state makes it very difficult, almost impossible, for non-Jewish immigrants to become permanent residents, let alone Israeli citizens. Immigration policy towards foreign labour migrants has been implemented mainly through decisions regarding the number of work permits (quotas) to be allocated to employers, coupled with a policy of deportation of undocumented migrants. Since in Israel work permits are granted to employers and not to the migrants, labour migrants with permits become a "captured" labour force (Rozenhak 2000). In fact, labour agencies and employers are those that receive permits for recruiting and hiring foreign workers while the state itself does not participate in the process, apparently so that the state can avoid assuming responsibility for the welfare and the working conditions of foreign workers (Raijman 2009; Kemp and Raijman 2008). Indeed, although the community of labour migrants in Israel has become a sizable and integral part of social reality, the state has not yet established a clear policy on the status of "foreign workers" in Israel (Raijman 2009).

Conclusions

Israel is an immigrant society with a high proportion of foreign-born population. Data show that flows of Jewish immigrants from practically every corner of the world have contributed more than any other social factor to the dramatic increase in the size of the Israeli population. Migration flows have also shaped the diverse ethnic composition of the population and influenced patterns of ethnic-linked socio-economic inequality. Since Israel is considered the homeland of the Jewish people, every Jew has the right to immigrate to Israel and to receive citizenship upon arrival. As the state is fully committed to successful social and economic integration of its Jewish immigrants, it is actively involved in helping Jewish immigrants to settle. Jewish immigrants are viewed as a "returning diasporas," and the state grants them generous financial and institutional support to facilitate their smooth incorporation into society. Indeed, the successful

integration of most immigrants into Israel society, despite the scope of immigration flows and the diverse nature of the immigrant populations, can be attributed in part to state policies and state support.

However, whereas Jews are fully welcomed and accepted by state authorities and by the public, non-Jewish labour migrants are faced with social and legal exclusion. Contrary to its policy that embraces and facilitates full inclusion of Jewish immigrants, Israel has implemented a policy of total exclusion toward non-Jewish global labour migrants. Viewed by the state and the public as temporary workers, not permanent immigrants, they cannot become citizens, nor can they become permanent residents. Thus, Israel should be viewed as a pluralist society inhabited by diverse groups of immigrants with differential access to privileges, rights, and opportunities for success. In this immigrant society, differential state policies toward different subgroups may affect immigrant opportunities for success.

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