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Multicultural Norms and Strategies: Minority Policy in an Ethnocratic State

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ABSTRACT: *It is widely assumed that a fundamental contradiction exists between multiculturalism and ethnocracy. As a result, there has been a distinct lack of research investigating the strategic relationship which can and does exist between both theories in practice. This article sets out to overcome this gap through an examination of state policy towards the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel. It identifies certain limits to the conceptual frameworks typically used to investigate multiculturalism and suggests that the range of policy options open to ethnocratic regimes is, in fact, far more malleable, selective and flexible than has hitherto been described.*

Keywords: multiculturalism, ethnocracy, ideology, policy, control, Palestinian Arab minority, Israel

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) proudly proclaims multiculturalism to be an inalienable fact of Israeli society.¹ With a population of over 7 million people belonging to a wide range of ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, political and regional groupings, this claim would appear to be consistent with the demographic realities of Israeli society. However, not all of these differences carry equal significance. Split between a Jewish majority which accounts for 75 per cent of the population and a Palestinian Arab minority which accounts for a further 20 per cent of it, Israeli society is distinguished by its prominent Jewish-Arab national divide.² For this reason, any discussion of Israeli multiculturalism has remained both a problematic and highly controversial affair.³

This paper tackles the controversy surrounding multiculturalism and explores whether it is legitimate to refer to state policy towards the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel in multicultural terms. This paper begins by outlining some of the major sensitivities and assumptions associated with the use of the term “multiculturalism” in Israel. It will then trace the roots of this controversy back to a wider international dissonance concerning the nature and definition of multiculturalism and disentangle three substantively different approaches to multiculturalism. The next section of this paper will define the local parameters affecting the application of multiculturalism in Israel, namely, the disputed nature of the Israeli state and the structural framework within which its policies towards the Palestinian Arab minority are

formulated. Finally, two particular examples of minority policy in Israel will be assessed in order to demonstrate the relevance and functionality of multiculturalism in practice in Israel. This paper will then conclude by suggesting a number of useful insights which an integrated analysis of multiculturalism can provide not only to our understanding of state policy towards the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel but also of the continued relevance of multicultural policies in a broader, international context.

Multiculturalism: A Disputed Term

Within the Palestinian Arab minority descriptions of Israel as a multicultural state remain few and far between. Indeed, many are quick to dismiss the multicultural label as nothing more than a convenient (but disposable) rhetorical device that is used by the authorities, and other pro-establishment elements, for the sole purposes of currying international favour and concealing the systemic discrimination which they experience as non-Jewish citizens of the state. Similarly, few Israeli Jewish voices – whether critical or pro-establishment – exist which have sought to describe the state in multicultural terms. This reluctance is not restricted to assessments of state policy towards the Palestinian Arab minority but is particularly evident with regard to the internal discourse on intra-Jewish diversity.⁴

What can be said to unite both Palestinian Arab and Israeli Jewish viewpoints is the shared view that multiculturalism runs counter not only to Zionist ideology but also to the fundamental idea of a Jewish nation-state.⁵ That Israel could simultaneously be considered to be both a Jewish and a multicultural state would, as such, appear to be contradictory and illogical. Demonstrating the difficulty many Israelis have in reconciling the Jewish character of the state with the concept of multiculturalism, the leader of the extremist Jewish national party, *Yisrael Beiteinu* (Israel Is Our Home), Avigdor Lieberman, has gone so far as to decry the notion of Israel as a multicultural state not only as being deeply antithetical to Jewish national interests but also as an existential threat to the preservation of the Jewish state. Thus, for Lieberman, multiculturalism is ranked on the same level of “threat” as calls from within the Palestinian Arab (and certain critical Israeli Jewish circles) to transform Israel either into a bi-national state or a secular “state for all its citizens”.⁶

Despite these objections, certain features of Israeli state policy have often been referred to and described as multicultural. With regard to the Palestinian Arab minority, this paper identifies three major areas where this has occurred. The first is the system of separate national identification and recognition in Israel. In Israel, the concept of “nationality” (*le’om*) is distinct from that of “citizenship” (*ezrahut*), with the Hebrew term *le’om* signifying ethnic affiliation or national grouping. As such, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior (MOI) has been able to recognise no less than 137 different possible “nationalities” to which Israeli citizens may belong.⁷ It is important to note, however, that while the MOI recognises a “Jewish”, “Arab” and “Druze”⁸ nationality, the category “Israeli” nationality does not exist.⁹ As such, nationality is not only an important source of communal identity for Israeli citizens, but it has practical implications for the range of rights and obligations extended towards, and expected of, each individual in turn.¹⁰ For instance, all citizens who are registered by the MOI as belonging to the so-called “Arab” nationality are exempted from performing mandatory military service, while members of the Jewish, Druze and Circassian nationalities are not. While this system of national categorisation provides important insights into the complicated nature of identity politics in Israel (notably the categorisation of Druze within a separate non-Arab nationality and the absence of a Palestinian Arab national category), it can also be argued that this system of separate group recognition subscribes to an essentially multicultural format based on the recognition of difference in society.

A second area of Israeli state policy which is regularly cited as an example of multicultural policy is the system of separate religious accommodations. The state officially recognises a total of 14 separate religious authorities: one Jewish, one Muslim, one Druze, ten Christian and one Baha’i. Separate state recognition provides these communal authorities not only with a legal status unavailable to other unrecognised religious denominations but with a large degree of autonomy in the administration of matters pertaining to faith and religious practice as well as in the jurisdiction of personal status issues (marriage, divorce, births and deaths), holy sites and religious endowments (*awqaf*). Each recognised religious authority also has a range of institutions at its disposal – including a system of religious courts and appointed judges – to apply religious law as well as to legislate on personal, family and other matters.

The last area of state policy which has often been described in multicultural terms is education. Education in Israel consists of four main, but separate, strands or educational

tracks: secular state (for Jews), secular state (for Arabs), religious state (for Jews only) and private. The vast majority of Palestinian Arab students in Israel attend either free Arab state-run schools or private schools which are, on the whole, run by Christian religious authorities. While Arab state schools fall under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education which is responsible for setting its distinctive curriculum, appointing its staff and maintaining its buildings, private schools run by religious authorities enjoy a significant level of autonomy, from both an administrative and financial point of view. Thus, private schools in the Arab sector teach a separate “Arab” curriculum using Arabic as the main language of instruction.

Critical Multiculturalism: A Theoretical Background

While these three areas appear to conform with multicultural expectations, the question remains how these policy provisions, together with the assertions of the MFA, can be reconciled with the common objection that Israel cannot truly be considered to be a multicultural state. This article suggests that the origin of this confusion and disagreement lies in the poorly-defined conceptual frameworks which have been used to define and explore multiculturalism itself. The terminological slippage between multiculturalism and the competing vocabulary of cultural pluralism and interculturalism has led Wieviorka to suggest that multiculturalism has become a much misunderstood, neglected and even maligned subject within the social sciences.¹¹ Given this, it is not an understatement to say that multiculturalism can and does mean many different things to many different people. For some, it can mean nothing more than a description of diversity in society, as demonstrated by the MFA. For others, it assumes a commitment to a certain set of values and normatively positive and affirmative assessments of diversity in society. For others still, multiculturalism implies the existence of a particular set of differential policies which regulate social, cultural or ethnic differences between groups in society. Despite the overlap between each of these perspectives, it is clear that each one assumes a markedly different starting point and substantive outlook. As a result, a number of thorny questions arise which must be addressed. Is it sufficient, or acceptable, for instance, to describe a state in multicultural terms based only on the mere existence of diversity in society? Similarly, must a society or state hold fast to, or forego, a particular set of ideological assumptions in order for it to be considered multicultural? Can a state apply multicultural policies in the absence of an

ideological attachment to multicultural values? Must all three exist at the same time for a state to be defined as multicultural? Can any state be truly multicultural? The list of unanswered questions goes on.

Despite the apparent deadlock, it is possible to build a tentative framework through which initial responses to these questions can be ventured. The framework used here consists of two levels, the first of which aims to deconstruct the different conceptual approaches to multiculturalism while the second elaborates the differences between each approach in turn. With regards to the first task, this article subscribes to Inglis' typology which recognises three "interrelated, but nevertheless distinctive" categories of multiculturalism.¹² The first usage is that of "demographic-descriptive" multiculturalism – incidentally, the most common of the three varieties in public and political discourse today – which assumes that multiculturalism represents nothing more than the mere existence of diversity in society and is, essentially, a reflection of empirical "facts on the ground" devoid of any normative interpretation or political obligation. Distinct from this, is a second conceptual category of "ideological-normative" multiculturalism, which states that multiculturalism must extend beyond the mere acknowledgement of diversity in society to an adherence to a particular set of multicultural values and ideas. According to this variant, difference is not only considered to be a natural and positive phenomenon in society, but one which should be protected both for the sake of the individual and for the good of society as a whole. Ideological multiculturalism assumes two basic rationales. On the one hand, it stresses that the individual in society is inextricably bound up with a wider social collective, and that the provision of individual civic rights alone is insufficient to the fulfilment of the basic rights and needs of the individual. Group rights are, therefore, considered to be as central and as indispensable to human rights as individual civil liberties. On the other hand, this approach also considers social conflict to be latent within all diverse societies as the needs and interests of different groups are prone to collide and compete with each other in their respective struggles for expression, development and power. Such conflict can only be managed, and political stability maintained, by recognising this tendency and according an equal level of recognition, respect and rights to the different groups which together make up the fabric of society. As such, if one group becomes disproportionately powerful or dominant in society, there is an increased probability that inter-group conflict and political instability will follow.

Finally, the third category of “programmatic-political” multiculturalism judges multiculturalism according to the practical implementation of differential policies. Inglis defines this category as consisting of the range of “specific types of programs and policy initiatives used to respond to and manage ethnic diversity” in society, while Wieviorka considers it to be “the institutional and political arrangements which explicitly refer to multiculturalism” or, more generally, as “multiculturalism in practice”¹³. As it is the relationship between ideological and programmatic multiculturalism which holds the key to this discussion, the subtle differences in meaning between “multicultural policy” and policies which “refer” to multiculturalism, as Wieviorka puts it, are of particular relevance.

Before examining the nature of the association between ideological and programmatic multiculturalism, let us briefly reassess the question of whether or not Israel can be referred to in multicultural terms. From the point of the view of the first definition, whereby diversity alone is its measure, Israel can be considered to be a multicultural society *par excellence*. In fact, there are very few places in the world that have as pronounced a level of ethnic, religious, national, linguistic and social diversity as Israel. Yet, from the point of view of the ideological-normative usage or register, the term “multiculturalism” immediately falls down. Israel, as this article argues, is a Jewish ethnocratic state, whereby the majority of Israeli (Jewish) citizens believe not only in the importance of maintaining Jewish numerical, cultural and political superiority in society, but also in their right to do so.¹⁴ It is at this ideological juncture that examinations of “Israeli multiculturalism” have usually run aground.

This suspension of inquiry emanates from a single major assumption which is that there is, or should be, a certain chronological and hierarchical order between the descriptive, ideological and programmatic levels of multiculturalism. Accordingly, it is assumed that Israel cannot be considered to be a multicultural state in practical or political terms if it is not, first and foremost, a multicultural state in ideological terms. This notion would appear to be, at first glance, quite logical. How can a policy be considered to be multicultural if the state which formulates and enforces it embraces a very different political philosophy and worldview? Surely, such a claim is as misguided as considering certain democratic features within non-democratic states to be testimony of a broader ideological commitment to democratic principles? Upon further inspection, however, this reaction is fundamentally misguided itself, or, at the very least, misplaced, as, on the one hand, it assumes the existence of a unified, coherent system of thought which, with respect to multiculturalism, clearly does

not exist, and because, on the other hand, it serves to collapse the boundaries that separate each of the three distinct categories or registers of multiculturalism from one another thus stymieing a full and critical inspection of the role and use of multiculturalism in practice.

As a result, this article challenges those who reject any examination of Israel in multicultural terms. Given Inglis' assertion that the three approaches to multiculturalism are "interrelated, but nevertheless distinctive", this article suggests that the disjuncture between ideological and programmatic multiculturalism not only does exist but is also quite common. By decoupling assessments of programmatic multiculturalism from its presumed ideological foundations, the path is made clear to investigate anew the nature of Israeli multiculturalism and the practical dimensions of multicultural policy in Israel. This approach has been made possible by a significant body of critical studies which point to the dislocated nature of multicultural policy even in states which are considered to be unequivocally democratic in nature. A brief summary of the limits of multiculturalism as identified by these critical theorists is instructive here.

The majority of attacks against multiculturalism have been formulated in what may be loosely referred to as the "West". While this regional and political specificity has engendered its own set of limitations, certain observations can be made which are useful to this discussion. Criticism has generally focused on two aspects of multiculturalism: its ideological claims and its practicality. With regard to the first, one common issue which has been raised is that, rather than promoting political stability within society, multiculturalism is, at its essence, a deeply divisive and fragmentary ideology which undermines and delegitimizes the basis for a single unified civic identity by stressing and, indeed, reifying differences rather than commonalities between groups. Through a process of essentialising and institutionalising differences between groups, multiculturalism has also been accused of impeding and eroding not only the rights and liberties of the individual citizen but also those of the very groups which it is supposed to protect. This encroachment on civil liberties is assessed from two different angles. On the one hand, individual citizens are understood to have become "locked in" to a group identity which, for whatever reasons, does not, or no longer, reflects their best interests or preferred outlook on life, thus limiting their rights as individuals in society and under the law to chose their own path or to opt out of particular group affiliations. On the other hand, multicultural recognition can cause group identities themselves to become artificial and entrenched as their capacity for further change is

obstructed by bureaucratic expectations and procedures. In other words, multiculturalism can cause group identity to become oppressive straitjackets both to the individual and to the group in question. Finally, some have charged that, given the bureaucratic measures required to make multiculturalism operational, traditional group leaders are empowered and, through their exercise of power, can become “forces for conservatism and clientelism” in society, thus imbuing multiculturalism with a further illiberal, and indeed oppressive, potential.¹⁵

The second major line of attack against multiculturalism focuses on the achievability of multicultural norms in practice. Given the indefinite and shifting number of possible group identities in society at any one time, it is argued that it is impossible, on the grounds of sheer practicality, for all groups in society to receive multicultural recognition and for that recognition to be measured out equally. Multiculturalism in practice requires important decisions to be made concerning which groups in society will be selected to receive recognition (and which groups will not) as well as decisions surrounding the type of multicultural rights which will be extended to those groups (and, again, those rights which will not).

At the source of each of these challenges lies the problematic and unresolved role of the state. According to traditional multicultural theory, the role of the state should be restricted to one of neutral arbitration and impartiality between groups but, as Habermas points out, “it is not possible to decouple majority culture from the political culture”¹⁶ of any country, let alone an ethocratic state such as Israel. As such, critics of multiculturalism challenge the practical and political ability and likelihood of any state to accomplish the lofty mandate assigned to it by multiculturalists. “Try as it might, the state has to have a public language, holidays, and certain particularisms that inevitably bear the mark of a majority group.”¹⁷ As such, the state is not only responsible for deciding the form, shape and extent of multiculturalism in society, but, given its own socio-political contingency, it is inextricably and inevitably biased in its decision-making process. It is, as a result, possible to diagnose multiculturalism as dysfunctional or bipolar in nature. While aspiring to serve as a force for inclusion, equality and protection, multiculturalism also conceals within it the negative capacity to divide, control and discriminate. Others have gone so far as to charge multiculturalism with conspiring to repackage and disguise the chauvinistic and exclusionary potential of nationalism within the more politically correct and munificent dress of equality and recognition.¹⁸

An analysis of the imperfect and contingent nature of multiculturalism in practice is provided by Wieviorka who examines the role and impact of multicultural policy in four different countries which are most commonly associated with multiculturalism. While it is beyond the remit of this article to analyse his conclusions in great length, a certain number of his observations will be touched upon here. Discussing the role of multiculturalism within the Canadian context, for example, Wieviorka presents multiculturalism in practice to be essentially based upon a policy of selective bilingualism aimed at stabilising growing tensions between an Anglophone majority and a sizable Francophone minority. As such, Canadian multiculturalism is understood to consist of the limited extension of recognition to two major groups in society only, resulting in the continued exclusion and marginalisation of other groups from the benefits of multiculturalism. Moreover, multiculturalism does not extend beyond certain linguistic and educational rights, demonstrating not only the political bias of multiculturalism in practice in Canada but the politically instrumental role of multiculturalism itself in diffusing group tensions, reasserting social stability and maintaining political order.

Wieviorka's assessment of multiculturalism in practice within the Australian context is also revealing. The first point which he stresses is that the Australian experiment with multiculturalism has been very different to the Canadian experience, reminding us that multiculturalism in practice can assume many different forms and shapes. To begin with, the Australian variant is distinct in that its commitment to multiculturalism is not formalised as it is in the Canadian case. While there is a wealth of specific legislation underscoring multicultural rights in Canada, Australian multiculturalism is guided more by a loose set of policy directions than it is by any constitutional obligation or commitment. A second major difference between the two cases concerns the type of groups affected by the two respective multicultural projects. While in the Canadian case multiculturalism is restricted to two large indigenous linguistic communities, the Australian version has focused upon economic rights with respect to various immigrant communities only.

While the Australian case demonstrates a basic level of selectivity in terms of the types of groups that are recognised and the range of rights covered within it, it is also distinctive in the particular role which is accorded to multiculturalism within the broader political order. Not only is English the only recognised national language in Australia, but it has "always been understood that the culture of the established society, its

political/administrative institutions, would retain its primacy”.¹⁹ As such, while multiculturalism has been used to bolster social cohesion and the integration of minorities within Australian society, it can also be understood to have structurally limited those minorities to a particular position in the pre-established social hierarchy.

Wieviorka’s comparative analysis of multiculturalism in practice in these and other countries offers two major insights. The first is that multiculturalism is not the guiding political ideology of any of the states which practice it. Instead, certain multicultural features and values are incorporated, but ultimately subsumed, within a broader political ideology within which it plays its part. The second major insight is that, regardless of the differences in implementation between each of the countries which have practiced it, multiculturalism has served as a response to the particular challenges faced by the state in maintaining both political stability and order within society. In other words, multiculturalism in practice is a reactive rather than proactive phenomenon, contrary to what many multiculturalists assume.

Ethnocratic Theory and Israel

While Wieviorka’s study widens our understanding of multiculturalism in practice as a reflexive and contingent political project, its relevance for this study is nonetheless temporarily clouded by its focus on “western” democratic states. As an ethnocratic state, Israel represents both an interesting test-case of the limits of multiculturalism in practice and of the nature of the relationship which can be said to exist between multiculturalism and non-democratic or partially-democratic states.

Ethnocratic theory first emerged in the 1990s as part of a growing body of critical Israeli studies which sought to provide a more effective conceptual and theoretical framework through which the nature of the Israeli state, and the relationship between its Jewish and democratic components, could better be reconciled and understood. In particular, ethnocratic theory emerged as a direct response and challenge to the common assertion that the Israeli state can be both Jewish *and* democratic in equal measure. In essence, ethnocratic theory posits that while certain democratic arrangements and procedures do exist in Israel, that they are structurally and ideologically subordinated to the dominant Jewish character of the state. This conclusion is supported by both the literature and various public opinion surveys:

On the declarative level, Israelis accord democracy a high level of support. Once asked about particular democratic values such as minority rights and equality for non-Jewish citizens, that support breaks down.²⁰

Others have argued that there is a “conditional acceptance of democracy” in Israel and that “the ideological commitment to democracy has not always been unconditional among all political groups, and consensus has not always prevailed concerning the specific norms implied about the broad concept of democracy.”²¹ As a result, Yiftachel has defined ethnocracy to be “a non-democratic regime” which, “[d]espite several democratic features, mainly ethnicity (and not territorial citizenship) determines the allocation of rights and privileges” within it.²² Ethnocracies are identifiable, amongst other characteristics, by the presence of a “dominant ‘charter’ ethnic group” which “appropriates the state apparatus, determines most public policies, and segregates itself from other groups”.²³ Thus, groups become segregated and stratified within an ethnocratic regime according to a particular ethnic order with the “charter group” at its head. This stratified and asymmetrical system of governance has the knock-on effect of “enhancing a process of political ethnicisation among sub-groups”. However, ethnocratic regimes usually attempt to legitimise and reinforce this asymmetric distribution of power through the promulgation of a particular historical and political narrative on the one hand and through the maintenance of “*selective openness*” on the other. Selective openness is achieved internally through the maintenance of certain features and institutions which are apparently democratic but which ultimately serve undemocratic or non-democratic aims. Thus, Yiftachel argues that ethnocratic regimes share with “façade democracies” the tendency to use “selective openness” strategically, and to great effect, in order to limit the power of political protest and opposition internally, and to maintain the legitimacy of the regime externally.²⁴

Given the selective openness of ethnocratic regimes and the subordinate and contingent nature of democracy in Israel, what role can multiculturalism be understood to play in the relationship between the Jewish state and its Palestinian Arab minority? As one of the major bridges between ethnocratic and multicultural theory, critical control theory provides the answer to this question. One of the earliest scholarly traditions which inspired the development of control theory in Israel was the critical neo-Marxist tradition of the late 1960s as exemplified amongst others by Rosenfeld. Within his various analyses of the village and the changing rural-urban dynamic of Palestinian Arab life in Israel, government

policy is described as deliberately maintaining and supporting the patriarchal leadership structure of the Arab village and of manipulating factionalism between the various *hamules* (extended families), which, he argues, is pursued in order to ensure the economic and political underdevelopment and dependence of the Palestinian Arab minority upon the state and its Jewish majority.²⁵ In a later study, Rosenfeld advances this charge by arguing that the state deliberately “sharpened or revived distinctions” between Muslims, Christians and Druze in a number of different ways.²⁶ The exceptional status extended to Druze in the military; the relatively harsher treatment meted out to Muslims during the period of military rule (1948-66); the categorisation of each religious and even cultural grouping as distinct minorities (“the Christian minority,” “the Druze minority,” “the Bedouin minority”), and the politicisation of religious groups as “positive elements” or “negative elements” all contributed to exacerbating tensions within the minority and increasing state control.²⁷ Similarly, the provision of separate autonomous arrangements is understood to serve mainly as a vehicle of control over the minority.

Distinctions were formalised and justified under the heady offering of cultural autonomy; local hierarchies for each of the sect groupings were formed and provided a legal status, and although they had effective control in personal matters (marriage, divorce, etc.), this tended to restructure internal authority specifically in religious terms, while attempting to center leadership around conventional personalities.²⁸

In addition to the creation of a dependent and conservative leadership within the Palestinian Arab minority, Rosenfeld also mentions the role of Arab Advisors and separate Arab sections of various ministries within the government as part of this broader policy of control which, he argues, was created not only to subdue the “Arab threat” but also in order to best advance the maximum expropriation of Arab lands into government hands.

These themes are reflected in the writings of several other scholars of this period. Zureik, for instance, who describes Israel as a “settler regime”, identifies the role of institutional separation in the creation of a dependent and “coercive social structure” within Palestinian Arab society.²⁹ Describing the media, economy and education system as “central socialisation agencies” in the creation of an asymmetrical political order that privileges the dominant group in society, he identifies the state’s plural policies as nothing other than a deliberate strategy aimed at undermining the coherence and unity of the minority as a whole. Within this, the separate Arab education system and curriculum are marks of “cultural

oppression” and subjugation.³⁰ Similarly, Kanaana considers control to have been the inevitable policy consequence of the clash between an exclusive Jewish nation-state ideology and the particular challenges posed to it by a large non-Jewish minority. Citing the state’s adoption of the *millet* (minority religious community) system, which provided separate recognition and a degree of communal autonomy to certain religious minorities during the Ottoman period, he argues that this system was “easily adapted to standard colonial divide and rule procedure” by the state in order to facilitate the expropriation of land, and their political and economic dependence upon the state.³¹ In describing the relationship between the state and its Palestinian Arab minority as being “based on privation, humiliation, coercion and national oppression”, former long-standing mayor of Nazareth, Tawfiq Zayyad, viewed the state’s insistence on identifying Palestinian Arabs in Israel as “a conglomeration of communities and religious minorities” as part of its broader refusal to acknowledge and recognise Palestinian Arabs as a single national minority.³² Thus the extension of differential recognition (and rights) of religious communities is linked with a parallel denial of recognition (and rights) of the Palestinian Arab national minority. This politically charged vision of society has resulted in what he refers to as several “absurd” and “fabricated” theories, the most prominent of which is the notion that the Druze represent a separate non-Arab nationality in Israel.³³

During the 1970s, the control perspective had also begun to influence the analyses of more pro-establishment writers who increasingly sought to reconcile the problematic status of a sizable Palestinian Arab minority within a Jewish state.

However fairly, decently and compassionately Israel may treat its minorities, however sincerely it subscribes to democratic principles, egalitarianism, justice and fair play, *political* discrimination is built into the system. A Druze, not to mention an Arab, must limit his ambitions. [...] They must remain politically limited not merely because of their small numbers but because they are, *a priori*, not of the group which founded a nation on the basic premise that it was to be a Jewish state ruled by Jews.³⁴

Recognising certain limits to state policy, however, rarely translated into a more concrete analysis of the nature of state policy in practice. Breaking with this silent tradition, Smootha offers the first major attempt to bridge the gap between both academic discourses. While arguing that the Israeli authorities remain more liberal in their attitude towards the Palestinian Arab minority than the general Israeli Jewish public, he demonstrates that they are nonetheless interested in engineering the “pacification” of the minority through a

combination of carrot-and-stick initiatives, whereby the “carrot” represents efforts to induce the voluntary “compliance” of the minority based on recognition of the obvious benefits, incentives and rewards pertaining to them as citizens of the state, while the “stick” encompasses their forced economic dependence on, and political subordination to, the Jewish majority. Through “an effective machinoy of control-exclusion, dependence and subordination” Smootha describes state policy as attempting to minimise “the potential costs of the presence of an Arab minority to the core national goals of the Jewish character of the state, Israeli national security and democratic pluralism”.³⁵ In a later study, Smootha goes on to highlight the limited nature of policy options available to the state given its parallel commitment to the Jewish character of the state.³⁶ Discussing several possibilities, he concludes that full integration, bi-culturalism, and autonomy are all unrealistic options for the Jewish state. His commentary on the impracticality of autonomy is particularly interesting.

Israeli authorities have always considered Arab national autonomy a threat to Jewish domination and to the state’s political stability and have adopted diverse countermeasures to avert it. These include depriving Arabs of control over their own institutions, preventing them from forming independent organisations, endeavouring to dismantle their majority status in certain regions, coopting their leaders, encouraging traditional internal divisions, and treating them as an ethnic rather than national group. These policies coupled with other restraints comprise the machinery of political control over the Arab minority.³⁷

Thus, it can be argued that whatever autonomous cultural or religious arrangements that do exist in Israel are both limited and hollow given the structural dominance of a political ideology which fears and rejects the provision of full or consequential autonomy.

Despite acknowledging the centrality of control within the Israeli state’s minority policy, Smootha nonetheless fails to provide a clear analytical framework through which the control of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel can be routinely addressed. Situating himself more solidly within international theories of structural pluralism, Lustick develops “an analytical framework for explaining the anomaly of political stability in deeply divided societies” that is based on notion of an Israeli system of control.³⁸ Such systemic control is based upon three different but mutually reinforcing techniques: segmentation, dependence and cooptation. While it is outside the scope of this article to discuss each of these techniques in length, it should be stressed how, within the Israeli system of control, internal differences within the Palestinian Arab minority are understood to represent “meaningful political categories” by the authorities.³⁹ Thus, internal differences within the minority are

subject to politicisation and manipulation. While it has already been shown how language and terminology play a central role in affecting the development of differential state policies towards education, religious accommodation as well as military service, Lustick's contribution allows us to unite each of these parts within a broader and united analytical framework. As such, it is "the network of mutually reinforcing relations" and the "reciprocal interdependencies" which have emerged within the Israeli system of control which is of relevance, and not any single policy or isolated measure within it.⁴⁰

While Lustick's systemic approach highlights the complex, dialectical and evolving nature of these interweaving components of control, and the capacity for the overall system of control to change and adapt itself over time (as well as to provide unanticipated and undesired consequences for the state itself), his approach was weakened to some extent by the temporal limits of his research and his overly optimistic prognosis of how various "challenges to the system" would ultimately be resolved within it. Lustick, as with Smootha and Rosenfeld before him, was primarily focused on the unique conditions which accompanied the period of military rule in Israel. With the end of military rule in 1966 and the relaxation of the bulk of emergency regulations which had hitherto contained and repressed the Palestinian Arab minority, a new period of self-confidence and awareness emerged in Israel. Faced with growing challenges to the Israeli system of control, both from within the Palestinian Arab minority and from within critical Israeli Jewish circles, Lustick assumed that, of the three different possible regime responses ("system adaptation, breakdown or transformation"), Israel would transform itself towards a situation of "effective binationalism".⁴¹ In the intervening thirty years since the publication of his groundbreaking work, bi-nationalism remains a whisper on the political margins of Israeli politics. It would, therefore, appear that Israel's system of control has proven far more effective and resilient than he had expected. Despite retreating slightly from his earlier understanding of the dialectical and dynamic nature of control in maintaining stability in deeply divided societies, and his inability to sufficiently recognise the structural potential for a *sophistication of control*, rather than an abandonment of it, Lustick's approach forms a cornerstone to many subsequent analyses of state-minority relations in Israel today.

Multiculturalism in Practice in Israel

The 1990s witnessed not only the emergence of ethnocratic theory but also of a new interest in the field of political geography, which focused on the growing sophistication of Israeli control measures. This new discipline focused on issues of territorial state control through direct and indirect strategies of land planning, reform measures and zoning strategies which developed subsequent to the period of military rule. While these new scholars were not primarily interested in issues of education or religious accommodation, a parallel surge of research interest into the subject of Druze identity which took place at the same time provided major advances in how state control measures over the minority could be understood.

During the first decade of the state, the Druze were described and categorised, together with the remainder of the Muslim and Christian population, as Arabs. However, when in 1956 Druze mandatory conscription into the military was legalised, it became necessary to justify the exemption of Muslims and Christians from military service, and to defend the exception that had been made for the Druze. Some of the literature on the Druze points to the “special relationship” that had historically existed between Druze and Jews in the area, particularly during the war of 1948, as having at least partially inspired this move.⁴² There is no reason to doubt that the Jews felt a measure of gratitude for the loyalty demonstrated by certain Druze villages. Similarly, there is evidence that the Jews related to, and sympathised with, the vulnerable status of the Druze as a religious minority in the Middle East. As a non-Muslim religious community which had been refused recognition within the Ottoman *millet* system, the state was eager to provide official recognition to them as a separate non-Muslim Druze religious category, which they did in 1957. Five years later, the state went one step further by extending to them official recognition as a separate non-Arab Druze nationality. This move, however, was far more controversial. Writing in the mid-1980s, Oppenheimer described this move as a cynical “manipulation of categories of identity and attributes of culture” by the state for the sole purposes of “ethnicising” and politicising Druze identity away from its Arab roots.⁴³ Firro also described the state’s attempt to encourage “Druze neoparticularism” through a series of invented traditions (such as the use of the *al-Nabi Shu’ayb* shrine⁴⁴ as a swearing-in ceremony for Druze military recruits) as an extension of its broader divide-and-rule policy towards the minority as a whole.⁴⁵ In order to achieve its aims, the state sought out and empowered traditional and conservative Druze leaders who would be obedient to and dependent upon it for their own power before

providing them with separate communal institutions, most notably a separate Druze religious court system, which was formalised in 1964. Having co-opted just such a conservative and patriarchal Druze elite, Hajjar has charged the state's identity policy of also "sexualizing differences" within the minority and of having contributed to the high level of gender inequality and even oppression facing Druze women within their community today.⁴⁶ The final move in separating the Druze from the Arabs and in institutionalising Druze difference came in 1976 with the introduction of a separate Druze curriculum.⁴⁷

The process of institutionalising Druze difference, which spanned more than two decades, produced few material benefits for the Druze. This is particularly evident within the context of their remarkable military service record. Over 40 per cent of the total Druze male labour force is dependent upon the army for jobs today.⁴⁸ However, the significance of the military for young Druze men is not an incidental consequence of their mandatory conscription alone but grew in line with the steady decline of the traditional Druze agricultural economy upon which they were previously dependent and wide-scale government expropriation of arable Druze land. By 1962, for example, more than two-thirds of Druze lands had been confiscated by the state with the result that, by the late 1990s, less than 1 per cent of this traditionally rural community was able to support itself through agriculture.⁴⁹ Poverty, the lack of further education and the hierarchical nature of the Druze communal leadership structure further restricted the occupational avenues open to the Druze and increased their dependency upon the military. The official rhetoric of state favouritism made little material difference to the Druze. One significant influence which it did have, however, was that it increased both the sense of Druze entitlement based on their military service and their resentment of other segments of the minority which were exempt from military service but which were nonetheless enjoying a relatively better standard of life. This disparity has contributed to growing intra-minority tensions and conflicts, most notably between Druze and Christians.⁵⁰

This is not to say that the Israeli authorities did not attempt to co-opt other segments of the minority into the military. Indeed, voluntary military conscription is increasingly popular among Israel's Bedouin community. Attempts to recruit non-Bedouin Muslim or, indeed, Christian recruits have, however, proven more problematic. This is due to the fact that Muslims and Christians – but particularly the former – continue to be viewed as potential "security risks" by the authorities. However, this is not the only explanation. In the 1950s

government officials did attempt to broach the subject of possible Christian conscription with local Greek Catholic religious leaders, but owing to the complicated hierarchical system of authority within the Catholic Church, and the relative administrative independence of local churches from the state, this venture failed to get off the ground.⁵¹

This is not to say that multicultural policies have not affected the Muslim and Christian segments of the minority. This is particularly true within the education sector. As has previously been mentioned, the private school system represents – after the separate Arab state school system – the main educational provider for Palestinian Arabs in Israel. While private education within the Arab sector falls under the jurisdiction of any of the Muslim, Druze or Christian religious authorities it has, in reality, been dominated by Christian church schools. Church schools were first introduced in the late 1880s when British, German, French and subsequently also American foreign Christian missions established a network of schools, hospitals and churches in the region. These schools, which were predominantly foreign-staffed and –funded, expanded with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire under the new administration of the British mandate in Palestine. However, it was with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, that the role of church schools in the Arab sector in Israel was radically transformed when Christian religious institutions, which enjoyed extensive external networks and international support, were spared the worst excesses of government encroachment and interference in their affairs.

While state-run public schools provide education to the majority of Palestinian Arabs to this day, places in private-run church schools are competitively sought after. As the quality of education and educational facilities available in these schools is generally acknowledged to be of a superior standard to that available in state-run Arab schools, matriculating from a church school is widely believed to improve a student's future opportunities.⁵² While church schools operate an open-door policy to students of all religious backgrounds, they nonetheless follow a selective admissions policy, reserving a set number of places in each class for Christian students even which this number is disproportionately higher than their proportion of the Arab student body.⁵³ Given that private schools charge tuition fees which many Palestinian Arab families cannot afford to pay, church schools have developed a noticeable middle class reputation. These factors, together with the concentration of church schools in built-up urban areas close to Christian centres (such as

Nazareth and Haifa) that are difficult to access by rural students have led many to categorise these schools as elitist.

Sa'ar, who conducted a study on Christian identity in Haifa, observed a strong trend towards Christian ethnocentric behaviour by those who wish to downplay their national identity and highlight their internal religious identity for the sake of personal gain and advancement. As this response is consistent with the state's desire to categorise the population according to a religious framework of identity and to promote divisions within the minority as a whole, she deems this behaviour "socially reproductive".

By adopting a socially reproductive orientation – emphasising Christian cultural distinctiveness and drawing on the personal benefits that accompany political conformism – many Christians cultivate the hope (or the illusion) that they will be able to escape the class and civil subordination that they face as Palestinians in Israel.⁵⁴

Despite the prevalence of this orientation, she nonetheless observes a countertendency among Christians to emphasise their national identity at the expense of their religious identity. This tendency demonstrates their "oppositional behaviour" to the state. However, Sa'ar argues that both of these tendencies are, in fact, embodied within the Christian school system itself. Church schools are attractive to Palestinian students because of their academic prestige, "the promise of individual success" and because they appear to have more independence from the state than public schools. From the point of view of the state, the autonomy of the church schools is both threatening and convenient at the same time. With its concentration of aspiring youth, church schools are, to a large extent, free from traditional control measures and, as such, serve as ideal sites for political mobilisation within the minority. This threat is, however, diminished or minimised by the advantages which church schools offer the state. On the one hand, they relieve the state of its own responsibility to supply the Palestinian Arab minority with an adequate and competitive education. On the other hand, church schools are, by their nature, "highly conservative and apolitical in nature" thus serving as forces for political conformism. As such, "Christian educational institutions... bear the dual potential of political obedience and opposition to the state or, in other words, of social reproduction and resistance".⁵⁵

Both the autonomy allowed to church schools and the separate recognition extended to the Druze population illustrate two different forms of multiculturalism in practice in Israel.

In both instances, the state developed a policy towards different segments of the minority which was based on its selective recognition of religious differences within the minority. In the case of church schools, the state adopted an indirect, laissez-faire attitude towards the historic Christian monopoly of private education in the Arab sector, while, in the case of “othering” Druze identity, the state applied a direct policy of cultural intervention and manipulation. While both policies assume different forms and require different levels of state engagement, both were conducted and continue to be nurtured under the mantle of multiculturalism. Both instances of multicultural policy facilitate – albeit to varying degrees – the maintenance of Jewish ethnocratic control over the Palestinian Arab minority through the institutional segmentation and asymmetric recognition of different group enclaves within it. In other words, both instances of multicultural policy are important components of an ethnocratic system of control.

Revisiting Multiculturalism

Both the politicisation of Druze identity and the extension of administrative autonomy to private church schools demonstrate, in a practical manner, the sophistication of the Israeli system of control over time and the use of multicultural policies for the purpose of maintaining ethnocratic control over the minority as a whole. Yiftachel has argued that Israel’s system of control is not only an integrated and inseparable component of Israeli ethnocracy, but that Israeli ethnocracy itself is based upon a system of control. This paper goes one step further in arguing that instrumental or selective multiculturalism is both a viable and well-established policy option that is consistent both with the practical needs and long-term strategies of control within the Israeli ethnocratic regime. Al-Haj coined the phrase “ethnocratic multiculturalism” to demonstrate the practical consistency between ethnocracies and multiculturalism in practice.⁵⁶ This paper supports this view, but recognises that the use of multiculturalism in practice as an instrument of political control is, in fact, not limited to ethnocratic regimes. While the State of Israel clearly does not conform to Inglis’ ideological register of multiculturalism, it is debatable to what extent any state can satisfy multicultural ideals. As such, multicultural policy in Israel is not dissimilar to multiculturalism in practice in other international contexts to the extent that it is as selective, limited, responsive and functional in nature as those cases have shown. Where the Israeli

version of multiculturalism differs markedly from the experiences of other countries concerns the inherently greater level of political instability affecting it. Given that ethnocratic regimes are preoccupied with the maintenance of asymmetrical and discriminatory power relations in plural societies, a greater level of control is consistently required in order to preserve the prevailing political order from internal dissolution or attack. It, therefore, follows that multiculturalism in practice in Israel is subsumed within this greater need for control and, in the absence of a radical transformation of the political status quo in Israel, multicultural controls will continue to play a central role in the state's policy towards its Palestinian Arab minority.

¹ See MFA website (www.mfa.gov.il): Ioram Melchor, 20/08/2001, Multiculturalism in Israel: The Situation and the Challenge)

² The significance of the Jewish-Arab ethno-political divide is reflected in Israeli census material. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) recognises 3 separate Israeli "population groups": "Jews" (who account for 75.5 per cent of the total Israeli population), "Arabs" (who account for 20.2 per cent) and "Others" (who make up the remaining 4.3 per cent of the population). Significantly, the "Arab" population group incorporates the Druze population, despite the fact that the MoI has, for several decades, classified this segment of the minority according to a separate non-Arab Druze nationality. Equally significant is the CBS category of "others", which is predominantly composed of non-Arab Christians who immigrated to Israel under the (Jewish) Law of Return but also those "not classified by religion", including (Arab) soldiers from the Southern Lebanese Army and their (Arab) families who entered Israel in 2000. Furthermore, while the Jewish and Palestinian Arab populations in Israel are equally heterogeneous in composition, it is only the "Arab" population group which is subdivided to reflect the internal – in this case, religious – diversity of the minority. Within the "Arab" population group, for instance, the CBS regularly provides separate statistics for Muslims (who make up 83.4 per cent of the minority), Christians (8.3 per cent) and Druze (8.2 per cent), while the internal diversity of the Jewish majority – along ethnic, sectarian or any other line – is consistently overlooked and denied. For further information on the classification system used by the CBS, see their website: www.cbs.gov.il, particularly the last Statistical Abstract of Israel 2009 (No. 60).

³ This conclusion is based on the findings of this author's doctoral research whereby a broad cross-section of Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab respondents were asked their views on the subject of whether Israeli state policy towards its Palestinian Arab minority (and particularly, the Palestinian Christian segment of it) could be described as multicultural. Of the 36 individuals interviewed, only 1 answered with an unequivocal yes; 3 answered yes, but with some or strong reservations; while the remainder answered in the negative or rejected the term altogether.

⁴ See Cohen-Almagor (1995) for a critical elaboration of the problematic associations of multiculturalism with Jewish nation-building efforts in Israel.

⁵ Smootha (2002: 478). Gavison (1999: 52) defines Israel as a Jewish state signifying, *inter alia*, “a state with a large Jewish majority, a nation-state in which the Jewish people exercises political self-determination, and a state inspired by Jewish religious law”.

⁶ Lisa Goldman, 10/02/2009, The Guardian, “Lieberman, Arabs and cannabis: pick of the Israeli election campaign clips.”

⁷ See: Nathan (2005: 268).

⁸ The Druze belong to a distinct religious community that is indigenous to the Middle East and which began as an offshoot of Shi’a Islam in the 11th century. The Druze are concentrated today mainly in Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan. In Israel, they are concentrated in the north of the country, in the Galilee and the occupied Golan Heights.

⁹ Cook (2006: 15)

¹⁰ Until recently, national affiliation was required by law to be listed on all ID cards. Following much debate, particularly within orthodox circles, over the definition of a Jew, and its loose usage to encourage immigration to Israel under the Basic Law of Return, the decision was taken in 2005 to make the nationality section of ID cards obsolete. It is, however, still possible to determine the ethnicity of a citizen based upon other information listed on the ID (such as their name, and the use of the Hebrew calendar for the date of birth which distinguishes Jews from non-Jews).

¹¹ Wieviorka (1998: 882)

¹² Inglis (1996: 16)

¹³ Inglis (1996: 16) and Wieviorka (1998: 882)

¹⁴ There remains a glaring absence of consensus on how best to define the nature of the Israeli state. While a small minority of scholars insist that Israel can be considered to be a fully-functioning “normal” democracy, the vast majority today recognise tensions between the Jewish and democratic elements of the state. This has led to a wide range of competing definitions ranging from descriptions of Israel as a partial, flawed or “thin” democracy; an illiberal democracy; a *Herrenvolk* democracy; an ethnic state; an ethnic democracy; an ethnocratic state; a theocratic state; or as an apartheid regime. For more on the wide range of competing definitions and approaches, see: Gavison (1999).

¹⁵ For an elaboration of the limits of multiculturalism, see Wieviorka (1998). Quote is on p. 903.

¹⁶ Habermas (1995: 852)

¹⁷ Joppke (2004: 240)

¹⁸ Habermas (1995: 852)

¹⁹ Wieviorka (1998: 885)

²⁰ Rouhana (1997: 39)

²¹ Horowitz & Lissak (1989: 144)

²² Yiftachel (1999: 367-368)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Yiftachel (1999: 367-368) and Yiftachel (2006: 3,19)

²⁵ Rosenfeld (1968: 732-3)

²⁶ Rosenfeld (1978: 391-2)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 392

²⁹ Zureik (1974: 98)

³⁰ Ibid. p.105

³¹ Kanaana (1975: 3)

³² Zayyad (1976: 92, 94)

³³ Ibid. p. 93

³⁴ Friendly (1972: 26)

³⁵ Smootha (1978: 45-46)

³⁶ Smootha (1989: 107)

³⁷ Ibid, p. 98

³⁸ Lustick (1980: 69)

³⁹ Ibid. 133

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp 77-78

⁴¹ Lustick (1980: 252-265) and Lustick (1989: 97-119)

⁴² Oppenheimer (1983: 264)

⁴³ Oppenheimer (1983: 266-7). Frisch (1997: 581) also refers to a “strategy of state ethnicization of the Druze”

⁴⁴ The Nabi Shu’ayb shrine, located close to the Jewish city of Tiberias in the Galilee, holds the burial site of the Prophet Jethro which was once a point of pilgrimage for both Muslims and Druze. Since 1948, custody of the shrine was entrusted to the Druze community and three days in April have been fixed by the state to commemorate Druze pilgrimage. These dates have since become recognised by the state as an official Druze religious holiday.

⁴⁵ Firro (2001: 44)

⁴⁶ Hajjar (1996: 3-4)

⁴⁷ Frisch (1993: 56)

⁴⁸ Firro (2001: 42)

⁴⁹ Firro (2001: 48)

⁵⁰ There have been several major incidents involving clashes between Druze and Christians in mixed Arab villages in recent years. In April 1981, Druze villagers from Julis attacked and looted Christian homes, cars and businesses in the neighbouring village of Kfar Yasif following a fight at a football match where a Druze man was stabbed. In February 2003, an attack on Christians in the village of Rameh occurred involving a missile attack against the local church. In February 2005, in the village of Abu Snan, a similar incident occurred, this time involving a bomb. Also in February 2005, a much larger assault on the Christian population of Mughar occurred, injuring 12 people, damaging the local church, vandalising dozens of Christian-owned businesses, homes and cars, and causing two thousand Christians to flee the village in fear for their lives. In each of these cases, army weapons were used and the police were heavily criticised either for their complicity in the attacks or for their delayed response in halting the attacks.

⁵¹ Peled (1998: 137)

⁵² Sa'ar (1998: 217)

⁵³ Okun & Friedlander (2005: 166)

⁵⁴ Sa'ar (1998: 215)

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 218

⁵⁶ Al-Haj (2004:684)

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