

De-Education And Cultural Oppression

Committee, admitted that this phenomenon represents the 'bankruptcy of education'.⁶⁹

The Palestinians commit a grave mistake when they compare the standard of Arab education with the average standard of Jewish education to emphasise the gap arising from the policy of discrimination.⁷⁰ If they made a comparison between their schools and the Ashkenazi schools (in the kibbutzim and in the Ashkenazi suburbs for example), they would find that the real gap is much, much greater than they had imagined. They commit the same mistake when they compare their economic conditions with the average for the general Jewish population. This does not encourage a common struggle with the Sephardim.

2. The deterioration of school buildings and equipment. After the government declared a moratorium on the construction of new school buildings or extra rooms, some of the teachers were forced to hold classes in air-raid shelters and cow-sheds. Due to cut-backs in the education budget, the government has kept psychologists and social workers away, and Sephardi and Palestinian schools were the first victims. At the same time, since 1967 the government has been spending enormous amounts to build new schools and to buy the latest school equipment for the Ashkenazi settlements in the occupied Arab territories. In these settlements, school classes have between 5-8 pupils, at the expense of the overcrowded classes in Sephardi and Palestinian schools.⁷¹

3. Increase in the number of boys and girls who neither go to school nor work. In Musrara these children make up 19 percent of the new generation. Nissim Gaon, Chairman of the World Sephardi Organisation, stated that the number of these children between the ages of 14-17 alone had reached more than 25,000, that 60 percent of Sephardi children skip school and that 70 percent of the delinquents in the state come from this community.⁷²

4. Underqualification amongst the Sephardi masses. The policy of de-education has led to a situation where the Sephardi masses end up with no educational or vocational qualifications, and this in turn has led to the spread of unemployment and hence poverty. This situation has made it possible to turn most Sephardim into unskilled labour.

5. The spread of delinquency, crime and drug addiction. This is particularly the case amongst the young people who neither study nor work, but it is also a cause for concern in secondary schools and in the armed forces. Police sources state that 50 percent of secondary school pupils have used hashish and that headmasters

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turn a blind eye and will not cooperate with the police to stamp this out.⁷³ A report of the Ministry of Social Services on juvenile delinquency stated that Sephardi juvenile delinquents formed 92.9 percent of the total number of repeat offenders.⁷⁴ 6. Alienation, despair and disaffection with the state of Israel, on the one hand, and loss of Sephardi identity by a great number of the community on the other, was widespread. However, the protests by the Black Panthers have roused many to try and recover their culture and identity (see the final chapter).

This process is well explained by Eliav: "They tell you, from your youth on, that you have come out from a place of darkness and void, and that your background was completely primitive, and they tell you this so often that you end up believing it. Then there is only one step for you to take, consciously or otherwise, which is to hate your family and the country you came from and to be ashamed of your roots. But in the following stage, you begin to hate those who made you believe that, and who hate you, and you start asking questions about yourself. Is it not all a pack of lies?"⁷⁵

Charlie Biton, MP, leader of the Black Panthers, said that 90 percent of those in military prisons are Sephardi: 'they have refused to do compulsory military service because of racism.'⁷⁶

NOTES

- 1 Ha'aretz, 11 January 1980.
- 2 Zu Haderekh, 14 May 1980 and 25 June 1980.
- 3 Shevet va'am, 1958.
- 4 Shevet va'am, A. 'Abbas, 1958 and Dr Smilansky, Megamot, July 1957, and see chapter five.
- 5 The Times, 24 December 1985.
- 6 Zu Haderekh, 13 February 1980.
- 7 Ha'aretz, 27 May 1982.
- 8 Zu Haderekh, 16 October 1985.
- 9 Ha'aretz, 10 July 1987.
- 10 Ibid, 16 April 1987.
- 11 Shevet va'am, 1958.
- 12 Avraham Khalfon, Shevet va'am, 1954.
- 13 Shevet va'am, 1958.
- 14 Shevet va'am, 1958.
- 15 Schools for teaching Hebrew to new immigrants.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Shevet va'am, A. 'Abbas, 1958.
- 18 Shevet va'am, A. 'Abbas, 1958.
- 19 Shevet va'am, 1960.
- 20 Shevet va'am, 1959.
- 21 Central Office of Statistics, 1978.
- 22 Ministry of Education and Culture, 1976.
- 23 Central Office of Statistics.

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- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Megamot, July 1957.
- 27 Shevet va'am, 1973.
- 28 Shevet va'am, 1959.
- 29 Shevet va'am, 1958.
- 30 Ha'aretz, 4 September 1981.
- 31 Supplement to Ha'aretz, 22 May 1981.
- 32 Les temps modernes, 20.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid, 21.
- 35 Since the 1970s IQ tests have been imposed on university entrants and army conscripts.
- 36 Zu Haderekh, April 5 1982, based on official figures.
- 37 Israeli Press.
- 38 Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel, official publications 1971, 1974, 1976.
- 39 Deputy Minister of Education, Government Report on Sephardi Youth, 1972.
- 40 Smooha, 1978, 160 and 161.
- 41 Les temps modernes, 26.
- 42 Ibid, 26-29.
- 43 Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, Israeli Statistical yearbook, 1980, 605.
- 44 Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1986, 608.
- 45 Les temps modernes, 130.
- 46 Ministry of Education data 1981, and Population Census, 1983.
- 47 Ibid, Special Series 418, table 19.
- 48 Shevet va'am, 1958.
- 49 Shevet va'am, 1960.
- 50 Minha marocait, 29.
- 51 Knesset Minutes, Volume 8, 1102, 14 February 1951.
- 52 Shevet va'am, 1954.
- 53 Knesset Minutes, 1949.
- 54 Ha'aretz, July 20 1979.
- 55 6 April 1980.
- 56 28 May 1980.
- 57 Ha'aretz, 25 September 1981.
- 58 3 February 1982.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ha'aretz, 16 April 1982.
- 61 16 May 1986.
- 62 6 November 1981.
- 63 Zu Haderekh, 29 May 1985.
- 64 Ha'aretz, 10 June 1983.
- 65 Swirski and Shushan, 1985, 27.
- 66 2 April 1980.
- 67 Hndashot Hala, Number 7, April 1987.
- 68 Ma'ariv, 16 March 1987.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Al-Mirsad, 1 July 1987.
- 71 Zu Haderekh, 20 April 1983.
- 72 Ha'aretz, 4 April 1980.
- 73 Ha'aretz, 14 May 1982.
- 74 Ha'aretz, 31 October 1975.
- 75 Les temps modernes, 21 and 22.
- 76 Zu Haderekh, 7 January 1981.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Rationalisation Of Discrimination

The policy of racial discrimination has led to the Israeli 'people' being divided roughly into two economic, social and educational strata - that is a class made up of the Ashkenazim which includes the elite, and an under class of Sephardim (and Palestinians). This divide also extends into the field of culture, with Ashkenazi/East European culture on the one side, and Sephardi/Middle Eastern on the other.

The Ashkenazim try to rationalise this split by means of racist views well-known in the West, particularly in South Africa. These views form an inseparable part of the racism directed against the Palestinians and the Arabs as a whole, and are not just expounded by the political leaders, but by journalists writers, sociologists and most Ashkenazim. Even if they differ as to tactics, all Zionist parties express these same views, even the non-Zionist Left or the self-proclaimed anti-Zionists.

VIEWS OF THE POLITICAL LEADERS

Herzl, the founder of political Zionism: 'Zionism will be an outpost of European culture against oriental barbarism.'¹ Based on this viewpoint, harsh opinions were formed and cruel steps taken against the Palestinians and the Arabs in general, as well as the Sephardim, who were deemed part of this 'oriental barbarism'. Jabotinsky, the guru of Right-Wing Zionist Revisionism, the Irgun and the Stern Gang, the Herut Party and the Likud Front: "The Jews, thank God, have nothing in common with the East. We must

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put an end to any trace of the oriental spirit in the Jews of Palestine.² In his article, 'Jews of the East,' which was published in 1919, he opposed mixed marriages with Sephardim and the creation of a single Jewish people, and also stated that he was opposed to integration because he did not know what this would beget - 'a brilliant people or a dull race. Ashkenazi Jews had to preserve their majority status in Jewish society in Palestine.'³ David Ben Gurion, Labour Party (Mapai), and the Histadrut, head of the Jewish Agency and the first Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Israel. He described the Sephardim, at a meeting with the army high command in 1950 as 'human dust, with no Jewish or human culture. They need a long course of education and civilisation before they can occupy their proper place in society.'⁴ He wrote: 'Godliness disappeared from the oriental sects and their influence on the Jewish people has been minimal or nonexistent. Over the last centuries, European Jews have been at the forefront of the people both qualitatively and quantitatively.' Ben Gurion added that he meant the Jews of Eastern Europe.⁵ The historian, Tom Segev, commented on Ben Gurion's words that 'it seemed that the state adopted the viewpoint which says that "the Jewish poor-house" in Plonsk (a poor Polish village where Ben Gurion was born) was "godly", whereas the house of a Jewish doctor, a graduate of the Sorbonne, in Algiers was not.'⁶ Ben Gurion believed that the real meaning of the Nazi holocaust was that Hitler had destroyed the fundamental strength of the state of Israel before it was founded. The state came into existence but did not find the people it was awaiting, and thus the Sephardim were brought in. Ben Gurion compared these latter to the 'blacks who were taken over to America as plantation slaves.'⁷ On 13 July 1949 he said at the parliamentary Constitutional Committee that the Jews of Morocco were 'human beasts', but he did aver that most thieves and pickpockets were Ashkenazi!⁸ In 1956 Ben Gurion stated that Moroccan Jews 'have no culture but are influenced by the Arabs, and we do not want any Moroccan culture here.' Of the Iranian Jews he said 'I cannot see what contribution Iranian Jews can make to Israel.'⁹ In 1959, after the Sephardi uprising at Wadi al-Salib in Haifa, he described the Moroccans as 'a primitive community', and accused them of sympathising with 'outlaws, thieves, pimps and murderers.'¹⁰ Of the Yemenites Ben Gurion wrote in a letter to the army chief of staff, Yigal Yadin, 'that this people can be more easily absorbed on a cultural and economic level than other groups since the Yemenite likes to work and is not keen on urban life, but', Ben Gurion

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continued, 'on the other hand, he [the Yemenite] represents the greater problem since he is 2,000 years away from us and needs to be taught the most basic concepts of civilisation. The Yemenite treats his wife and children as a primitive man. His health is weak and his physical strength is feeble; he has no knowledge of basic sanitary matters . . . Ben Gurion demanded that Israel 'civilise' the Yemenite when he said in the Knesset that 'the aim of the government is to inculcate the Yemenite immigrant with Israeli mores to the extent where he forgets where he came from . . .'¹²

It is true that Western technology has not spread quickly in the Yemen, but the situation of the Jews there was better than that of the Ashkenazim who were living in the ghettos of Eastern Europe - see the works of the Ashkenazi writer Mendele Mokher Sefarim, particularly *The Travels of Benjamin III*. The Jews in the Yemen were goldsmiths, blacksmiths, cabinet-makers etc., whereas the Ashkenazim were subsisting in the ghettos as pedlars or small shopkeepers with many occupying jobs relating to religion.

In 1960 Ben Gurion declared that 'Jews in Middle Eastern countries have lived in backward and corrupt societies and lack education, independence and self-respect. The old generation cannot be changed fundamentally but we must imbue the new generations with lofty intellectual and moral values - the characteristics of those pioneers who built Israel. If we fail in this, God forbid, we will face the danger that the coming generation will turn Israel into a Levantine state.'¹³ Ben Gurion and other leaders demanded that more Ashkenazi Jews should be brought from Russia, Europe and America in order to 'improve' the ethnic composition of the population. Ben Gurion also said that 'we must resist the spirit of the Levant, for it corrupts individuals and communities.' In 1962, when it was suggested to him that another 'oriental' appointed as a minister, he replied angrily, 'Israel will not be a Levantine state.'¹⁴ 'Levantine' is a term of abuse used by Ashkenazi settlers against Middle Eastern people. It means an oriental person of no culture who adopts the external forms of Western civilisation such as Western costume.

Between 1947-1973 Ben Gurion and the Sephardi leader, Eliahu Eliachar, carried out a correspondence, with Eliachar stressing the importance of eradicating anti-Sephardi discrimination and the broadening of Sephardi representation in state institutions - 'for the sake of unity'. In his letters, Ben Gurion dodged the issue of discrimination, pointing out that Sephardim did not constitute a single community. He claimed that he did not feel he was an

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'Ashkenazi' but just a 'Jew'. Finally, Ben Gurion admitted in a letter dated 25 July 1973 the necessity to eliminate the 'gap' for the sake of unity'. These letters were published in the magazine *Shevet va'am* in 1973, and in Eliachar's book *Life with the Jews*. Ben Gurion had been the most important leader in all the Zionist institutions since the British Mandate, and in the 1948 war, in his capacity as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, he was primarily responsible for the expulsion of the Palestinians, the destruction of hundreds of villages and the expropriation of their property and land. He was also responsible for bringing over the Sephardi Jews from their respective countries and cramming them into the camps. Arthur Ruppin. A veteran Zionist leader who specialised in agricultural settlement. In 1913 he expressed his fears that Sephardi immigration might lower the cultural level of the country. He set aside a special role for the Sephardim in the economic and social infrastructure, which was 'to compete with the Arab workers', for the Sephardi Jew could 'carry out menial jobs for the same wages as an Arab labourer.'¹⁵

Golda Meir. Prime Minister and Minister of Labour. A leader of the Labour Party (previously Mapai): 'We in Israel need high-level immigrants, for the future of our economic infrastructure. We have immigrants from Morocco, Libya, Iran, Egypt and other [Middle Eastern] countries whose society is that of the sixteenth century.'¹⁶ Golda Meir made other racist statements (see chapter ten for her dispute with the Black Panthers).

Moshe Sharett (formerly Shertok). Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister, belonged to the Labour Party. Sharett said to the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vishinsky, that 'there are countries, and here I am talking about the countries of North Africa, whose Jews need not emigrate. It is not a question of the number of people, but their quality. Our concern in this state is to be pioneers, and we need people with a capacity to adapt . . . we cannot depend upon the Jews of Morocco to build the state on their own, for they are not qualified to do that . . . we need people who can withstand any difficulty and who possess the power of endurance. You know that when it comes to constructing the country at the present time, the Jews of Eastern Europe are the salt of the earth . . . '¹⁷ Abba Eban, from South Africa, a Labour Party leader. He referred to Sephardi immigration as the 'danger' threatening the Ashkenazim in Israel. He defined this danger by stating that Sephardi immigration 'may well force Israel's cultural level down to that of the surrounding countries.' Eban opposed the view that the

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Sephardim constituted a bridge to the Arab world, and added that the aim of Zionism was to inculcate a Western spirit amongst the Sephardim instead of allowing them to drag Israel toward an eastern culture.¹⁸

Motti Gur, former Chief of Staff and a Minister, a leader of the Labour Party: 'The oriental communities will not achieve the level of the Ashkenazim over the next 20-30 years. All the efforts expended on their behalf have only had partial results, and only a few of them have achieved high levels and then only after much difficulty ... no one blocks the road to progress for them. Unfortunately, it will take many years until the oriental communities, including the university graduates, reach a Western intellectual and technological level. It is a problem.'¹⁹ Motti Gur is correct if the policy of de-education continues, but the case of the Sephardim who emigrated to France and other Western countries belies Gur's argument. Eliahu Eliachar pointed out that the number of Sephardi professors at the Sorbonne was 80 and that 49 percent of Jewish students at the university were North African. General de Gaulle's surgeon was an Algerian Jew, Professor Abu al-Khair. The Baghdadi professor, Eli Kedourie, teaches at the University of London, as does Sami Zubeida, and in the United States the Baghdadi professor, Daniel Khizum, was well-known, and so on. Let us leave the views of Motti Gur and look at his values and methods. In his party's election campaign Gur declared at a well-attended meeting that 'we will screw the Sephardim like we screwed the Arabs.'²⁰ This shameless provocation was one of the factors which made Sephardim vote for Likud. Finally we should mention a statement of his that he was ready to withdraw from East Jerusalem in exchange for one million Russian Jews.²¹

Moshe Dayan, a leader of the Labour Party and the military establishment. He declared in 1974 as follows: 'the greatest problem facing Israel is that the number of Sephardim is greater than that of the European immigrants.' Those listening to this speech were white settlers in South Africa and understood his message with no need for further clarification.

THE STANCE OF THE ASHKENAZI PRESS

Since 1948 the Israeli press, which is completely Ashkenazi, has been carrying out a racist campaign against Sephardim, whose aim

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has been to rationalise the government's discriminatory policies. The press wrote that 'these (Sephardim) understand neither toilets nor toilet paper, and grow vegetables under their beds! They hide their babies in cartons to save them from the doctor and medication.' On 22 March 1951, the liberal newspaper, Ha'aretz, wrote about Iraqi transit camp inhabitants that 'many parents teach their children thievery and teachers are helpless in face of this phenomenon . . . a girl said "if I don't do as my parents say, they won't give me enough to eat and they'll beat me twice as hard" . . . the children drink wine on occasion, and their parents teach them to lie.'

In 1952 the same newspaper published a series of articles about the Tunisian,²² the Afghani and the Iranian²⁴ Jews. The articles highlighted their poverty, disease and disintegration and stated that many the Iranian Jews were opium and hashish addicts. There were syphilitics even amongst the children, since this was hereditary according to the newspaper. On 11 April 1952 the opening article of the newspaper carried the headline that immigration from 'backward' Arab countries constituted a danger to the existence of Israel as a modern state.

The newspaper, Yedi'ot Aharonot,²⁵ wrote that Sephardim were sub-standard, and that one should fear a lowering of standards amongst employees. On 23 February 1952 the same newspaper wrote that employers were demanding 'civilised' employees, 'not from the oriental communities'. We shall examine in detail the view of some journalists.

Aryeh Gelblum

The attacks reached their zenith in an article by Aryeh Gelblum in Ha'aretz on 22 April 1949. The following are some passages from it: ' . . . the immigrants belonged to a race previously unknown in Israel. It seems that there are differences between those who come from Tripoli (Libya), Morocco and Algeria. But I cannot say that I have managed to study the essence of this difference, if there be one. They say, for example, that the Libyans and Tunisians are "better", and that the Algerians and the Moroccans are "worse", but it is the same problem. Generally stated . . . we are faced with people which is extremely primitive and whose education is that of complete ignorance. More dangerous than that is that they are incapable of taking in anything spiritual. On the whole, their level only slighter better than the general level of Arabs, negroes or

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Berbers in their native countries. Accordingly, their level is below what we were used to in the past with the Arabs of the land of Israel. In contrast to the Yemenites, they have no roots in Judaism. They are completely at the whim of their instinctive and savage natures. Just how can we teach the Africans to queue properly for food in the dining room? There was a Bulgarian Jew who argued with them about queuing up, but one of the African Jews drew a knife and cut off his nose. More than once they have pounced upon officials of the Jewish Agency and beaten them up. In any case, the camp officials are in constant danger of attack. In the corners of Africans' dwellings in the camps you will find piles of filth, gambling, alcoholism and prostitution. Many of them suffer from eye, skin and sexual diseases, in addition to carrying out acts of assault and robbery. This anti-social group is dangerous and no one restrains them "properly" . . . not only luggage disappears but also equipment belonging to the camp. They robbed one of the camps I used to visit and emptied its general warehouse. In another camp, for example, there was a murder. The dead body was prepared for burial in a room near the hospital, and when the undertakers returned after the funeral they found that all their equipment had been stolen. The "Africans" in the army used to tell me, "when we finish the war, we'll make war on the Ashkenazim." In one camp they had a plan of rebellion which included overpowering the guards and killing all the employees of the Jewish Agency in the camp. When the police come, there sometimes occur disputes. But more important than all that, there is a basic truth of no less significance which is the lack of any readiness to conform to the life of the country, particularly their chronic indolence and their dislike for work. Almost without exception, they all lack a trade and hence they suffer from crippling poverty. They all tell you that they were "merchants" in Africa, but the truth is that they were itinerant vendors. And they all want to live in "town". What can we do with them? How can we absorb them? Have we thought what would happen to this state if they were its citizens? One day the rest of the Jews from the Arab world will immigrate! How would the state of Israel look and what kind of standard would it have if it had citizens like these? . . . '

This article is one of the most scurrilous attacks on the Sephardim and North Africa as a whole. I myself have met just such Moroccans but the overwhelming majority were kind and pleasant people in the full meaning of the words. I believe that Ashkenazi Jews, like Gelblum, have always hated the Moroccans because they stood up

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for themselves. The year before, the Ashkenazi high command sent thousands of Moroccan and other Sephardim to their deaths.

The Ashkenazi poet, Natan Alterman, renowned for his humanism and his love of peace, does not include the Sephardim in his affections. He has described them in his works as 'dwellers in dark caves and prison cells from which smoke arises.'²⁶ Even the socialist kibbutznik, Amos Oz, describes the Sephardi girls he played with as a child in Jerusalem as 'cruel, evil, poisonous oriental girls with a penetrating smell of peanuts, sweat, soap and halva, . . . whose big brothers are involved in the world of crime and football, and mothers and sisters go out with English soldiers.'²⁷ This is the image of Sephardi Jews in modern Hebrew literature which is created by Ashkenazi settlers.

Along with the Yemenites, the racial discrimination directed against the Moroccans was much worse than that faced by other Sephardim. All the vices which Gelblum rails against in his article arose in the terrible camps in France and Israel, and as for 'standing up for themselves', the General Director of the Ministry of Finance of the time, David Horovitz, told David Ben Gurion that 'the residents of the immigrant camps constitute a second nation, a rebellious people who think that we constitute the rich ruling elite. This is a matter which could easily flare up, and it would be dynamite for the Herut and Communist parties. In many ways the Sephardim have taken over from the Arabs and we have come to view them with the same superiority.'²⁸ David Horovitz was correct in what he foresaw, and we shall see in chapter ten how the Moroccans formed the beginnings of a resistance to Ashkenazi Zionist rule.

Kalman Katsnelson

Ashkenazi Zionist racism has reached its furthest development in the works of this right-wing Revisionist author. He justifies the great number of Ashkenazim in high positions in terms of their European superiority. Moreover, the Ashkenazim constitute a 'one nation', having overcome sectarian divisions. He then adds that the backwardness of the Sephardim is the main cause of their debased situation and discrimination against them by the Ashkenazim. The Sephardim would need 150 years to catch up.

The author asserts that Ashkenazim are capable of representing the Sephardim in parliament, and he is against the concept of equality. He emphasises that proportional representation in

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government for Sephardim would undermine the concept of 'a chosen people'. He states that this principle should also apply internally within the Jewish state. According to Katsnelson, Jews do not accept the concept of majority government, but a quality government. No intelligent Jew would submit to a Jewish government that was not elected on the basis of quality. He then reiterates that it is the chosen group of the chosen people who should rule. Finally he states that the 'Ashkenazi nation' is ready to admit the Sephardim, but he threatens that if the Sephardim insist on being separate, then the Ashkenazim would declare themselves a completely separate nation and would go to great lengths to strengthen themselves and their quality as well as treating the Sephardim as a separatist community.²⁹

The Sephardi magazine, *Shevet va'am*, published this article which contained these views so that Sephardi leaders could comment on it.

In 1964 Katsnelson brought out his well-known book, *The Ashkenazi Revolution*, in which he wrote that 'Sephardim constitute the majority, and their rate of natural increase is greater than that of the Ashkenazi community. They look like the Arabs, and think like them, and hence Ashkenazim must prevent them from uniting against the European minority . . . The superior Ashkenazi nation, which was ordained to govern, made a mistake in allowing inferior non-Ashkenazim to immigrate. The Ashkenazim must take up the reins of power immediately to prevent the deterioration of their rule and the disintegration of Israel.' The author then enumerates the necessary racist means to exclude the Sephardim from power and authority. Prof. Yehuda Nini claimed that this book is the one document which reflects the real stance of the Ashkenazim toward the Sephardim (see the last chapter).

The novelty here is that this author expressed these views in public and angered many Sephardim. There are other Ashkenazim who object to these views, both in theory and in practice, vis-a-vis the Palestinians, but who ignore the racial discrimination directed against the Sephardim since it serves their interests. And then there are exceptions.

Eliahu Eliachar, a Sephardi leader, calls Katsnelson a 'Jewish Nazi', but he confirms that 'there are many Ashkenazim who hold the same opinions but do not express them in writing.'³⁰ According to David Sitton, even some leaders of the state of Israel held Katsnelson's ideas.³¹

Dr Mosheh Almozolino commented on Katsnelson's article that

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Israeli democracy was a 'myth', for Sephardim were not properly represented in parliament. 'The concept of minority rule by the elite is Nazi, racist and undemocratic.' He compares the claims that 'the Ashkenazim form one nation which is prepared to absorb the Sephardim in its culture,' to attempts by Czarist Russia to eradicate the cultures of the small nations and Russify them. Dr Almozelino believes that this is exactly what the Ashkenazi Zionist media are doing. He stresses that the intellectuals, more than others, are resistant to 'Ashkenazi-Westernisation'. He wonders about Katsnelson's vow that Israel would not agree to be turned into an oriental state, 'What does it mean, they would not "agree"? Is it their state? Do they have the monopoly on Europe and its culture?' He goes on to warn that the Sephardim 'have suffered discrimination patiently, but they are at the end of their tether', and reminds the reader that 'the cause of the destruction of the Second Temple [i.e. the Second Jewish State] was internecine conflict.'³²

Yoel Markus

He justifies Ashkenazi 'superiority' over Sephardim in his article 'Ethnic Degeneration'³³ in which he wrote that the Ashkenazim had lived in Europe in the shade of European culture for a thousand years, whereas the Sephardim came from countries possessed of no culture. Markus appears to forget that the Ashkenazim lived in ghettos, taking little part in European culture until the nineteenth century and unable to speak the language of their European neighbours.

Amnon Dankner

This Ashkenazi journalist wrote two articles about Sephardim which were published in Ha'aretz during February 1983 and in which he described Sephardim as 'backward', 'Khomeinist', 'primitive' and 'living in cultural darkness'. He went on to praise the 'Western, humanistic and liberal' culture of the of the Ashkenazi settlers who, according to him, bear 'the heritage of Heine's poetry, Freud's psychoanalysis, and Einstein's physics.'

Dankner had not read the works of these intellectuals; if he had, he would realise that they would have opposed Zionist principles and the inhumane treatment of the Palestinians. Einstein, we should

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point out, was approached to immigrate and to be the President of Israel, but he refused.

This racist stance taken by the media and followed in education and literature has led to deepening discord and enmity. Ashkenazi discrimination is not covert, but is open and can be encountered in the workplace, the army, on the bus or in the street. Ashkenazi vocabulary is replete with expressions of contempt and derision for Sephardim (and Palestinians and Arabs as a whole), and Ashkenazim use the word 'Arab' as an insult against Sephardim or to describe anything in a derogatory manner.

If peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours comes about, how will the Arabs manage to live and work on a day to day basis with such arrogance? Even the 'Leftist Progressives' amongst the Ashkenazim take a very paternalistic attitude toward the Palestinians.

VIEWS OF THE SOCIOLOGISTS

1. The School of Modernism

This school is headed by S. N. Eisenstadt and his students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Their theory centres on American 'functionalism' which divides mankind into two parts: the progressive which is the Western world, and the backward traditional which is the Third World. These social scientists say that the cause of the gulf between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim is not racial discrimination, but the backwardness of the Sephardim. They believe that, in order to overcome this gulf, Sephardim must discard their Middle Eastern heritage and accept Ashkenazi culture.

It is important to note that the technological level and development of economic skills in the ghettos of Eastern Europe was certainly no better than that of the Jews who came from Beirut, Alexandria, Baghdad and other urban Middle Eastern centres. Moreover, the acquisition of higher education does not help Sephardim to achieve equality in Israel.

In contrast to the prophecies of the school of 'Modernism', the second and third generation Sephardim, who were born in modern and progressive Israel and study in its schools, have suffered a decrease in their economic and educational standards in comparison to their fathers who came from the Arab world.

2. The School of Ethnic Pluralism

This is also an American school, headed in Israel by Yohanan Peres and Sammy Smootha. Their theory is that most nations consist of more than one group, and that all communities participate together in the various fields of national life such as the economy and politics, but they live apart in the areas of the family, religion and culture. Smootha believes that the differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim in Israel are crumbling and that some progress is being made toward integration. Smootha supports the School of Modernism in this respect, but he stipulates that there must also be a change in government policy. He adds that a halt in the flow of money from abroad and an end to the state of war would cause a sectarian crisis.

I believe that social polarisation contradicts these two theories (see chapter nine).

3. The View of the 'Humanists'

In 1951 the Israeli magazine, Megamot, approached five Ashkenazi staff professors from the Hebrew University to discuss the problem of the Ashkenazi/Sephardi gulf in a series of articles. The professors were Akiva Ernst Simon, Natan Rotstreich, Meshulam Grul, Yosef Ben David (Gross) and Karl Frankenstein.

Karl Frankenstein wrote: 'We must discuss the primitive mentality of many of the immigrants from various countries.' His colleagues agreed with this, and he then suggested that in order to understand the Sephardi mentality it had to be compared with that of children, the mentally retarded or psychotics. Yosef Gross believed that the Sephardim were 'mentally backward' and suffered from a 'defective development of their ego'. They discussed the 'essence of primitivism'.

But Professor Simon, who was one of the leaders of 'Ihud', an organisation that fought for Arab-Jewish cooperation at the time of the British Mandate, warned against imposing a foreign culture on the Sephardim, since that would lead to a state of both social and moral alienation. He emphasised the positive sides of the 'primitive mentality', such as 'religion and prayers, emotional reaction to goodness and beauty, and genuine cordiality in personal relations - these are all positive attributes which the Sephardim possess in contrast to the Ashkenazim.'

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These articles crystalised Ashkenazi unanimity: some of them were paternalistic and others harboured feelings of superiority or contempt for Sephardim. They also brought out the fear that there was a danger stalking Ashkenazi culture. The participants in this debate expressed the view that the 'absorption' of the Sephardim was a 'cultural necessity', which aimed to inculcate Sephardim with western values in the hope of integrating them into Ashkenazi society.

Finally, Professor Simon warned that 'the absorption of hundreds of thousands with "primitive" mentalities would split society into two camps, with the one distinguished by its feelings of superiority and the other by its inferiority.'³⁴

4. The 'Mahbarot lemehkar ulevikoret' Group

This is a progressive Ashkenazi group which grew up around Dr Shlomo Swirski, a professor at the University of Haifa, and included Deborah Bernstein and Sarah Katsir. It started publishing 'files' about the conditions of the Palestinians and Sephardim in 1948, and hence its name - 'Research and Criticism Files'. Even though they did not use expressions such as 'discrimination' and 'racism', they collected important facts and figures on these matters. They ignored the historical perspective and missed an important point, which is that relations between the settler community and the Sephardim did not start in 1948 but had been developing since the beginning of Zionist colonisation. They create the impression that the conflict is between the 'host country' (i.e. the foreign settlers) and the 'immigrants' (i.e. the native Jews of Palestine and the neighbouring countries). They also overlooked the cultural and political suppression carried out by the establishment.

Swirski and Bernstein wrote that 'even good intentions cannot alter the gulf which has occurred.'³⁵ Anyone who has lived in Palestine since the British Mandate knows that the intentions of the Ashkenazi settlers were never good toward the natives, whether they were Palestinians or Sephardim. In the third part of his book,³⁶ Swirski believes that the extension of public services will not create equality or change the 'division of labour' in society. Public services actually deepen and cement the gulf for most of those who benefit from them are Ashkenazim.

As for setting up a Sephardi political party, he says that even if they manage to form an 'oriental' government, it would face strong

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opposition from the Ashkenazi establishment, such as the wealthy, the Histadrut leadership and the state apparatus. He adds that the Ashkenazi parties have strong financial backing from Histadrut concerns, the banks, and industry etc, and this is the source of their power, which is much more important than the parliamentary political organizations which represent them. Therefore, Sephardi political organization will remain without any financial footing and, according to Swirski, will thus not be able to effect any change in the social infrastructure of the country.

It does not occur to Swirski that an 'oriental' government might make peace with the Palestinian people, redistribute land for the benefit of its inhabitants and reorganise the economy to benefit the underprivileged - as happened in Algeria and Zimbabwe.

Swirski points out that even Sephardi uprisings, such as that at Wadi al-Salib in Haifa and in Jerusalem with the Black Panthers, will end up with promises, the improvement of services, the setting up of committees of enquiry, the expansion of the welfare budget and the absorption of some leaders. But the division of labour and the social structure will not change.

Swirski then recommends setting up an economic and organisational infrastructure under Sephardi governance, centred on the trade unions and places of residence, on the assumption that this will have an effect on the parliamentary and political level, enabling the Sephardim to participate in all strategic departments of the state.

The author also suggests that cooperatives be set up to run a slum improvement programme and the participation of Sephardim in ownership and control of the firms in development towns. He states that these cooperatives could wield enough economic influence to pressurise the government and to help ameliorate conditions in the Sephardi development towns. All the agricultural moshavim inhabited by Sephardim could form a federation either inside or outside the general moshav movement - then all these establishments and moshavim could unite in a national federation. On the subject of the Histadrut, the author suggests that the Sephardi majority change the institutions of the Histadrut, or secede from it and set up their own unions to work with the Arabs and the Ashkenazim. Swirski believes that in the slum districts teachers and social workers from the Sephardi community should be appointed, the school syllabus should be changed to revive Sephardi culture, and that some form of community service must be set up to deal with the problems of the Sephardim. Swirski claims that

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an 'oriental' economic and organizational foundation would represent a step forward not only toward ameliorating the conditions of Sephardim, but also toward renewing the original aspirations of the Zionist movement, that is, to create a society founded on 'justice and equality'. The author presents no proof to support his last claim.

Unlike the Communists and Trotskyists, the author says of the remark that the Sephardi struggle should be a general 'class struggle', that the class struggle in Israel cannot be compared to the class struggle in Britain, for example, where the bourgeoisie and the workers are from the same ethnic background. Economic development in Israel has not created a general class division but a division of labour along ethnic community lines. For this reason the 'class' struggle is not that of simple workers but of Sephardim since the bourgeoisie is Ashkenazi and the proletariat is Sephardi. This also applies to the Arab workers who are not like workers in Europe since they have been proletarianised by the policy of land confiscation and the non-development of the Arab areas, and accordingly theirs must be a national struggle. The Ashkenazi workers will not effect this struggle since they receive preferential wages. The left-wing parties do not defend the rights of the down-trodden Sephardim since they are taken up with nationalist matters. He does not mention that the parties, being Ashkenazi, benefit from ethnic discrimination - he only says that this merits a separate study.

Swirski warns that the Ashkenazi establishment might try to foil any plan to establish a Sephardi economic and organizational infrastructure by buying out Sephardi activists. This is exactly what has been happening since the beginning of Ashkenazi settlement. In addition to oppression, a policy of dismissals and impoverishment. Professor Swirski lives within the University of Haifa, does not experience this problem, and is unaware that conditions are much worse than he imagines. Even though he deconstructs many myths in his work, he is still influenced by the Zionist myth that the gulf between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim is incompatible with the aspirations of the Zionist movement which aimed to establish 'a new Jewish society to be an example to the nations' - according to his own words.³⁷ I do not wish to refute this opinion by quoting the pronouncements of the Zionist bourgeoisie, right-wingers or capitalists, but I shall quote Ber Borochoy (1881-1917) the ideological father of the Zionist Marxist Mapam Party: 'The foundation upon which our future society will be built, will be as follows: healthy Sephardi or Yemenite labourers who can be made

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into a proletariat, and a large number of diggers, camel-drivers and porters.' Swirski's greatest contribution has been his analysis of the ethnic division of labour in Israel.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES' POSITIONS

The Ashkenazi Zionist parties - from the far left to the far right - form the ruling establishment in the state, private capital, the nationalised industries, the Histadrut and the World Zionist Organisation.

Fundamentally there are only tactical differences between the parties on the Palestinian issue or with regard to the Arab world and Sephardim.

The Zionist parties try to ignore the Sephardi problem since they believe that any discussion of the issue could shatter the 'unity of the people'. The official line is that there exist neither a problem nor discrimination, and that if there be a gulf, it is a transient phenomenon. In the lead-up to elections, the parties co-opt some workers from the ranks of the Sephardim, in the hope of winning Sephardi votes with promises. After the elections, everything reverts to normal.

We must point out, in this regard, that the right-wing nationalist Herut Party has exploited the hardships of the Sephardim by condemning discrimination. Some members have also treated Sephardim humanely, for reasons of national unity. This party, more than any other, has opened the doors to party advancement to the Sephardim, except for ministerial and parliamentary positions, which have remained mostly the preserve of Ashkenazim. The bitter struggle in 1986, between Polish Yitzhak Shamir and Moroccan David Levi, was not a personal struggle but one between two ethnic factions within the party. This does not mean that the Sephardi faction represents the interests of the Sephardim. In any case, the main reason why almost half of the Sephardi electorate voted for Menahem Begin in 1977 was the policy of discrimination followed by the Labour Party since 1948.

The Israeli Communist party wins 40 percent of the Palestinian vote inside the Israel of 1948's borders for, until the later emergence of Progressive List, it was the only party to represent the interests of the Palestinian people inside Israel. Arabs constituted more than 50 percent of the party cadres and members, and the rest were, and still are Ashkenazim. The Communist Party won a very small

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portion (perhaps 2 percent) of the Jewish vote, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Ashkenazim do not vote for the party for a number of reasons including its proclaimed anti-Zionism, and pro-Palestinian and pro-Soviet stance.

One can well wonder, why do the down-trodden amongst the Sephardim not vote for the Communist Party which has always defended them? We should consider the following reasons.

Whereas the Communist Party defends the Palestinians as a people and a working class simultaneously, it defends the Sephardim only as workers. The communist press which supports the slum areas, the development towns, the unemployed, etc., does not make any reference to them as an ethnic community suffering from racial discrimination. In the party newspaper, *Zu Haderekh*, of 19 March 1986, in which are described the conditions of the agricultural moshavim, the communists wrote that the rich moshavim might confiscate the property of the poor moshavim, but they did not mention that the rich moshavim were in fact Ashkenazi moshavim controlling most of the fertile land, whereas the poor moshavim were the ones with no economic foundation, into which the Sephardim had been crammed.

The communists ignore the ordeal of the educated and middle-class Sephardim, because they cannot fit them into the artificial mould of 'the working class'.

However, the Sephardim are not a 'working class', and they do not desire to be. The Sephardim who immigrated from the Middle East were merchants, professionals and artisans. The Sephardim who have become a working class in Israel were forced into it. They are not exploited by abstract capital, but by alien capitalists. According to Swirski, the situation in Britain, where the workers and the employers constitute the same ethnic group, does not apply to South Africa or Israel. If it were a class issue in Israel, the conditions of Ashkenazi workers would be comparable to those of the Sephardim.

The people who governed the Sephardim (and the Palestinians) and who destroyed them economically, socially and culturally from 1948 until 1977, were not capitalist but members of the Socialist Labour Party. During this period the conditions of the Ashkenazi workers improved at the expense of the Sephardim and the Palestinian people. Ashkenazi kibbutzim, more than businessmen, exploit Sephardim, and discrimination in state and Histadrut industrial projects is worse than that in the private sector. Unfortunately this situation is what pushed many Sephardim into

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joining the Likud.

The Sephardim are not just fighting for food, drink, clothing and housing, but against the extirpation of their culture. A crude theory of 'class struggle' excludes this.

On 14 January 1981 a Communist Party leader published an article, signed 'a Brother', in the newspaper Zu Haderekh. The 'Brother' ascribed Sephardi under-representation in the political apparatus to a lack of Sephardi capital, for, according to him, 'Israel is a bourgeois dictatorship.' If this explanation were correct, the Ashkenazi Labour Party would not have ruled Israel from 1948-1977. The 'Brother' tries, indirectly, to whitewash Israeli discrimination, by pointing out that discrimination in Israel is not enshrined in the law, as it is in South Africa (as if illegal discrimination is preferable . . .) The only concession which this party makes to the Sephardi community is the inclusion of four words in its lengthy resolutions: 'opposed to ethnic discrimination.'

From time to time, the communist press mentions that there are 'oriental communities' in addition to 'the working class', and compares them to 'Israeli society' (i.e. the Ashkenazim). This also means that the Communist Party, just like the other parties of the Zionist establishment, does not recognise the cultural unity of the Sephardim, just as Zionism does not recognise the unity of the Arab nation but supports Arab centrifugalism.

When Emil Habibi, a communist leader, was asked, at a meeting he convened in London a few years ago, about the Sephardim in Israel, he refused to answer, claiming that he was not knowledgeable on the subject! Which other communist leader is not knowledgeable about 80 percent of the 'working class' in his country?

When the president of the state of Israel attended the Communist Party Conference which was held in 1986, he praised the party for its defence of the 'foundations of the state of Israel'.

50 percent of the members of the Central Committee of the Israeli Communist Party are Palestinians, and 50 percent are Ashkenazi settlers. The same composition exists throughout the party apparatus, and means that the party institutions do not represent Sephardim.

THE STANCE OF THE ASHKENAZI FAR LEFT

In the seventies, the Ashkenazi far left supported the struggle of the Sephardim and helped the Black Panthers, but when they failed

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to dominate them they desisted. Subsequently some leftist extremists started to propagate a spirit of discord between Palestinian Arabs and the Sephardim, accusing the Sephardim of fascism, racism and hostility to the Arabs. This stance effectively prevents any solidarity between the two down-trodden communities and helps the Zionist establishment and the secret police.

THE KNESSET AND RACISM

On 26 May 1982 the Knesset rejected a resolution which would outlaw discrimination, incitement, the publication of hatred and the committing of acts of violence for racial or religious reasons. Voting against this resolution were the parties of the government coalition and the opposition Labour Party. The Marxist Zionist Mapam Party did not attend this session.

In 1985, a parliamentary majority voted against a similar resolution on the basis that there was no need for such a law, since 'Israel is not racist.'

Finally, in May 1985 the Knesset did pass a law against racial incitement alone, but reserved the right of prosecution solely to the state and not to the persons involved. Racial discrimination carried out by the government or Zionist groups or individuals remained, as previously, not against the law. It is true that the Israeli declaration of independence in 1948 promised the citizens of the country equality, regardless of origin, religion or sex, etc., but this declaration has never been considered as the law and the Knesset has never accepted it as one of the state's precepts.

THE UN RESOLUTION 1976

It was due to the racist nature of the Zionist state of Israel that the General Assembly of the United Nations declared on November 10 1976 that 'Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.' The Moroccan Jew, Mikha'il al-Baz has said that 'this internal colonialism over Sephardim, which is based on Jewish ideology, has become legal owing to ongoing ethno-centricity. In this context, the emergence of a Sephardi ethnicity indicates the rejection of an inadequate Israeli identity and could become the catalyst for the formation of a society in which Arab and Jewish citizens are equal.'⁴⁰

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CHAPTER NINE

Economic Development, Exploitation And Polarisation

We have seen in chapter five how the Zionist establishment made a 'working class' of 750,000 Sephardim from countries in the Middle East and North Africa in its camps of various kinds. In this chapter, I shall explain how both 'Socialist' and capitalist Ashkenazi Israel exploited them for the sake of its economic development and political domination and go on to the social polarisation which has resulted from this policy.

1. INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

During the British Mandate, Zionist industry was under-developed. It had a small workforce and market and lacked investment and modern equipment. Its small factories concentrated in the main on assembling imported components. After the founding of the state of Israel, the Arab-Islamic countries furnished Israel with hundreds of thousands of workers, and it is these people, in addition to those who came from the socialist countries, who expanded the consumer market. This mass immigration helped Israel to import funds in the form of Jewish donations, American grants and German reparations, etc. Thus Israel was provided with all the necessary conditions for rapid economic development: a work force, funds and a consumer market.

The percentage of the development budget of the government's budget invested by the government in industry was as follows: 1948-1953 11 percent 1954-1955 16 percent

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1956-1959 19 percent

Between 1955-1958 17.5 percent of imported machinery came from Germany as reparations,¹ and in 1958 the Bank for Economic Development was founded.

As a result of this economic policy, between 1959-1965 the number of workers in industry averaged 25 percent of the total work force. Unemployment went down from 9 percent in the fifties to 4 percent starting from 1961. The basic catalyst for this speedy development was access to cheap labour, which helped business owners to reap massive profits. Between 1958-1963, which was a period of speedy industrialisation, the distance between top and bottom incomes widened considerably.²

Those who benefitted from the state policy of industrialisation were private and Histadrut projects which were controlled by Ashkenazi settlers and which received enormous sums of state money in the form of low-interest loans, paid low taxes and enjoyed various financial inducements, not to mention access to armies of cheap labour.

By dint of this industrial development a new Ashkenazi class came into being - a service stratum of engineers, managers and university teachers who trained and taught the specialists, the marketing people and bankers, etc. By 1975 this class formed 32.4 percent of the total Ashkenazi work force (compared with only 11.8 percent Sephardim who were second-grade compared to Ashkenazi officials and managers). This gulf between the ethnic groups widened in the generation of those born in Palestine, with 42 percent Ashkenazim and only 12.5 percent Sephardim.³ Clearly, this accelerated industrialisation enabled relatively lowly Ashkenazim to ascend the socio-economic ladder on the backs of the Sephardim.

The gulf in the working class can be seen in the following figures: 25.5 percent of Ashkenazim work as labourers (generally skilled), and 42.1 percent of Sephardim (generally unskilled). The gap is greater among the generation born in Palestine: 17.4 percent Ashkenazim and 42.4 percent Sephardim.⁴ Even the Sephardim who have managed to scale the Ashkenazi fortress and gain government positions only form a servile sector in the ruling Ashkenazi aristocracy.

By 1965 there were 43,750 workers in the textile industry, that is, double the number of 1955, and this caused production to rise by 250 percent.⁵ The value of exports went up from \$5.7 million to \$46.6 million over the same period.⁶

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The establishment favoured the textile industry because of the low investment needed for its development, the large profits it produced and the existence of a proletariat in the development towns such as Dimona, Kiryat Shemoneh, Ofakim and Kiryat Gad, etc.

The number of workers in the clothing industry went up from 13,490 in 1961 to 30,590 in 1972. The number of Sephardi workers in this industry went up four times whereas the number of Ashkenazim only went up by 170 percent.⁷ Wages were less than the national average and Sephardim had leadership positions in only 46 out of 334 factories. All the large factories were controlled by Ashkenazi settlers.⁸

There were 168 metal factories with more than 80 employees, whereas there had only been 28 prior to the founding of Israel.⁹ Most of the metal factories were controlled by Ashkenazi companies such as Kur, Klal, the Investment Company of Bank Discount, etc. Only 17 of the 170 metal factories employing more than 80 people were controlled by Sephardim and these were effectively subsidiaries of the large firms.¹⁰

Ashkenazi would-be entrepreneurs were actively assisted by the state. At the end of the sixties, the government gave the owners of the diamond industry easy low interest loans for up to 80 percent of the cost of their raw materials and 90 percent of exports costs and helped them to find and train their work force. Subsequently profits went up 360 times (1949-1970) and production went up from I£2 million to I£700 million over the same period, that is 350 times and the number of workers rose from 800 to 9,500.¹¹ Ashkenazi capitalism has been massively state-aided.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Mass immigration led to the development of the construction industry to the extent where 18-19 percent of the gross national product was invested in it, compared to 9-13 percent in Western Europe in the period 1956-1965. 10 percent of the work force was involved in construction and new housing units increased from 843,000m² to 3,373,000m² over the period 1949-1962.¹²

This branch of the economy can be divided into two parts: the public sector, that is housing built by the state, local authorities and Zionist agencies; and the private sector, that is housing built by

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private capital. Naturally, private capital built better and much more spacious housing, which was specifically for privileged new immigrants. The public sector built shoddy, small dwellings for Sephardim, even though they had much larger families than the Ashkenazim. The flats allotted to Sephardim had a ground area of between 45 and 61m² over the period 1955-1965, whereas an Ashkenazi family was allotted between 75-92m².¹³

Additionally, the Histadrut undertook the construction of 70,000 luxury dwellings for Ashkenazim¹⁴ in the central districts of the country. Sephardi housing was constructed in remote areas and they had to pay a 65 percent cash deposit with the remainder to be paid over instalments carrying a high interest rate. Moreover, in these remote districts the Sephardim had to pay an additional sum of 22 percent for roads, the development of neighbouring lands, the construction of a sewer system and an electricity network. The work force used in this construction activity was made up overwhelmingly of Sephardim and Palestinians, particularly in the unskilled jobs (that is, 'black work'). Exploitation in this field was particularly ugly, since the labourers worked intermittently and were considered 'non-permanent'. Even Solel Boneh, the Histadrut company, employed 70-80 percent of its construction labour on a non-permanent basis and paid them less than Ashkenazim who worked in Histadrut cooperative industry. Accordingly, the Histadrut gained greater profits from construction than from all other branches of production, particularly cooperative industry (36 percent against 11.5 percent from cooperative industry).

Avraham Cohen stated that state sector and Histadrut construction in 1960 produced returns of 30-35 percent profit compared to 60 percent in the private sector.¹⁵ One of the phenomena of economic development in this area was the emergence of the Histadrut company, Solel Boneh, as a powerful force - not only in Israel but also in third world countries - extending Israeli influence and building military bases for the Americans in Turkey and elsewhere. In 1948 the turnover of this company was I£5 million and by 1953 it was I£60 million. In 1958 the Kur company, which supplies South Africa with arms, broke away from Solel Boneh.

Construction activity was paralleled by the emergence of new banks to form a link between the government housing companies and the residents of the new housing developments. One of these banks is the Mishkanta'ot Leshikun Bank (Mortgage Bank) which the Histadrut set up in 1951. Banking activity expanded along with

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their funds and profits - all under Ashkenazi control. We must also add that industrial development, particularly in the metals industries, helped the development of the military armaments industry to the extent that Israel is now a major arms-exporting country, particularly to countries where Israeli weaponry has killed many innocents.

3. AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Mass immigration necessitated increased food production. Citrus production used 250,000 dunums in 1945, which figure rose to 430,000 dunums by 1978, whereas other agricultural lands rose from 1,650 million dunums in 1948 to 4,110 million dunums in 1958. These figures include expropriated Arab lands, that is the lands of the refugees and also the Palestinians who remained in Israel. During this period, vegetable production went up 330 percent, egg production by 240 percent, milk by 330 percent and wheat by 340 percent, and the number of tractors rose by 510 percent. This development took place at a time when the population doubled in size. (Israeli sources ignore the fact that this population increase was equal to the number of Palestinians expelled from their homes.) Moreover, the government undertook irrigation and afforestation works, soil improvement, the revival of the citrus industry and the exploitation of Arab lands.

The value of agricultural production went up from I£274.2 million in 1949 to I£586.5 million over the following five years, and then doubled again by 1959. Exports went up from \$18 million in 1949 to \$35 million in 1964. Investment in agriculture went up 300 percent between 1948-1965, and Israel thus managed to supply its inhabitants with the necessary vegetables, and to develop the citrus and industrial agricultural produce as well as its livestock and poultry industries. Between 1958-1960, the new moshavim produced approximately 60 percent of total vegetable production, 42 percent of fodder, 46 percent of sugar cane and pistachio, 35 percent of milk production, and 25 percent of poultry products. All other production took place on the rich 'veteran' settlements which used low-paid Sephardim and Palestinians to expand their production and profits, particularly for the seasonal work involved in fruit-picking and the agricultural products used for industry, such as cotton. The citrus workers were often paid 'emergency wages'. These workers earned I£28 per month, compared to I£40

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for a construction worker, and I£41 for a factory worker. Profits from citrus-growing multiplied, as a result of state support and the modern equipment which Israel had received American loans to buy. Between 1956-1959 the turnover per dunum was I£450 of which I£210 was profit. The children of the Palestinians and Sephardim who worked on these plantation often went hungry. I would go so far as to say that seasonal work in agriculture was the greatest dividing factor between the Ashkenazi oppressor and the Palestinian and Sephardi underclass.

In addition to the citrus industry, exploitation was also widespread in the cultivation of commodities, such as cotton, sugar and olives - in spite of state support paid to the owners of these businesses.

Agriculture helped the state budget. Cotton, for example, was first cultivated in 1954. After only 10 years the area of land dedicated to cotton was 129,500 dunums, production reached almost 20,000 tons, and the profit was I£92 per dunum. Sugar cane and pistachio cultivation developed along the same lines, using modern machinery, and cheap labour, particularly on the Ashkenazi kibbutzim.

In addition, the Ministry of Labour used Sephardim for irrigation and afforestation works and to drain Lake Hula, which gave the kibbutzim 40,000 extra dunums, and for which works the government paid 'emergency wages'.

Agricultural development was paralleled by the expansion of various services such as marketing (the Tnuva and Ha-mashbir companies), export projects, industries linked with agriculture, banks and financial institutions. All the former, along with the employers, earned huge profits.¹⁶

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT APPARATUS

Mass immigration together with its high birth rate, necessitated the expansion of the government apparatus. This enabled the Ashkenazi settlers to better themselves and occupy the highest positions of the state, including the government, the army, the Histadrut and the Jewish Agency. In addition, the poverty of the Sephardim necessitated the establishment of welfare institutions and prisons to deal with their social and economic problems. Most of the officials of these institutions were members of the settler community, and

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the situation was the same in education where the number of students rose from 140,000 pupils in 1948 to 540,000 in 1958.¹⁷ This created thousands of well-paid jobs for the Ashkenazi settlers (see chapters six and seven). Dispersal, the destruction of families and traditions and the degrading life in the camps, unemployment and poverty all led to disaffection among the young, prostitution, drug addiction, divorce, crime and other social problems. 90 percent of those in need of welfare services are Sephardim, and 90 percent of the welfare officers are Ashkenazim!

Israel set up four special educational institutes in the universities to train social workers. Instructors were appointed, which meant more jobs for Ashkenazi intellectuals and social workers who were inculcated with reactionary and discriminatory social theories.

Consequently, four distinct social groups came into existence in Israel. They are:

1. The state apparatus, which includes the government, the Histadrut, the army and the Jewish Agency.
2. Business owners and bankers.
3. Engineers, professionals and skilled workers.
4. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers, the prison population, the unemployed, the marginal sub-cultures, etc.

The first three groups are in essence the Ashkenazi community, whereas the lowest group is in the main the Middle Easterners -that is, the Sephardim and their Palestinian brethren. In every Israeli establishment the whites are on top, with very few exceptions. Mass immigration from the Middle East (and Eastern Europe) helped the Ashkenazim to secure their economic, political and military position.

In a lecture he gave to soldiers on how to suppress the identity of the Arabs in the occupied territories, the American (Ashkenazi) officer who specialised in psychological warfare said, 'The Arabs have to be trained the way a man trains a dog.' When an Ashkenazi soldier asked him if this was also applicable to the Sephardim who had come from Arab countries, the officer replied, 'Yes! Most of them are like the Arabs, but if we do our utmost, many real Jews will come from the United States.'¹⁸

ELIACHAR'S WARNING

Zionist history in Palestine is characterised by provocation,

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polarisation and explosion. This does not apply solely to relations between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim but also to those with the Palestinians. The struggle of the Palestinians started with the Ashkenazim only, but it was escalated to become a general Jewish/Arab schism, and thence an international quarrel with the threat of nuclear war.

The harsh conditions for Sephardim in the Zionist camps and the aforementioned speedy economic developments, led to a quickening of ethnic polarisation. This was not a post-1948 phenomenon, but had been in existence since the very beginning of the Ashkenazi Zionist presence in Palestine, as we have described in previous chapters.

On 30 November 1941, the greatest intellectual of the Zionist labour movement, Berl Katsnelson, wrote in Hapo'el Hatzar¹⁹ that 'the Ashkenazi workers organized within the Histadrut [the General Trade Union Federation] form a quasi-aristocracy in comparison to the Sephardi worker who lives on the fringes of the Histadrut. This deprived class will one day rise up against the Histadrut if its conditions are not improved.' Eliahu Eliachar, the leader of the Jerusalem Sephardim, quoted this statement (of Katsnelson), but commented that since its publication the conditions of Sephardim had become ten times worse.²⁰

In his article,²¹ Eliachar wrote that 'anyone can absorb Western technology if he is given the opportunity, as Sephardi intellectuals have proved.' Eliachar dramatically accused the Zionist establishment and its agents within the Sephardi community of being responsible for the spread of misery and suffering, starting each sentence with the words 'I accuse.'

Eliachar blames the Ashkenazi leaders who have wasted millions of the state's funds instead of using them to solve economic problems such as poverty and housing. He apportions blame for the spread of prostitution to Sephardi girls, pointing out that there are more than 200 of them. He emphasises that prostitution was non-existent amongst Sephardim before they came to Israel. He mentions that he asked the Ministry of Finance for a credit of I£30 million to improve housing conditions, but the Ministry turned down the request. He adds that the leaders have built palaces for themselves instead of granting free secondary and university education.

Eliachar goes on to say that whereas the state encourages Sephardi families to have many children, it neither helps them nor invests more than a paltry percentage of its I£10 billion annual budget in

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this. At the same time, the state uses the children from these families for compulsory military service. Representatives of Israel abroad make much of the miserable conditions of the Sephardi families to raise funds for the state. Eliachar criticises Sephardim who have accepted token or honorary positions in government, but who do not help their own community, and have objected to the establishment of a non-political organization to defend Sephardi rights.

Eliachar enumerates the organisations which Sephardim have set up in Palestine since the British Mandate, and ascribes to the Zionist establishment the failure of them all and its strengthening of narrow sectarian, class and party hegemony which has led to the non-representation of Sephardim in the higher institutions of the state, with the exception of the Minister of Police, Bekhor Shitrit, who represented the Mapai Party.

Eliachar warns that the continued state of poverty and grievances amongst the Sephardim represent a danger to the security of the state, for most of the army is made up of Sephardim. He demands the establishment of an organization to work on bridging the gap between the communities. He warns that 'in the future, there could well arise a group of demagogues bent on inciting the down-trodden Sephardi masses.' Nilly Arkin warns that poverty, cultural backwardness and degrading living conditions would affect the military capability of the young generation and that those children might constitute a danger for Israel in the future.

We should draw the reader's attention to the fact that Israeli militarism has reached a point where one cannot speak of right and wrong, but only in terms of 'security'. Those who have tried to bring up the subject of discrimination have been labelled traitors, and only the euphemism 'gap' is used to hint at the great divide.

BEGIN AND THE SLUM REHABILITATION PROJECT

When the state of Israel came into existence in 1948, Begin was the leader of a small right-wing party called Herut (Freedom). Begin knew that he would only be able to defeat the 'Labour' establishment which had governed the settler community for many years by exploiting the anger of the Sephardim. He promised to set up a new system built upon total ethnic equality, not only in the state but within his party also (this party together with business interests

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and liberals formed a right-wing bloc called Likud). Begin spread the fiction that he was 'Moroccan' whereas he was in fact Polish, having fled at the beginning of the Second World War from the Polish nationalist army to Palestine where he led the Irgun. In 1977, Begin finally managed to win a large portion of the Sephardi vote because of his calls for equality - and not because of his anti-Arab policy. He formed the first right-wing government (the Labour government had been no less hostile to the Arabs than Begin, being the government which had expelled the Palestinian people, destroyed hundreds of Arab villages and towns, expropriated the lands and property of the Arabs in 1948 and annexed a large part of the Palestinian territories (according to United Nations declarations), invaded Sinai in 1956 and occupied the West Bank, Sinai and the Golan in 1967 etc.).

In 1978 Begin started a new programme to 'improve the people's conditions', as he had promised. This programme was called the 'Slum Rehabilitation Project'. It took in 169 slum areas, including the Black Belt areas of the large cities, the development towns and the bankrupt 'cooperative' villages. Ha'aretz wrote on 5 January 1979 that the number of inhabitants in these areas was 300,000 and that \$1.2 million dollars had been set aside for the first stage of the project. Begin's government agreed to match the contributions of American Jews to this project.

It soon emerged that the project was a complete failure. It had only tidied up a few sites in the slum districts, and most of those who had benefitted from the project were Ashkenazim.

This came about because the government refused to allow the Sephardim involved to elect their own committees to run the project and to spend the funds on the necessary housing, jobs and education, etc. The government instead set up an enormous bureaucracy of Ashkenazi officials co-opted from various authorities, such as the central government, local authorities, the Jewish Agency, etc. Amongst these committees were a Ministerial Committee, a Civil Service Committee, with a Project Comptroller in the Prime Minister's Office, a Project Director in the Jewish Agency and a Project Director in the Ministry of Labour and Social Services. On the local level there was participation by the following committees and individuals: Director of the Steering Committee, Director of Construction and Housing, municipal employees, and civil servants from various districts who dealt with matters of housing, education, labour and health. The central government supplied experts in geography, sociology and engineering, and the Amidar and Amigur

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Housing Companies played an active role.

When these bureaucracies became aware of the vast sums of money and the political influence which the money brought with it, a mighty struggle broke out amongst the various agencies vying to control the project.

Out of I£400 million budgeted for 1978, I£200 million were set aside for public buildings, and another sum to pay the salaries of Ashkenazi experts. Only a small sum was set aside for services to the slum districts.²³

The Israeli press reported that 60 percent of the project's funds were paid out as salaries to the army of Ashkenazi officials, and that most of the remaining funds were spent on sprucing up the slum districts with public buildings, and parks to impress foreign visitors, instead of being spent on building residential units, ameliorating living conditions and fighting unemployment, delinquency, crime and disaffection.

The local authorities, which are controlled by the Ashkenazim, started to spend more and more on Ashkenazi neighbourhoods, at the expense of municipal services to the poor districts. The municipalities thus managed indirectly to exploit the project to improve Ashkenazi areas. The residents of Shekhunat Hatikvah in Tel Aviv for example say that the Art College which was set up in the district used up a large amount of project funds, even though students at the college are Ashkenazim who commute from the rich suburbs. The residents of the district demanded that the college be moved away, and recently the municipality agreed to this.²⁴

In addition to this, the central government started to make cuts in the social services budget. Local authorities then had to turn to the Slum Rehabilitation Project to ask for financial help. This practice enabled the central government to spend more of the funds on Ashkenazi settlements in the occupied territories.

On 4 April 1980, Ha'aretz wrote that the residents of the Amidar district had left the project's steering committee, because they were only represented by 4 out of the 24 members, and they wished to take the initiative. The newspaper on 23 May 1980 quoted residents of the poor districts in Kiryat Ata who claimed that the project only served to give employment to Ashkenazim and who demanded that local committees be set up to administer the project. After describing the harsh conditions in the slum districts, the newspaper wrote that the Sephardim were threatening to carry out a 'revolution' together with the Sephardim in the slum district of Tel Hanan and Tirat Hacarmel, and the Ohalim organization in

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Jerusalem. The newspaper added that in one building there were 200 children who had to play in the street because there was no garden for them to play in, and that the neighbourhood was full of crime, drug addiction and prostitution.

On 1 August 1980, the historian Tom Segev published an article in Ha'aretz, under the heading 'It's all a big cheat!', in which he described these developments and affirmed that 'it all exists on paper only'. He enumerated all the departments involved in the project and described their ongoing quarrels. He stressed cuts were being made in the social services budget by the government, that some committee chairmen had enriched themselves through this project and that much money was being spent on 'window-dressing for propaganda purposes'.

On 8 October 1980, Zu Haderekh wrote that 'out of the \$6 million collected in America for this project, the government only spent \$700,000 by February 1980 - the rest having been swallowed up by the (Ashkenazi) bureaucracy.'

The most important article written on this subject, appeared in Ha'aretz on 29 January 1982. It was by Ze'ev Yefet and appeared under the headline 'The Flight of the Budget'. Yefet wrote that the project administrators had built incomplete pavements in the slum districts of Kfar Saba. In Ashdod they set up a large park at a great distance from the slum area. In Amidar at Ramat Gan, they planted flowers instead of treating the problems of housing, crime and violence. He wrote that the mayors control the project, and it is they who have ignored these districts for many years. They have now taken over the project's funds and spend them as they wish. Some municipalities spend the project's funds to provide the regular services which should fall under the municipalities' own budgets. In D Street in Jaffa, for example, there is a music conservatory which used to be funded by Tel Aviv, but the mayor, Mr Lahat, declared that from now on the municipality could not afford to fund it, and that the 'Project' had to support it. Leaders of the Social Services' Workers Union say that the municipalities dismiss their employees in order to re-employ them again on the payroll of the Slum Rehabilitation Project. In Bet Shemesh, the local council received 300,000 shekels from the project, and spent it on garbage collection. In Kadima the Ministry of the Interior reduced its financial help by 800,000 shekels claiming that the municipality could receive this sum from the project. Out of the 6 million shekels set aside for the project, 3 million shekels are spent on regular government services which do not do anything for 'Slum

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Rehabilitation'. At Hatzor in the Galilee, the government stopped paying the extra cost of afternoon school hours and the project was forced to step in. In Safad the Ministries of the Interior and of Housing cut back the regular budget and demanded that the Mayor use project money instead. The project has also had to fund the intermediate classes in secondary schools, instead of the Ministry of Education, and this Ministry has cancelled other educational programmes which were intended to help Sephardim.

After these shocking facts were published, the government declared that funds invested in the project had reached \$600 million, that 50,000 apartments had been renovated and 20,000 apartments enlarged. The government did not disclose the meagre part of the total \$600 million that it used for this. Its communique only mentioned that the government spent project funds to set up clinics, nurseries, sports centres and public buildings²⁵ - which should all have been built with funds from its own budget and not with project funds.

Thus the Slum Rehabilitation Project met its demise, and the remaining funds were swallowed up by central government, the municipalities and the Ashkenazi apparatus. Menahem Begin, the Prime Minister who had come to rescue Sephardim from injustice and oppression, saw all of this but took no positive action (while he was Prime Minister). He simply sent the slum children off into the army, perhaps to die in the Lebanese war, and it may have been this last fact which led to his physical and psychological breakdown.

In her report for 1984/85, Rina Gottman, the Jewish Agency Comptroller, did not publish the serious shortfalls in the project administration. However, she admitted that posts were not advertised. The project administration did not look too carefully at the qualifications of its officials, and there was no system of prioritising the project's various schemes in progress. The Jewish Agency has spent \$175 million to date.²⁶

POLARISATION

In addition to the failure of the Slum Rehabilitation Project, the policy of economic 'opening-up' which has been taken by the Likud governments has led to the increased polarisation between the two Jewish communities (except for a small group of Sephardim which has managed to better itself and has joined the small bourgeois class of restaurateurs, garage and boutique owners and which has

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accordingly linked its fate to the Likud bloc for economic reasons).

As for the recent economic crisis in Israel, as part of the Western world, the Sephardim and Palestinians were the main victims.

Moreover, the severance of all trade relations between Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran including the imports of oil, has resulted in closure of all the Israeli factories which exported to Iran before the revolution.

To make matters worse, there was the invasion of Lebanon whose cost Israel offset by cutting back social and educational services, etc.

The setting up of Ashkenazi settlements in the Arab territories occupied after 1967, and 'defence' expenses in addition to debt repayments took up two thirds of the state budget.²⁷ In the 1986 budget, this amount was 69.2 percent whereas social and municipal services were allocated only 17.8 percent of the state budget.²⁸

Consequently, unemployment, cut-backs in food subsidies, inflation and the concomitant erosion of wages worsened. The Times²⁹ pointed out inflation was running at almost 1,000 percent, and that the new economic programme included reducing inflation by 30 percent, cutting the budget by \$500 million and reducing the work force in the public sector by 10 percent, that is 14,000 workers. The newspaper reported that there was a danger of violence spreading and damage to the regime owing to its austerity policy and that the police were drawing up plans to deal with this. In September 1981, the monthly expenses of a family with 3.4 members living in a city were 8,898 shekels. By September 1984 this amount had reached 257,000 shekels.³⁰ A vendor in one of the large markets told a correspondent of The Times that 'people are ready to kill over a frozen chicken.' The Times correspondent did not mention the expenses of the large families.

There is no doubt that the percentage of Sephardim who live below the poverty line had doubled since Begin's accession to power in 1977. Charlie Biton, MP, stated that between 1977-1979 this section of the community had increased by 78 percent, and that the reduction of taxes on consumer luxuries such as cars and televisions had not helped the down-trodden. At the same time, the government was paying reparations of \$100,000 to Ashkenazi settler families who left Sinai - in total a sum which could have been used to build 17,000 residential units for the poor.³¹

The annual statement of the state Social Security Institute in 1980 added that during the Likud administration (1977-1980) the gap deepened and that the number of babies born in poverty doubled. There was an increase of 300 percent in the number of families with

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4-5 children below the poverty line. These families came to form 11.7 percent of the national total. Families with more than 5 children below the poverty line increased by 400 percent, forming together 25 percent of the national total. The report stated that one of the reasons for this phenomenon was the abolition of some taxes which had been previously imposed on the rich (property, commercial and inheritance taxes, etc.) The Liberal MP, Amnon Rubeinstein, described this poverty as 'a time bomb placed in our midst by Begin.'³²

In 1977 3.8 percent of children, that is 28,200, were living below the poverty line. By 1981 this figure was 8.4 percent, or 67,000.³³ The Milk Marketing Board stated that since the government withdrew its subsidy, milk sales had gone down by 13-29 percent. The Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv said that it had started treating children for malnutrition.³⁴

We must mention that the poverty line in Israel is lower than that in Western countries, and that the families who live below it in Israel are those who earn less than £36 sterling per month. There were 547,000 such people in 1983,³⁵ that is 13 percent of the population. On 22 May 1985 the Central Office of Statistics published a special report on workers' income, in which it stated that the standard of living of most labourers had gone down in 1983/84. The income of rich and middle-class (Ashkenazi) families had dropped by 1.5 percent whereas that of the (Sephardi) bottom tenth of the population had fallen by 11.5 percent.³⁶

When Israeli (that is, Ashkenazi) sources speak of the poor and the inhabitants of the development towns and slum districts, they do not mention that they are Sephardim for reasons of 'national unity'. Instead, they make out that the problem is purely a gap between the rich and the poor.

The Moroccan intellectual, Mikhail al-Baz, said that 'the dependency of Sephardim on the welfare institutions of the state is becoming more acute from one generation to the next. In 1964, 34.5 percent of families in the development towns were in need of welfare payments, compared to 17.4 percent nationally. By 1973 the number of destitute went up. 40.3 percent of the destitute were concentrated in the development towns even though these towns only held 17 percent of the Israeli population.' Al-Baz adds that 83 percent of elementary school pupils have comprehension difficulties, compared to 45 percent nationwide.³⁷ Al-Baz concluded that ethnic inequality is institutionalised.³⁸

Even Ashkenazi intellectuals admitted these facts ten years before

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al-Baz wrote his comments. Yonah Rosenfeld and Avraham Zlatschwi stated in 1965 that the ethnic inequality tended to increase in the Israeli-born generations.

Zionist propagandists say that the condition of the Sephardim has improved in Israel in comparison to their previous condition in their countries of origin but Dr Ya'akov Nahon disproved this statement. In his analysis, which was published by the Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Research, Dr Nahon demonstrated that the number of Ashkenazi white collar workers had increased by 90 percent compared to the number of Sephardim while the number of the blue collar Sephardim had gone up by 90 percent! There were five times more Ashkenazim in academic positions than Sephardim. When it came to the menial jobs, there were 200-350 percent more Sephardim than Ashkenazim.³⁹ If there is any hint of equality, it is only to be found amongst the petits bourgeois who represent 18 percent of both ethnic groups.

Poverty and polarisation have worsened to the extent that Hesqel San'ani, of Yemenite origin, declared that he was prepared to sell his eye and kidney in order to buy a flat instead of having to sleep in buses, as he had done for the past eight years. Sara Barneya declared that she would sell her unborn baby to be able to buy a small one-and-a-half room flat.⁴⁰

Yohanan Peres, a social scientist, observed that the ethnic and social gulf in Israel was greater than in any other country in the world, including the United States.⁴¹ In 1984 the rate of pay for one hour's labour in the United States was \$13 and in Canada it was \$11.5, whereas in Israel it was only \$4.5.⁴² These figures are for the average and this is always misleading since the Sephardi and Palestinian masses earn wages much lower than the average.

Dr Yohanan Peres suggests, 'If we do not eradicate the sectarian gap, the preponderant feelings of injustice may well lead to a destructive explosion'.⁴³ He added that 'the second generation [of Sephardim], born in Israel, is more aware of injustice than the first foreign-born generation . . .'.⁴⁴ He wrote that an average Ashkenazi family had an income 400 percent greater than that of an average Sephardi family,⁴⁵ and that 'the sectarian gap between the whites and the blacks in the United States in the area of labour, the professions, administrative and technical jobs is less acute than it is in Israel'.⁴⁶

The number of Israelis who married outside their community was 18.5 percent in 1971,⁴⁷ but this does not mean that the two communities are moving towards integration. It signifies just the

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opposite - that 81.5 percent of Israelis do not marry spouses from the other community. Moreover, those who do intermarry, marry partners from the same social class.

Travelling from Haifa to Marseilles on a Turkish ship, most of whose passengers were Israelis, both Ashkenazim and Sephardim. . . I noted that when we first set off, relations between the two groups were restrained but correct and the Sephardim spoke amongst themselves of their lives and work in Israel, and then about their problems in Israel. Gradually the conversation turned to their hardships and finally they all said that if they found suitable work in France they would stay there. Contact with the Ashkenazim cooled as we approached Marseilles, and when we disembarked the Ashkenazim and Sephardim formed separate groups, hired separate taxis and parted without a word. In London there are many Israelis, from both communities, and I have seen little evidence of friendly relations between them.

The deepening of the gap between the two communities in the Israeli-born second generation in the 'upper classes' is to be noted. 12.9 percent of Sephardi immigrants (1977) belong to this group, compared to 30.9 percent of Ashkenazim. In the Israeli-born generation the relative figures are 14.6 percent compared to 45.6 percent. These figures also prove that the downward trend amongst the Sephardim is an Israeli-created phenomenon.

Break-down of Occupations amongst the Jewish population according to ethnic origin⁴⁸

Occupation	Born in Africa & Asia %		Born in Europe & America %		Born in Israel of Sephardi Origin %		Born in Israel Ashkenazi Origin %	
	1974	1977	1974	1977	1974	1977	1974	1977
Liberal, technical, and managerial professions	11.4	12.9	27.8	30.9	11	14.6	41.4	45.6
Services and commerce	39	41.5	28	28.2	40.6	43.1	33.8	31.1
Agricultural, and skilled and unskilled labourers	39.5	45.7	34.2	30.8	48.4	42.1	24.8	22.2
Total (000s)	306.7	302.6	393.3	390.2	91.9	122.	150.8	75.2
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The reality is much worse, since in every occupational class the Sephardim are normally at the bottom.

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The disparity in income can be seen in the following table. It can be shown clearly that the disparity in income appears among the higher grades. At the lower end of the wage scale in 1966, wages were only 30 percent of the national average, that is ten times less than the highest wages.

Segments of the population ⁴	9-12 years of education		Over 13 years of education	
	Sephardim	Ashkenazim	Sephardim	Ashkenazim
Lowest fifth	10.8	12.0	15.5	7.6
Second fifth	21.6	16.4	8.5	9.7
Third fifth	26.0	17.3	9.9	13.0
Fourth fifth	24.6	24.8	36.6	23.2
Top fifth	17.0	29.5	27.3	46.5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

The picture is worse if we take into account the income of Sephardim who did not have a chance to finish 9 years of education. In 1979 19 percent of the Israeli population (that is 445,000 people) were classified as poor, and 75 percent of whom were Sephardi. According to G. Habib's statistics, 78 percent of poor children, (92 percent according to Katz) come from large Sephardi families. Their misery was not relieved by the welfare payments they received, for these were only 43 percent of the national average.⁵⁰

The report on income prepared by the Social Policy Research Centre stated that the distribution of income in Israel was just less than in the Western countries.⁵¹ Those in the top tenth of the income scale (excluding businessmen) - generally Ashkenazim - earn 40 percent of the total income for all workers. The richest 1 percent of the population in 1984 controlled more than 11.5 percent of total national income.⁵² Data point to the fact that the rich (Ashkenazim) are earning more, and in 1980 their average individual income reached \$86,900. By 1984 it had reached \$100,700.

The polarisation of the Ashkenazi settler community on the one hand, and the Sephardim and Palestinians on the other, becomes apparent in the sample data on family income: on the first and second lowest rungs of the social ladder the average family income was \$150-200 per month in 1984 (mostly Sephardim and Palestinians). On the sixth rung, family income was \$500 per month, on the eighth rung \$900 (generally Ashkenazim) and in the ninth rung it was \$1,200 per month (generally Ashkenazim).⁵³

The latest official data confirm that poverty is spreading amongst

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Sephardim and Palestinians. The newspaper Yedi'ot Aharonot quoted official sources that 'the number of people who live below the poverty line has reached 267,000, of whom 120,000 are children. Their number increased by 25 percent during 1983 and 1984.'⁵⁴ Since the beginning of 1985, the new economic policy has led to wages being eroded by 35-40 percent. The minimum wage has gone down from 40 percent to 23 percent of the average wage. Unemployment has gone up to a national average of 10 percent, but in Sephardi and Palestinian districts it is 30-40 percent. Steps are continually being taken to cut back the amount of welfare payments, child support and other educational and social services. (In Beer Sheba, for example, the Soroka Hospital admits 300 children a month, including 20-30 who, because of the extent of their malnutrition, look like concentration camp children. These are the children of Sephardim, Palestinians and American Black Hebrews.)⁵⁵

CRIME AND TORTURE

The reader may wonder: How is it that the Sephardim have accepted the Ashkenazi Zionist regime? Did they accept it as a fait accompli, or did they struggle?

Defeatists surrendered and accepted what the Ashkenazi chose to give them. A large portion of this group belonged to the rich and middle classes and is relatively very small.

The group of Eliahu Eliachar, which belonged to the native Jewish 'aristocracy', struggled and compromised at one and the same time, and failed abysmally. Another group of the native Jewish 'aristocracy', which included Bekhor Shitrit (former Minister of Police) and Yitzhak Navon (formerly President), cooperated with the Zionist establishment, particularly with the Labour Party.

There is also a large group of people who have been silently and patiently waiting. In contrast to them there is the vociferous group which has refused to acquiesce and which includes the Black Panthers, the Shahak, Oded, the East for Peace and Ohalim Organisations, as well as other small and ad hoc organizations which mainly arose in the slum districts. We shall cover these organisations and their struggles and solidarity with the Palestinians in the next chapter.

Finally, there is the group of offenders. These are people who live in the slum districts of the large towns, the development towns

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and the moshavim. Social scientists claim that crime and misconduct are sometimes the means of struggle used by the down-trodden against the ruling establishment and the dominant society. The crime rate in Jewish society in the Muslim-Arab world was 0.1 percent, but in Israel 90 percent of the prison population is Sephardi. The same percentage applies in the brothels. The Chief of Police of Tel Aviv, Moshe Timokan, pointing to the worsening situation, stated that 'in one district alone there are 2,000 boys (between 10 and 16) with criminal records.' Israeli social scientists warn that 'social segregation is a graver danger than the enemy outside.' In these districts there are border police armed with guns and truncheons, and exchanges of fire between them and the youths of the slum districts have become a daily occurrence.⁵⁶ Some of these youths belong to resistance groups, or to be more precise, they have been pushed into throwing in their lot with resistance groups.

In 1970, Sephardi Jews represented 78 percent of those committing criminal acts, and Sephardi youth represented 93 percent.⁵⁷

The Israeli establishment confronts all these challenges with a policy of pitiless oppression, that is, the imposition of harsh punitive measures, severe beatings, torture and corruption. 88 percent of the Israeli police force comes from the Sephardi and Druze communities (which also provide 90 percent of the prison officers). It also appointed the Sephardi Bekhor Shitrit and Shlomo Hillel as Ministers of Police. Israel thus was employing the same means as Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and South Africa where they use blacks to police blacks. Israeli sources state that most of the mercenaries in South Lebanon are Shi'ites.

The press throughout the world has published much material about torture in Zionist prisons and the various punitive measures employed against the Palestinians, but nothing about torture inflicted on Sephardim, except for the British Tribune newspaper, which publicised this in a letter from Ya'kov Yeruba'al.⁵⁸ Zionist influence has been able to suppress these facts out of fear that they might cause an outcry of indignation from world Jewry, and particularly from the hundreds of thousands of Sephardim in the West.

The following are some of the facts of this issue. Yahya Hazzan: Torture has meant the possibility that he could lose his sight in his right eye. His lawyer, Oded Dovrath, states that Yahya was taken to the police station in Rehovot where he was beaten, punched and kicked by police officers hoping to force him

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to make a statement, until he collapsed on the floor. When he raised his head, they kicked his eye until he fainted. He was then forced to sign a 'confession', but had no idea of its contents. When he started to vomit blood he was transferred to a hospital for an operation on his eye.⁵⁹ Ha'aretz took up his case again on 2 March 1979 with a picture of the victim, and added that police officers had almost strangled him. After the operation on his eye, he was sent to Rehovot prison. Shortly thereafter he was examined by a specialist who found that damage to his eye was causing him to have double vision and that this could be a permanent condition. Uri Naqqash: He was arrested when he was on a bus because a policeman did not like his manner or the way he spoke. His ill-treatment led to a perforated ear-drum.⁶⁰

S. Nunikashvili: A soldier from Georgia (Georgian Jews belong culturally to the Sephardi community). He is 19 years old and was tortured in a police station in Petah Tikvah. He was embarrassed to describe what they did to him there: they started by beating him on the face, then a policeman urinated on him. They stripped his clothing from him and sodomised him twice with a broom-handle. They stuffed a urine-soaked rag into his mouth to stifle his screams. When he asked to see a doctor he was taken to the police headquarters where he was beaten again. A policeman said to him, 'If you ask to see a doctor I'll string you up and say that you hanged yourself.'⁶¹

Anonymous: the lawyer Ladisky stated that one of his clients was forced to remove his clothing, upon which point he was beaten, punched and kicked by a policeman using a stick. Cold water was then thrown on him. They sprayed tear gas into his eyes, stuck a broom handle in his mouth and then did the same with the barrel of a rifle. When they interrogated him they held a knife over his genitals and threatened to cut them off. Then they threw him onto the ground which was covered with water.⁶² Pinhas Bahbut: Tortured until he signed a statement.⁶³ Binyamin Shitrit: He was tied up with chains and tortured until he needed hospitalisation. The previous year he had been so badly tortured that he tried to commit suicide by throwing himself out of an upper-storey window of the police station. He did not die and the police proceeded to harass him.⁶⁴

Elie Avraham: He has a long history of being tortured by the military police because he refused to do his military service. He stated that he refused to be conscripted because of racial discrimination in Israel.⁶⁵

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Shim'on Abu Tubul: Committed suicide in prison. An adolescent who, after his death, became a hero in the folk songs of the Sephardim.⁶⁶

Another sadistic method used in Ramla Prison was the use of enemas.

General Moshe Nativ, head of all armed forces personnel, stated that 16 soldiers had committed suicide over a period of only six months.⁶⁸ Charlie Biton, MP, sent a letter to the Minister of Justice decrying the treatment meted out to Sephardim in the army and mentioning the names of some of the soldiers in question: Elie Avraham, Moshe Bahbut, Albert Danino, Atyas Ricardo and Me'ir Badusa. He wrote that these soldiers had complained of being tortured with tear gas. Biton added that the military authorities had refused to look into these complaints.⁶⁹ In December 1980 Israel Radio announced that the parents of soldiers were complaining of the mental breakdown of their boys in the army as a result of the dreadful treatment they received in the army and that some of them had to be sent to psychiatric hospitals.

Natan Dunevitz, a correspondent of Ha'aretz, admitted that only Sephardim were the victims of torture, which is why the Ashkenazi public showed no interest in the matter.⁷⁰ A high-ranking officer in the Israeli police admitted to torturing prisoners with electrodes attached to their genitals. He boasted that 'these methods are "effective", and when we employ them the accused is prepared to sign anything.'⁷¹ A high court judge, Hayyim Cohen, condemned torture, and The Jerusalem Post which reported this said that such a denunciation in a Western country would lead to the resignation of the chiefs of police.⁷²

In Zu Haderekh on 13 February 1985, Yosef Algazi published an article based on a report of the Israeli Human Rights Organisation. Algazi wrote 'a day does not pass that we do not submit a complaint about the torture and violence practised by the police. Often no complaint is made out of fear of police reprisals. In spite of that, the number of complaints has risen over recent years. In 1982 there were 2,098 complaints and this rose to 2,230 in 1983. Three times as many policemen were tried in disciplinary hearings in 1984 as in 1983. Since the judge and the accused were policemen, the severest punishment meted out to those accused of torture was a fine which was the equivalent of £5 sterling.' The report names the following Sephardim who have been tortured:

Yosef Baraka: He had a hemorrhage and his spinal column was broken.

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Shlomo (Salim) Zurihan: Tortured with electrodes eighteen times consecutively, causing grave damage to his nerves and sight.

Menashe Ezra: Beaten harshly for a number of hours, then pins were stuck in his wounds, was kicked in the groin. Then they spat on it and verbally humiliated him.

Marcelle and Yaffa Ohna: Both beaten and gassed with tear gas.

Yohai Cohen: Died on 20 January 1985 after being strung up and tortured. Eleven days before his death, he was seen by a witness, suspended and being tortured. The police claim that he hanged himself. When Ma'ariv and Hadashot published the circumstances of his death at the hands of the police, the journalists involved were called in to the police station and threatened.

Rahamim Salim: Harshly and continuously beaten by a group of policemen.

Yehuda Idri: Beaten and kicked in the genitals, stomach and neck.

From polarisation and alienation the road to resistance was wide open.

NOTES

- 1 Prime Minister's Office, 1968, 413-418.
- 2 Bank of Israel, 1968.
- 3 Mahbarot lemehkar ulevikoret, No. 1, 41.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ministry of Trade and Industry, 28, 29 and 40.
- 6 Ibid. See also Kleiner, 1966, 153.
- 7 Mahbarot lemehkar ulevikoret, No. 4, 46.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Dunsguide, Tel Aviv, 1979.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Mahbarot lemehkar ulevikoret, No. 4, 42.
- 12 Central Bureau of Statistics, 1973.
- 13 Heffer, 1975, 93.
- 14 Riva'on lekalkala, 1963.
- 15 'Profits in Israel', Basha'ar 6, 1963.
- 16 Swirski and Bernstein, 1980, 18-26.
- 17 Central Bureau of Statistics, 1978.
- 18 Zu Haderekh, 1980.
- 19 No 13/14.
- 20 Shevet va'am, 1960.
- 21 Shevet va'am. Second Series, No. 1. 1970.
- 22 A reference to Zola's famous words 'J'accuse' regarding the Dreyfus case - which was event that inspired Theodor Herzl to write his Judenstaat.
- 23 New Society News, 1979, quoted by Swirski, 1981, 344-355.
- 24 Ha'aretz, 4 April 1986.
- 25 Ha'aretz, 28 March 1986.
- 26 Ha'aretz, 12 July 1985.
- 27 The Times, 22 February 1982.
- 28 Zu Haderekh, 29 January 1986.
- 29 25 October, 1984.

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- 30 Israeli Office of Statistics.
- 31 Zu Haderekh, 9 April 1981.
- 32 Ha'aretz, 6 November 1981.
- 33 Zu Haderekh, 9 March 1983, quoting the Annual Statement of the Institute for Social Security.
- 34 Zu Haderekh, 28 December 1980.
- 35 Ha'aretz, 22 February 1985, quoting the Annual Statement of the Institute of Social Security.
- 36 Zu Haderekh, 29 May 1985.
- 37 Les temps modernes, The Second Israel, 112.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Zu Haderekh, 15 August 1984.
- 40 Zu Haderekh, 28 January 1981.
- 41 Ha'aretz, 26 June 1981.
- 42 Zu Haderekh, 31 December 1985 quoting a statement from the Institute of Productivity.
- 43 Peres, 1977, 82.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid. 132.
- 46 Ibid, 143.
- 47 Ibid, p 147.
- 48 Mikhail al-Baz, Les temps modernes, The Second Israel, 1981, 116.
- 49 Ibid, 119.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Al Hamishmar, 6 September 1985.
- 52 Ha'aretz, 6 September 1985.
- 53 Q.v. Article by Ahmad Sa'ad in Falestine al-Thawra, 9 November 1985, and also the article by Salim Jubran in Falestine al-Thawra, 13 July 1985..
- 54 11 September 1985.
- 55 See the statement of Professor Stanley Yudetsky of the Soroka Hospital in Zu Haderekh, 22 July 1987.
- 56 Shalom Cohen, Les temps modernes, 95.
- 57 Central Office of Statistics, 1970: Special Series 417, Table B, and Special Series 408, Table E.
- 58 25 March 1980.
- 59 Yedi'ot Aharonot, 17 January 1979.
- 60 Yedi'ot Aharonot, 22 February 1979.
- 61 Ha'olam Hazeh, 7 February 1979.
- 62 Israeli press, 15 January, 1979.
- 63 Yedi'ot Aharonot, 1 July 1979.
- 64 Zu Haderekh, 5 March 1980.
- 65 Zu Haderekh, 9 July 1980.
- 66 Zu Haderekh, 3 February 1982.
- 67 Ha'aretz, 26 February 1982.
- 68 Ma'ariv, 25 December 1980.
- 69 Zu Haderekh, 28 January 1981.
- 70 11 April 1980.
- 71 Yedi'ot Aharonot, 30 March 1979.
- 72 29 June 1979.

CHAPTER TEN

Sephardi Resistance And Solidarity With The Palestinians

RESISTANCE

The Beginning Of Popular Protest Demonstrations

After the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, the Zionist establishment, with the help of the Western powers and their sympathisers in the Arab countries, displaced most of the Sephardim and brought them to Palestine where they joined with native Palestinian Jews to form the overwhelming majority of the new state. The tragic conditions in the refugee camps, and the urban and rural slums, which we have described in earlier chapters, brought about the emergence of a new type of resistance - involving popular uprisings, strikes, demonstrations and bloody clashes with the police force and the border guard.

This kind of Intifada has often spread among the soldiers too, in the form of hunger strikes, indiscipline and verbal and physical violence against Ashkenazi officers, but reports have been suppressed by censorship.¹ In the city of Ashkelon, a local leader, Na'im Khaschi, led many thousands of Sephardim against the policy of racial discrimination. In the seventies, Na'im helped to set up the Black Panther organization.

Toward the end of April 1949, 300 Sephardi residents from the town of Ramleh staged a noisy demonstration in Allenby Street in Tel Aviv. They demanded 'bread and work' and tried to storm the old Knesset building, until the Israeli police managed to turn them back, whereupon they went off to the government offices at Hakiryia and were met by some officials who promised them that the

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government would employ them in 'emergency work'.² Two weeks later Sephardim stormed the Jewish Agency building in Haifa and went on the rampage inside the Department of Absorption. They demanded 'work and housing' but this time the police only managed to overpower them by bringing in reinforcements. Some of the demonstrators were injured during the clashes, and a number were arrested.³

In July of the same year, demonstrators from Jaffa attacked the former parliament building in Tel Aviv, using sticks and destroying its doors. At the last moment, the police managed to stop them getting into the hall itself. Yosef Shprinsak refused to meet the demonstrators and declared 'We cannot talk with those who break down doors.'(Knesset Minutes 26 July 1949.)

At the same time as the Zionist establishment was bringing in hundreds of thousands of immigrants and sending them to inhuman camps, the Jewish Agency was listening to detailed reports of their misery and hunger.⁴ Hungry children attacked other children on the way to school and stole their food.⁵

The Events Of Wadi Al-Salib

These were the culmination of the popular uprisings undertaken by the Sephardim, and the Moroccans in particular. They took place in July 1959. The immediate cause was the granting of comfortable housing to new Ashkenazi immigrants from Poland whereas hundreds of thousands of Sephardim were still living in filthy tents and dilapidated housing since 1948. Moreover, the government bought additional flats from private companies for these Polish immigrants, and flats which were built for Sephardim were given at the last minute to the Ashkenazi newcomers. We should also mention that most of Israel's leadership was of Polish origin, including Ben Gurion, Peres, Shamir and Chaim Wisemann.

The spark was provided by the police when they shot down a Moroccan in the street. The Sephardim considered this to be a racist provocation, and the Moroccans who were living in the slum district of Wadi al-Salib in Haifa, staged demonstrations under the leadership of David Ben-Harush, secretary of the North African Association. The demonstrators, who included many women and children, destroyed the local Histadrut headquarters and then thronged out of Wadi al-Salib making their way toward the Ashkenazi area of Hadar, breaking shop windows in the main street.

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The police and the border guard hurried to the area, and behaved as if they were putting down an incipient revolution, causing serious casualties amongst women and old men. Eventually they managed to corner the leaders of the uprising, including David Ben-Harush, who opened fire on them as they moved in. However, the police managed - albeit with great difficulty - to arrest him and his colleagues. Some of the ringleaders were beaten up and sentenced, whilst others were bought off. There was a simultaneous outbreak of violence in most of the Sephardi camps, with the masses staging spontaneous demonstrations, acts of sabotage and arson against government buildings, causing millions of dollars worth of damage. The protest movement called upon Sephardim to leave the Ashkenazi political parties and to join the North-African Association.

In order to calm down the protesters, the Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, formed a committee to look into the problem under M. Etzioni, a member of the High Court. The committee produced a detailed report about the social gap between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, together with lengthy recommendations on how to eliminate it. The government, naturally ignored the report.⁶ The committee of investigation denied the existence of any racial discrimination in Israel. Subsequently Ben-Harush was given a new flat and a job.

In 1963 the secret 'Front for National Equality' emerged, and was eliminated by the secret police and for 'security reasons' there was a complete media blackout.⁷

The Intifada of The Black Panthers

In 1971, Sephardim from the Musrara district of Jerusalem formed the largest protest organisation - the Black Panthers. They adopted the name of one of the black organisations in America because they believed that there was no fundamental difference between anti-black discrimination in the United States and anti-Sephardi discrimination in Israel in the fields of occupation, education, housing, etc. They set out to challenge the 'Labour' establishment's concepts of 'equality', 'socialism', 'democracy', 'Jewish liberation' and 'the ingathering of the exiles'.

One of the crudest provocations which gave rise to this ethnic organisation was the way the Ashkenazi immigrants from Russia were being received: In March 1971 they were given a royal

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reception by the government and the Jewish Agency, granted luxurious furnished housing and jobs which matched their qualifications. The [Russian] Prime Minister, Golda Meir, rushed to Lod airport on Mondays and Thursdays with tear-filled eyes and a voice cracked with emotion to welcome them: 'You are the real Jews. We have been waiting for you for 25 years. You speak Yiddish!' She added 'Every loyal Jew must speak Yiddish, for he who does not know Yiddish is not a Jew.'⁸ You are a superior breed - you will provide us with heroes.'⁹

This welcome aroused a cry of indignation among the Sephardim who took it as a slight that Golda had divided the Jews into two: the real Jews who spoke Yiddish, and the lower classes, that is the pseudo-Jews who spoke Arabic instead of Yiddish, the dark Jews from the Middle East. The receptions laid on by the leaders of the state for newly-arrived Ashkenazi immigrants angered the Sephardim who had been welcomed at the airport, upon their arrival in the country, by being sprayed with DDT.

The new Russian immigrants were also provided with the following:

1. A long-term low-interest mortgage. This enabled every family to pay less than one quarter of the price (of a flat). The mortgage repayments then shrank to almost nothing because of the chronic inflation.
2. Luxury flats. Every family of three received a flat with two large bedrooms, usually in the large towns. The area of a flat was 80m², whereas Sephardim with large families had been allocated flats averaging 30-40m². In Tel Aviv, the Ashkenazi immigrants were housed in a plush suburb, Neveh Sharet, which lies next to the Sephardi slum district of Shekhunat Ha'argazim.
3. The postponement of compulsory military service, whereas the state sent the Sephardim straight to the front, where they died in their thousands in 1948.
4. No income tax for a certain period.
5. No customs duties or import tax, which meant that every Russian could buy a car or a fridge at less than half price on an instalment basis.
6. Employment commensurate with the immigrant's qualifications.

Even though these privileges cost the people, the majority of whom were Sephardim and Palestinians, more than \$25,000 per family,¹⁰ the new immigrants treated their Sephardi (and Palestinian) neighbours contemptuously. They sent petitions to the

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Tel Aviv Town Hall to express their indignation at having to live next to 'Black' Jews whom they claimed were 'Levantine' and uncivilised, and they threatened to leave the country.¹¹ The Ashkenazi authorities gave in to some of their demands and removed Sephardi children from Ashkenazi schools and youth clubs, and in some places kept them out of the local swimming pools. These outrageous measures led some of the slum residents to stone the new Russian immigrants, many of whom left Israel for America in search of a higher standard of living.¹²

One of the immigrants, a certain Oltchik, became quite notorious. This Oltchik received a spacious and luxurious flat in the neat 'American' suburb of Kiryat Yovel. He found a position in the Solel Boneh company - and, he could not stand Sephardim. Upon being told that there were eighty thousand children who did not have a bed to sleep in, he snapped, 'You make all these children and then ask me to pay for their education and food? Is it my concern if you must have ten children?' During the summer break, Solel Boneh employs a number of school-children for a daily wage of I£12, but Oltchik's son was paid I£47. Charlie Biton, a Black Panther leader stated, 'if this immigration [of Russian Jews] continues, there will be a civil war.'¹³

Though these Russian immigrants were born and raised in the socialist Soviet Union they, along with American extremists such as Rabbi Kahane, form the racist extreme right-wing and are the backbone of Zionist settlement on the occupied West Bank.

In addition to this provocative wave of immigration, there was another cause for the groundswell of support for the Black Panther uprisings which was the plot to gentrify Musrara for the Ashkenazim. After the occupation of the old city of Jerusalem in 1967, Musrara suddenly gained economic importance, located as it was between the old and new cities, which is why the ruling establishment wanted to raze the old Arab houses and make Musrara a 'redevelopment area' with luxury housing for the Ashkenazim. That implied the expulsion of the poor Sephardim. Sephardi families would have to be ripped apart and crowded into the ugly tower blocks which had been built around Arab Jerusalem. We should add that most Sephardim instinctively refused to settle in the occupied Arab territories, perhaps because they realised that the settlements were being built on sand, and that sand in the East is fickle!

There was another provocative factor: much of the youth of Musrara and other Sephardi slums was made up of those who had

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not studied, had no jobs and had not served in the army. The police would goad, arrest and expose them to humiliation, torture and 'dry beating', and in prison they were exposed to buggery. At the age of fourteen, Charlie Biton MP experienced this treatment for a crime which he had not committed. The courts would impose the heaviest sentences on them for delinquency whereas they were lenient with big Ashkenazi criminals, sending them off to mental institutions instead of prison. Accordingly, Sephardi youth from Musrara and the slum districts started to consider the state as their archenemy and inimical to Sephardi society as a whole. These youths also heard long stories from their parents about the treatment they had received from the Jewish Agency and the Israeli government after they immigrated to Israel since 1948.

Finally, these youths were influenced by the popular uprisings which were staged by the blacks in America, South Africa and the third world against racism and colonialism. The Ashkenazi settlers 'helped' these youths to become politicised by calling them 'blacks', 'shvartses', 'Arabs' and so on.

Conditions in Musrara were no better than those of the black areas in the United States. S. Malka described the district and the conditions obtaining there as follows: 'Musrara is a district which falls within the boundaries of Jewish Jerusalem and at the edge of the old city. It was hastily founded on the second day of 1948 to house immigrants from Morocco and Iraq. The authorities then paid no attention to it and it stayed in a state of neglect. Its dark coloured stones . . . washed clothes speak of poverty and despair? . . . fluttering from windows and in the streets. The dilapidated houses lean against each other and inside the inhabitants live six or seven to a room . . . suffering from poverty and hardship. The families here are large . . . with members being spread over three or four floors of a building. A nerve-wracking din rises from the incessant chattering of the people outside. Inactivity wears the people down, and finally there is crime. That is the natural result of filthy hovels and the human material: the majority are working class, migrant workers, unemployed, a whole class without qualifications ... a whole society suffering from economic, social and educational deprivation . . . Musrara is the kingdom of the poor - of the Sephardim.'¹⁴

At the same time as the Sephardim (and Palestinians) had to make do with such miserable conditions, Ashkenazi Jews were enjoying an unprecedented economic boom due to the occupation of the remaining Palestinian territories in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip

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plus Sinai and the Syrian Golan Heights. They eagerly improved their material situation, snatching up cars, televisions and hi-fi sets. A nouveau riche class arose which rushed madly towards land speculation and alarming financial activities. Inflation rose fast and there were price rises which delineated more sharply the contours of social inequalities and Ashkenazi/Sephardi polarisation (which phenomena were even more drastically manifested amongst the Palestinians).

This was the soil in which the Black Panthers arose and flourished. They were not struggling for the Sephardim alone, but for the rights of the Palestinian Arabs also. Their leaders started to be proud of their Middle Eastern origin and their Arab ethnicity, which sent a shiver through the Ashkenazi ruling establishment which had been relying on 'divide and rule'. This was particularly the case of the extreme Ashkenazi left-wingers who purported to like the Palestinians. The following are some of the claims of the Ashkenazi leftists as to the reasons for the emergence of the Black Panthers:

1. The residents of the slum districts started to confront the danger represented by the cheap Arab labour from the occupied territories. (The fact is that most of the jobs carried out by Arab labourers from the territories had been turned down by the Sephardim, who realised that the expropriation of Palestinian lands and the establishment of settlements would push the Palestinians into the labour market in Israel.) In order to create a schism between the Sephardim and the Palestinians, these 'friends' add that the occupation serves the interests of the Sephardi whereas the truth is exactly the opposite, since the state spends millions on Ashkenazi settlements in the occupied territories at the expense of social services, and at the cost of neglecting the slum districts and the development towns where the Sephardim live.

2. Israel's victory in 1967 encouraged the Sephardim to demand their share of the booty, having fought against the Arabs. The truth is that most youths in the Black Panther movement and their supporters did not take part in that war. They had refused to do military service and the military establishment could not force these 'marginals' into military service.

Black Panther Demonstrations

On 1 March 1971 the Black Panthers asked the police to allow them to stage a peaceful demonstration against discrimination in front of

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the Jerusalem Town Hall. The decision came from the Prime Minister, Golda Meir, who rejected the request decisively for no stated reasons. On the evening of the same day, the police made a series of provocative arrests of Black Panther members and supporters in Jerusalem. The French newspaper published by Moroccan students of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem commented on the arbitrary arrests as follows: 'Yesterday evening freedom passed away in Israel. It died without a whimper, with no funeral or cries of grief. . . when the police arrest 15 young members of the Black Panthers who had resolved to demonstrate in front of the town hall . . .'

On 3 March 1971, a demonstration took place and registered a dazzling success. The five hundred demonstrators in front of the town hall consisted of Panthers, students, leftists and passers-by. There resounded the call of 'set them free' and 'enough of discrimination'. Then the Mayor, Teddy Kollek, appeared on the balcony in his night-clothes and addressed the demonstrators sneeringly, 'Demonstrate if you wish, but keep off my grass.' This policy of contempt was consciously used by the Zionists against the Sephardim and the Arabs in the hope of undermining their self-confidence. But this time, it did not work, and the government instituted a paternalistic campaign to deal with these 'unpleasant children' - as the Prime Minister, Golda Meir, termed them during her meeting with them.¹⁵ Golda Meir started to pamper them as if they were her children, always reminding them 'we are all Jews'. However, she did not succeed and one of the members of the movement said, as he came out of a meeting with her, 'her vision is superficial and emotional. . . nice children and wicked children . . .' In that meeting the Panthers presented thirty-three demands, e.g. participation in social projects. The Prime Minister answered that 'there will be no such thing' and refused to discuss them. She tried to 'buy' the leaders, but failed.

Subsequently, the Black Panthers worked on developing a social movement against racial discrimination. They called for decent housing and for fully qualified teachers. They demanded that the school syllabus include Maimonides instead of Bialik and Chernihovsky. The whisper became a shout, as the cries for help issuing from Musrara and Qatamon turned into public displays, bloody clashes between the Black Panthers and the police force and Molotov cocktails . . . 'bombs thrown by Jews against Jews in the Jewish state' as Golda Meir stated. Often the clashes were provoked by the police under the leadership of the Iraqi Minister of Police,

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Shlomo Hillel, who was nicknamed 'the Black Collaborator'.

The fire which was kindled in Musrara spread to all the slum areas inhabited by the Sephardi poor and jobless. When the demonstrators saw that the Israeli police were using the same repressive measures they used on the Palestinians, that is beatings, arrest and torture, the walls separating Sephardim from Palestinians crumbled. There came about a solidarity between them, as Kochavi Shemesh, a Black Panther (Iraqi) leader, declared, 'It is unfeasible for one people to exist at the expense of another people. We must quickly find a common language with the Palestinians.'

On 18 May 1971 the Panthers staged one of their largest demonstrations with 5,000 participants which lasted seven and a half hours and during which the police arrest 260 people. The police promised to release them if they joined a moderate association - 'The Alliance of Moroccan Immigrants'. The police used batons to beat up the demonstrators and the public saw police brutality for themselves.

Demonstrations by the Panthers continued throughout the summer of 1971 although the media only reported them if there was violence. In the meantime 5,000 Sephardim joined the Panthers' organisation and others offered help. Some rich Sephardim provided money and advice, but secretly.

On 23 August 1971 the largest demonstration took place. It was joined by six or seven thousand people who set fire to a picture of Golda Meir. There were prolonged clashes between the demonstrators and the security forces which led to many people being wounded and held in custody for long periods, among them the majority of the Black Panther members. This demonstration was considered the zenith of Panther resistance. The next demonstration they staged was in January 1972 outside the building in Jerusalem where the Annual World Zionist Conference was being held. The police had to employ one thousand officers. University students and poor young couples joined the demonstration. The protesters declared that the Zionist conference did not represent them. In the end they succeeded in presenting their demands to the conference. On 1 May 1972 the Panthers' demonstration was broken by the police. On the following day the Jerusalem students demonstrated in support of the Panthers. A few days later Ovadia Harari was shot by the police, which sparked off further demonstrations.

A mature political consciousness amongst the Panthers was slow to emerge for they had little education; most of them had not had

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the opportunity to finish elementary school. During those days (May 1972), the Panthers stole the milk delivered to the houses of the rich in Rehavia and distributed it to poor Sephardi children. They also constructed a bier and carried it through the streets in a long funeral procession, repeating 'we shall bury hatred and the social gap', and then they returned their army reserve cards to the authorities indicating that they refused service as a form of protest. When residents of the slum district of Hatikva in Tel Aviv staged a demonstration against the racial discrimination directed against one of their football teams, the government used the notoriously cruel border guard to crush them. The border guard laid siege against the district on 7 and 8 June 1971, using all forms of oppression. When Ashkenazi business owners were asked about the suppression of the district, they replied, 'the authorities ought to beat that riff-raff up even more . . .'¹⁶ Thereafter the state used the Mafia, under the leadership of Mintsch - a known criminal - to attack the Panthers.¹⁷ On 14 June 1971 the Panthers' demonstration in the Hatikva slum district was crushed by the right-wing Herut party, and on 5 July of the same year 7,000 people demonstrated in Jerusalem without any violent incidents.

Views Of The Black Panthers

Kochavi Shemesh became one of the most courageous leaders of the Panthers by declaring his revolutionary views in public. In a discussion with a correspondent of the magazine *Israleft* on 20 November 1972 he stated that 'the problem of sectarian inequality between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim can only be solved after the solution of the Palestinian problem. I accuse the government and the media of inciting the Sephardim to hostility against the Arabs.' He emphasised the necessity for solidarity between Arab and Jewish workers in order to reduce the tension that existed between them and to move them toward a common struggle against the rulers of Israel. He added that the government could not change the conditions of the Sephardim without changing the social make-up of the country, but it did not want to do that, and so the Panthers had to undertake that operation, to redistribute the national income and resources and to reform social services such as education, housing, welfare etc. He stated that criminality amongst the Sephardim was a result of social injustice and spoke of the path of struggle to be followed by other sections of youth. He stated that the Panthers had established party branches throughout

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the country and had no difficulty in finding support everywhere, but that it was more useful to stage demonstrations in Jerusalem than in the remote villages.

When Shemesh was questioned about the concept of Zionism as a solution to the problem of Jews throughout the world, he replied, 'the Zionists have solved the problem of the Ashkenazi Jews in Israel, but the Sephardim are worse off in Israel than they were in the Arab countries, and they also face greater dangers to their security in Israel than they did in the Arab countries.'

Shemesh also mentioned that anti-Semitism did not exist except when Iraq allied itself to Germany in 1941. He emphasised that there is anti-Semitism in Israel, against the Sephardim and that what happened to the Ashkenazi Jews in Europe is happening now to Sephardim in Israel. The derogatory terms used to describe Sephardim in Israel, such as 'primitive' and 'Frank' epitomise racist thinking. Shemesh added that 'I witnessed an Ashkenazi child on a television programme saying that his mother told him not to play with Sephardim.'

Shemesh goes on to speak of the Ashkenazi left, which he claims is helping the Sephardim in their struggle, but it cannot lead them to victory since it is bogged down unnecessarily with internal feuding. In any case the Panthers must lead the struggle of the down-trodden until the end.

He was then asked: 'Has the ruling establishment tried to buy you out?' and he replied, 'They tried many ways, but with no success. When they failed, they tried to destroy our organisation through arrests and police harassment, and two or three of our members have decided to desist from any further political activity.'

Shemesh said that 'the Sephardi question, in my opinion, starts with Zionism, for adherence to Zionist ideology means abandoning your original culture. Anyone who understand Zionist ideology knows that it is based on the culture of the European Jews and stands in direct contradiction to the native culture of the area. One of the establishment's greatest mistakes, for example, was to state that Sephardi culture is no more than a Jewish folk culture, for they were afraid that we would accept the concept that our culture is Arab. This is where the huge gap appears between Ashkenazi and Sephardi culture. We do not have any theatres or newspapers and so on, our customs, traditions and culture were Arab, whether we came from the Yemen, Iran, Iraq, the Middle East or Morocco. We are culturally part of the Arab world. That is what the Zionists fear most. Accordingly, they have done everything possible to deprive

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us of our past. In other words, they have presented a distorted image of Arab culture as "backward" . . . they ridiculed our accent . . . they despised us ... if I were to support Zionism that would mean that I would be working against my own identity. We Sephardim must thus sever our connections with the Zionist movement and say to them: "Yes. We are Sephardim. Yes. We are 'Orientals.'" This term is positive and not negative. We are not against Arab-Oriental culture, on the contrary we are part of it. I believe that we must make it easy for the Sephardim to reclaim their identity.' Shemesh mentioned that he did not want to study the literature which described the life of the Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe, or the history of Ashkenazi Jews whilst he knew nothing of his forebears' history. He declared, 'I will say it aloud: we are in the East and if Zionism wants to survive it can only do so through constant warfare. Thus, the only way for Israel to survive is for it to become a Middle Eastern country and to integrate with the area.'¹⁸

Sa'adya Marciano, the leader of the Black Panthers at that time, stated that 'Sephardi culture and the Sephardi way of life have been suffocated over the last thirty years. I am speaking of art, music and creativity. The establishment has been intent on suffocating all of that to stop it flourishing. It has wilfully neglected it, out of fear that Sephardi culture would destroy the way of life they have been trying to create here. In fact, the Ashkenazi establishment almost succeeded but for the renaissance of Sephardi culture amongst my generation. We are a generation which likes Arab music because it is beautiful and fascinating and which is not only moving away from being ashamed of its culture and traditions but is proud of them, and upon whose shoulders has fallen the burden of preserving that culture. The new state of peace with Egypt will bring about the most significant development for this generation. The bond will become natural when the borders are opened, and at that time our Ashkenazi brothers will see the majesty of Middle Eastern values. . . . They will accept it without fear, and it will be possible to take the best from both cultures . . .'¹⁹ Although Marciano supported the Palestinian cause, he stressed the Sephardi cause in order to widen his base among his community. On the other hand, Biton stressed, 'Zionist society is unjust. We started our activities with the struggle against poverty, but slowly we realised that the struggle is for the oppressed Palestinians as well. . .we should fight against a government which lets a minority govern a majority and we should support the poor against the rich.'

The longing of the Sephardim for their Middle Eastern homelands

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planted in their heart the hope that peace with Egypt would expand to include the Palestinians and the other Arab countries and that the borders would be open for them to revisit their homelands. The events which followed the 'peace' have proved that their belief was only political naivete.

After the Black Panthers elected a chairman, a treasurer and a legal adviser, and had set up an administrative apparatus for their activities, they drew up a political and economic manifesto as follows:

1. The rehabilitation of the slum districts
2. The availability of free education from the kindergarten to the university levels for all families of limited income.
3. Free housing to be built for all the poor.
4. The replacement of remand homes by agricultural children's villages.
5. A general increase in the wage levels for the heads of large families.
6. Comprehensive representation for Sephardim in the power structure.

The ruling Zionist establishment believed that the Black Panther Movement constituted a grave danger for the following reasons:

1. It was a revolutionary political movement which was born in the poor Sephardi areas, and was trying to unite the Sephardim and increase their representation in the organs of state and it expresses the feelings and the aspirations of most Sephardim.
2. It was opposed to the Ashkenazi settlers who controlled the state and the economy, although it was willing to work within the establishment and it did cooperate with Ashkenazi progressives.
3. It sympathised with the struggle of the Palestinian people.
4. Its pride in Sephardi-Islamic culture was destroying all the efforts of the ruling establishment to eradicate the Sephardi identity. These last two points could lead to forging an alliance between the Sephardim and the Arabs based on common culture, history and cause.
5. In order to meet its demands, Israel had to change its infrastructure.
6. It used mass demonstrations which threatened the existing order.

In 1973, Marciano and his followers joined the new and radical Israeli Democratic Party which had been formed by the journalist Shalom Cohen (of Iraqi origin, educated in Egypt and then the editor of the magazine, Ha'olam Hazeh). The party suffered failure

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in the parliamentary elections of 1973 but gained three seats on the Executive Committee of the Histadrut and 28 seats on 7 workers councils (of the Histadrut).

When prices rose sharply in 1974, the Panthers organised several demonstrations and strikes. Biton was sent to prison for a crime he did not commit, but thanks to public support he was pardoned. On 23 September 1975, the Black Panthers' Convention called for the elimination of discrimination and the establishment of a Palestinian state. From now on the Ashkenazi left diverted the Panthers to 'class struggle' rather than ethnic equality. The most active Ashkenazi groups in the work were Ya'ad, Moked and the Communist Party.

In 1977 the Panthers started aspiring again to enter the legislature, but they split up into small groups with each one sheltering behind a different Ashkenazi left-wing party. Charlie Biton joined the Democratic Front (Hadash) which included the Communist Party, the local Palestinian Councils and some Jewish revolutionary factions. He was placed third on the electoral list and was appointed a Member of Parliament, although his organisation was still called the Black Panthers. In 1990 he left Hadash. Sa'adya Marciano joined the Sheli Party which represented the Zionist far left and whose leadership was made up of Aryeh Eliav, Uri Avneri and Matti Peled. Shalom Cohen, Yehoshua Peretz (a Moroccan trade unionist) and the famous Israeli author, Ephraim Kishon, formed a new group. Another group of Panthers joined the Dash Party which was headed by Yigal Yadin. The Black Panthers then ceased to exist politically and all its leaders disappeared, except for Charlie Biton and Kokhavi Shemesh.

Charlie Biton's membership of the Democratic Front under the leadership of the Communist Party had advantages and disadvantages. The advantages were as follows:

1. He was elected to Parliament to represent the interests of the Palestinians and the Sephardim.
2. The Panthers received financial support from the Front.
3. Sephardim worked together with Palestinians since the overwhelming majority of the Front's and the Communist Party's members were Palestinian Arabs. Generally the Front won 40 percent of the Palestinian vote.

The disadvantages were that the Panthers, before they joined the Democratic Front, used to stress that they were struggling against Ashkenazi Zionist racism, but they now have to talk in terms of

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'class struggle' - which is the exact stance of the Ashkenazi left. This transformation has led to the alienation of most Sephardim from the Panthers (see chapter eight, pp 223-25).

Why The Black Panthers Failed To Become A Mass Movement

1. Fear of state terrorism, violence, arrests and torture used by the government against the Black Panthers paralysed many of their supporters.
2. The government incorporated some of the Panthers by providing them with jobs or housing.
3. The policy of 'divide and rule' which the left-wing parties employed. We must mention that all the factions of the Panthers which joined the left-wing Zionist parties, such as Sheli and Dash, disappeared. This belies the belief of some who claimed that 'we must work from within the establishment in order to change it to our advantage.'
4. Membership of the Panthers in the Democratic Front limited the Panthers' independence and alienated those who refused to apply the theory of 'class struggle' to ethnic division. We must emphasise that the worst form of McCarthyism in the West took place in Israel. It destroyed the lives of thousands of Jews and Palestinians - most of whom were not communists. In addition, the Democratic Front paid no attention to the struggle of the Sephardi intelligentsia and professionals against racial discrimination.
5. The lack of any economic base. All parties in Israel have an economic base to fund them. The party in turn represents and defends the interests of this economic base in the institutions of state. The economic base of the Mapai (Labour) Party, for example, is the Histadrut and its economic institutions such as the Histadrut factories, banks, the construction and development companies, the communications and marketing companies, etc., as well as the settlement movements which subscribe to the party, such as kibbutzim and moshavim. These utilities together form the largest employer and control most of the workers and jobs, that is they control the standard of living of the majority of the population. When a disagreement arose between Ben Gurion, the head of the party, and most of the other party leaders, he seceded and formed a new party - 'Rafi' - in the belief that he would be able to attract the party membership over to his side. He failed however, and the new party remained small and weak. The party apparatus and the

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economic empire behind the party is stronger than any single leader. The left-wing Zionist Mapam Party has its base in its own kibbutzim which are members of the Kibbutz Ha'artzi Federation. The power base of the Likud bloc is private sector capital. The Black Panthers, on the other hand, do not have an economic base, and their membership was, and still is, made up of the poorest sector of the population. As a result, the organisation cannot fund its activities or help its supporters. In addition, the state funds the parties and their electoral campaigns in proportion to the number of members they have in parliament and the local councils, making it almost impossible for the new or small parties to compete with the well-established 'veteran' parties. Hence, the participation of the Panthers in the general elections meant certain failure, and it would have been better for them to remain an extra-parliamentary movement representing the Sephardim of all political beliefs. They could thus have worked at uniting to fight against racial discrimination and for a just peace.

6. A large part of the Sephardi population lives outside the Panther's field of influence (which is mainly in the Black Belt districts where they live). These are the people who live in the development towns and the remote cooperative settlements under the economic, political and organisational control of Zionist settlers, and they receive their daily bread from Zionist overseers (see chapter five).

7. All the Panthers' leaders come from the 'margins' of society, having very little education and being alienated from the trade unions, the professions and the Sephardi bourgeoisie.

8. Whereas the trade unions and the left-wing parties in other countries support down-trodden and oppressed communities, these organisations in Israel form the backbone of the Ashkenazi Zionist establishment. Even the Communist Party only supports the Sephardim as workers, and not as an ethnic community with its own cultural identity.

9. The Ashkenazi media depicted the Panthers as riff-raff and criminals, which alienated the 'respectable' Sephardim from them. Charlie Biton says that 'we published our abhorrence of racial discrimination wherever we could, hoping that we could attract Sephardi university students, the elite of the youth, but to no avail. They sympathised with the reasons which pushed us to rebel and even helped us, but only from afar - unfortunately, since the great majority of them feared for their status and achievements.'²⁰ The truth is that for the Sephardi intelligentsia the threat of 'job loss' was a very effective weapon which neutralised them.

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10. The 1973 war enabled the government to engross the masses in the 'external' danger. Since the time of the British Mandate, the Zionists have exploited the 'Arab danger' to dilute the struggle against racism. They used the slogan 'the unity of the Jewish people against the Arab enemy'. The same 'danger' helped them to spend most of the resources on military expansionism and to maintain the economic gap between the two Jewish communities. Obviously the Israeli rulers are afraid of peace. In the fifties, they said that they needed thirty years of tension and siege by the Arabs so that the 'desert generation' would die out - that is, the Sephardi Jews who were born and raised in Arab countries - and for Israeli society to be fully integrated.

11. Lack of experience and knowledge in political work.

In addition to state-sponsored harassment and terror, the Jewish Defence League, headed by the American Rabbi Martin Kahane, 'declared war' on the Black Panthers in 1973. In the eighties, after this fascist gang formed the Kach Party, its members started demonstrating outside the home of Charlie Biton in Jerusalem, shouting 'Where is Charlie Biton, the Arab? We are not the foreign settlers!'

The bulk of Kach's membership is made up of Jews who immigrated from America and who held anti-black views there. They, together with Russian immigrants, have now turned their racism against the Sephardim as well as the Palestinians.

Claims of the Ashkenazi Far Left

The far-leftists who took up the Palestinian cause published their reasons for the failure of the Black Panthers. It will be noticed that their claims are based on dubious Zionist sources.

1. Sephardim (or 'Orientals' according to their paternalistic terminology) do not constitute a single society with a culture of its own, there are Iraqis, Moroccans, Yemenites, etc. Each group has its own culture. This view is in complete accord with Zionist claims that there is no single Arab community and culture. Most of these leftists are ignorant of the true state of affairs in the Arab world, and can only communicate with their Palestinian 'brethren' in English.

2. Lack of cooperation with the Palestinian people. Firstly, the Sephardim believe that the Palestinians would be a danger to their

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livelihood, and secondly, the Sephardim are hostile to the Arabs because of the 'oppression' they suffered in the Arab world which is why they started supporting the 'hawks' in Israel.

The truth is that the Black Panthers have always supported the principle of solidarity with the Palestinian people. The Sephardim did not begrudge the Palestinians from the occupied territories their jobs road-sweeping, cleaning Ashkenazi toilets, dish-washing and so on, since these were very low-paid jobs and the Sephardim had refused to do them. The Sephardim believe that the real conflict is not between them and the Palestinians but with the Ashkenazi overseers who try to keep them down so that they can preserve their privileges. Funds spent on rehabilitating the slum districts would mean cut-backs in the amount available for Ashkenazi settlement in the occupied territories. It would not mean a cut-back in the budgets of Arab villages, since they function almost without government funding anyway.

The myth that the Arabs oppressed the Jews in Arab countries has been propagated by the Zionists. There were, in fact, some regrettable incidents, but how can the new generation of Sephardim remember this 'oppression' when they have not lived in Arab countries, but were born in Israel? Their parents, who were born in Iraq, Iran, Egypt etc., and suffered from the so-called 'Arab oppression' did not vote for the 'hawks' but for the Labour party - until 1977. Thereafter half of them voted for the right-wing Likud, but not for ideological reasons, rather it was an economic protest vote. Far left-wing Ashkenazim always blame the Sephardim for having voted for the hawks and forget that all these 'hawks' are Ashkenazim. When they speak of the settlements on the West Bank they forget that they are all Ashkenazi, and when they speak of the fascist media in the slum districts they forget that the fascist machinery is totally Ashkenazi.

Who are Kahane, Begin, Sharon, Eitan, Shamir, Levinger and the other right-wing party activists who form the core of the Likud? They are all Ashkenazim. Who are the left-wing hawks such as Ben Gurion, Rabin, Dayan, Yadin, Peres and others? They are all Ashkenazim. The same goes for the leaders of the army, the intelligence services, the police and the whole Zionist establishment. When Ashkenazi left-wingers speak about these people, they forget that they are Ashkenazim and do not refer to their ethnic origin. When they speak about 'their following' they emphasise their ethnic origin - Sephardi. This is not to say that the Sephardim have no

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negative characteristics or that there are no traitors amongst their ranks, but to stress these negative phenomena does not help the common struggle for a just peace. It seems to me also that there is a division of labour amongst the Ashkenazim themselves. The Ashkenazi right incites the Sephardim against the Arabs, and the Ashkenazi left incites the Arabs against the Sephardim. The far left presents another 'reason' for the failure of the Panthers: they refused to cooperate with the Ashkenazi working class. The truth is that the Panthers were fragmented, as we have seen, because of this cooperation.

The Ashkenazi far left accuses the Sephardim of anti-Ashkenazi racism because Sephardim on the whole believe that the Ashkenazi community is responsible for the racial discrimination directed against them and against the Palestinians. This is exactly the position of the progressive world toward the whites in South Africa, and toward the French settlers in Algeria before independence. The international community has accepted this principle with regard to the responsibility of the German people for the policies of the Nazi era. This stance cannot be termed racist. The high standards of living of the Ashkenazim are founded on the exploitation of the Palestinians and the Sephardim.²¹

Establishment Reaction

Following the Panthers' demonstrations, the government formed the Horovitz Committee to enquire into the problem. The brief of the Committee was to look into the government's official stance that 'the lower educational level of the Sephardim has caused them to be discriminated against.' The Committee, however, came to the opposite conclusion, which was that 'as the educational level of the Sephardim is raised, they meet more discrimination' - that is to say that Sephardi intellectuals are exposed to greater discrimination than their under-educated brethren.²² This indeed is the secret of the worsening of the economic and educational gap between the communities.

The committee of enquiry added that the standard of living of the Sephardim went down between 1959-1969.²³

At the beginning of 1972, Dr Katz, the Director of Israeli National Social Security, published an article entitled 'Who and what is preventing the narrowing of the social gap?' DrKatz concluded that national insurance was not capable of narrowing the economic gap

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between the two communities, and that many children from large (i.e.Sephardi) families cannot benefit from university education because of their economic condition. Only 6 percent of the children who began their elementary schooling in 1951/1952 finished their secondary schooling successfully. In the Ashkenazi community, the percentage is 35 percent.²⁴ Dr Katz does not reveal how many Sephardi students were accepted by the Hebrew University or the Technion in Haifa.

On 28 June 1973, Ma'ariv published the report of the Prime Minister's Committee on Youth which dealt with the harshness of their material and psychological conditions. The report mentioned that 80 percent of youth belonged to the working class, and that 92 percent were Sephardim. The criteria used in the study were as follows:

1. A monthly income of \$20 per person
2. Poor housing conditions with 3 or more persons to a room.
3. The parents' lack of education.

The Prime Minister, Golda Meir, when receiving the Black Panthers, had declared, 'In the past they were good children, and I hope that some of them will continue to be good. But I am afraid that others are not!'²⁵ This is the paternalistic attitude which runs through the state at all levels. None of the social services provided for the Sephardim acquit themselves honourably, rather they provide 'acts of charity to help the Sephardim to be better off than they were in the Arab countries they came from.' One of the means of psychological control used against the Sephardim is 'the cult of the state' whereby they serve the state and not vice versa.

Let us return to Dr Katz, who chaired the government committee made up of 113 members to look into the problems of poverty, and which did not include a single non-establishment Sephardi. The committee set up 14 sub-committees, and finally presented a lengthy report with their recommendations. Neither the government of Golda Meir, nor those which followed, did anything to diminish discrimination. Nor did Dr Katz himself, who subsequently became Minister of Employment and Social Services in the Likud government in 1980.²⁶

The author, Matti Ronen, commented on this report,²⁷ that 'the government feared the spread of the Black Panther organization throughout the country which is why it set up the Katz Committee to appease the moderates in the Panther movement, and to persuade them that the government was undertaking some action to solve

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the problems of the Sephardim.'

The Katz Committee was authorised:

1. To define issues concerning underprivileged youth.
2. To look into the services which deal with the youth and children.
3. To make suggestions on how to improve their conditions.

The report issued by this committee comprised 11 topics which covered all the branches of the social services and included 289 recommendations. However the government only implemented a small portion of them. The following are some of the recommendations:

1. An effort should be made to reduce the gap between the two communities in the areas of housing, health and education, etc. The report stressed that 25 percent of the country's children were living in misery owing to their parents' lack of education as well as overcrowding in the home. This high percentage represents a danger to social equilibrium and could well push the underprivileged sector of the population to take revolutionary steps against the establishment, since 94 percent of the poor are Sephardim who believed that racial discrimination is the reason for their poverty. Matti Ronen commented on this recommendation that the government decided to upgrade social services without giving any priority to the needs of the poor. Therefore some Ashkenazim were able to benefit from this action and the social gap between the communities worsened.
2. A special government bureau should be set up to deal with the welfare of the poor (i.e. the Sephardim). However, the government rejected this recommendation and instead set up advisory committees without any executive authority. There was a prevailing belief that the government was only taking cosmetic measures.
3. Sephardim should participate in welfare plans by decentralising government, granting extensive powers to the local authorities. Furthermore they should be allowed to form local leaderships. Ronen comments that the ruling establishment has always tried to strengthen the central authority and has steadfastly treated the Sephardim paternalistically, justifying this with claims that Sephardi culture is debased and that their Arab culture cannot cope with the demands of a modern state. However, the Government rejected this recommendation.
4. Public consciousness should be dealt with for the sake of 'social cohesion' - that is, the racist opinions of Ashkenazi society should be countered. (However, what in fact happened was that racist views

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about Sephardim and Palestinians became more firmly entrenched after the beginning of the seventies.)

In conclusion, we can state that Ronen was correct. The Ashkenazi government did not try to solve the problem of the two communities mutual incompatibility, and only tried to quell the Black Panther movement's popular uprisings.

At the same time, foreign journalists were sending out detailed reports about the bloody clashes between the Black Panthers and the security force. International circles received these reports with incredulity - 'Jews fighting Jews? Racism within the Jewish people, itself the victim of racism?' World Zionism, which had managed to cover up these problems since the end of the last century, very quickly started up its propaganda machine, which is one of the slickest in the world, to persuade public opinion in the West that racism does not exist in Israel and that the economic gap between the communities was a result of the Sephardim being educationally so far behind the Ashkenazim who were qualified, experienced and trained to deal with the latest technology. It also churned out the old story that Israel too was beset by the same hardships as the Western countries with their third world immigrants.

Sephardim and Likud

After the disintegration of the Black Panthers' unity in 1977, the Sephardim had only one way of getting rid of the Zionist establishment's rule as represented by the Labour Party, and its parliamentary bloc, Ma'arakh, that was to vote for the opposition - the right-wing Likud under the leadership of Menahem Begin, leader of the Herut Party. Many Sephardim took the view that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. From then on, the Sephardim started to gain more influence in the Herut Party, until the party conference of 1986 when there were clashes between the interests of the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim over the leaders of the party.

In a letter to Falestine al-Thawra,²⁸ Na'im Kedourie Ruben discussed the reasons which had made Sephardim vote for Begin and the growing position of his community in the Likud Bloc which had managed to oust the Labour Party from power in 1977.

He writes:

. . . Begin started off as the leader of a small party. After 29 years

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as the leader of the Opposition to the Labour (Mapai) Government he won the elections in 1977 for the following reasons:

1. He exploited the plight of the Sephardim who had been condemned by the Labour government to become the 'proletariat', after having been members of the middle classes in Arab countries and in Palestine before Zionist settlement. Begin promised them complete equality, not just in the state but in his party too.
2. Begin encouraged Sephardi party activists who had a local following. He helped to establish local leadership such as that of David Levi who led the poor of Bet Shean.
3. By believing in economic liberalisation and encouraging private sector capital, Begin helped the Sephardim, who suffered from racial discrimination in state and Histadrut workplaces, to improve their situation and to become part of the petit bourgeoisie. Many became restaurateurs, or garage- and boutique-owners. He thus tied them economically to his right-wing party, and at the same time many [Sephardi] workers went to work for the private sector since advancement was much easier there than in the state or Histadrut factories.

Since work conditions in state and Histadrut factories were much better than in the private sector, competition between Ashkenazim and Sephardim was more aggressive, with the Ashkenazi managements giving preference to their own. On the other hand, promotion for Sephardim in the private sector was much easier. Moreover, the Sephardim were, and still are, subjected to much worse exploitation by the Ashkenazi kibbutzim than by the private sector.

Consequently, half of the Sephardi workforce moved into the private sector, and was tied economically to the Herut party. This analysis disproves the propaganda which states that the Sephardim support Herut because of their hostility to the Arabs.

The foregoing shows how the Sephardim gained influence in the Herut movement by flocking to the conference in large numbers. This development could well lead to their complete control of the party and its leadership with the help of their Druze and Bedouin comrades in the party.

The 'Sephardi danger' instilled fear in the hearts of the Ashkenazi settlers and businessmen and Shamir has only managed to stay in power by manipulating the figures . . .

This was the reason for the break-down of the party conference.

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Many Sephardim believe that the Herut Party is going to be the Sephardi party, (although the balance of power favours the rich Ashkenazi minority over the poor majority). Accordingly, the Ashkenazi minority in the party has managed to attract to its ranks some Sephardim, such as Moshe Katsav and Meir Shitrit.

At any rate, 40 percent of Sephardim are currently voting for Labour and far left wing groups.²⁹

Since the Likud did not fulfil its promises to the Sephardim, and the poorest section became worse off as described in chapter nine, it lost many votes in the 1984 election. Neither of the two large parties was able to form a government, causing a real parliamentary crisis until the Americans forced the two blocs to form a coalition government. Henceforth, this government has been paralysed, spending most of its time in quarrels and mutual backbiting, leading to the present crisis (1990).

The Impact of the Black Panthers on the Sephardim

The Black Panther Movement encouraged the Sephardim to discuss ethnic discrimination publicly, to condemn it and fight against it. It also provided an active incentive for the renaissance of Sephardi culture and provided a groundswell of support for the struggle of the Palestinians.

Previously the Sephardi masses had been afraid to discuss the problem openly for the ruling establishment accused anyone who complained of racial discrimination of 'incitement', 'sectarianism' or 'exploiting the sectarian plight for his own personal interests'. It often accused him of what it termed 'dividing a united people', or it sneered that he was suffering from an inferiority complex. In fact the ruling establishment had, and still has, a terror of people like Eliahu Eliachar, David Ben Harush and others, who fought back. The Israeli intelligence services have always placed Sephardim who criticise racial discrimination under surveillance.

Not all of those who started speaking about this subject publicly were 'marginals' or anti-Zionists - there were also people who had served the Zionist establishment. Amongst these was Professor Yehuda Nini, of Yemenite origin, who was a commander in the 1948 war. He was later appointed secretary to the Minister of Education, Zalman Aran, and professor of literature at the Hebrew

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at the Hebrew University, participating in various committees of the Zionist media. We mentioned in chapter two his writings about the abhorrent treatment meted out to the Yemenites in Palestine by Ashkenazi settlers. In the spring of 1971 Professor Yehuda Nini wrote an important essay entitled 'Thoughts on the Destruction of the Third Temple'. The author foresees that the destruction of the state of Israel will come about through anti-Sephardi racial discrimination. Nini states it was necessary to go to the Yemenite Jews and 'tell them that they died (in 1948) for the Abramovitches and their like; sons of small shopkeepers, textile merchants and profiteers became the princes who rule us. The government and administration are Ashkenazi Jews. Statistics show that among them are a few from Eastern countries, but note well to what posts they are relegated. You will find them at the bottom of the ladder, among the waiters in the cafes, the clerks and small administrators.'

Professor Nini accused Israeli judges of being racists and swindlers: 'Let an Oriental commit the smallest crime, even if acquitted he gets thrown into prison. Let an Ashkenazi contravene the law, eyes are shut to it and he is even acclaimed publicly and if he must be penalised he can "aspire" to an open prison.'

Nini presents the Abramovitches (i.e. Ashkenazim) as 'bloodsuckers' on the body of the Sephardi community: 'those from Islamic countries have been expelled with trifling opposition from any corner of good earth which could be the object of a development programme so that the "others" may prosper.'

Nini demolishes the myth of complete equality in the army, saying that 'there is not a single Sephardi general, and there are very few Sephardi colonels or lieutenant-colonels. In rank below that of major, there are 10 percent Sephardim. The other military professions, such as pilots and specialists are staffed by the kibbutzniks and Western immigrants. The soldiers who have to do the cooking, the cleaning and other services are all Sephardim, and these latter hate their military duties and sometimes beat up their Ashkenazi officers. In some units you will find that a third, or a half, of the soldiers have served time in prison for insubordination or violence.'

It should be pointed out that Nini's study was not published in the anti-government press, but in *Shdemot*, a magazine of the Kibbutz Organisation.³⁰ The essay caused an outcry. It was not easy to make vicious attacks on Nini, for he was not a 'marginal' or 'an agent of Moscow'. The magazine which published his article

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was an establishment publication and Ha'aretz therefore concluded that Nini was worse than Matzpen (i.e. the extreme left).³¹

Cultural Renaissance

The awakening of the Black Panthers coincided with social developments which led to a radical change in the stance of the Sephardim toward the Ashkenazi rulers and their culture. Until that point, the Sephardi position had been characterised by fear, vacillation and shame over their culture and history. The fear was a result of the government's iron fist which employed the weapon of job dismissal in a harsh manner against any Sephardi who raised his voice in protest. Control by the ruling party (Mapai, or Labour) over the Sephardim was total as the party controlled the government, the government apparatus, the trade unions, the Jewish Agency and the factories and economic projects of the Histadrut. Hesitancy was a result of the crumbs dropped by the authorities to those who kept quiet, and the Sephardim exhibited shame toward their culture as the Ashkenazi-controlled media and educational system, literature, theatre, etc., managed to condition the new generation into believing that Sephardi culture is 'primitive, backward and barbarian'. Now their courage started to appear anew, not only because of the emergence of the Black Panthers, but there were other developments too which reinforced their identity.

The rise in the proportion of Sephardim - for example, from 30 percent in 1948 to 65 percent in 1971 - was a catalyst in this process. Wherever they were, in the fields, the factories or the coffee shop, they started to see that they were surrounded by members of their own community, they heard Arabic spoken, and they started to discover their common traditions again, notwithstanding that they had different countries of origin. They became increasingly aware that the Ashkenazi/American culture imposed on the country was what had pushed some of them into crime, prostitution, cultural bankruptcy, corruption and the breakdown of their families. They concluded that their Sephardi culture was better than the culture of the Zionist state and they started to take pride in it and tried to revive it. Their lowly position in Ashkenazi society only made them more aware of the honoured position they had held in Arab society, in Baghdad, Cairo, Beirut and Damascus, etc. They realised that Zionism had misled them.

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In the fifties, most Sephardim were immigrants from the Arab world who did not understand Hebrew or the ins and outs of government. Some of them clung to the false premise that Israel was the long-awaited Messianic state which had come about to save Jews and mankind from injustice . . . By the seventies most of them were Israeli born and educated. They could speak the language of the regime, and understood the ruses and cruelty of their rulers and started to disdain their parents' naivete and weakness. They started to rebel.

There was another reason: in the fifties, unemployment was widespread amongst the Sephardim and forced them into submission - the welfare state did not exist. Those without work were in danger of dying from hunger. However, in the seventies the economy was in a better state, unemployment had gone down and the private sector had expanded and was not controlled by the ruling party. Many Sephardim left the public sector and the Histadrut sector and joined the private sector, particularly the petits bourgeois - divesting themselves of the formerly omnipresent fear of unemployment or dismissal.

On the other hand, the Ashkenazi government has used the Sephardim as front-line soldiers resulting in considerable loss of life and fostering systematic evasion of army service. In the slum districts most young men refuse to join the army. There are 'no go' areas for the military authorities, which call this phenomenon 'social shortcoming' (in addition to claiming that they are 'drug addicts' and 'criminals' or 'lunatics'). They issue a document which indicates that the bearer has been 'exempted' from military service under Article 24. Those holding it boast that they belong to 'Commando Unit 24'. The minority who join the army are considered stupid and are the butt of jokes and objects of scorn in the slum districts.

The journalist Shalom Cohen (of Ha'olam Hazeh) asked one of these youths if he would like to join the armed forces. He replied, 'Me, serve in their army! No chance. When they summoned me for the medical examination, I stuffed myself full of drugs, and they sent me to a psychiatrist and got my papers stamped with Article 24. I'd have to be a real sucker to throw away three years of my life doing nothing.' The journalist added that this youth lived in Pardes Katz where those exempted from the army constitute over 50 percent.³²

In the realm of culture, the Sephardim started to show an interest in Arabic poetry and music in public. Having previously listened

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to the Arabic radio stations half-secretly, they now started to tune into the Arabic radio and television of the Arab states openly, throwing down the gauntlet to the Ashkenazim's distaste for what they termed 'primitive' Arabic music. They started to form Arabic music and dance groups and set up a cassette and video industry to make up for the almost complete absence of Arabic music and films in the Israeli media, which only broadcast one half hour a week of 'ethnic programming', as if the Sephardim were a small minority.

In addition, they started to criticise the school syllabuses for only covering Ashkenazi culture and history and for depicting the Sephardim as having been primitives who were straight out of the desert - until the settlers 'civilised' them. The curriculum included no mention of Sephardi history, because it was part of Arab history, and Palestinian history was studied in a way that accorded with Zionist views. That is to say that it was studied up until the fall of the Jewish state in 70 A.D. and then taken up again with the start of Zionist settlement at the end of the last century - as if Palestine had been empty for 2,000 years until the Ashkenazi immigrants discovered it and set about planting trees, draining the swamps and 'making the desert bloom'.

Sephardi intellectuals in France applied themselves to studying their history and publishing it. Hayyim Za'afarani stated 'we are witnessing now the awakening of the Sephardi mind ... a mind which is giving impetus to the development of an ethnic group, a culture which is different from the other cultural, ethnic and intellectual groups which make up the Jewish world . . . we have set about rediscovering the culture and history inherited from the golden age of Jewish-Arab cooperation which occurred in the Middle East.'³³ Professor Za'afarani continued, 'Our studies in Jewish thought in North Africa have been completed. Our findings show, and will continue to show, the Jews' constant devotion in those countries to producing excellent works in the fields of philosophy, law, poetry, literature, commentaries, sermons, and collections of oral folklore which were written down in the Hebrew dialects which were a mixture of Hebrew, Arabic and Berber.'³⁴

Sephardi intellectuals were proud of the tolerance of their Judaism (which was undoubtedly influenced by Islamic tolerance), compared to the Ashkenazi rite which is much stricter and more dogmatic.

Nairn Khlaschi, of Iraqi origin, pointed out that 'Sephardim are part of Arab culture. They have common traditions, they honour the teacher and the father, they respect the family framework, strive for their children's education, eat the same food and listen to the

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same music. Rich and poor alike, they prefer the music of Farid al-Atrash to that of Wagner. Charlie Biton and his colleagues are promising to resurrect Sephardi culture, which is being suppressed and destroyed. Israel does not deserve to carry on as a foreign Western state here in the East.' Khlaschi added that when he attempted to defend Sephardim in the transit camps, the establishment threatened to make him a simple worker. However, he refused to do other than preserve his human dignity, and his culture as an Iraqi, at any cost. 'Once the Minister of Police was invited to Ramat Gan, a small town near Tel Aviv whose population is 25 percent Iraqi, to discuss foreign and security affairs. Invitations were sent to all the Iraqis, including the deputy mayor. 600 people attended the meeting, but there were only 6 Iraqis. The rest were Ashkenazi pensioners. When the minister asked why the Iraqis had stayed away, he was told that a concert of Umm Kulthoum was being televised.'

Khlaschi ascribed the spread of prostitution amongst Sephardi girls in Israel to the destruction of Sephardi culture and the imposition of Western culture. He spoke of his optimism that Middle Eastern culture would eventually prevail in spite of the difficulties. He said that instead of a perfunctory glance at the history of the Jews of Iraq and North Africa which is how schools teach now, pupils would be taught in depth about the ancient Jewish universities in Iraq, such as Sura and Pumbedita. He added that Ashkenazi teachers claim that these were only religious seminaries whereas in fact they taught a wide range of subjects.³⁵

In the field of singing, Shlomo Bar, of Moroccan origin, set up a group called 'The Natural Choice Band' which was received enthusiastically by the nostalgic Sephardi public. Bar stated that Moroccan Jews never suffered from oppression in Morocco. Jews and Muslims coexisted so closely there that Muslims prayed at the graves of Jewish saints. Bar added that he wanted to teach his son Arabic so that he could get along with his Palestinian neighbours.³⁶

Amongst the tapes which have been distributed on cassettes were the songs of Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, Umm Kulthum, Farid al-Atrash, Asmahan and Nazem al-Ghazali.³⁷ An eager Iraqi public lapped up tapes of Milo Hamama, and of the Iraqi singer, Murad Salman Basun, who re-recorded and reissued his songs.

A number of intellectuals have started to write their memoirs of life in Arab countries. Because of the climate of cultural repression, most of these works are published in Hebrew. The best-known of these books is *A House in Baghdad* by Yitzhak Bar Moshe, in which

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he describes the warm relations which prevailed between Jews, Christians and Muslims in Iraq. Y. Qujman published his valuable book, *Contemporary Classical Music in Iraq*, which was published in London by ACT in Arabic in 1978. Ezzat Sasson-Mu'allim published the memoirs of his family in a book entitled *By The Rivers Of Babylon* in 1980 (in Arabic). Nissim Rejwan wrote *The Jews of Iraq* in English and was published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

One of the best-known intellectuals who did not give up his mother tongue, that is Arabic, is Samir Naqqash. On 28 June 1986 Falestine al-Thawra published an article by him in which he condemns the way he was arbitrarily uprooted from Iraq and he explains why he persevered in using Arabic as follows:³⁸

'Language is the most important means of communicating with people. Communication is the basic objective of the writer. Language is the raw material and the writer's expressive power and energy is in proportion to his grasp of the raw material.

'Arabic is my first language. The first words I spoke were in Arabic. It is my natural language and I have always loved it. I have a great passion for it. Moreover, Arabic is well known for its beauty and richness. Hebrew, which was a dead language for thousands of years until it was resurrected very recently, can just not be compared with it in terms of richness or utter beauty.

'In modern Iraq, some of the most outstanding poets and writers were Jews. Studies in the development of contemporary Iraqi poetry and literature concluded that the first short story was written in the twenties by a Jewish youth - Murad Mikha'il (who recently passed away in Israel). These Iraqi/Jewish writers and poets continued writing in Arabic in Israel. However, there are those who continue to express their surprise at the fact that I write in Arabic although I left Iraq when I was 12 years old . . . Some people repudiate the fact that I have personal and artistic reasons for writing in Arabic and simply consider it a "complex" I have.

'All the problems, which I and my family went through after the catastrophe of being uprooted from Iraq and transplanted here, have made me more nostalgic. My love for Arabic was redoubled and I made an effort to absorb every word of classical and colloquial Arabic that I come across. I have never become assimilated in this country. On the contrary, I have opposed everything 'Israeli', and I, like many people of Iraqi origin, still consider myself an Iraqi. That is the truth, notwithstanding that some people try to deny it.'

However, Sephardim were unable to revive their Arabic-Islamic art and craft and their skills died with them. Only a fraction of their

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works found their way to Israeli museums.

The Emergence of Other Protest Movements

Since the British Mandate, all the Zionist parties have set up special branches for the Sephardim, that is, a bureau for Sephardi affairs within the party. In fact the purpose of the bureau was to solicit Sephardi votes in parliamentary and local elections. The officials of the bureau were salaried and their duties included bribing, intimidation and patronage. These methods are still employed. When Na'im Khaschi was brought to Tel Aviv in 1951 to work on Al-Mirsad (the Arabic newspaper of the left-wing Mapam party) he was sent to party headquarters where he was told to go to room number 8. It was labelled 'Bureau of Sephardim and Yemenites', next to the lavatory and the 'Arabic Section'). He was thunderstruck. When he was asked to come in, he replied 'No. I'm going home. I am having an attack of diarrhoea. Perhaps tomorrow. . .'. Khaschi described a Sephardi meeting which took place in Mapam under the banner 'For Socialism and Zionism and the Brotherhood of Peoples'. Ashkenazi leaders gave speeches of mind-boggling lengthiness. He asked to be allowed to say a word and they shut him up. Finally he was permitted to speak for five minutes. He addressed his words to the head of the party, Me'ir Ya'ari: 'We do not want a special department for Sephardim and Yemenites. We don't want a "Negro's Department"' Me'ir Ya'ari refused to countenance absorbing the Sephardim and Yemenites into the main body of the party, so Na'im threw away his party card and left the meeting. The department was only abolished ten years later. 'My quarrel with those leaders is not new,' Na'im added. 'I have known how they behave for a long time. In the Mapai (Labour) Party too there is a special Sephardi Department - next to the toilets too, but the room number is different!'

Ezra Sofer wrote about Zionist party agents in Sephardi society in Ha'aretz on 22 May 1981. 'In the past people used to boast about their thoroughbred horses but now the party leaders compete over the Sephardim. Menahem Begin won over David Levi, Moshe Dayan has Ben Porat and Shimon Peres uses Shoshana Arbili. Soon they will start comparing the relative values of their tame "natives".'

Against this background, Gabriel Ben Simhon (of Moroccan origin) said to a correspondent of Ha'aretz on 28 May 1980 that 'Sephardim realise that this government does not represent them . . .

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They must create an organized opposition, a force which is ready to fight - a force which by rights is theirs.' (See chapter seven for a precis of the article.)

The formation of the Black Panthers was followed by Sephardi youth organisations which aimed to improve conditions through positive action, and not through popular uprisings. The most important of these organisations are Oded, Ohalim, Ela, ShHQ and the Eastern Front.

Oded

This movement was born in the Israeli universities. It believes in positive action to improve the conditions of the Sephardi community, such as helping weak pupils with their studies. It also aims to raise the level of social consciousness and independence of action of the Sephardim so that they can solve their own problems instead of waiting for the progressive Ashkenazim to come along.

It cannot be denied that the Ashkenazim have imbued the Sephardim with an inferiority complex. The membership of Oded says that in order to throw off this complex they must help their community and prove that they have freed themselves from this psychological domination and that they can succeed independently in a new society.

Since the community was always autonomous under Islamic and Ottoman rule, it was the individual's duty to serve his community. This autonomy has been destroyed in the state of Israel, and those who want to work for their community were told 'Leave it to the government or the Jewish Agency,' or 'you are a sectarian and are shredding the unity of the Jewish people'. Thus the Sephardi community, particularly the poor, were left to the mercy of those in power - the Ashkenazim. When things got worse, they criticised the government and the Jewish Agency, but they did nothing because the state of Israel had made them forget how to work on behalf of the community and had conditioned them through the media to believe that they, and the Arabs as a whole, were incapable of carrying out social action, or cooperating with each other, because they suffered from the individualism and corruption which had been prevalent in the Ottoman era. Of course that is the racist view point from which Oded tried to free people.

Oded also encouraged 'help exchange' groups to work with pupils who were weak at school, to organise summer holidays for Sephardi

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children and to run preparatory courses for new pupils. It encouraged political activity at the university level, and its activity spread throughout the country.

Initially the authorities had reservations about the organisation, but then became hostile and cut off all financial help for two reasons: firstly, because the movement helped the community to work independently of the establishment, and secondly, because the organisation was accused of 'political activity'.

The organisation does admit that its activities can be somewhat condescending in the way help is meted out by the intellectuals to the masses, but the Sephardi masses have reached such a state of degradation that the organisation has to customise the help it offers to them. The organisation hopes, however, that by helping the down-trodden to set themselves aright and achieve positions within the ruling establishment, these same people will perhaps be able to change government policy towards their community by means of ethical pressure and by stirring up opposition - not against the Ashkenazi community, but against existing conditions in the country.

The weak points of Oded are very apparent and can be summarised as follows:

1. Dependence on government funding means that the government can destroy the organisation whenever it wants. It is the ruling establishment which created the social structure, and thus it is pure political naivete to demand the government's help to destroy it.
2. Its paternalistic attitude toward the masses: if the Oded Movement believed in independent action it would have joined the Black Panther Movement, and/or worked at the grass roots level. The way to confront the problems should be for the intellectuals and the workers to unite in their struggle.
3. If the Sephardim are the victims of the Zionist state, why does the movement insist on the principle of supporting Zionism and the state of Israel? This is reminiscent of the stance of the Communist Party which states 'We are against Zionism, but we support the state of Israel', even though the state of Israel with its institutions and policies is the true embodiment of Zionism.

The Oded people proved their political naivete when they joined with Mapam for two years. This marriage ended in failure because Mapam is a Zionist colonialist party whose kibbutzim exploit Sephardim. Mapam wanted to use Oded as a bridge-head to control the Sephardi community, particularly to win votes in the elections,

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but it refused to grant any significant positions in the party leadership apparatus to Oded people. When they insisted that such positions would help the whole community to improve its lot in the social ladder, the party fobbed them off. Subsequently it started to fight them by bringing in unknowns to vote against them at party meetings, which eventually led to their departure. The Oded people said later that the Mapam kibbutzim were not in the least bit interested in the Sephardim of the development towns.

There is also a 'psychological' reason for the failure of this 'marriage' between the North Africans and Mapam: the Ashkenazi members of Mapam, particularly from the 'Hashomer Hatzair' kibbutz federation, are the most arrogant in the country. They form a political, social and ethnic closed group, which believes that it is the ideological, socialist, Zionist, Marxist and pioneer elite. They believe that their socialism is the most perfect brand known to mankind, and that the Sephardim are still living in the jungle. The strange thing in the Zionist political scene is that the more left-wing the Ashkenazim are, the more they tend to denigrate the native culture of the Middle East (with a few rare exceptions, such as Felicia Langer), and here we are not talking about politics, but about personal relations and prejudices. This was one of the strengths of the Herut right-wingers and what made them so attractive to the Sephardim.

Shelly Yehimovitz claimed that the Oded Movement failed because it was a bourgeois movement, made up of highly educated or rich North Africans. The author agrees with this, but the nationalist bourgeoisies of the Third World have scored decisive victories against colonisation. If the members of the North African bourgeoisie in the Oded Movement were to ally themselves with the other opposition movements, such as the Black Panthers -instead of the with the ruling establishment, they too would score some impressive victories. We only have to cast a glance at the Palestinian bourgeoisie, or the struggle of the Palestinian intellectuals.

Charlie Biton points out that 'Oded has operated as a part of the ruling establishment, but the Panthers work for radical social change. We are sure that our way is correct - whereas they get a salary from the regime'. F. Ezran, a former leader of Oded, admitted that 'the Panthers' participation in social change was outstanding.'

In the final analysis, the Oded movement has had a positive result - which is the lesson its members learned from having requested help from the regime. This lesson is a necessary stage in the

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development of Sephardi consciousness about the nature of Zionism.⁴⁰

Dr Asher Edan (of Tunisian origin) of the University of Tel Aviv and some comrades followed the path of Oded and started arranging crash courses to train Sephardi youth for leadership work. The Zionist Organisation funded their activities, but when they became too popular, they were dismissed from their jobs and their activities ground to a halt.

Ohalim [Tents]

Alongside Oded which functioned in the universities, Sephardim in the slum districts set up other organisations, the most important of which was the Ohalim, or Tents, Organisation. The name recalled the tragic camps Sephardim lived in when they were brought to Palestine after 1948. On 16 June 1979 Ohalim announced 'the end of the Ashkenazi colonialist mandate over Palestine and the founding of the Ohalim Slum Districts Council in order to carry out the Declaration of Independence' which contained the movement's manifesto with regard to complete equality amongst the citizens. At the beginning of this declaration the organisation mentioned that 'the Declaration of Independence of the state of Israel, dated 14 May 1948, promised that the State would develop for the benefit of all of its inhabitants regardless of religion, race, etc.,' and that it would be 'founded on principles of justice, freedom and peace' and would 'implement social equality'.

Ohalim accuses the rulers of Israel of having ignored the 'Declaration of Independence'. Instead of setting up a democratic country founded on equality, they have divided the people into two 'and condemned us to be hewers of wood and drawers of water'. The signatories to the declaration continued 'and you have imprisoned us in slum ghettos and in your tower block cages and you have debased our humanity through overcrowding in your desire that we should be in your shadow with no self-expression or cultural identity. You have done everything to keep us out of political decision-making and the central subjects to do with the conditions of our life. You have created the conditions for crime to burgeon and to transform our children into prisoners.' The signatories then address the Likud government:

'Since you tricked us after having promised the slum districts that you would repair the damage wrought against society by past

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Israeli governments since the founding of the state, and over the last two years have added other failures to the list, we, the youth of the Ohalim slum in Jerusalem and the second generation in the slum ghettos, have decided to put an end to this state of affairs and to embark upon a struggle to create a new society. Today [16 June 1979] we announce the end of the disgraceful and unjust mandate which has practised discrimination against 60 percent of its citizens. To this end, we have set up the Ohalim Slum Council and have written the Declaration of Independence of the Ohalim Slum Camp. We, the residents of the slum districts, will not rest until this Declaration is made an intrinsic part of the basic law of the state . . . The Declaration contains the following: 'We the Ohalim Slum Youth, call for the building of a Society which will have as its aim the following:

1. A revolution in education and culture in order to liberate our children and families from servitude.
2. A change in the realm of housing in order to allow every family to live in human conditions with decent educational and health facilities.
3. The extension of free health services.
4. Acknowledgement of our equal rights in order to determine the content and aim of welfare policy.
5. The departure from the slum ghettos must be paralleled by the development of our authentic cultural identity.
6. Rehabilitation to be extended to those who have fallen victim to injustice.
7. The provision of decent living conditions for bread-winners, children, the aged, pensioners and the sick.

Ohalim categorically rejects the idea of collecting donations for the slum districts. It calls for an end to the amassing of funds at the slum districts' expense. We aim to set up a society founded on equality with no social gap, and we demand to be a centre for social reform to start immediately under the leadership of the Ohalim Slum Council. Jerusalem, 16 June 1979. Signed: Members of the Council.

We should mention that the seventh article of the Declaration includes the Palestinian people. The organisation does not deal with their political problems but with social, economic and cultural matters with particular emphasis on the slum districts.

In 1984, Ohalim under the leadership of Yamin Suwisa joined

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the Labour Party. Although the residents of the slum districts represent 22 percent of the country's population, the organisation was only granted three seats in the Party Bureau, whereas the kibbutzim which represented 3 percent of the population had 12 seats. Suwisa stated that peace with the Palestinians, the liberation of the occupied Arab territories and the expenditure of funds on helping the underdogs, as opposed to war-mongering and the establishment of new settlements, were the principal reasons that made him join the Labour Party. He stated that Peres, the leader of the Labour Party, believed in a true peace. Suwisa stressed 'the Occupation does not only corrupt, but is the single most important cause for the current conditions in the slum districts.'⁴¹ He personally would like to be a member of parliament one day.⁴²

Defiance

Alongside 'positive' struggle as practised by members of the middle class, poor Sephardim under the leadership of the Black Panthers, Ohalim, Shahaq and Elah challenged the authorities with other means of struggle, such as establishing camps on public lands in pre-1967 Israel to house homeless young families. These camps were not set up to be permanent but to act as a protest against Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip at the expense of social services inside Israel. These activities led to bloody clashes between the youths in the camps and the police which ended in the demolition of the camps and mass arrests.

Ohel Moreh was one of these camps. It was established in June 1980 and named after one of the West Bank settlements.⁴³ In the same month 'Ohalim City' was set up in Nahalat Yehuda in the centre of the country. This new site was hurriedly besieged by the police and the border guard, and after a bloody battle the camp was demolished and a large number of its dwellers were wounded. As usual there was a campaign of arbitrary arrests.⁴⁴

In July 1980, two hundred Sephardim occupied empty flats in Hadar Yosef in Tel Aviv, condemning the settlement policy in the West Bank. Four women were wounded by the border guard during the ensuing clash.⁴⁵

On 1 August 1980 Ha'aretz reported that two hundred Sephardi families were building a camp near the town hall in Mevasseret Tsion. The mayor, Elias Moyal, warned that the social gap between Ashkenazim and Sephardim could well lead to a social explosion.

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He censured the Ministry of Housing for not having built any new residential units over the past five years.

On 4 July 1980 Ha'aretz reported that 30 families had put up 20 tents in the town of Yahud, near Petah Tikvah. The newspaper added that 85 percent of these families had been living with their in-laws. The security forces and the border guard quickly arrived and demolished the camp. We should note that the border guard, which is notorious for its cruelty, is only ever used against the Palestinians and the Sephardim.

The second method of struggle was to build unlicensed extensions. The Palestinians and the Sephardim both did this to ease their housing needs. If a son or daughter got married and had nowhere to live, the family would add a room to their old houses - but the government refused to grant licenses for this. The Ashkenazi controlled municipalities tried their utmost to have these old houses demolished and to sell the land off to companies greedy to build luxury housing for Ashkenazim. Often these plots were in the middle of the large cities and worth millions. There was another reason that made the government demolish these districts, which belonged to Palestinians who had been expelled from them. Moshe Smilansky, a writer and humane, veteran settler, commented on this common phenomenon that 'the ruling establishment is trying to destroy anything built by the Palestinians in this country to prove to the world that Palestine was an arid desert and that everything was built there through the efforts of the Zionist settlement.'

Sometimes the authorities simply bulldoze these extra rooms. This action is followed by violent clashes between the police force, the border guard and the inhabitants and ends with many arrests being made.

The racial discrimination inherent in these acts of demolition makes the Sephardim particularly angry, since the authorities take no action against the illegally built rooms on Ashkenazi homes in the north of Tel Aviv.

Ha'aretz wrote on 9 June 1980 that 'the authorities have demolished the house of the Mondani family in Holon even though the family had bought and paid for the house. The government claimed that the land was state property. The family with twelve children became homeless.'

In Segev in Galilee, the authorities demolished six houses which belonged to Me'ir Azulai, Shimon Buonaparte and other Sephardim. These victims screamed at the rulers 'You are treating us like the Nazis.' Ha'aretz added on 12 December 1980 that the

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government is removing the town's Sephardi residents as part of its plan to establish an Ashkenazi settlement to be called Moshav Atsmon. Two hours after this event the police and the border guard attacked the Palestinian village of 'Arraba. They demolished a workshop which belonged to Tawfiq Shalash and Othman Asali because it had been built without a permit. On the same day the South African Minister of Finance arrived in Israel and gave a televised speech in which he affirmed the similarity between Israel and South Africa.⁴⁶

On 23 December 1982 the police carried out a shocking provocation at Kfar Shalem in Tel Aviv by demolishing the extra room that Shimon Yehoshua, of Yemenite origin, had built with the help of a Palestinian friend on to his house for his marriage. When this young man tried to resist the police, they shot him dead. On the day of the incident, his father had won a stay of demolition from the courts, which the police disregarded. They claimed that the deceased was armed although eye witnesses said that the gun could have been taken from him without having to shoot him at point blank range. Yehoshua had to build the unlicensed extra room since his family, with nineteen members, was living in only three rooms. The incident aroused the anger of the Sephardim in the slum districts. The newspapers which reported this claimed that orders had been issued to demolish Ashkenazi property also in the Dizengoff Centre, and the Plaza Hotel, but that they were not carried out. Sephardim, who staged noisy demonstrations, pointed out that the police did not open fire on the armed Ashkenazi settlers who commit acts of violence and pick quarrels with the Palestinians in the occupied territories. They did not open fire on the Ashkenazi settlers who forcefully resisted the orders to evacuate Yamit in occupied Egyptian territory. After the murder of this Yemenite, youths from the district blocked streets, burnt tires and wrote anti-Ashkenazi slogans on the walls, such as 'Ashke-NAZIS'. The irony is that 'Ashkenazi' means also 'German' in Hebrew.

A few days later, on 1 January 1983 demonstrations broke out in various towns over the demolitions and the Member of Parliament, Tewfiq Tubi, stated in his report to parliament that a similar incident had taken place on 8 November 1977 when the police killed a Palestinian called al-Masri in the village of Majd al-Kurum. He mentioned another incident in Nazareth in which forty-four Palestinians had been injured.

The Knesset decided to delay the Yemenite youth's burial until nightfall to prevent any other disturbances.⁴⁷ One of the reasons

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for the murder of this youth could well have been his friendship with a Palestinian. The authorities try to make sure that the only 'friendly' relations with the Palestinians take place via the secret service. The Ashkenazi progressives keep the secret services and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs up to date on any 'secret' peace talks they hold with Palestinians abroad.

Two years after the murder of the Shimon Yehushua, there were more bloody clashes between the residents of Kfar Shalem and the security forces following the demolition of some buildings. The demonstrators closed off the main streets and set fire to a warehouse which belonged to the municipality and the police arrested five people including Moni Yakim, a Black Panther leader. The demonstrators shouted 'Ashke-NAZIS!' at the police. Ha'aretz, which reported this incident on 28 December 1984, stated that the municipality of Tel Aviv had demolished 100 houses and more were slated for demolition. It mentioned that a Member of Parliament, Michael Eytan, and a police officer were injured in the demonstrations and that the police had managed to stop the demonstrators storming the residence of the mayor, Shlomo Lahat. As the value of land in this slum district (formerly Kafr Salama) rocketed, the authorities sold it off to private companies and asked the residents to leave. When they refused, the municipality cut off all services, and filth and rubbish started to pile up in the district (the desperate conditions in Kfar Shalem are similar to those of the Palestinian refugees in the occupied Gaza Strip and the West Bank). The Sephardi residents of the district threatened to kill the mayor. One of them, Elias Mizrahi, stated to a correspondent of Ha'aretz that 'people here suffer from racial discrimination. The state has crushed them and the situation is very explosive.' The demonstrators then demanded that the United Nations intervene to protect them against the state of Israel. The MP, Charlie Biton, stayed with the demonstrators throughout the day.⁴⁸

Hada Bosem wrote in Ha'aretz on 15 February 1985 that the mayor of Tel Aviv was waging a war for the sake of law and order. However, he was only waging it on the weak and not demolishing buildings erected by the Ashkenazim in the Dizengoff Centre or elsewhere. On Friday, the municipality carried out the demolition orders in Kfar Shalem as the residents carried out demonstrations and threw fire bombs into the main street (Ha'aretz, February 14 1984).

Eliezer Dammari, of Yemenite origin, admits to having built an unlicensed room, but he claims that Avraham Shapira, a Member

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of Parliament, also broke the law and the authorities did not demolish his home. A municipal engineer corroborated this claim. The correspondent of Ha'aretz pointed out that for every six demolitions carried out in the slum districts of south Tel Aviv, the authorities carry out only one in the Ashkenazi northern suburbs. The newspaper condemned this discrimination. In the Palestinian sector this policy is much more severe, particularly if we take into consideration that the number of Palestinians doubles every ten years. The government generally refuses to grant licenses for new Palestinian houses or to extend existing houses.

Since the emergence of the Black Panther Movement, there has been a great increase in Sephardi disturbances, demonstrations and riots aimed at improving their living conditions and their children's school, as well as against the cut-backs in social and health services and the policy of unemployment.

In December 1980, about 30 youths from the Hatikva district in Tel Aviv locked the mayor, Shlomo Lahat, in his office with 7 of his senior aides and nailed the door shut because he had refused to fund a youth organisation in the district. 400 policemen and border guards rushed to the scene and attacked the youths. The incident ended with some of the protesters being injured and their leaders arrested. The youths declared that the municipality was trying to paralyse the activities of the local leadership in Hatikva.⁴⁹

Five days after this incident, the police arrested twelve youths from the district without warrants, and confined them to house arrest from six p.m. until seven a.m. One of the leaders of the district emphasised that the police did not treat the Ashkenazi extremists, such as Gush Emunim, the same way when they committed acts of violence against the Arabs.⁵⁰ The police beat Motti Levi and Smadar Batish so badly that they lost consciousness and had to be taken to hospital.⁵¹

Ha'aretz stated on 3 April 1981 that the youth of Hatikvah carried out a protest demonstration against the closure of the Ohel club. They blocked the crossroads of Lod and Nitzahon Streets and stopped all traffic. They threw stones at the police who had to use force to reopen the roads. In Natanya, the mayor fled from his office to avoid having to meet Sephardim from Ramat Herzl who were carrying out a noisy demonstration over the closure of the youth club in their district.⁵² The authorities had closed down these clubs because they were afraid of the anti-establishment political activities which the Sephardi were planning in them.

During the election campaign of 1981, the Sephardim used the

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dispute between the two major parties, the Labour and the Likud Bloc, to carry out violent attacks against the Labour party in revenge for the policy of discrimination. There was also another reason: during this election campaign the Labour leaders provoked the Sephardim, one of whom said 'the Labour Party is supported by the generals and the intellectuals, whereas Likud is only supported by the chakh chakh.'⁵³ Accordingly, many Sephardim started to put stickers on their cars which read 'This chakh chakh votes Likud'. The media joined in the anti-Sephardi campaign as did the Ashkenazi actor Dudu Topaz. One of the reasons for this was the emergence of a new North African electoral list headed by Abu Hatzerah. This list - Tami - won four seats. On the other hand, Motti Gur a former chief of staff and a Labour Party leader, uttered the statement that 'we'll screw the Sephardim like we screwed the Arabs.' These racist comments led to an increase in acts of violence. Ha'aretz wrote that the Sephardim set fire to a police station in the (Yemenite) township of Rosh Ha'ayin and caused extensive material damage. Sephardi youths threw stones at the police and harassed and insulted them in various other places. Shimon Peres, the leader of the Labour Party, was pelted with tomatoes and driven out of Bet Shemesh.

Likud naturally exploited these incidents to garner the Sephardi vote and won by forty-eight seats to form its second government in 1981.

The Sephardi president, Yitzhak Navon, condemned ethnic tension and the hostile language used by the Ashkenazim. When asked about Israel being on top of a sectarian time-bomb, he replied, 'the fuse has become very short and must be put out,' A correspondent of Ha'aretz,⁵⁴ who described the televised discussion in which Navon made these remarks, pointed out that 'the president knows as well as we do that we are sitting on a volcano.' The president attributed the bitterness of the Sephardim to their exclusion from active participation in the state's affairs. The newspaper commented on the programmes for Balkan Jews (who are Sephardim) by stating that even in the death camps in Europe the Ashkenazim discriminated against the Balkan Jews.

Shlomo Tsadok, a member of Tami, wrote an article in Yedi'ot Aharonot in which he suggested that the way to solve the problem of anti-Sephardi racial discrimination was through armed struggle against the Ashkenazim.⁵⁵

Two days later, Natan Dunevitz commented that 'even the Sephardim who have done well for themselves get angry when they think back . . . they will not forget the time their parents were

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humiliated, how they were sprayed with DDT and pushed into the transit camps for years. They want revenge upon the Ashkenazi establishment which is led by the Labour Party. This party will not get back into power by granting symbolic representation to the Sephardim, for this has now been unmasked and lost the people's trust.⁵⁶

The string of insults directed against the Sephardim is not new. We have become accustomed to hearing them since the British Mandate. All these terms of abuse - Arab, Oriental, Black, primitive, Iraqi, Persian, Egyptian, etc. - express the racism and arrogance of the Ashkenazim toward the Muslim, Christian and Sephardi inhabitants of the Middle East. What is new is that the insults now appear in the media, at political meetings and on the street where previously they were only used in the private domain. This change has come about because the Ashkenazi rulers in the Labour Party lost their nerve and their reason when they realised that these 'slaves' were starting to raise their heads and had managed to oust them from power in spite of their political weakness. It is true that owing to the political economic and parliamentary system the Sephardim cannot form a political party able to compete with the Ashkenazi parties, even though the Sephardim form two thirds of the Jewish population, but they can sway the balance in a general election to keep an Ashkenazi party in or out of power. This numerical power has strengthened the importance of the Sephardim and they have started using their 'numbers' to uphold their dignity on both a political and a grass roots level.

Let us examine some other examples of the protests carried out by the Sephardim against the settlers. In the township of Or Yehuda (made up of the former camps of Saqiya and Khairiya and Kafr 'Ana), all the schools and kindergartens went on strike in protest at the poor level of teaching. The children and their parents, who were mostly Iraqi, demanded that the school and its equipment be improved and that qualified teachers be appointed. Strikes spread to the township of Bnei Brak where overcrowding in the school building forced a class of one hundred pupils to study in an air-raid shelter.⁵⁷

In February 1986 all civil servants in the development towns went on strike and demonstrated in front of the Knesset demanding a meeting with the Prime Minister, Shimon Peres. However, he refused their request and sent out a huge number of mounted policemen and border guards armed with the latest riot-control equipment. The demonstrators shouted 'We want bread and work',

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'Bread for the townships, not for the settlements', etc. They summarised their problems as follows:

1. Unemployment.
2. Low wages (£100-160 per month).
3. Delays in getting paid.
4. The municipalities' debts which had reached \$31 million.
5. Lack of economic development.
6. A shortage of skilled work for the educated.
7. The exodus of inhabitants from the townships.
8. The atrocious state of housing and the towns in general.⁵⁸

In the township of Yeruham, where a third of the workforce are unemployed, the residents struck for five days. They then sent representatives to meet the Histadrut leadership in Shfayim. They demonstrated in Dizengoff Street and Kings of Israel Square in Tel Aviv, asking the people to sign a petition of support with their struggle. Then they travelled to Jerusalem and set up tents in front of the houses of the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. Residents of all the development towns went on strike at this time in sympathy with Yeruham.

In its leader article on 4 April 1986, Ha'aretz wrote that some of the development towns had been condemned to death. The MP, Charlie Biton, confirmed that the ruling establishment was setting up hi-tech industries in Ashkenazi areas, but that the development towns had only the textile and food industries which need unskilled workers because the towns were planned as a source of cheap labour. His colleague, Asi Arma stated that 'the government's heart is in the West Bank and we must struggle to regain it and help the development towns and Yeruham.'⁵⁹

Discrimination is leading to alienation, and alienation is leading to solidarity with the old neighbours - the Arabs and the Palestinians in particular.

SEPHARDI SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIANS

Anti-Sephardi racial discrimination was undoubtedly one of the main catalysts for the Sephardi cultural renaissance and their growing sense of pride. Even though the Israeli-born generation had never lived in the Arab world, their solidarity with the Palestinians was born of their common culture, language, history

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and fate as oppressed natives.

At this historic moment, parents and grandparents who were still alive, started to tell their children about the amicable relations which they had had with their Muslim compatriots in their countries of origin. They also recalled the good relations that the Palestinian Jews had had with the Muslims and Christians of Palestine before Ashkenazi-Zionist settlement. The old-timers mentioned the heroic efforts they had made to find a peaceful solution to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

Dr Eliahu Eliachar, the most prominent Sephardi leader, stated in his book *Life with the Palestinians* (1975) that from 1921 native Jewish notables offered to mediate but the offer was categorically rejected by the Zionist establishment, as was any idea of a peaceful solution. Some of the Zionist leaders, including Dr Ruppin and Brener, believed that there could be no understanding or peaceful coexistence with the Arabs and that the problem would sooner or later be decided by resorting to arms.⁶⁰ (Menashe Eliachar recalled that 'during the reception ceremony for the British General Allenby who conquered Jerusalem, the Mufti, Kamal al-Husseini [his uncle] and Musa Kazim Pasha sat at the door of the hall. The VIPs sat on the dais. I said to one of the "organisers" that the Mufti, the Mayor and Kamal al-Husseini are protesting and wish to leave. He replied, "So let them go."' ⁶¹)

Eliahu Eliachar stated that he and his native Jewish friends supported the principle that the Jewish community in Palestine should be integrated in the Middle East, but the Ashkenazi Zionist leadership feared becoming 'Levantisised' and objected vehemently.⁶² Equally it opposed the principle of a joint education system for Jews and Arabs, and instead it set up Jewish schools which taught Arabic only as a third foreign language⁶³ and operated the principle of 'Jewish labour'.⁶⁴ Eliachar goes on to condemn the cultural oppression of the native Jews and Arabs.⁶⁵

Eliachar describes as suicidal the policy of force which does not relinquish a square inch of land.⁶⁶

At the World Conference of Arab-Jewry in 1925, which was convened in Vienna, the Chairman, Moshe de Figiatto a Syrian from Aleppo, criticised Zionism for its lack of concern for Palestinian interests.⁶⁷ Rabbi Hayyim Nahum (a former Ottoman Chief Rabbi) supported this peaceful stance. Dr Yitzhak Levi and Rabbi Toledano demanded that an Arabic newspaper be established for the Palestinian Jewish community.⁶⁸

After the foundation of the state of Israel, Jewish communities

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in the Middle East wanted to help the warring parties to find a peaceful solution, but the Jewish Agency opposed this on the grounds that 'such mediation could be harmful for Israel's future.'⁶⁹

Dr Eliachar stated that with regard to the future there is no possibility of a settlement with the Arab countries without a solution to the Palestinian problem.⁷⁰ He demanded that meetings be convened between Jews and Palestinians to increase mutual understanding.⁷¹ He opposed the Zionist views which do not recognise the rights of the Palestinians on the grounds that 'they do not constitute a separate people.'⁷² He also opposed the establishment of boundaries between the Sephardim and the Arab world, or between the Arab nation and the non-Arab Muslims in the area. Dr Eliachar mentioned that the Israeli government has not allowed a Sephardi to speak about the Zionist-Arab dispute at the United Nations, or in any other international fora. He called upon Ashkenazim to relinquish their policy of force, and to withdraw from the Arab territories occupied in 1967, as well as from the villages of Bir'im and Iqrit (on the Lebanese border). Eliachar supported the recognition of the Palestinian people's right to independence and to setting up a Palestinian entity based on justice and self-determination.⁷³

Despite the lip service the author pays to Zionism, as is the case with all Sephardi notables, this book bears witness to the sympathy that Sephardim have for the Palestinians, as well as highlighting the evil intent of future Zionist expansionism. We should point out that Dr Eliachar was born in the old city of Jerusalem. He studied medicine at Beirut University and then law at Cairo University. In the First World War he was a medical officer in the Ottoman Army. He was appointed director of the Bureau of Trade and Industry in the British Mandate Government and the editor of the English Trade Bulletin. In 1937 he was elected head of the Jewish community in Jerusalem, and in 1946 head of the Sephardi community, whereupon he became active in organising world Sephardi conferences. When the state of Israel was founded, he was elected to the first and second parliaments as well as deputy mayor of Jerusalem.

In 1975 Dr Eliachar publicly demanded the establishment of a Palestinian state, and this in turn inspired some of his colleagues to hold discussions with representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in London and Paris. The Zionists plotted against him, however, and ousted him as leader of the community. In his place was appointed David Sitton, the Deputy-President of the

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World Sephardi Federation headed by Nissim Gaon. However, David Sitton supported the plan to establish a federal state which would include Israel, a Palestinian state and the Kingdom of Jordan, explaining that 'even if this plan is not realised now, the Palestinians cannot be denied the right to establish their own national entity.'⁷⁴

Even Shlomo Cohen-Sidon, a well-known Likud 'hawk', declared after the peace treaty with Egypt that 'the establishment of settlements in the occupied Arab territories has become meaningless. If Arafat were to come to Jerusalem I would agree to withdraw from the West Bank and to the establishment of a Palestinian state. I know the Arabs, and I am convinced that we can live with them.'⁷⁵

After the 1948 war, some Sephardi leaders who came from Arab countries offered to mediate for Israel with the Arab states. They had very warm relations with the leaders of the Arab countries. The best known of these Sephardim were Eliahu 'Eni, Mahlab Ibrahim and Siyon Efraim from Iraq; Sa'ad Maliki, who was a good friend of Nasser; Yehuda Maslim who was a friend of King Hassan of Morocco; Albert Maimun who was a friend of President Bourguiba; Shalom Cohen who was a friend of the Algerian leader Belqasim and Hashem Jawwad, the Iraqi politician. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs however rejected their offer even though these high-ranking Sephardim had covert encouragement from the respective Arab leaders.⁷⁶

The Zionists' rejection was based on the following:

1. Their expansionist ambitions (note Israeli territorial expansionism since 1948).
2. A fear of peace, since this would renew the friendly relations between the Sephardim and the Arab world at the expense of the privileged settlers. Therefore, the ruling establishment has tried to preserve the wall of hostilities between Israel and its Arab neighbours for more than 40 years - waiting for the death of the generation which was born and brought up in the Arab and Islamic world.
3. Zionist leaders believe that the state of war, tension and siege will forge all the communities into one people, otherwise the conflict between the Ashkenazi settlers and the Sephardim will tear the state apart.
4. The state of war helps Israel to collect donations from world Jewry, as well as backing from the Western world and the United States in particular.
5. The participation of Sephardim in peace negotiations would

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strengthen their hand and influence in the power structure.

Notwithstanding the brave efforts made by the Sephardim for the sake of peace and in support of Palestinian rights, the Ashkenazim claim that Sephardim are anti-Arab. The Ashkenazi settlers have apparently split into two groups: the first is made up of left-wingers who incite the Palestinians against the Sephardim, and the second is made up of the right-wingers who incite the Sephardim against the Palestinians! The Israeli security services stand on the sidelines pulling the strings and erecting a steel barrier between Sephardim and Palestinians lest they unite and revolt.

The MP, Charlie Biton, claims that anti-Arab discrimination does not stem from the Sephardim but arises in the imported Eurocentric political philosophy of various movements and groups and that most of those who vote for the extreme right-wing parties such as Tehiyya and Gush Emunim are not Middle Easterners. The Sephardim who vote for the Likud Bloc do not do so out of right-wing nationalist beliefs, which is why Menahem Begin and the Ashkenazi leaders of the party united against the North Africans and their leaders, such as David Levi, during the Herat Conference in 1986. Biton adds that the settlers in the West Bank are not Sephardim but Ashkenazim and that Rabbi Meir Kahane and his supporters are American Jews. Their views are those of the American 'Jewish Defence League' as are those of Finkelstein in Upper Nazareth, the racist of Tiberias and others. Biton goes on to claim that 'Sephardim are far from being racist, since they have not lived in the West. They are not opposed to intermarriage with Arabs, whereas the Ashkenazim are against intermarriage with Sephardim, never mind with Arab Muslims or Christians . . . Those who believe in the concept of "Eretz Yisrael Hashlema"⁷⁷ and support the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland are not Sephardim, but Ashkenazim in Kahane's movement and the Tehiyya Party, such as Levinger, Sharon, Ne'eman, Eytan, Druckman and Shapira, etc. The Sephardim who continue to vote for the Likud bloc and some of the religious parties only do so as a protest against the Labour Party which embittered their lives for decades.' Finally Biton emphasises that the Sephardi supporters of Likud are not interested in its nationalist policies. If the Likud bloc were to decide to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories it would win the approval of the Sephardim, as happened when it resolved to withdraw from Sinai.⁷⁸

During their national conference which was held in Beer Sheba

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in 1975, the Black Panthers decided upon the following principles:

1. The necessity of peaceful coexistence with the Arab states and the Palestinian people.
2. The condemnation of the continued occupation of the Arab territories since 1967.
3. Temporary agreements, such as the one already concluded, cannot guarantee peace. It is with the Palestinians above all that the future of the occupied territories must be discussed.
4. There can be no peace without a solution to the Palestinian problem.
5. Both peoples in Palestine must have the right of self-determination.
6. The Sephardim have the capacity to be a bridge for peace by dint of their common culture with the Arab world and through their participation in the struggle for equality in Israeli society.⁷⁹

From its very inception the Black Panther Movement declared common cause with the Palestinian people as follows:

1. A people which oppresses another people cannot be free.
2. The Palestinians have an inalienable right to self-determination and nationhood.
3. Peace is a vital concern for the people, security and economy of Israel. No peace can be achieved in the Middle East without the support of the Palestinians.
4. The Palestinians have a right to their own state in the land of Palestine.
5. The struggle against racism and discrimination is a basic tenet and anti-Sephardi and anti-Palestinian discrimination cannot be distinguished from one another.⁸⁰

In September 1982 80,000 Sephardim protested over the Sabra and Shatila massacres.

We should mention that on 11 November 1979 the Panthers occupied the settlement of Elazar on the West Bank. In spite of the fact that they did not use any weapons, they managed to disarm the Ashkenazi settlers, members of Gush Emunim. The settlement remained under the Panthers' control until army reinforcements arrived.

The Panthers linked solidarity with the Palestinian people to their struggle against the economic policy which had abolished most state subsidies on foodstuffs and caused the continued inflation. During the bloody clashes which took place on 20 and 21 November

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1979, the security forces arrested seventeen demonstrators. Ha'aretz added⁸¹ that Sephardi children in Qatamon in Jerusalem taunted Jewish American tourists with cries of 'We are all Arafat ... all Arafat.'

This thinking had been developing since the emergence of the Black Panthers. On 11 April 1972, Ma'ariv published a report on the discussions held between the leaders of the Panthers and members of the left-wing Zionist party, Mapam, in the Hashomer Hatza'ir Cultural Centre in the Bet She'an Valley. The following is a summary of the Panthers' points:

'Our aim is a social revolution which will be left-wing, but will not resemble the Russian or Chinese revolutions. We shall build a society founded on complete equality, and we shall struggle with the oppressed Arabs against Zionism. We are the only segment of society which can be a bridge to the Arabs. We oppose colonialism which is intent upon monopolising citizens' funds, and therefore we do not differentiate between military or settler colonialism. That is the difference between us and the Mapam Party (whose kibbutzim had taken part in the plunder of Palestinian lands after 1948). We want to found a large socialist party . . . There is no difference between the leaders of the Zionist right or left. They all belong to the two hundred families who control Israel's destiny. The offer to make the Yemenite member of Parliament, Yesha'yahu, the Speaker of Parliament makes us laugh. It is sheer hypocrisy, since Yesha'yahu and his ilk belong to the two hundred ruling families. We shall not participate in the next election campaign since changes cannot be effected in this country through the parliamentary system. We are not concerned that the parliament is totally Ashkenazi, since parliament is insignificant. Senior civil servants, appointed by the government, decide the affairs of the country. There are three hundred civil servants between the grades of 1 and 3, which number includes only 9 Sephardim and even they are members of the oligarchy. The Sephardi revolution will explode within 30 years.'

Kochavi Shemesh stated that Sephardi hatred for Arabs is no more than a myth. It is the establishment which has dwelt on hatred. Jews had lived in Iraq in peace and quiet until Zionist agents arrived there and bombed Jewish institutions in their attempt to cause a Jewish/Muslim schism.

With regard to cooperation with the Palestinians, the Panthers declared 'we have organised meetings with the Jewish poor and the Palestinians in Arab Jerusalem, Nablus and elsewhere . . . the Palestinians sympathise with our activities. We must strive toward

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a common struggle with the Arabs against the ruling establishment.'

Charlie Biton said of the acts of violence, 'the use of violence is permissible as a response to government violence. The laws of the state defend the system and not the citizen, and therefore we have been forced into answering violence with violence.' Shemesh said that the Black Panthers chose their name because it shocks. It was used for the first time by Ms Meyuhas, a member of the Jerusalem Town Council, when she delivered her report on these youths.

Solidarity with the Palestinians is only a part of the psychological revolution and cultural revival which has exploded amongst the Sephardim in Israel. An intellectual told the journalist Shalom Cohen (of Iraqi/Egyptian origin), 'they told us for many years that we were just like the Arabs. That was the greatest insult they could find for us. Gradually we were beset by an inferiority complex with respect to the Ashkenazim . . . When someone called me an Arab, I beat him up. Some time after this incident I said to myself "In fact . . . it's true ... I am an Arab Jew," and the word "Arab" stopped being an insult, not just for me but for everyone in my position.'

Many Sephardim in Israel took to saying, 'We know the Arabs very well. We can live with them better than the people we are living with now.'

When the first wave of Israeli journalists returned from Egypt in February 1978, an Israeli broadcaster described how twelve Israeli journalists were making a boat trip on the Nile. Amongst them were two Sephardim, one of whom, Shlomo 'Anbary, responded to the impact the scenery had on him by stating 'I am an Arab Jew. My real name is Salim and I feel happy here.' This vexed his Ashkenazi colleagues, and no sooner had 'Anbary returned to Jerusalem than he was requested to clarify exactly what he had meant. He replied, 'I was born in Iraq, part of my education took place in Egypt and I was imbued with Arab thought. I am fluent in their language and I love their music. Obviously I am an Israeli by nationality, a Jew in religion, but I cannot help being Arab in culture and thought.' All the journalists on this first trip observed that the Sephardi journalists got on much better than the Ashkenazim. The Sephardim could mix freely and openly with the public, whereas the Ashkenazim preferred to be accompanied by Egyptian security police. At a soiree, the editor of Yedi'ot Aharanot posed the question 'What would happen to Israeli society if we made peace with the Arabs, and the majority of the people feel that they are closer to the Arab than to us [the Ashkenazim].' He

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followed this question by stating 'it is obvious that peace has not come yet.'⁸²

The Black Panthers were amongst the first Israelis to challenge the Ashkenazi Zionist establishment by declaring that Sephardim constituted part of the Arab world. Kochavi Shemesh stated, 'There is no difference between me and an Arab with the exception of religion. Would those who claim that religion is what defines nationality also claim that Arab Catholics and French Catholics, for example, belong to the same nation?' When Shemesh met Ashkenazi immigrants from Russia, he realised that they did not have common national ties with him. He added, 'the Sephardim and those Ashkenazim come from two different cultures . . . we even differ in our physiognomies. The only thing that we have in common is our religion.' Shemesh believes that the state of Israel is trying to combine religious groups of different nations into one nation. 'That is Zionist theory, whereas in fact Zionist practice is to treat the Sephardim like the Palestinians.'⁸³

An Israeli soldier claimed that during one of the battles of the 1973 war, he witnessed a group of soldiers leave their positions and start playing cards with each other. When he advised them to return to their positions they refused, since they did not consider themselves part of the Zionist entity.⁸⁴

The MP, Charlie Biton, said in Parliament on 7 January 1981 that anti-Sephardi discrimination was the reason why they avoided conscription and that 90 percent of those held in military prisons were Sephardim. Obviously, of the Sephardim who do join the armed forces a large number disobey the orders of Ashkenazi officers and are jailed. Natan Dunevitz ascribes this phenomenon⁸⁵ to the fact that the army is a symbol of the ruling establishment and it is more usual for Sephardi youths to avoid conscription. (The number of draft evaders was 10,000 in the years 1985/86. Emil Elimelekh, commander of the military police, stated that 72 percent of the Sephardi prisoners are serving sentences for desertion.)⁸⁶

An extract of a letter, which was sent by one of the Black Panthers to his brother in the army, may explain the state of alienation between the repressed section of the population and the establishment.

He says that his wife has given birth to his fifth son, who will have to sleep in the same bed as his brother Ezra and sister Geula. Ya'akov, his oldest son, has been arrested for stealing a bar of chocolate and he will be sentenced to three years in prison where he will learn how to take drugs and rob. His daughter, Ruti, who

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is seven years old, has rheumatism, and coughs up blood all night. When he requested help from the Ministry of Housing, the official screamed at him that the government only deals with housing for new immigrants. The father is bemused by the fact that they seem to have money for immigrants, settlements and security, they have funds to invest in (pre-revolutionary) Iran and Uganda, to build a new Hilton, to cover financial losses for the banks ... so why can they not save the life of his daughter! Even death is expensive in Israel! His monthly salary is less than \$50! He writes to his brother, the soldier: 'You are not defending me. I don't own anything that needs defending, not even my life. You are defending my oppressors, and you are defending them, my brother, so that they can oppress me.' Signed: the poor citizen.⁸⁷

Draft resistance on such a large scale led to a lowering of morale amongst the privates in the army, most of whom are Sephardim. Since the Lebanese war, the Army High Command has not been able to depend upon these soldiers and has had to rely upon the Ashkenazi-controlled air- and sea-borne weapons to destroy Syrian and Palestinian positions. This change has led to increased destruction and more carnage of innocent civilians.

FIRST STIRRINGS OF ARMED STRUGGLE

Animosity to the ruling establishment and belief in violence as an inevitable means of struggle developed to the point where they were embodied in a number of small organisations, such as the Red Front, which was a secret movement in the early seventies and was involved in armed struggle against Israel in support of Syria, and the Palestinian Resistance, and whose membership included Sephardim, Ashkenazim and Palestinians. One of those arrested on suspicion of membership in the Front was Hesqel Cohen, a former member of the Black Panthers. He was sentenced to seven years in prison.

On the other hand, there was the Ma'atz Organisation which was comprised of Sephardim only. This organisation undertook extensive sabotage and arson operations against large factories. As it was a secret organisation and trials of its members were carried out in camera, no details are available about it other than those published in the Israeli press. On 13 October 1978 Ha'aretz reported

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that the police had sent six members of the organisation to trial charged with having carried out thirteen acts of arson between 1975-1978 in the Tel Aviv area. In addition they were accused of having caused I£2.5 million worth of damage to the Bulgat plant in Kiryat Gat and I£3 million worth of damage to the Bulgat plant in Lod, where the fire raged for three days. (Bulgat produces the boxes used in the export of citrus fruit.) The police tortured the suspects during interrogation. They were then tried in camera and sentenced to long stretches in prison, at which time they disappeared from the Israeli media. The group also carried out other acts of sabotage against furniture shops and the building which housed Ha'aretz. The group was accused of plotting to blow up the police headquarters in Tel Aviv and kill senior officers.

The well-known journalist, Shalom Cohen (who worked for many years as an editor of Ha'olam Hazeh), stated that Ma'atz had a 'Prime Minister' and stolen army weapons. After an investigation which took a few months, Ma'atz members admitted that their organisation was 'the Israeli Red Brigade'. They all stem from the Black Belts and in fact the organisation started its activities in the Hatikvah district of Tel Aviv. One of their aims was to kidnap the Minister of Justice, Shmuel Tamir, who opposed a general amnesty. They set fire to a number of industrial plants, including a textile factory where they caused damage in the value of I£40 million. A representative of the public prosecutor claimed that these arson attacks were aimed at the national economy and that Ma'atz members were enemies of Israel.⁸⁸

There were also numerous acts of sabotage undertaken by individuals. In these cases the police were unable to arrest any suspects, and the attacks were described as 'accidents'. Many in Israel believe that the Israeli secret service (the Shin Bet) secretly assassinated individuals who they believed were 'cooperating with the Arabs' and whose guilt they could never prove in a court of law. The killings take place during army reserve duty. The Shin Bet would then inform the family of the victim that he had been murdered by Arab infiltrators or during a military operation.

After the Ma'atz operations, the Panthers continued their struggle against the government and the Ashkenazi settlers in the West Bank. On 23 March 1980 Ha'aretz reported that the Panthers had stormed the offices of the Minister of Labour and Social Security, Israel Katz, leaving behind eight rabbits as a symbol of the helplessness of the poor. Sephardim in the Ezra, Hatikva and Argazim slums of Tel Aviv then staged violent demonstrations on 14 April 1981

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following the municipality's demolition of four houses. The demonstrators set fire to shops and municipal property after which the police instituted a campaign of arrests. In November 1980 the police opened fire on students in Ramallah on the West Bank wounding ten. On the same day the police, for no reason, fired on a Sephardi youth in Jerusalem, seriously wounding him. Charlie Biton condemned these incidents in Parliament: 'This government is the enemy of Sephardim. What you will be seeing is the establishment of a united front among Sephardim from Musrara and youths from the University of Bir Zeit against an oppressive government.'⁸⁹

During this period of mass struggle, on 30 August 1980, all the slum organisations united in the framework of a single independent national organisation. At the founding meeting, which took place in Tel Aviv, the speakers condemned the following:

1. Racial discrimination
2. Condescension towards Sephardim and Sephardi culture.
3. The paternalistic treatment of Sephardim by Ashkenazim.
4. Neglect of the Slum Revival Programme.
5. Neglect of economic development in the development towns.

The participants demanded complete social, economic and cultural equality with Ashkenazim. They affirmed that the organisation was independent and apolitical but stressed in the Israeli press that 'money must be spent by the state on the slum districts instead of the Ashkenazi settlements in the occupied territories.'

Acts of violence continued to take place in the slum districts. After one such incident when a bus, a car, a municipal warehouse and other public buildings were set on fire, Ha'aretz reported that nine people were arrested in the Hatikvah district, including Shlomo Khoja, Eliahu Siso, Dalia Batai and others.

Dan Margalit wrote in the same newspaper⁹⁰ that the Black Panthers had succeeded in their political work, for they expressed the people's true feelings toward racial discrimination and the social predicament and that the establishment was in a state of alarm. He attributed the Panther's election failure of that year to a new form of protest by the Sephardim, that of an election boycott.

Sa'adya Marciano, a Panther leader, predicted in 1978 that acts of violence against the authorities would increase. He stated 'the Ashkenazim are not prepared to give up even a small part of their hegemony ... In this context I therefore expect that the explosion which took place in 1971 will repeat itself. When that happens the

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generation of the new movement will have greater resolve, better planning and be more active and violent. As a result, the explosion will have more force.' Marciano expected that 'the generation of tomorrow will move towards partition.'⁹¹

Kochavi Shemesh considered that it was vital for the Panthers to join the Democratic Front (which included Arab Local Councils and the Communist Party). 'By electing to do that, we will have forged for the first time a real bond between the Sephardim and the Palestinians who are both the butt of discrimination. This bond is very important to us, the Sephardim, for we must see the Arabs as our natural allies.'⁹² I am a Sephardi, or to be more precise, I am an Arab Jew and my culture is Middle Eastern.' However, he denied the existence of any cultural link between him and the Jews who came from the Balkans (apparently he was not aware that they are Sephardim whose ancestors were expelled from Spain along with their Muslim brethren after the fall of the Muslim state).⁹³

Three years later, Moni Yakim, another Black Panther, expected that armed struggle would begin. He stated, 'it is impossible to challenge anti-Sephardi racial discrimination in Israel through democratic means. Regrettably the Ashkenazi ruling class could well be pushing us into armed struggle against them in order to achieve our just aims.'⁹⁴ He continued, 'the Black Panther movement constitutes a political movement which defends the Sephardim who have been proletarianised in Palestine. These oppressed believe that democratic means have been discredited since the world only recognised the Palestine Liberation Organisation after it carried out commando operations.' Yakim addressed the following words to the Ashkenazim, 'The new generation of Sephardim will not speak with you, they will act.' He expressed his opposition to the immigration of Soviet Jews, since 'these immigrants are reactionary and the government is bringing them over to settle them in the occupied territories.' Charlie Biton added during the same newspaper interview that 'the Ashkenazi immigrants from the Soviet Union are not wanted here, as they come to take over our houses.' (We should point out that the government allotted to these new immigrants the houses which had been built for the Sephardi poor who had been waiting for them since 1948.) Yakim stated that the Ashkenazi kibbutzim 'represent the ugly face of Israel and their profits should be distributed amongst the workers - who are the Sephardim.' He expressed the Sephardim's distaste for these settlements, because they are exploited by them, stated that in the future the Sephardim would

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take over the settlements and demanded that half of the kibbutzim's lands be granted to the poor. He claimed that the Black Panthers' victory should not be measured by the number of votes they get in the elections, but by the spread of their revolutionary ideas amongst the various parties. Yakim emphasised that America was hindering a rapprochement between the Sephardim and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

These radical declarations raised an outcry of indignation in Ashkenazi society. Aharon Stern accused Yakim of aiming to complete what Hitler started. Stern threatened that 'the Ashkenazi settlers will not just stand by and watch.'⁹⁵ Yakim then asked Ha'aretz to allow him to respond to these accusations, and on 30 October 1981 they published an article by him in which he stated 'regarding armed struggle, I believe that the Ashkenazi ruling class had always used force to monopolise economic and political power. In the light of historical developments, we must defend ourselves, we must meet acts of violence by the state with acts of violence by the masses and respond to the use of arms with the same. We have been pushed into this sorry state of affairs by the folly and arrogance of the ruling Ashkenazi class which has shut in our faces any democratic means of alleviating Ashkenazi-Zionist oppression.' Finally Yakim demanded 'a fundamental change which could stop Zionism being worshipped, and the implementation of an anti-racist policy based on cooperation with the Middle East.'

SEPHARDIM AND PEACE NOW

In December 1982, an alliance of the Peace Now movement and the Sephardim from the slum districts emerged to oppose Zionist settlement in the occupied territories. Marciano and R. Ben-Harush pointed out that the means of repression employed on the West Bank would soon be turned against the Sephardim. On the same day (23 December 1982), the police demolished a part of a Yemenite's house - Shim'on Yehoshu'a - in Kfar Shalom in Tel Aviv. The police fired at him and shot him dead, as mentioned above. Reuven Ben Harush, a representative from Musrara in Jerusalem, stated 'Before 1967 they taught us that the enemy was over there [he pointed to Arab Jerusalem], but afterwards we realised that the real enemy is here' [he pointed to the Ashkenazi suburbs of West Jerusalem].⁹⁶

S. Abu Tubul, a Sephardi youth who was drafted into the

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Lebanese war, published the following poem in Ha'aretz,⁹⁷ in which he expresses the tragedy of his fellow Sephardim in the Lebanese arena. He also speaks of the wall which has been constructed to keep Sephardim from the Arab world.

A Naive Poem for the Neighbour Behind the Border
She stood before me, gazing at me,
I saw her eyes.
How like my mother's are her eyes,
in which I saw her pains!
How like my mother's are her pains.
I wish I knew what to say to this mother's glances.
The mother, behind the valley,
The mother who is gazing at me,
her eyes telling me everything,
everything they don't tell me here.
I wish I knew, how to meet this scream in her eyes.
They did not teach me how to witness screams in eyes -
eyes behind the valley,
They did not teach me how to witness eyes behind the valley.
They did not teach me how to witness
life behind the valley.
Consider! What did they teach me?
O, Neighbour! O, Neighbour behind the valley,
to you I say They didn't teach me,
they blocked my path
to you - to your emotions,
they forbade any contact,
I want to say to you,
Now I know
that one gets to know by seeing.

A month later the Sephardi Slum District and Development Town Committee organised a commemoration for the victims of the Lebanese war. The slogan of the organisers was that the war must be stopped and the principle of equality must be instituted. David Hamu, the Haifa representative of the organisation stated that 'during this ceremony we will light two candles: one for the souls of the Palestinian and Lebanese martyrs, and the second for the Israeli dead. In so doing, we are calling for the cessation of this war. We, children of the Middle East, believe that Israel must join together with the peoples of the region by means of peaceful

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dialogue and that Israel must respect the indigenous peoples of the area and their customs and traditions.' David Hamu criticised the lack of recognition of the Palestinian people, saying that this is against democratic principles. He added that the lack of equality in the use of the state's resources represented the corollary of the policy of force used by Israel against the Arabs. Domestic policy had created two tiers of Jewish citizens, he claimed. 'Inequality would worsen due to the war, since the economic burden was being placed upon the weaker classes. At the same time, the warmongers would get richer, and the gap between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim would deepen.' Candles were lit, and those assembled expressed their solidarity with the Arab nation across the border. In the second part of the ceremony the group 'Natural Choice' under Sholmo Bar sang solidarity songs. One of the slogans of the meetings was 'The Ashkenazim have failed to manage both society and peace.' Another slogan called for Sephardi unity in Palestine.⁹⁸

On 10 February 1973 Peace Now demonstrated in Jerusalem against Sharon and the policy of warmongering. Fascist gangs attacked the demonstrators, beating and cursing them. A bomb was thrown at them killing Emil Grunzweig and wounding a number of demonstrators. The Ashkenazi press wrote hundreds of articles about the death of the Ashkenazi peacenik, but ignored the case of Eddie Levi, a Sephardi, who was demonstrating with Grunzweig and was seriously injured. The media also ignored the rest of the Sephardim who exposed themselves to fascist hostilities. The well-known writer, Shulamit Har-Even, who was an eye-witness to these events, wrote about the case in the March/April 1983 issues of *New Outlook*. Amnon Dankner published a number of articles in which he portrayed the Ashkenazim as peaceniks and the Sephardim as a fascist mob, ignoring the fact that Sharon and the rest of the fascist leadership are Ashkenazim (see above p. 217).

In Musrara, Kiryat Menahem and Hatikva slums the Sephardim staged a demonstration and marched to the settlement of Efrat on the West Bank under the slogan 'Spend money on the slum districts and not on the settlements.'⁹⁹

However, the coalition of Sephardim and Palestinians on the one hand and the Peace Now movement, which is supported by the rich kibbutzim, on the other, cannot be a lasting one, for these kibbutzim have increased their property and profits a number of times since 1948, by exploiting the development towns and grabbing the most fertile Palestinian lands through various legal

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means, such as the land appropriation law. Moreover, the kibbutzim provide the state of Israel with its military elite, who form a class similar to the Mamelukes of Egypt or the Janissaries in the Ottoman state. We saw during the Lebanese war that most members of this elite opposed the invasion or wanted its speedy end, but they carried out all orders except for one officer - Officer Geva.

Ha'aretz reported on 8 February 1985 on the class conflict between the kibbutzim and their hired workers. There was a 'rumour' going round that the leadership of the Kibbutz Federation had convened a secret meeting at the kibbutz of Kiryat 'Anavim (near Jerusalem) to discuss the possibility of an attack on the kibbutzim by unemployed Sephardim, particularly those who had been laid off by the kibbutzim. When a correspondent of the newspaper contacted leaders of the Kibbutz Federation, such as Yehuda Harel and Shlomo Leshem, he felt that they were not happy with his question. The correspondent was told that after the meeting had listened to a talk by Hayyim Barkai, a professor of economics, it went into closed session, not to discuss armed clashes, according to them, but the demonstrations. They did not discuss how to confront the possible events, but how to prevent them by allowing Sephardim to participate in their factories or by setting up integrated schools.

We do not wish to detract from the significance of Peace Now's struggle, but we must state that the alliance is only a stepping stone until the nature of the kibbutzim changes.

THE BLACK BELT MOVEMENT

In the neighbourhoods of West Jerusalem the Sephardim set up a resistance organisation called ShHQ¹⁰⁰ in 1982. Its activities were concentrated in the districts of Eyn Ganim and Kiryat Menahem which contain 18,000 inhabitants, 80 percent of whom are North Africans. The most important leaders of the movement are Yehuda Ashraf and his brother Daniel Odani. The organisation is a broad front supported by individuals from various parties. It demands funds to be invested in the slum districts instead of in the settlements in the occupied territories. The inhabitants of these districts declared that it was they who bore the cost of the Lebanese war and the new settlements. The Sephardi inhabitants staged noisy demonstrations in protest at having to pay 30 percent of their income to cover 'free education'. After the government announced the start of the Slum

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Revival Project in these districts, the municipality stopped providing services and stated that the new project would provide them. The correspondent, Lili Galili, wrote that the inhabitants would use peaceful means, but would also use less peaceful means such as closing off streets, in their struggle.¹⁰¹ This organisation later formed a united front with the Ohalim organisation under the leadership of Yamin Suwisa, and with a branch of the Black Panthers led by Sa'adya Marciano. The chief factor in this step was the new economic policy and the cutbacks in social services.

In June 1983 the ShHQ Organisation pitched an illegal camp near Jerusalem to protest against the housing shortage. The movement's leader, Dada Ben Shitrit, declared that Sephardim refuse to be moved into the new houses built in the occupied territories, because they oppose the expropriation of their Arab neighbours' lands. He continued, 'in the Arab countries we lived in peace and friendship with the Arabs and we are prepared to support any party which will help the Palestinian people, but not the right-wing who build settlements in the occupied Arab territories.' Another leader of the movement stated that 'for twenty years we have been exploited, but we refuse to be fodder for their cannons any longer.' A few days later, police and border guard reinforcements demolished the camp and forcibly dispersed the inhabitants.¹⁰³

In 1985 all the Sephardi organisations from the slum districts united under the leadership of the Black Panthers and started the '1985 Struggle', which was an extensive series of uprisings against the policy of poverty and de-education and the policy of suppression and settlement in the occupied Arab territories. In Tel Aviv, for example, the five district committees organised noisy demonstrations against budget cutbacks in education, adult-education and youth clubs.¹⁰⁴

On 25 February 1985 Charlie Biton and Sa'adya Marciano presented a petition to the High Court to allow the Sephardi movement to stage a protest march on the West Bank against the Prime Minister and his settlement policy. The Prime Minister had already decided to visit the settlements on the West Bank at the same time, and the leaders of 'the 1985 Struggle' planned to demonstrate along the Prime Minister's route. However, the establishment took fright and the Minister of Defence, Yitzhak Rabin, banned the march.

On 11 March 1985 Ha'aretz reported that 'the 1985 Struggle Organisation', under Charlie Biton and Sa'adya Marciano, was preparing for demonstrations against the Lebanese invasion and to

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demand the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. Biton and Marciano stated to the correspondent of Ha'aretz, 'the time has come to use the firm hand of the slum districts to apply pressure to the government's throat.' The correspondent, Lili Galili, met a leader of the slum districts, Afi Ben David, and asked him why he was supporting these demonstrations when he had been a supporter of the policies of Likud and Sharon for fifteen years. He replied that 'the people can be duped sometimes, but not all the time.' He added, 'they told us that they had finished off the terrorists and then the Shi'ah emerged . . . when Israeli soldiers started being picked off in Lebanon like sitting ducks the residents of the slum districts wised up and for the first time they went out into the streets to demonstrate - not for economic reasons but for political reasons.' Ben David criticised the accusations of the Ashkenazi left and the Ashkenazi press which claimed that the Sephardim are anti-Arab, oppose peace and like war, etc. He confirmed that Sephardim realise that the policy of war is one of the reasons for their economic hardships.¹⁰⁵

In District C in Beer Sheba on 15 December 1985, five hundred Sephardi men rushed to try and prevent Kahane, who was accompanied by a gang of his bullies, from coming to their district.¹⁰⁶ Charlie Biton, MP, pointed out that anti-Kahane demonstrations in Giv'atayim (near Tel Aviv) had forced the racist Rabbi to pay \$500 dollars to every poor person from Afula to join him in an anti-Arab demonstration. Biton went on to wonder where Kahane gets his funds.

Lili Galili wrote in Ha'aretz on 23 August 1985 that 55 young activists from the slum districts such as Musrara and Qatamon in Jerusalem had met to discuss the problem of racism. At the end of the meeting they declared 'Racism is an expression of extremism, and extremism has never been a part of Sephardi culture. Those who harm the Palestinians, harm the Sephardim and will push the nation into civil war.' The correspondent added that the movement would publish a paper on life in the slum districts and would institute a political and social awareness campaign in the 'Black Belts' and the development towns.

THE INTELLECTUALS' MOVEMENT

The Movement for Solidarity with the Palestinians did not just spread in the slum areas, but its activities encompassed Sephardi

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intellectuals also. On 1 June 1983 Ha'aretz wrote that Sephardi intellectuals had founded a new movement called East for Peace, which aimed to encourage the cause of peace with the Palestinians and the Arabs and to struggle against racial discrimination in Israel.

Professor Menahem Amir, a social scientist, declared that Israel was on the verge of civil war owing to ideological and political polarisation and ethnic disintegration. The President, Yitzhak Navon, commented that 'there are dangers, and I am worried. They are more serious than the threat posed by the Palestine Liberation Organisation or an external war.'¹⁰⁷

In July 1983, Palestinian and Sephardi university students in Haifa set up The Black Force, an organisation which believed in strengthening the alliance between the Palestinian people and the Sephardim. This movement operated under the leadership of Menasheh Aharoni, the Chairman of the Students' Federation at Haifa University and a member of the Tami Party (the North African Jews' party headed by Abu Hatserah). Also active in the movement's leadership was Yisrael Ben Bast of Beitshan, who was a member of the Ma'arakh bloc (Labour). Ben Bast declared 'I believe that the Palestinians and Sephardim must unite and struggle for their common interests, as it is incumbent upon all those who are downtrodden to join ranks.' Nissim Dahhan, the former chairman of the Students Union expressed his radical opinions regarding the anti-discrimination struggle. Ha'aretz Supplement commented on 22 July 1983 that a Palestinian student, Nizar Hassan, had instigated the founding of this movement.

The organisation believes that the state's resources should be channelled toward the amelioration of living conditions in the Black Belts areas, instead of for the establishment of Zionist settlements on plundered Palestinian land. The organisation supports the principle of peace with the Palestinian people and the Arab world. Members of the organisation set up a workcamp in the Haifa suburb of Halisa to help the Palestinian and Sephardi residents. The Black Force gets complete support from the Palestinian and Sephardi communities as well as from Tami and the Labour and Communist parties.

In 1972 a common front was set up along the lines of this organisation and managed to win 32 out of the 40 seats in the Haifa University Students' Union Committee. A year later, members of the Labour Party and the Likud Front united and destroyed it.

Authors and politicians, who had previously cooperated with the Zionist establishment, joined this protest movement. We have

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already mentioned Dr Eliahu Eliachar, but we must also mention the historian Nahum Menahem who originates from Qamishly in Syria. He wrote a valuable book, entitled *Tension and Ethnic Discrimination in Israel*, which was published in 1983 by Ahdut Press in Tel Aviv. In this the author condemned discrimination and the arrogance with which the Ashkenazim have viewed the Palestinians and the Arab world since the start of Zionist settlement. In an interview with the journalist Amnon Dankner,¹⁰⁸ he expressed his horror at the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, and pointed out that the Ashkenazi Zionists have always requested imperialist governments, such as Britain and the Ottomans, to help them against the Arabs, whereas the Arabs always wanted to negotiate directly. He stressed that the Palestinians always stretched out their hands in peace to the Jews, but were rejected. In 1920, Menahem added, the Arabs were ready to accept a compromise with the Zionists and those who said that the Arab-Israeli dispute was insoluble were not telling the truth. He added that the West considered the Arab countries primitive and backward, an opinion which heavily influenced the Zionist movement which, for the same reason, founded the kibbutzim as societies closed to the Arabs. Later the Ashkenazi settlers displaced the Palestinians and founded settlements on their lands. The first military organisation to be set up by the Zionists was the 'Hashomer' organisation, which aimed to separate Jewish society from Arab society in Palestine. The author also reveals that landowners in Syria and Lebanon offered to sell huge tracts of land to the Zionists for very low prices in exchange for help against French imperialism. Herzl, however, was not interested in the rights of the Arabs.

Menahem provides details of the conversation which took place on 24 June 1919 between the Zionist leader, Ussishkin and the Mayor of Jerusalem, Musa Kazem.¹⁰⁹ When Ussishkin arrived in Palestine, he was met and welcomed by the mayor. Ussishkin started to criticise the Arab municipality and its services and then went on to the Arab-Zionist dispute and threatened the Palestinian nationalists with force. Menahem continued his interview with the correspondent of Ha'aretz by referring to what Moshe Dayan said after the 1967 war - 'If Nasser and Hussein want peace, they should telephone me.' Menahem condemned the destruction of the town of Yamit in Sinai before it was handed back to Egypt. He stated that the Ashkenazi leaders do not know how to deal with the Arabs or how to avoid offending them.

The historian went on to describe Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations

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since the start of Zionist colonisation. He stressed that a civil war would break out if politicians could not find a solution for the problem of anti-Sephardi racial discrimination. The cover illustration to his book shows a broken and bleeding star of David. Nahum Menaheem was not the first to warn of the danger of civil war in Israel. The author Natan Dunevitz had already written¹¹⁰ that 'the animosity between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim is a time bomb which will explode one day if it is not defused.' He went on to say that a hundred years ago the Palestinians and Sephardim were the aristocracy in Palestine whereas the Ashkenazim were poor and not overly clean. The situation is now much more dangerous since the Sephardim are hostile to anything which represents the ruling establishment. Their state of alienation is so acute that they explode over any incident such as an industrial dispute, a quarrel with neighbours and so on. Sephardi youths express their bitterness by overturning police cars and arson -according to Dunevitz.

THE DIALOGUE COMMITTEE 1986

In addition to the previously mentioned university circles which support the Palestinian cause, there emerged in 1986 another intellectual movement - the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue. It was founded by Sephardim to support the Palestinian right to self-determination and the struggle for peace and democracy. The Committee convened a press conference attended by its leadership:

Dr Shlomo al-Baz (of Moroccan origin) - Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Professor Sasson Somekh (of Iraqi origin) - Professor of Arabic literature at Tel Aviv University.

Dr David Tsemah.

Latif Dori (of Iraqi origin) - Director of the Arab Bureau in the Mapam Party and leader of this committee.

Etti Danino - a social scientist.

Shlomo al-Baz declared that the signatories to the Committee's manifesto would work to counter the common slur that Sephardim hate Arabs. He added that Sephardim do not belong to the leadership of the chauvinist nationalist camp, and added that Sephardim have the power and the will to build a bridge between the Arab world

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and Israeli society in order to revive their common history and to integrate in the region.

Dr Tsemah made it clear there had indeed been contacts with Palestinians in the occupied territories over the possibility of setting up a common organisation. These contacts had been with two mayors who had been removed from their positions, with Rashad al-Shawa of Gaza, and Mustafa al-Natsha of Hebron.

One hundred Sephardim signed the Committee's manifesto, including the lawyers Ezra Gabbai and Nissim Eli'ad, Dr'Ada Aharoni, Dr Sa'adya Rahmi, Menashe Khalifa a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Efraim Katsav, head of the Workers' Committee in the Teva Factory in Petah Tikvah, the authors, Sami Mikhael and Dr Shimon Balas, and the singer, Shlomo Bar.

The Likud bloc expressed their anxiety over the course of events in the Sephardi community. A Likud official described them as 'a deleterious ideological virus which has been carried over into Likud from the Labour party grass-roots.'¹¹¹

The founding of the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue was announced at a press conference at Bet Agron in Jerusalem on 26 January 1986. The answers given by those participating in the press conference showed the new direction developing amongst the Middle Eastern communities towards a greater understanding of the dispute.¹¹² Latif Dori stated that the Palestine Liberation Organisation was the representative of the Palestinian people whose responsibility was to speak on behalf of the Palestinians in any negotiations. The participants handed out a declaration in Arabic, Hebrew and English as follows:

Support The Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue

We the undersigned, a group of Sephardi Israelis, are worried by the situation of the people in this Jewish/Palestinian country. We recognise the inalienable right of each people to live in peace under its own leadership. Through our duty to play our role in the struggle taking place for peace and democracy, we propose to: 1 Persevere in the fight against all forms of national and ethnic discrimination in Israel and to strive for peaceful cohabitation. We reject the abject generalisation which claims that the Sephardim 'hate the Arabs'.

The Sephardim have the ability and the desire to build a bridge between the Arab world and Israeli society and to renew our common culture whose roots go back hundreds of years so that

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we can be integrated into the Middle East.

2 To persevere in the struggle to attain a peace which will put an end to destruction, suffering and bloodshed. We propose that the two parties start political negotiations on the basis of reciprocal recognition of the two people's respective right to self-determination. When such an agreement is reached it will guarantee a secure and prosperous future for our people and the peoples of the region.

3 To continue to encourage an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue amongst those concerned with fostering a peace consciousness. In order to highlight the afore-mentioned aims we announce the formation of the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue which will be open to all those desire peace.

Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue

On 1 June 1986 the newspaper Al Hamishmar reported that the Sephardi members of the Committee for Dialogue had convened their first meeting with Palestinian leaders inside the country. Amongst those present were Ibrahim Qarain, the editor of the magazine, Al-'Awda, Dr Najwa Muhawwil, a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Latif Dori, the secretary of the Committee for Dialogue, Hana Seniora, the editor of the newspaper, Al-Fajr, and Kokhavi Shemesh from the Black Panthers.

In May 1986, Latif Dori met the editor of the Palestinian weekly, Sawt al-Bilad, and had stressed the Sephardim's struggle against racism and the efforts to solve the Palestinian problem.¹¹³

On 14 April 1986 Latif Dori sent a telegram to Yitzhak Navon, the Minister of Education, demanding the withdrawal of all textbooks which describe Arabs pejoratively and stated that such action would constitute an additional measure against racism. Dori expressed his gratitude for the withdrawal of textbooks which portrayed Sephardim in a negative light.

On 20 February 1986 Al Hamishmar claimed that most of the leading lights of Kahane's racist party were Sephardim. Dori asked the leaders of this party for the names of its leaders and he was given a list of names of which two were Sephardim and the remaining 11 were Ashkenazi. Dori condemned the newspaper's attempt to denigrate the reputation of Sephardim.¹¹⁴

This does not however mean that all the Sephardim have rushed to join in the struggle. The ruling establishment continues to control the minds of the majority by manipulation of the media, schools, the draft and the economic and political scene. What it cannot do

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is to solve the structural contradiction between the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi communities inside the Zionist regime.

The bloody clashes between the Sephardim and the Zionist establishment aroused much interest in international, Arab and Palestinian circles and the Palestinian resistance movement started to consider it an important phenomenon.

THE COUNTER-TERRORISM ACT

In response to the meetings between Sephardim and the Palestinian leadership, the Knesset passed into law on 6 August 1986 a new motion forbidding such contacts. This law was called the Counter-terrorism Act and its aim was to prevent meetings between Israelis and PLO representatives.

The Committee for Dialogue called a press conference in Jerusalem in which they condemned the new law. Latif Dori stated 'this law is despotic and has no equal in any state in the world, it is out of accord with the laws of logic and democratic values.' Dori affirmed that he and his colleagues would continue their contacts with PLO representatives at any time and anywhere. Hana Seniora stated to the press conference that 'this law destroys any opportunity for dialogue and peace, for peace cannot come to pass without talks and meetings between Israelis and Palestinians.' He added that the only impediment to peace was the Israeli refusal to negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the single legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.¹¹⁵ Dori commented on the meeting between Shimon Peres and King Hassan of Morocco that 'every Israeli leader who meets an Arab leader without announcing his recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination will return empty handed. We suggest that the leadership of the state follow in our tracks and instigate a real Israeli-Palestinian dialogue which would lead to a fruitful dialogue with the PLO and the Arab peoples.'

THE FIRST SEPHARDI-PALESTINIAN CONFERENCE IN ROMANIA 1986

The first meeting between Latif Dori and his colleagues and the PLO took place in Romania on 6 November 1986. The magazine *Falestine al-Thawra* published a number of articles about this meeting

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in its edition of 15 November 1986, including the following, filed by Ziyad Abu al-Hayja' from Bucharest:

In its successive sessions, the Palestine National Council decided to move toward a meeting and dialogue with individual Jewish and Israeli democratic forces which support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent state and which consider the PLO the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

To counter this declaration, which was issued by the highest legal authority of the Palestinian people (the Palestine National Council being the Palestinian people's Parliament), the Knesset on 6 August 1986 outlawed all meetings with representatives of the PLO under pain of a three-year prison sentence.

Abu al-Hayja' went on to say that both the PLO and the Israeli peacemakers decided to defeat this law and to hold this conference in Romania.

The meeting opened at five-thirty on 6 November, in the presence of over one hundred journalists from all over the world who had come to cover this event.

At the start, Latif Dori confirmed his support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent state. He stated that the meeting showed that there can be no peace in the Middle East without the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Latif Dori went on to comment about the law passed by the Knesset. 'In fact it is not an anti-terrorist law. It is a terrorist law.'

Dori concluded by quoting some verses by the Tunisian poet Abu al-Qasim al-Shabi.¹¹⁶ My Palestinian brothers, the night of occupation will be dispelled, the shackles of occupation will be broken and destiny will respond to your aspirations by establishing your independent Palestinian state.'

Colonel 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Yahya, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee and the head of the Palestinian delegation, then spoke. He welcomed the courage of the Israeli individuals in standing up to the Knesset law and attending the meeting with the PLO. He reasserted that the PLO was interested in fostering peace-loving forces in Israel and that it was always ready to meet them in accordance with resolutions passed by the Palestine National Congress . . .

He added, 'Israel is waging war against representatives of the Palestinian people from its representatives on the village council level up to its representative in the leadership of the PLO.'

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Father Ibrahim 'Ayyad, adviser on church affairs to the chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO, called upon peaceloving forces in Israel to transform their struggle into real action. 'Imad Shaqur, adviser on Israeli affairs to the chairman of the Executive Committee, addressed the Israeli delegation. 'Tell your children, tell your people that you found the hands of the PLO extended to you in peace.' The Palestinian journalist Raymonda Tawil, who lives in occupied East Jerusalem, praised the courage of the Israeli delegation.

At seven o'clock that evening the meeting ended and the Palestinian delegation distributed to the journalists the following communique: In accordance with resolutions of the Palestine National Council in its various sessions with regard to a positive dialogue with Jewish democratic forces which recognise the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and its inalienable rights and which believes in and struggles for a just and lasting peace based upon the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, there has taken place a meeting between a number of Israelis and Palestinians. The Palestine Liberation Organisation reaffirms its deep commitment to struggle by all means to achieve a just and lasting peace within the framework of an international conference with the participation of the Soviet Union, the United States, the permanent members of the Security Council and the parties concerned, including the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

After the meeting, the Israeli authorities decided to try some of the Israeli delegates on a charge of being in contact with an enemy 'terrorist organisation'. Latif Dori, the secretary of the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue and head of the delegation to Romania, together with a number of other leaders of the delegation lodged a complaint with the police after they received anonymous death threats.

Dori stated that the Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, and the security authorities, would bear responsibility for any attack upon himself or his colleagues and mentioned that Shamir had already accused them of treason.

The Kach Movement of Rabbi Kahane distributed leaflets in Jerusalem containing the names, addresses and telephone numbers of four members of the delegation under investigation by the police. The movement announced that it intended to have them tried for

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breaking the new law by meeting members of Palestinian organisations.¹¹⁷

THE SECOND PLO-SEPHARDI CONFERENCE: BUDAPEST 1987

On 9 June 1987 in Budapest two PLO leaders, Mahmud 'Abbas (Abu Mazin) and 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Yahya, received a Sephardi delegation headed by Charlie Biton, MP. The delegation included fifteen Sephardim from the slum districts and the development towns, members of the Black Panthers. Before he left Israel, Biton stated that the authorities had employed terrorism and intimidation to stop his mission and that they had pressurised the East for Peace organisation into withdrawing from the delegation. He added that the Sephardim in Israel would prove that there was another Israel, an Israel in which the Sephardim denounced the attacks made by Gush Emunim and Kahane's gang on Deheisha Camp. In Budapest he made a statement in which he said that 'this delegation recognises the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and calls upon Israel to recognise the national rights of the Palestinian people including the right to establish an independent state alongside Israel. This delegation calls upon Israel to participate in the proposed international conference with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and the superpowers.' Biton stated that he condemned the anti-democratic Israeli law which forbids meetings with the PLO, and called for it to be retracted.¹¹⁸

On 15 June 1987 The Guardian reported that Biton and members of the delegation might be tried for having contact with an 'enemy' organisation, a crime which carries a maximum sentence of three years. Mahmud 'Abbas Abu Mazin, declared that the PLO strongly supported the delegation's proposals. Ha'aretz added that the Israeli delegation comprised twenty-two members¹¹⁹ including members from the Mapam and the Communist parties.

The Palestinian Delegation included:

Mahmud 'Abbas (Abu Mazin), member of the PLO Executive Committee and head of the National and International Relations Department.

'Abd al-Razzaq al-Yahya, member of the PLO. Executive Committee, and its representative in Jordan, former commander of the Palestine Liberation Army.

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Nabil 'Amru, Director of Broadcasting for the Palestinian Revolution.

Ramzi Khuri, Director of the Office of the Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Sa'id Abu 'Ammara, PLO representative in Moscow.

'Imad Shaqur, Adviser on Israeli Affairs to the Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Khalid Salam, Editor of the newspaper, Sawt al-Bilad, published in Nicosia.

During the meeting, Dr Vilner had stated 'I do not want to say that most Israelis of Sephardi origin do not support the Likud - but their reasons have nothing to do with the Arab-Israel dispute. They do not support it for its policy of expansionism and settlement. It was their economic and class situation which pushed them into supporting Likud. Ma'arakh [Labour-Alliance] and the Ashkenazim, as an haut bourgeois class, oppressed the Sephardim. Now, the Sephardim have started to learn how their exploitation has been started by the Right.'¹²⁰ Abu Mazin then spoke. 'Friends, let us speak as frankly as we can about a subject which deserves some clarification, both by us and by you - that is the picture painted over the years about Sephardim in Israel, most of whom had lived with us in peace and harmony for many years. The ruling establishment in Israel together with influential Western propaganda machinery have gone to pains to depict the Sephardim as Arab-and Palestinian-haters. However, your presence here with us as representatives of significant sectors of public opinion in Israel proves the invalidity of this claim. Your peace proposals are heading inexorably towards a lasting peace founded on justice, and as we agree, that means the realisation of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people. Hence our welcome to you is founded on your deep awareness of the benefits of a just peace in whose shade we all need to live. Our National Council, particularly in its last session, has made all these positive ideas the subject of consideration and respect. The Council has passed unambiguous resolutions according our meetings and dialogue all the necessary support and legality. We met yesterday for the sake of peace and we are meeting again today for the sake of peace. It is our common desire to forge peace and through our shared awareness we are putting an end to those who want this region to remain a permanent theatre of war and destruction. With peace it will be possible for all our children to live in security, stability and freedom just like

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children the world over.¹²¹

It is significant to note that Ashkenazi settlers from the Zionist, non-Zionist and anti-Zionist Left have held many meetings with the PLO over recent years, particularly with 'Isam Sartawi, but they have not been prosecuted - perhaps they were secretly encouraged by the government which received briefings about their talks. The new law was not passed until the Sephardim founded the Dialogue Committee and resolved to start a dialogue with the PLO. The law is in complete accord with Zionist policies, which are to erect a barrier between the Sephardim and the Palestinians. A secret serviceman, named Reuven, admitted in court that the government had requested Ashkenazi Israelis to establish contacts with the PLO. and that prior meetings had all taken place with government permission.

Ha'aretz reported on 19 June 1987 that Latif Dori met the delegation upon its return from Budapest. He declared 'no power in the world that can halt the dialogue which will continue anywhere and at any time. We are ready to pay the price for our struggle for a just peace and peace co-existence amongst our two peoples.' Charlie Biton took the opportunity to mention the threats directed against members of the Palestinian and Israeli delegations. Ze'ev Even, the chief of criminal investigations in the central region, summoned Biton, who then claimed parliamentary immunity. The delegation's lawyer, Amos Giv'on, stated that the members would retain their right not to answer questions from the secret service. In 1988, Dori and three other Israelis were sentenced to six months in jail or community service for meeting PLO officials in Romania, and Dori received the Kreisky Peace Award in Vienna.¹²³ Abbi Nathan, the owner of the pirate 'Voice of Peace' radio station and originally from Iran, was sent to prison for meeting PLO officials in 1986. Unrepentant, he claimed that as soon as he got out of prison he would go and meet Arafat.¹²⁴

THE THIRD PLO-SEPHARDI CONFERENCE: TOLEDO 1989

'While the Ashkenazi Establishment of Israel is refusing to negotiate with the PLO,' stated Abu Mazin, 'it is important to deal directly with the Sephardi Jews who represent the masses of the Israeli people. Since the Sephardi Jews are the majority in Israel, matters of peace and war will be dependent on them. They are an organic

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part of our culture, our Arab Islamic society, part of our history and memory. We ought to renew our memory to use our common cultural dimension in order to overcome the present and plan for the future.'

The Toledo Conference was held between 3-6 July 1989 and organised by the Spanish Institute for Peace and International Studies and two Jewish Moroccan groups based in Paris: 'Perspectives Judeo-Arabe' and 'Identity and Dialogue'. The choice of Toledo is highly significant since it symbolises the cultural and political co-operation between Sephardi Jews and Muslims in Spain over many generations.

The Jewish communique published at the end of the deliberations describes 'the common culture of Jews and Arabs is an important basis for the future of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples'. The statement praises PLO moderation and calls upon the government of Israel 'to respond to the challenge of peace offered by the PLO and to begin negotiations in order to attain a just and peaceful solution based on self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel.'

The Palestinian group was led by Mahmud 'Abbas Abu Mazin, and the poet Mahmud Darwish, both members of the PLO Executive Committee.

Darwish pointed out that peace must be based on mutual interest and cultural heritage, and Sephardi Jews are more able than others to live with this idea since it does not lead them into the unknown.

Thirty-eight Sephardim from Israel attended. They included Latif Dori, Secretary of the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue, Rabbi Mordechai Malka, Rabbi Moshe Suwisa, Professor David Tzemah, Dr Shimon Balas of Tel Aviv University, Professor Shlomo al-Baz of the Hebrew University, the actor Yosef Shiloah, the poet Erez Biton and Nairn Giladi-Khlaschi, Secretary of the World Organisation of Jews from Islamic countries.

Interestingly, many of them preferred to address the conference in Arabic, their mother tongue, rather than Hebrew or English. Sephardi Jews living outside Israel were also present, among them Seraj Berdugo, head of the Jewish Community in Morocco, Seraj Eyda, Deputy President of the Tunisian Human Rights Organisation, Amiel Alcalay, a researcher and interpreter from the US, Elie Baida, a Syrian economist and Nairn Katan, an Iraqi writer and Chairman of the Royal Academy of Science in Canada.

Progressive intellectuals from Arab countries were present in strength. Hamadi al-Sayyid, head of the Arab League in Paris,

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writers Lutf Allah Suleiman, Mahmud Hussein and Burhan Ghalyun among many others.

Seraj Berdugo observed that although many Moroccan Jews in Israel vote for the right, for social reasons, 'deep in their hearts they are not anti-Arab.' He revealed that 30 percent of Moroccan Jews did not emigrate to Israel but to the West where they are better off. As for the Jews in Morocco, he stressed, 'we are living evidence of the form of life which will exist in the Middle East after the achievement of peace.'¹²⁵

MORDECHAI VANUNU - 1986: A MOROCCAN IN CHAINS

The story of Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli of Moroccan origin who divulged information about Israel's secret nuclear plant to The Sunday Times, can only be explained within the framework of anti-Sephardi racial discrimination and Sephardi solidarity with the Palestinian people's struggle. Israeli newspapers have published a number of scurrilous articles about this brave man with the aim of covering up this truth.

Mordechai is the son of Salman Wa'anunu who immigrated with his family from Marrakesh in 1963 and lived in one of the Sephardi slum districts in Beer Sheba. Vanunu went to elementary school and was then transferred to a religious secondary school, subsequently entering the department of geography and philosophy at Beer Sheba University. His father still sells religious artifacts in Beer Sheba market.

During his university education he made friends with Palestinian students and started to defend their rights. In November 1985, for example, Vanunu took part in a meeting on Middle Eastern culture attended by Arab students, at which the Palestinian flag was raised and enthusiastic speeches were given. Vanunu gave a speech in which he said 'every Arab student must continue to struggle against Zionist racism which also oppresses the Sephardim.' He called for the establishment of a Palestinian state. M. Artzi'eli, who published the declaration¹²⁶ noted that Vanunu neither added 'alongside Israel' nor 'in its place'.

During his studies, Vanunu stated that the Ashkenazi establishment treated the natives the way the whites treat the blacks in South Africa and that the Ashkenazim had blocked all means of advancement for the Sephardim. He demanded that the number of

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rooms allotted to Arab students on the campus be doubled and he was in constant contact with the Progressive List and the Democratic Front.

After working in the Israeli nuclear programme, Vanunu determined that the publication of Israel's nuclear secrets would save the Middle East from destruction. It is possible too that the security services knew about Vanunu's movements and did nothing, hoping that the publication of the nuclear secrets would intimidate the Arab states. Now (1990) solitary confinement in prison and the abject treatment meted out to him both aim at destroying him psychologically.

In July 1987 Mordechai Vanunu sent a letter to the MP, Charlie Biton, asking him to speak out about the dangers of nuclear arms in Israel. He stressed that he was neither a spy nor an agent of any organisation and had not acted for financial reasons, but because he wanted the average citizen to know the truth. Vanunu referred to the fact that he was kidnapped by the Mossad and Shin Bet in contravention of international and Israeli law, and that he was undergoing humiliation in prison and had been fair game for the press (e.g. the seizure and publication of his diary). However, according to Vanunu, he was still strong and believed he was right as much as he did before he was kidnapped. He asked for help to obtain the rights legally allowed for prisoners as he was in solitary confinement and not allowed to receive visits from anyone except his brothers and his girlfriend. He was not allowed to make a telephone call, even to his lawyer. He added that he was not a prisoner but a captive of the Shin Bet. Vanunu accused the Israeli authorities of disgraceful behaviour in the Lebanese war and other scandals. He asked Biton to visit the prison to 'see for himself how he is deprived of all his human rights in the name of security'. *Zu Haderekh* published this letter¹²⁷ with parts cut out by the censor.

At the beginning of August 1987 the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation convened a press conference in London at which Me'ir Vanunu described how Mossad kidnapped his brother. The *Sunday Times* published the details¹²⁸ and it appeared that a Mossad agent named Cindy (a Jewish American immigrant married to an Israeli army officer) enticed Vanunu into travelling from London to her 'sister's' apartment in Rome where two men pinned him down as Cindy gave him an injection. He woke up shackled in irons and on a ship to Israel. The abduction took place just a few days before The *Sunday Times* published Vanunu's information about the Israeli nuclear bomb.¹²⁹ In prison Vanunu was forced to 'confess' his crime

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and went on hunger strike for thirty-five days. He was informed that he would be tried for treason and could face the death penalty. Vanunu is now demanding that the court acquit him immediately as he was transferred to Israel in contravention of international and Italian law. His brother revealed details of the case but the threat of 15 years imprisonment has decided him not to return to Israel.

At his court appearances, Vanunu was forced to wear a helmet to hide his face from distant cameras. His trial was held in camera and he was not permitted to tell the court certain facts in his defence. Two security officers flanked him, ready to gag him should he attempt to disobey. Finally convicted, he was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

In the short history of the state of Israel, there have been others convicted of treason and espionage but they were not treated so brutally or given such long sentences because they were of European origin while Vanunu is 'only a Moroccan Jew' belonging, according to the Zionist mentality, to the 'inferior Arab-Islamic society'.

Actually, Vanunu did not spy for another country, as convicted Ashkenazim had done, but published, in a 'friendly' country, information which had been common knowledge throughout the world.

Although Vanunu's main motive was to aid the cause of peace, there is no doubt that he was deeply marked and embittered by the racism which he and his family have been subject to for many years.

As a nuclear technician, there is no doubt that he was aware of the strategic alliance between Israel and South Africa, aiming at the possibility of using nuclear weapons against the 'inferior races'. This is the social and ideological environment in which Vanunu formulated his bold action for peace.

The most crucial question is: how did the 'most efficient intelligence service in the world' allow a man with his political ideas to work for nine years on a nuclear project, to collect secret information, to photograph Israel's nuclear installations and to leave the country (which has very tight exit controls) with all this documentation?

It is reasonable to suppose that the Israeli security services knew about his movements and turned a blind eye, assuming that he would go abroad, publish his material and alarm the Arab world. Israel knows that sooner or later the balance of power will shift in favour of the Islamic world, so the nuclear option could be held up as a deterrent.

There is no point in building up a deterrent force without

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informing the other side of its existence. Vanunu appears to have been allowed to do this job and pay a heavy price for it.

The last question must be: can Israeli nuclear bombs deter a combined Arab-Islamic attack? The answer must be no. A nuclear assault on any of her near neighbours would have disastrous consequences for Israel: even with no retaliation, Israel could not survive the fall-out from her own weapons used close at hand.

In any case, Israel's paymaster, America, would not permit the use of nuclear weapons, not out of love for Islam, but because they would destroy vital oil supplies and thereby the Western economy. However, the Arab states reacted with the development of chemical and long range missiles.

THE EASTERN FRONT

Kochavi Shemesh and Sa'adya Marciano - both veteran Black Panthers, founded this new organisation in solidarity with the Palestinian people. On 11 October 1986 Falestine al-Thawra published an interview with these two leaders.

Shemesh's view was that 'life taught us, as did events and their repercussions, that we could only expect poverty as long as "war" remained a weapon in the hands of the Ashkenazi bourgeoisie and that in order to distribute more bread and milk to our children we needed "peace". Thus a common front with the Palestinian people was inevitable in order to put an end to the problem of discrimination.

'The concept of the Eastern Front arose as an organisation which would work for peace with the Palestinians as a prelude to the struggle for equality amongst all the communities in Israel and to purge it of the plague of racism.'

As for the dangers of war, Shemesh pointed out that the 1967 war showed that Israel, not the Arabs, was the aggressor.

Despite the activities of Rabbi Kahane's group, Shemesh asserts that most educated Sephardim support the peace movement in Israel.

How do you differ from Peace Now?

Shemesh: 'Firstly, we stem from a Sephardi cultural background and we represent the poor Sephardim. The Peace Now people are

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members of the intelligentsia and have their roots in the state of Israel which masquerades as a Western state and looks for its cultural stimulus to the countries of origin of the Ashkenazim. Hence we are struggling inside Israel for equality and social justice.

'Our cultural background is Middle Eastern. The issue of equality and that of being Middle Easterners is a vital issue for us whereas it does not concern the Peace Now movement at all.

'We differ from Peace Now in that we have a programme. Where is their programme?

'We understand peace with the Palestinians to mean the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Peace Now does not demand this, and we have not heard that they see it as a basis for peace in spite of the fact that many members of Peace Now support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. We believe that the borders of the Palestinian and Israeli states can only be drawn by mutual recognition and negotiations. We accept the pre-1967 borders, but Peace Now has not taken a stance on this matter.'

Support for the Palestinian Intifada

Sephardi Jews, along with other progressives, took part in noisy mass demonstrations in support of the Palestinian people's uprising. One of those who refused to serve in the army in the occupied territories during the Intifada, which started in December 1987, was M. 'Amur, an officer of Moroccan origin and a member of the Eastern Front. He was sent to Megiddo prison. The Eastern Front, along with the Yesh Gvul ('There is a Limit'), Day Lakibbush ('Stop the Occupation') and Year 21 organisations staged a demonstration in front of the prison. Yosef Shiloah, an Eastern Front representative stated that 'Me'ir 'Amur is a hero, since he is challenging the occupation authorities by rejecting the means of oppression wielded against the Palestinian people, and we support him for that.' Shiloah pointed out that 'Amur had refused to do military service for another reason, which was the racial discrimination suffered by Sephardim in Israel.'

The demonstrators chanted, 'Rabin, Rabin, how many bones have you broken today? No to shooting, no to crying, no to military service on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.' Amur's colleagues in the Department of Social Science at Tel Aviv University published a petition in Ha'aretz¹³⁰ in support of his refusal.

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At the same time, Erez Biton, the poet of Moroccan origin, stated at a meeting of progressive writers, 'the Palestinian intifada is a boon in that it brings Israel back to its senses. The Jordanian option is dead . . . We cannot live as crusaders or colonialists. We have to learn that the Palestinians are part of our life.'¹³¹

After he came out of prison, 'Amur spoke with Rahel Sa'ar, a correspondent of Ha'aretz,¹³² He blamed the Ashkenazi 'doves' for ignoring anti-Sephardi discrimination.

Lili Galili reported in Ha'aretz the words of a youth in the streets of Dimonah. 'Poor Israel. Who is there to defend her in the next generation? All her young people are alcoholics and drug addicts. They prefer non-combat positions in the army. Yasser Arafat doesn't need his intifada. He just has to sit tight for another ten years and Israel will blow itself apart.'¹³³

During the course of the Sephardi struggle against occupation, two soldiers won a great moral victory. Angelo 'Idan (of Libyan origin) and Rami Hasson (of Sephardi Palestinian origin) served several prison sentences in 1989 for refusing to serve in the occupied Arab land. Eventually the military command released them.

Hasson (33) said after 140 days of imprisonment that he also refused to accept any command in the army and that most Sephardi soldiers did not want to keep these territories. He stated that they had good memories from Iraq and Morocco - their original countries. However after five terms of imprisonment he was called up again in October 1989 but refused to go . . .

Charlie Biton, MP, went to Shabura refugee camp, near Rafah, where five Palestinians were shot dead and a curfew had been imposed for 18 days. He demanded that the soldiers involved should be tried.¹³⁴

Sephardi inhabitants of the slum districts began to hold meetings with their Palestinian neighbours in order to help them. In Jerusalem, Professor Shlomo al-Baz hurried with his friends to the nearly Arab village when he heard shots (fired by the Border Police). His very presence stopped another disaster.¹³⁵

Even Sephardim who have joined the Zionist Establishment tend to be more moderate than their Ashkenazi colleagues. When Navon, for example, became the head of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee in the Knesset in 1983, he demanded that talks be held with the Palestinians instead of with Jordan and he believed in a peace based on Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories.¹³⁶ When Menahem Begin refused to form a committee of enquiry to look into the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, Yitzhak Navon went

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on television and demanded that such a committee be formed. He intended to resign as president if the government rejected his request. Navon also opposed the principle of the Judaisation of the Galilee, saying 'We should develop the Galilee for all its inhabitants.'¹³⁷

Mordechai Ben Porat and Aharon Ozan, of Iraqi and Tunisian origin respectively, demanded the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon without preconditions.¹³⁸ Whilst recent Ashkenazi religious fundamentalism is serving as a vehicle for extreme nationalism inspired by the Book of Joshua, Sephardi reaction to Ashkenazi permissiveness is driving towards non-Zionist traditionalism. The vehicle for this trend is the fast growing support for the new Sephardi religious movement, known as SHAS. Rabbi Yitzhak Perets, its leader who is considered 'reactionary right-wing', demanded the participation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the proposed international conference, making reference to the harmony and good relations that had prevailed between Jews and Muslims over their common history, in contrast with the sufferings of Ashkenazi Jews in Europe.¹³⁹

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, regarded as the primary spiritual leader of Israel's Sephardim and SHAS and whose dovish views have long been known, was invited to Cairo in July 1989 by the Egyptian president. In their talk, Rabbi Yosef advocated withdrawal from parts of the occupied territories if Israel could be guaranteed a secure and lasting peace.

The Cairo visit provoked outrage in Israel's right wing, but reports that Rabbi Yosef would issue a formal religious ruling along the same lines caused near panic.

The right wing fears that a declaration by Rabbi Yosef that Jewish religious law obliges Israel to give up territories if it would spare bloodshed could have a serious impact on opinion.

Rabbi Yosef was to deliver a religious ruling on the subject at a religious meeting in Jerusalem in August 1989. However, the Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, and other leading right wing politicians reportedly pressed him not to speak out formally on the subject for fear it would invite political pressure and even bloodshed.¹⁴⁰

In fact the Rabbi had already stated in 1980 that 'blood is more important than land', and thereafter he was removed from office as Sephardi Chief Rabbi. In April 1990 this party decided to support Labour to form a Peace Government, but its economic weakness enabled the Ashkenazi boss, Rabbi Schach, to veto the move, demanding support for Likud (Hadashot, 27 April).

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THE SEPHARDI MOVEMENT ABROAD

Ever since the emergence of the Black Panthers in the streets of Jerusalem, progressive Sephardim have been active in the West, trying to raise the consciousness of world and Jewish public opinion, particularly among the hundreds of thousands of Jews who emigrated from the Arab world and Israel to the West.

Members of this movement take an active part in pro-Palestinian meetings and demonstrations as well as writing letters and articles for Western and Palestinian newspapers on anti-Palestinian and anti-Sephardi discrimination.

Amongst these organisations are the World Sephardi Organisation which is headquartered in New York, the Sephardi Organisation for Israeli-Palestinian Peace with its headquarters in Paris, and the 'International Committee Against Oppression of Sephardi Jews in Israel' whose headquarters are in London.

Sephardi organisations in the West have come up against a great many difficulties for the following reasons:

1 Western, and particularly American, support for Israel as a fundamental policy notwithstanding moral considerations. This is because Israel constitutes a Western military outpost against the socialist bloc and the Middle Eastern peoples.

2 The ability of the World Zionist Organisation, Israeli embassies and Mossad agents to penetrate Western news media, such as radio, television and the press, and political parties as well as philanthropic organisations and trade and student unions, in order to defend Israel by suppressing the truth.

3 The Israeli government's ability to exert complete control over the religious, political and social life of the Jews who live in the West, including the Sephardim who emigrated from the Middle East. This takes place through the synagogues, the Zionist press and the World Zionist Organisation.

The World Zionist Organisation has exploited synagogues to collect funds for Israel and to spread Zionist propaganda. All the donations are handed over to the Zionist Organisation, which pays no tax on them to the British government, since it is ostensibly a 'charitable' organisation whereas every Israeli knows that these funds are used to establish settlements in the occupied territories and to purchase war material, directly or indirectly.

I asked an experienced journalist why the press did not publish material on the oppression of the Sephardim in Israel. He replied, 'I am afraid to. The Zionists would accuse me of anti-Semitism.'

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If a newspaper publishes an item which Israel wants retracted, scores of letters are immediately sent to the editor.

When the BBC broadcasts a news item which is not favourable to Israel, it receives scores of letters of complaint. There are more Muslims than Jews in Britain, but they are not as well organised and unable to orchestrate phone calls and letters.

4 The massive financial resources at the disposal of the pro-Israel lobby abroad could buy up an army of journalists, politicians, unionists and parties.

5 The United Nations does not deal with organisations which do not represent member states.

6 Some of the Arab states show no concern about anti-Sephardi racism in Israel and are not aware of the significance of this internal conflict.

7 Israeli pressure (via America and the Arab governments) on the PLO to stop any cooperation with Sephardi organisations.

8 The anti-Sephardi lies spread by the extreme Ashkenazi left amongst the Palestinians in order to prevent them uniting in struggle. The most vicious of these lies is that the Sephardim are anti-Arab. We believe that the Israeli secret service is the source of this libel.

The most important of these factors is Western, and particularly American, support for Israel. The Western powers will change this policy when they realise that it does not serve their national interests. This analysis does not mean that we should sit by and wait.

Notwithstanding the importance of political work in the West, the crucial struggle will take place, not in London, New York or Paris, but in the Middle East - in Nablus, Nazareth, Jerusalem and the Black Belts, in the development towns and the Sephardi moshavim.

That will happen when the Arabs recognise the root of the dispute in the Middle East. It is not a religious war, between Jews, Christians and Muslims, but an anti-colonialist struggle between foreign settlers and the natives, who are the Christians, Muslims and Sephardi Jews.

The callous attitude of the East European Zionist leaders to genuine grievances and human life seems to be imported from their countries of origin; and the collapse we are witnessing in that part of the world will probably repeat itself in Israel with much more catastrophic consequences.