ISSN: 2587-2532 | **e-ISSN:** 2587-1862
http://filistin.org

FAD- Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi Sayı: 5 (Yaz 2019)

BPS- Bulletin of Palestine Studies Issue: 5 (Summer 2019)

Başlık/ Title: Identity Stereotypes and Communal Identity: Representations of Jewish Immigrants to Palestine by 19th Century Hebrew Journalists

Yazarlar/ Authors **ORCID ID**
Gideon KOUTS https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4663-9227

Bu makaleye atıf için: Gideon Kouts, Identity Stereotypes and Communal Identity: Representations of Jewish Immigrants to Palestine by 19th Century Hebrew Journalists, *Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no.5 (2019): 1-14.

To cite this article: Gideon Kouts, Identity Stereotypes and Communal Identity: Representations of Jewish Immigrants to Palestine by 19th Century Hebrew Journalists, *Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no.5 (2019): 1-14.

Makale Türü / Type of Article: Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article
Yayın Geliş Tarihi / Submission Date: 3 Mart 2019
Yayına Kabul Tarihi / Acceptance Date: 13 Haziran 2019
Yayın Tarihi / Date Published: 30 Haziran 2019

FAD- Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi
BPS- Bulletin of Palestine Studies
Tarandığı Uluslararası İndexler/ Abstracting & Indexing

INDEX COPERNICUS | SCIENTIFIC INDEXING | CEEOL | DRJI | İSAM

Yazar: Gideon Kouts*

Kimlik Kalıp Yargıları ve Topluluk Kimliği: Filistin'de Yaşayan Yahudi Göçmenlerin 19. Yüzyıl İbrani Gazetecilerince Temsilleri [1]

Özet: Yahudi toplulukları arasında, özellikle "Aşkenazim" [Aşkenazlar] ve "Sefardim" [Sefaradlar] arasındaki bölünme bağlamındaki gerilimler, sosyal psikologlara göre, bu veya şu topluluğa bazı özellikler ekleyerek kalıpyargılar yaratan karşılıklı görüntüler üretiyor. Basmakalıplar, tarihsel kavramları dahil olmak üzere kültürel kimliklerin oluşumunda ve dönüşümünde de kültürel araştırma bilim insanlarında teşhis edildiği gibi, bir fonksiyona sahip olabilir. İsrail Devleti'nin kültürel kimliğini şekillendirmesinde doğulu toplumlara karşı ayrımcılık iddiası iyi bilinmektedir. Bizim tarafımızdan bilinen bu olgunun, İsrail Devleti kadar eski olduğu varsayılabilir. Bununla birlikte, önceki göç dalgaları da bir Topluluk/ Cemaat Kimliği durumu yarattı. Zamanın önemli İbrani gazetecileri tarafından yazılmış, 1878-1884 yıllarına ait metinler ve raporlar, "Aşkenazi özelliklerini" ve "Sephardi özelliklerini" belirleme girişiminin 19. yüzyıl Filistin'inde zaten açık olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Filistin'deki ilk İbranice gazete *The Lebanon*'nun [Lübnan] (1863) kurucusu ve editörü Yehiel Bril ve 1884'ten beri Filistin'deki Modern İbranice basının kurucusu Eliezer Ben Yehuda'nın metinlerinden faydalanıyoruz. 1878'de Bril, Kudüs'ün "cemaat sorunlarını" analiz ederek bir arkadaşına mektup olarak bir metin yazdı. Bu metinde ve üç yıl sonra yazılan bir diğerinde, Bril'in gözlemleri, övgülerini nasıl niteleyeceğini de bilmesine rağmen Sephardim'e daha sempatiktir. 1883'te Bril tekrar Filistin'i ziyaret etti ve Sefarad ve Aşkenazi özelliklerinin yeni karşılaştırmalarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bril Filistin'i ziyareti sırasında, bir başka üst düzey İbrani gazeteci de oradaydı. Yeni gelen, İbranicenin yenileyicisi Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Kudüs'te kendi basın "İmparatorluğu "nu yarattı. Rusya'nın doğumlu Ben-Yehuda, İbranice'nin Sefaradça telaffuzuna olan tercihini çoktan dile getirdiğini belirtti; fakat "Sefarad üstünlüğünü" ("oryantalist" yaklaşımla karıştırarak) diğer kalıplaşmış kişisel ve sosyal özelliklere de genişletmiştir. Toplumsal gerilimlerin 19. yüzyılda zaten var olduğu anlaşılıyor. Basmakalıplar mevcuttu, ancak içerikleri her zaman günümüzünkiyle aynı değildi. Ancak, cemaat kimliğinin bir ulusal kimlikle birleşmesi gerekiyordu. Bununla birlikte, Habermas'ın dediği gibi, kimlik "verilen bir şey değil, fakat ve aynı zamanda kendi projemizdir". Görünüşe göre, böyle bir proje üzerinde, hatta günümüzde İsrail ve Yahudi Dünyasında bile net bir anlaşma yoktur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aşkenazim, Sefardim, Filistin, 19. yüzyıl, Basmakalıplar, Topluluk Kimliği, Temsiller.

* Prof. Dr. Head of Jewish, Hebrew and Israel Studies Department and the Research Studies Unit, Paris 8 University, Prof. Dr. Yahudi, İbranice ve İsrail Araştırmaları Bölümü ve Araştırma Çalışmaları Başkanı, Paris 8 Üniversitesi, gkouts@orange.fr

[1] This paper is an extended and revised version of an oral presentation under the title "Representations of Jewish Immigrants in Palestine under Ottoman Rule by 19th Century Hebrew Journalists: Stereotypes and Communal Identity" presented at the Second International Conference on Israel and Judaism Studies 2018 (Bandirma, October 27-29, 2018) and published in *the Proceeding and Abstract Book*.

Identity Stereotypes and Communal Identity: Representations of Jewish Immigrants to Palestine by 19th Century Hebrew Journalists

Abstract: Tensions between the Jewish communities, particularly in the context of the division between "Ashkenazim" and "Sephardim" produce reciprocal images, which, according to social psychologists, create stereotypes that "attach" some characteristics to this or that community. Stereotypes can also have a function in the formation and transformation of cultural identities, including in their historical concept, as diagnosed by cultural studies scholars. The claim regarding discrimination against oriental communities in shaping the cultural identity of the State of Israel is well known. It could be assumed that the phenomenon, as known to us in its present dimensions, is as old as the State of Israel. However, the previous waves of immigration as well created a situation of Communal Identification. Texts and reports from the years 1878- 1884 written by notable Hebrew journalists of the time, demonstrate that the attempt to identify "Ashkenazi characteristics" and "Sephardi characteristics" was already obvious in 19th century Palestine. We make use of texts by Yehiel Bril, founder and editor of the first Hebrew newspaper in Palestine, *The Lebanon* (1863) and Eliezer Ben Yehuda, founder of the Modern Hebrew press in Palestine since 1884. In 1878, Bril wrote a text as a letter to a friend, analyzing "communal problems" of Jerusalem. In this text and another one written three years later, the observations of Bril, are more sympathetic to the Sephardim, although he also knows how to qualify his praise. In 1883, Bril visited Palestine again and found new comparisons of Sephardic and Ashkenazi characteristics. During the visit of Bril in Palestine, another top Hebrew journalist was already there. The newcomer, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the renovator of Hebrew language, created his own press "Empire" in Jerusalem. Ben-Yehuda, native of Russia, expressed already its preference to Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew language, but in his writings, he enlarges the "Sephardic superiority" (however, mixed with "orientalist" approach) also to other stereotypical personal and social characteristics. It appears that communal tensions existed already in the 19th century. The stereotypes existed, although their contents were not always similar to those of today. However, the communal identity was supposed to merge into a national identity. Nevertheless, identity, as Habermas urges, "is not something given, but also, and simultaneously, our own project". There is apparently no clear agreement on such a project, even in Israel and the Jewish World of our days.

Keywords: Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Palestine, 19th century, Stereotypes, Communal identity, Representations.

Introduction

Tensions between the Jewish communities, particularly in the context of the division between "Ashkenazim" (Jews originating from northern and central Europe, whose customs follow the "German" traditions) and "Sephardim" (Jews originating from southern Europe, Asia and North Africa, whose customs follow the "Spanish" traditions), are reflected in the world of images. As frequent in other societies- thus used to claim Social psychologists- these images create stereotypes that "attach" some characteristics to this or that community.

W. G. Allport[2] defines the stereotype by comparing it with other terms (such as prejudice):

"Stereotypes are primarily images within a category invoked by the individual to justify either love-prejudice or hate-prejudice...

A stereotype is not identical with a category; it is rather a fixed idea that accompanies the category. It often exists as a fixed mark upon the category...

Stereotypes are not identical with prejudice. They are primarily rationalizers. They adapt to the prevailing temper of prejudice or the needs of the situations."

M. R. Wiliams[3] adds: "Along with social distance feeling, stereotypes are one of the most common manifestations of prejudice. Stereotypes are labels or identities we assign to people that show what we believe these persons are like and how we think they will behave...".

R. Brown[4] speaks of the components: generalization, ethnocentricity, and a "kernel of truth" in the creation of a stereotype.

Allport claims that: "we have seen that stereotypes may not originate in kernels of truth, they aid people in simplifying their categories; they justify hostility; sometimes they serve as projection screens for our personal conflict. But there is an additional or exceedingly important reason for their existence: they are socially supported, continually revived and hammered by our media or mass communication."

However, stereotypes can also have a function in the formation and transformation of cultural identities, as diagnosed by cultural studies scholars.

---

[2] W.G. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., Inc.,. 1954).

[3] M. R. Williams, *Strangers Next Door: Ethnic Relations in American Communities* (N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964).

[4] Roger William Brown, *Social Psychology* (N.Y.: Free Press, 1965), 172-189.

Jorge Larrain[5] explains that "the formation of cultural identities presupposes the notion of the 'other'; the definition of the cultural self always involves a distinction from the values, characteristics and ways of life of others."

Stuart Hall[6] presents a historical conception of cultural identity: "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."

According to Colls and Dodd[7] the fact that there are recent symbols and ideas used to define a cultural identity does not ensure that their meaning has always been the same or that it does not change in the context of new practices. However, to uphold a historical concept of cultural identity does not suffice, says Larrain[8]:

> One has to accept that there are always several 'versions' of what constitutes the contents of a cultural identity. This is a result of the fact that cultural identities are not only historically constructed but also constructed around the interests and world-views of some classes or groups in society by a variety of cultural institutions. The criteria for defining cultural identity are always narrower and more selective than the increasingly complex and diversified cultural habits and practices of a people. Thus one can typically find a process of selection whereby only some features, symbols and group experiences are taken into account and others are excluded. There is also a process of evaluation whereby the values of certain classes, institutions or groups are presented as national values and others are excluded. So a moral community with supposedly shared values is constructed, which leaves out other values. A process of opposition is also frequently resorted to, whereby some groups, ways of life and ideas are presented as outside the national community. Cultural

[5] Jorge Larrain, *Ideology and Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994), 142.
[6] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Cultural Difference,* ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 225.
[7] R. Colls and P. Dodd, Preface *to Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880-1920* by R. Colls and P. Dodd (London: Crown Helm, 1986).
[8] Jorge Larrain, Ibid.,, 163-164.

identity is defined as against these other groups; thus the idea of 'us' as opposed to 'them or the 'others'. Differences are exaggerated.

However, the separation between Ashkenazim and Sephardim is a product of the situation in the Diaspora (and not of the life of the Ancient Jewish people in its own land- which produced different divisions).

Immigration to the Holy Land transfers and reintroduces it in Palestine- the country of origin that becomes a small-scale model of the transformations in national identity that took place in the Diaspora. Hall and others introduced the concept of Diaspora to the analysis of identity.

Paul Gilroy[9] summarizes thus the contribution of this concept to the study of identities: "Diaspora identification stands outside and sometimes in opposition to political forms and codes of modern citizenship."

"Diaspora offers a basis to re-assess the idea of essential and absolute identity, and offers a way to imagine a more complex, ecologically sophisticated and organic concept of identity than offered by the contending options of genealogy and geography."

The claim regarding discrimination against oriental communities in shaping the cultural identity of the State of Israel is well known. The rivalry between Ashkenazim and Sephardim constitutes the accepted foundation for this claim.

It could be assumed that the phenomenon, as known to us in its present dimensions, is as old as the State of Israel- the melting pot and merging of the diasporas, or as old as the great immigration waves to Israel and the demographic dynamics they created in the 20th century.

However, the previous waves of immigration as well created a situation of Communal Identification.

At the end of the 19th century, the majority of the old Jewish community in Palestine (some 25, 000 souls) was of Sephardi origin and it "absorbed" an Ashkenazi immigration; this was the opposite of the situation that was to exist after the establishment of the State of Israel, following wave after wave of "Ashkenazi" immigration.

A document from the year 1878 demonstrates that the attempt to identify "Ashkenazi characteristics" and "Sephardi characteristics" was evident already among the "old Jewish Establishment" (*Ha-Yishuv Ha-Yashan*) in 19th century Palestine.

In order to observe the stereotypes of that time and their possible sources ("kernel of truth"), the best way is to listen to the testimony of those

[9] Paul Gilroy, "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity," in *Identity and Difference*, ed. Kathryn Woodward (London: Sage- The Open University , 1997), 339.

experienced in that field, like Yehiel Bril, founder and editor of the first Hebrew newspaper in Palestine, *The Lebanon* (1863).

Jerusalem did not deal fairly with Yehiel Bril. He was forced to close down the paper after a year, and move with it to Paris, after he was denounced to the Turkish authorities as a result of the conflict between his paper and *Havatzelet*, the paper published by the Hasidim (a charismatic Jewish Orthodox movement). Nevertheless, Bril remained "Palestinian" for the rest of his life. He was deeply involved in what was happening in the Holy Land, took part in its struggles, and even headed groups of settlers who went there. One evening in the summer of 1878 he wrote a letter to his friend, Rabbi Yehiel Michal Pines, who was going from London to Jerusalem as an emissary of the "Montefiore Memorial Committee", and who had asked him "to advise him about the ways of life in Jerusalem".[10]

Bril writes from Mainz, an additional station in the wanderings of *The Lebanon*, which had become the journal of the ultra-orthodox. His letter was found in the archive of the late historian A.R. Malachi, and Yehiel Bril devotes most of its contents to analyze "communal problems" of Jerusalem. Bril himself, we should know, is an "authentic" Ashkenazi, born in Ukraine and lover of French culture, but his letter shows that he not always toed the line.

This is the advice Bril gave to Pines:

> If there is a Jewish hotel in Jerusalem, I would advise you to go to a hotel and to stay there all the time you are there alone. But if there is no Jewish hotel there, the need will justify you if you request lodging in the home of one of the residents of Jerusalem, but do not go to the Polish home, or the Ashkenazi or the Hungarian, and do not break bread with them all the time you are alone in Jerusalem, and do not talk with them in their home, but rather go to an honorable Sephardi home...
>
> At a Sephardi home you can eat and sleep, and select a place to pray all the time in the Ashkenazi houses of prayer- once with the Pharisees and once with the various Hasidim. On Saturdays and Holidays, and particularly on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when the Jerusalem custom is to weep a lot (something you will not do)- pray among the Sephardim. Try by all means to get a letter from the Committee written both to the Ashkenazi and Sephardi rabbis... and asking from them that

[10] The quotations are taken from Yehiel Bril's letter to Y. M. Pines, in an annex to the article by A.R. Malachi, "The History of The Lebanon," in *Mayer Waxman's Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Jewish Studies College of Chicago, in cooperation with Mordechai Newman Publishers, 1967), 127-129.

the Sephardi Rabbis choose among themselves a man, and that the Ashkenazi rabbis choose among themselves a man to go with you and who will show you all the places you must see. and should you have such a letter, then the Sephardim will select such as Nissim Baruch (brother-in-law of Bril and son-in-law of Rabbi Yaakov Sapir, G.K.), and from here I shall try to have the Ashkenazim choose the wealthy merchant Ben-Zion Leon (founder of Mea Shearim, G.K.)[11]. Because both Leon and Nissim Baruch are friends. In Jerusalem, it is rare that a Sephardi and an Ashkenazi be friends...

It will be unnecessary for me to recommend you to the Sephardim, because they will receive you with all honors and distinction, because they are respectable and they give much honor to those who respect them, and above all somebody from whom they expect assistance. But what they tell you, do not take as holy writ nor as a tradition from Sinai.

I do not have many friends in Jerusalem, but those who fear me are not few and I don't know to whom I shall write about you, to prepare the public opinion before you arrive... and generally speaking, there is no point in preparing the public, because in Jerusalem there is no public opinion among the Ashkenazim...

Do not discuss religion and do not study Jewish law with the Ashkenazi scholars, but show the Sephardim how much you know of the Talmud. But if they tell you something, even if it is worthless, you will say 'sweeter than honey', and thus your knowledge will grow much in their eyes...

We'll stop here for a brief recapitulation. The observations of the "community's analyst", Bril, are more sympathetic to the Sephardim, although he also knows how to qualify his praise. The Sephardim are, therefore, respectable people and exemplary hosts (particularly towards a person whom they believe to be important in some way); they are courteous, and also like to be complimented. Another "praiseworthy" characteristic, in the eyes of whoever is not too strict in his orthodoxy: they keep within bounds their prayers in holidays and refrain from the Ashkenazi "exaggerations". The Ashkenazim are regarded with distrust. They are politicians, with whom one should negotiate; they are also individualists ("in Jerusalem, there is no public opinion among the Ashkenazim") Bril adds another recommendation that reveals his perception of the reality:

When you arrive in Jerusalem, take as your teacher Senior Joseph who was hired by the Gabbaim (managers or treasurers of a synagogue) of the

[11] Mea Shearim is today an Orthodox quarter of Jerusalem's new city.

> Rabbinical School, to teach Talmud, Torah and the Arab's language, for he will teach you the Arabic language, and first of all get used to speak the language, for the grammar and the pronunciation you'll learn later in the course of time....

In Palestine, one should know and speak Arabic, even if the grammar and the pronunciation are not acquired immediately.

However, it turned out, as Bril suspected, that Pines did not follow his advice. In articles, some of them anonymous, and in reports published in the Hebrew press in Europe, he criticized those who had sent him (Sephardi notables of the British community) and showed sympathy rather to the Ashkenazi community, who appeared to him more ready to accept changes, to improve their situation and to settle the land. In an angry letter, written three years later[12], Bril complains about his friend's "disloyalty":

> Tell me, my friend, who sent you to Jerusalem, the ruined Russians, or the British. Were not the British who selected you? and why should you justify or blame those who finance you in various journals under a pseudonym, so that nobody will know that you and nobody else is the author? and did not everybody say that this is a childish act? Please tell me, by what right did you reject the Sephardim with both hands, and turned your eyes and your heart only to the Poles, who don't belong to the Establishment but rather are contentious and quarrelsome people, who are not respectable in the eyes of the people and do not respect others?
>
> I know that you will reply to me that you turned to them because you saw in them enthusiasm, not like the Sephardim, who have been infected with the Turk's laziness, and also will not settle the land.

The reality of disagreements between the Ashkenazi communities in Europe is reflected in the situation in Jerusalem. In that period (in contrast, for instance, to the first years of the State of Israel, when there was a great immigration from North Africa) there is no question of relations between a "majority" and a "minority"; the communities are more or less equal in strength and status. Bril explains how, in his opinion, a Hebrew journalist can "navigate" between the communities, even if the conflict is inevitable.

> Therefore, there is one thing that if you do it, you'll be able to regain your previous respect in the Holy Land and abroad. This is, that you come back and rejoin the Sephardim, not with heart and soul, as you sold yourself to the Poles with their imagination and delusions, but rather for appearances, so that they believe that they can get assistance from you as

[12] Malachi, Ibid., 133-135.

they wish and as is their custom, and they are not afraid like the Ashkenazim, who want you to act before speaking, but for help from afar they will honor you and praise you, and very soon will forget what they thought about you previously. And when the Ashkenazim shall see that the Sephardim welcome you and befriend you, they too will become friendly. I know from my experience that the Ashkenazim are jealous only towards the Sephardim, and you should not fear that the Ashkenazim should denounce you to the Committee, because you and I know that the words of the Sephardim are better heard everywhere, and I am certain that you will find arguments to excuse your former words about the Sephardim (since I have not the slightest doubt that in your reports you praised the Ashkenazim more than the Sephardim). and I thought that I should certainly write articles in this manner in *The Lebanon*. And I see that by befriending the Sephardim I infuriated the Ashkenazim. They will be more angry yet when I shall announce (if the Rabbis themselves will not eradicate the forgers from their midst) that you cannot rely on any signature or seal of the Ashkenazim, unless a Sephardi Rabbi authenticates the signature with his own.

In the year 1883 Bril visited Palestine, heading a group of Russian farmers who came to settle. He found a more dynamic Palestine, Jerusalem that broke out of its walls.

In the course of his travels, he also reached Safed, where he found another good quality among the Sephardim: their readiness to settle and develop the Holy Land everywhere. This is what he wrote in his book *Yessod Hama'ala*[13]:

In the short time I remained in Safed, I was able to see that our Ashkenazi brethren who live there are not part of the Establishment. That is to say: they are not engaged in settling the Holy Land, as our brethren in Jerusalem. Here in Safed, reason is a hidden light in their hearts, therefore they will not improve their condition. On the other hand I saw some breath of life in our Sephardi brethren, so different from our Ashkenazi brethren in their homes and in their conduct and their opinions about the world, whose air they also breathe.

However, two years earlier, as we know, in Jerusalem he had discovered this "breath of life" rather among the Ashkenazim.

In Safed Bril found seventy families originally from North Africa or more exactly from Algiers. They had French citizenship and their representative

[13] Yehiel Bril, *Yessod Hama'ala*, new photocopied edition by G. Kressel (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1978), 223-225.

gave Bril, who was returning to France, seventy francs, one franc for each family, as a donation to erect a statute honoring the national hero Gambetta in his home town, Cahors.

Bril sharply censured, with no little contempt, the Ashkenazi community in Safed, because of the deplorable sanitary conditions in which they lived, and he did not mince his words:

In Safed as in the old Berdichev, everywhere the passer-by turns to look, he will see the excrement, rubbish and refuse coming from the houses and the courtyards and flowing in the streets, as the Kidron river before. So much so that when going through I had to put a handkerchief before my mouth and my nose, so I wouldn't choke from the smell coming from it...". and in a note at the bottom of the page he remarks: "this revolting spectacle will appear to the viewer only in the upper part of the city where our brethren from Russia, Galicia and Romania live. While in the lower part, where our Sephardi brethren live, even there the streets are not clean, but they are not like the latrines of the upper part."

In Safed, Bril was to have a surprising encounter with English-speaking women from a Sephardi family. He discovered that they had been born in Liverpool, and their parents, who immigrated to Palestine in their old age, married them to Sephardim. and here Bril remarks with indignation "the Sephardim, who are so meticulous on cleanliness, do not care if their women look like beasts..." The attitude of the Sephardi community towards women enrages Bril, with his progressive European opinions.

In Tiberias, Bril observes in the Jews of European origin a characteristic that exasperates him: "Nothing new for our Ashkenazi brethren, they conduct themselves as in Poland, from whence they came, and they have almost the same ideas as their brethren in Safed." Their delusion, that they could continue living in Palestine as they lived in Poland, is in his opinion destined to fail. [14]

Bril's book contains an interesting commentary about the relations between European Jews. In the chapter on Rosh Pina, Bril relates that most of its inhabitants came from Romania, among them three families originally from Russia. A youth of Russian origin lent his rifle to the son of a Sheik, who wanted to try it. The lad did not know how to operate it and was killed by a stray bullet. The Arabs wanted to revenge the boy's blood collectively on all the Jews "until it was made known to them that in the village there were two kinds of Jews, one from Romania and the other from Russia, and

[14] Ibid., 228.

the youth that (in their view) had killed, belonged to the second kind, and therefore only they are accountable." [15]

Romanian Jews who arrived in Haifa amazed the local Arabs by their behavior. "Our brethren from Romania behave in every respect as in Romania. They will not stay in their home. They and their women and their grown children go around the city and sit in the coffee houses and drink wine and liquor and play dice both during the week and on the Saturday. Thus they became a byword among the local people, who said they had never seen such Jews before." [16]

There is another testimony about the Jews of Jaffa: "About a hundred Israelite families now live in Jaffa, whose entire population counts ten thousand souls. Most of the Jaffa Jews are originally from those who fled from Morocco because of their suffering there, and the least minority are those called Ashkenazim (because they speak a muddled German), some of them had first settled in Jerusalem, and some are newly arrived from abroad."[17] Only the old Jerusalemites received support from the "Distribution".[18]

During the visit of Yehiel Bril in Palestine, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, a new immigrant from Paris, was already there. He approaches Yehiel Michal Pines and Israel Dov Frumkin, editor of *Havatzelet*, to whom Ben-Yehuda sent articles from Paris. Ben-Yehuda does not hide his preference for Sephardi pronunciation as that of the renewed Hebrew. It is interesting, however, to quote his description of the "Sephardic qualities" beyond the questions of pronunciation and language...

> ... The best, the more pleasant impression was made by the Sephardim. Most of them were shapely, with a beautiful figure, all of them elegant in their oriental dress, their personality and manner were nice, almost everyone spoke with Havatzelet's editor in Hebrew, and their language was familiar, natural, wordy… and the syllable is so original, so Oriental and sweet! The Ashkenazi visitors from all the classes were mostly of the diasporic type. Only the older ones, who came when the Ashkenazim were still the minority in the Jewish community in Jerusalem, had already assimilated a bit into the Sephardim and

[15] Ibid., 188.
[16] Ibid., 193.
[17] Ibid., 195.
[18] The "Distribution" (*Halukah*) was the distribution of funds donated by Jewish Diaspora benefactors through their local agents.

> resembled them a little, in their dress and customs, and the Diaspora mark was a bit erased from their faces.[19]

Elsewhere he tells about renting his first apartment in Jerusalem and about meeting his Sephardic neighbours:

> And in this close relationship with this Sephardic Jewish family, we soon saw how Sephardic Jews liked cleanliness and how meticulous they were about it, even in a discreet and modest place. It was a poor family who barely made their living, and yet the floor of the room was clean with washing and polishing almost every day, and the whole dark room was almost gleaming with the whitewashed whiteness of the walls, and all the cutlery and eating utensils were really glittering in the purity of their cleanliness. I mentioned this detail here by the way, because it was one of the reasons that shaped my later attitude to Sephardim and Ashkenazim.[20]

It appears that communal tensions existed already in the 19th century among the Jewish communities of the Yishuv. The situation was such that Bril remarked, as we have read in his letter to Pines: "It's a very rare occurrence in Jerusalem that an Ashkenazi and a Sephardi befriend one another." The stereotypes exist, although their contents are not always similar to those of today; they are often inversed. This inversion justifies claims by social psychologists about stereotypical images arbitrarily attaching some characteristics to this or that community. It also justifies the claims of cultural studies scholars who speak about identities undergoing constant transformations and argue that the current existence of symbols and ideas used to define a cultural identity does not ensure that their meaning has always been the same or that this meaning does not change in the context of new practices. However, in the case of the Jewish settlers in Palestine, tension on ethnic or religious grounds did not mean "civil war". Bril takes care to speak of "our Sephardi brethren" as well as "our Ashkenazi brethren." And even if the formation of cultural identities presupposes the notion of the "other," the communal identity is merged into a national identity, with the main part of the "other" being reserved for non-Jews.

"These are the main points on how to conduct yourself in Jerusalem", concludes Bril's first letter to Pines. "And after you have lived in Jerusalem a year or ten months, you will understand their nature."

---

[19] E. Ben-Yehuda, *The Dream and its Fulfillment, Selected Writings,* edited by R.Sivan (Jerusalem: Dorot, 1978) 97.

[20] *Ibid*. 106.

Nevertheless, today, as well, more than a hundred and twenty years later, different visions of narratives of the past reappear – something that we have not yet fully grasped.

Identity, Habermas urges, "is not something given, but also, and simultaneously, our own project".[21] However, there is no clear agreement on such a project, even in the Israel of our days.

[21] J. Habermas, "The Limits of Neo-Historicism," in *Autonomy and Solidarity*, ed. J. Habermas (London: Verso, 1992), 143.

Bibliography

Allport, W.G. *The Nature of Prejudice.* Cambridge, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., Inc.,. 1954.

Ben-Yehuda, E. *The Dream and its Fulfillment, Selected Writings,* ed. R.Sivan. Jerusalem: Dorot, 1978.

Bril, Yehiel. *Yessod Hama'ala*, new photocopied edition by G. Kressel. (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1978.

Brown, Roger William. *Social Psychology*. N.Y.: Free Press, 1965.

Colls, R. and P. Dodd. Preface *to Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880-1920* by R. Colls and P. Dodd. London: Crown Helm, 1986.

Gilroy, Paul. "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity." In *Identity and Difference*, ed. Kathryn Woodward. London: Sage- The Open University , 1997.

Habermas, J. "The Limits of Neo-Historicism." In *Autonomy and Solidarity*, ed. J. Habermas. London: Verso, 1992.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Identity, Community, Cultural Difference,* ed. J. Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Larrain, Jorge. *Ideology and Cultural Identity.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994.

Malachi, A.R. "The History of The Lebanon." In *Mayer Waxman's Jubilee Volume.* Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Jewish Studies College of Chicago, in cooperation with Mordechai Newman Publishers, 1967.

Williams, M. R. *Strangers Next Door: Ethnic Relations in American Communities.* (N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964).