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»Europeans in the Levant« Revisited –
German Jewish Immigrants in 1930s Palestine
and the Question of Culture Retention

In April 2012, on the occasion of Holocaust Memorial Day, journalist Gideon Levy dedicated his column in *Ha'aretz* to a belated obituary to his father, Dr. Heinz Loewy, »born in Saaz, in the Sudeten region, a *Yekke* in every way«:

»[I]t seems to me that he lived most of his life as a refugee, even though he would have vehemently denied it. He lived in Israel for 60 years, but never arrived here, not really. It's true that he had a good life here. But looking back, it seems to me that he never really found his place here. It wasn't that he was trying to relive the Europe he had left behind but it's doubtful that he found a replacement for it here. He stored his suits and ties in the closet, his Bermuda shorts replacing them in the hot summer. He also left behind the Latin he had learned, save for one proverb that he would repeat to us. Even his doctorate in law from the University of Prague was unused here [...] he became a clerk at *Herut*, a Histadrut labor federation-owned company [...] they called him ›Dr. Levy,‹ with a mixture of admiration, distance and a chuckle. All his colleagues were Eastern Europeans, with whom he had difficulty connecting [...]. My father [...] never really connected with Israeliness. I doubt he knew the difference between hummus and tehina, since he never touched either. He even wrote his family name as ›Loewy,‹ differently than most. He read *The Jerusalem Post*, voted for Labor's forerunner, *Mapai*, and remained a foreigner. Once a year he would go off with my mother on vacation – to Germany, of course.«¹

Although Levy's father came from a periphery of the German-speaking territories, his story, as told by his son, summarizes in a nutshell the typical narrative of the German-Jewish immigrants – the *Yekkes* – who arrived in Palestine between 1933 and 1939. More than 75 years after the immigration wave of around 60,000 German speaking Jews, their sense of alienation as European foreigners in the Levant is still very present in the local cultural consciousness.

The endurance of this cultural estrangement may seem paradoxical in view of the fact that it hardly corresponds with their actual socio-economic integration. Typically, this story is not about immigrants' *social* or *economic* hard-

1 Gideon Levy, Israel Must Remember the Holocaust's Refugees, Forever Changed, in: *Ha'aretz* (English edition), April 19, 2012.

ships, but rather about *cultural* incompatibility. The *Yekkes'* immigration experience in Palestine is obviously not the classic case on which immigration research usually focuses. In the latter framework, which deals mostly with low-status groups, immigrants' retention of their old-country culture is often seen as a strategy of survival of the deprived; it is associated either with retreat to ethnic enclaves and losing access to public resources, or, alternatively, with empowerment and self-identification.² Whereas formerly the assimilationist approach associated it with failed social integration, today a pluralist multicultural agenda prevails in which ethnicity is endorsed as successful counter-politics.

Neither of these views holds for the *Yekkes* in Palestine. They have never been considered helpless in terms of economic, educational or self-organizational abilities, nor has a second-generation problem ever been identified in their case. Consequently, their story has hardly been discussed as a social problem in the framework of immigration research.³ While there is much historical scholarship on German Jewry before emigration, their immigration experience in Palestine remains enigmatic. Having been accepted as a major agency of Westernization within the emerging Hebrew culture in Mandate times, the discrepancy between their status as the bearer of a hegemonic culture and their experience of being culturally marginalized still needs be explained.

However, immigration students in recent decades have challenged the clear dichotomy between ethnic retention and acculturation, suggesting that immigrants' maintenance of their native cultures is complex and versatile, and not necessarily conflicting with successful absorption.⁴ They all accept that acculturation processes are intertwined with questions of identity, which is taken to be neither given nor fixed, but always processual. Constituting a

2 For discussion see, for example, Herbert Gans, Toward a Reconciliation of »Assimilation« and »Pluralism«: The Interplay of Acculturation and Ethnic Retention, in: *International Migration Review* 31/4 (1997), 875-892; Peter Kivisto (ed.), *The Ethnic Enigma: The Salience of Ethnicity for European-Origin Groups*, Philadelphia and London 1989; William L. Yancey/Eugene P. Ericksen/Richard N. Juliani, Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation, in: *American Sociological Review* 41/3 (1976), 391-403.

3 See, however, Yoav Gelber, *A New Homeland: Immigration and Absorption of Central European Jews, 1933-1948*, Jerusalem 1990 [Hebrew]; Doron Niederland, *German Jews: Emigrants or Refugees?* Jerusalem 1996 [Hebrew].

4 Gans, Reconciliation (fn. 2); see also, for example, Richard D. Alba, *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America*, New Haven, CT and London 1990; Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, Berkeley, CA 1990. For the reconstruction of »German identity« by German-Jewish refugees in the USA, see Judith M. Gerson, In Between States: National Identity Practices among German Jewish Immigrants, in: *Political Psychology* 22/1 (2001), 178-198.

resource that is at play in intergroup relations,⁵ it is continuously negotiated and reconstructed through endless social struggles.⁶ Symbolic ethnicity, in the sense of selective adherence to the group's native culture, may often provide immigrants with capital in the host society and help – rather than prevent – their adjustment to social functions.⁷ Similarly, evocation of ethnic »identity options«⁸ by subsequent generations is often situational, dependent on their potential symbolic profits for the individuals. All this implies the power of *identity capital* in shaping acculturation strategies of immigrants.⁹ Image making is central to this process. Rather than confining our view to alienating attitudes against immigrants through stereotypes imputed by the host society, this line of research highlights the active role of the immigrants themselves in shaping their identities while taking a position vis-à-vis that society.

Against this background, my aim in this article is to contextualize the *Yekkes'* experience of estrangement in Palestine as a case of *identity negotiation by immigrants*. This process naturally depends on the interrelations between the immigrants and the host society. In the early 1930s, the semi-autonomous Jewish society in Palestine (the *Yishuv*) was already in an accelerated process of formation. Although this had been a society of immigrants from its inception, the newcomers from Germany were specifically marked out as a foreign element. Obviously, the context of their alienation was not their encounter with native or »oriental« groups, but rather with the mainstream Jewish community of predominantly East European origins, who were the majority, and from whose ranks the political leadership emerged.¹⁰ In view of this social context, it is my contention that the *Yekkes'*

5 Simon Harrison, Identity as a Scarce Resource, in: *Social Anthropology* 7/3 (1999), 239-251.

6 For analysis of negotiation of identity resources other than ethnicity, see Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, Detachment and Engagement: Israelis' Everyday Verbal Representations of »the Israeli Person« and the Contest for the Right to Condemn a Collective Identity, in: *Social Identities* 12/3 (2006), 325-344. Also Umut Erel, Migrating Cultural Capital: Bourdieu in Migration Studies, in: *Sociology* 44/4 (2010), 642-660; Suzanne Huot/Debbie Laliberte Rudman, The Performances and Places of Identity: Conceptualizing Intersections of Occupation, Identity and Place in the Process of Migration, in: *Journal of Occupational Science* 17/2 (2010), 68-77.

7 Herbert Gans, Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2/1 (1979), 1-20.

8 Waters, Ethnic Options (fn. 4).

9 For discussion of this notion in the context of acculturation see, for example, James E. Côté, Sociological Perspectives on Identity Formation: The Culture-Identity Link and Identity Capital, in: *Journal of Adolescence* 19 (1996), 417-428; Purnima Sundar, To »Brown It up« or to »Bring down the Brown«: Identity and Strategy in Second-Generation, South-Asian Canadian Youth, in: *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 17/3 (2008), 251-278.

10 The early modern Jewish settlers in Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came mainly from the territories under the rule of the Russian Em-

distinctive habitus and ethnic retention tendencies were induced by an ongoing distinction process which was instrumental in – and not an obstacle to – their social integration.¹¹

The vast amount of miscellaneous materials at our disposal – memoirs, autobiographies, popular anecdotes, interviews, newspaper articles, literary prose and other accounts – all contribute to a collective narrative of the *Yekkes'* alienation, which is in itself a powerful social fact, to judge by the way it has been so intensely perpetuated. This narrative is twofold, suggesting that the *Yekkes* mentally remained in Europe and that they were the forerunners of a European-bourgeois culture in Palestine. In what follows I elaborate on the double perspective of this collective image-making, with attention to two aspects: the *Yekkes'* opening conditions as German Jewry in their old-country context; and the status of their cultural baggage in the context of the host society. I seek to problematize the two accepted assumptions underlying the *Yekkes'* narrative in Palestine: their longstanding and unifying German habitus; and the incompatibility of their cultural baggage with that of the locals.

I. *The Yekkes' German Habitus*

There is a whole folklore about the *Yekkes'* culture shock on encountering the life in Palestine, which was allegedly characterized by non-modern public services, poor hygiene, non-professional standards, lack of finesse and good manners, and lack of highbrow taste in everything related to »culture.« It is usually assumed that the local patterns of life were not just unfamiliar to the *Yekkes*, but more profoundly *clashed* with their deeply internalized German-bourgeois habitus that shaped their very sense of self. Inflexibility and conservatism, the mental dispositions most commonly attributed to the *Yekkes*,¹² are believed to have originated in this habitus, which is regarded to have been so firmly imprinted in their minds and bodies as to have become a

pire, which changed borders and rulers throughout these centuries. For the German Jews the tag »East European« referred mostly to Yiddish-speaking Jews.

11 Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, *Integration through Distinction: German-Jewish Immigrants, the Legal Profession and Patterns of Bourgeois Culture in British-Ruled Jewish Palestine*, in: *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19/1 (2006), 34-59; idem, *High-Status Immigration Group and Culture Retention: German Jewish Immigrants in British-Ruled Palestine*, in: idem/Gideon Toury (eds.), *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures: Papers in Honour of Itamar Even-Zohar*, Tel Aviv 2011, 79-100.

12 See, for example, Mordechai Eliav, *German Jews' Share in the Building of the National Home, Palestine and the State of Israel*, in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 30 (1985), 255-263; Ruth Gay, *Dankeschön, Herr Doktor: German Jews in Palestine*, in: *The American Scholar* 58/4 (1989), 567-577; Gideon Stachel, *The Jewish Immigration from Germany to Palestine during the Years 1933-1939 and Their Meeting with the People of the Yishuv from the Immigrants' Point of View*, Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1995 [Hebrew]; Curt D. Worman, *German Jews*

second nature. Cognitive and bodily patterns, such as emotional restraint, pedantry and excessive orderliness, bordering on dogmatism, are thus taken to attest to the complete and thorough naturalization of these middle-class highly educated mental dispositions, to the point of preventing their adaptation.

However, this inclusively objectified habitus should be reviewed in light of the heterogeneity of the German Jews as an immigrant group, at least with respect to the following two points:

Heterogeneity

The term *Yekke* automatically brings to mind the stereotype of highly cultured, urban middle-class professionals and intellectuals. But this social profile applied to only one layer that amounted to roughly 10 percent of this heterogeneous group.¹³ The others were merchants and retailers (roughly 30 percent) or blue-collar craftspeople and manual workers (roughly 20 percent).¹⁴ Other demographic differences that divided this group were those between city dwellers and residents of small towns and rural provinces, between highly educated and semi-educated, and between single young people and families with capital and property.¹⁵ Despite this diversity, the bourgeois intelligentsia profile is commonly accepted as the core of the *Yekkes'* collective image, which stands at the focus of both popular and scientific accounts, with meager interest in lower strata sectors, especially blue-collar and agricultural workers.

Age and marital-status differences are particularly telling. A considerable segment of this immigrant group were children and adolescents (around

in Israel: Their Cultural Situation since 1933, in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 15 (1970), 73-103.

13 The estimated number of this sector was 7,000 people. See Eliav, *German Jews' Share* (fn. 12); Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3), 57. Yet in the beginning their proportion was higher: in 1933 emigrants from Germany to Palestine were mainly physicians, lawyers and civil servants, who suffered most drastically from the boycott on their jobs in Germany and who were able to receive immigration certificates to Palestine as professionals. See Baruch Ben-Avram, *The Zionists of Germany in the Third Immigration Wave*, in: Shmuel Ettinger (ed.), *A Nation and Its History*, Jerusalem 1984, 243-260 [Hebrew]; Niederland, *German Jews* (fn. 3).

14 For a detailed analysis, see Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3).

15 Miriam Getter, *The Immigration from Germany 1933-1939: Socio-Economic vs. Socio-Cultural Absorption*, in: *Cathedra* 12 (1979), 125-147 [Hebrew]. For an analysis of immigration patterns of German Jews in general, see Niederland, *German Jews* (fn. 3). A distinction is usually drawn between the large heterogeneous immigration wave of 1933-1939 and the small community of mostly Zionist German Jews with educated bourgeois background who had settled in Palestine in the early 1920s.

9,000 according to Gelber;¹⁶ about 4,500 arrived with the Jewish youth immigration organization Youth *Aliyah* [Aliyat ha-No'ar] before 1939), who pursued schooling or other training programs in Palestine. Another important segment comprised about 5,000 single young men and women, who arrived with Hehalutz (The Pioneer) organization, usually after an occupational or agricultural training period in Germany.¹⁷ They constituted a large part of the work-certificate immigrants in Palestine,¹⁸ many of whom settled in kibbutzim and other rural settlements. True, many of these young immigrants came from middle-class urban families with envisioned educated trajectories, which included academic schooling and professional careers. Yet given their annulled prospects in the early 1930s, they were forced to give up these trajectories, often to join the *bakhsbarot* (pre-immigration training frameworks organized by Zionist organizations and youth movements).¹⁹ The younger ones had not even completed their gymnasium; some were sent to Jewish schools that multiplied rapidly, while others turned instead to an apprenticeship in crafts or technical occupations.²⁰

Given that these young people left their homes and homeland at an early age, it stands to reason that at this phase of their life their acculturation process was different from that of adults with families, who left behind careers or businesses and a lifetime of practicing their German identity. Even though the younger immigrants had a firm sense of inborn Germanness (as emerges from testimonies of German Jewish children in the 1930s),²¹ they eventually became more susceptible to identity negotiation and changing competencies through their new social networks and training venues, which prepared them for contact with the local culture. In their memoirs and letters, their pre-immigration period and early years in Palestine are usually described as a process of refashioning.²² In a letter of 1937 to his mother in Berlin, Hans Ginsburg (later Shaul Ginossar), one of the »Werkleute« movement members who founded Kibbutz Hazorea, typically outlines his break with his family's bourgeois mindset:

16 Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3), 186–221.

17 *Ibid.*, 175–185; Kuti Eliyahu Selinger, *In Spite of Everything: Pioneer Youth Movements in Germany 1933–1943*, Jerusalem 1998 [Hebrew].

18 Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3), 186–221.

19 Selinger, *In Spite of Everything* (fn. 17).

20 Orly Selinger, *Vorstellungen über Identität und Identitätswechsel von jüdischen Kindern und Jugendlichen im Deutschland des »Dritten Reiches,«* Ph. D. diss., Tel Aviv University 2008.

21 *Ibid.*

22 See, for example, Asher Benari, *Memories of a Halutz from Ashkenaz, Kibbutz Hazorea 1986* [Hebrew]; Gerda Cohen, *Returning a Smile*, Tel Aviv 2000 [Hebrew]; Shaul Ginossar, *Letters to His Parents, 1933–1939*, trans. Esther Lavid, Kibbutz Hazorea n.d. [Hebrew]; Amnon Lahav, *The Book of Galed: Testimonies, Kibbutz Galed 2009*.

»Why do you think that only life inside the family is important and all the rest is ›nonsense‹. You do not have the right to say so because you do not know any other form of life! I am sorry you do not believe me but a moshavnik's domestic happiness is gained at the cost of illness and early aging.«²³

These young immigrants' acculturation strategy was, by and large, closer to John Berry's idea of integration, in the sense of a balanced combination between home culture retention and host culture adoption, as opposed to separation or marginalization.²⁴ A paradigmatic example is their linguistic habits. Although they continued to use German, it mainly served for intimate social functions and communicating with their parents' generation. The younger immigrants learned Hebrew without difficulty, including reading and writing, and for their own children Hebrew was a mother tongue. In the above-mentioned letter to his mother, Hans Ginsburg adds: »You lament the fact that you will not be able to understand your grandchild who will speak only Hebrew, why is that sad?« Whereas Walter Leiser of Kibbutz Galed, writing in 1949, noted that »[a kibbutz member] who likes to stand by the piano with a group of friends and professionals speaks mostly German... This is not necessarily his own choice, but is rather done to accommodate himself to those around him.«²⁵

At the same time, these young immigrants keenly evoked their German background. Along with stories of self-transformation, allusions to their distinct German habits and manners, not without pride, are abundant. For instance, Gerda Cohen (who arrived in Palestine in 1938) recalls fondly that

»[o]nly when the *Yekkes* arrived in [Kibbutz] Geva [...] did [the kibbutz members] learn how to cook a soft-boiled egg properly [...] only then did they realize how tasty it is to eat an egg with a spoon or in a glass [...] in some kibbutzim they failed to learn how to cook an egg properly and the *Yekkes* grumbled [...].«²⁶

Inside the *Yekkes*' homes in the kibbutz, she continues, »there was no toilet [...] but they did have the ›Complete Works‹ of all the German Classics, and bookshelves occupied a lot of space in the tiny rooms.«²⁷

The younger *Yekkes*' negotiation of identity resources was thus more complex, and their ethnic retention more volitional, better attuned to achieving different social functions than those of the elderly *Yekkes*. Precisely be-

23 Ginossar, Letters (fn. 22), 48. All translations from the Hebrew are mine. A »moshavnik« is a member of a moshav, a cooperative village.

24 John W. Berry, Migrating Youth: Is There a Best Acculturation Strategy?, in: *ISSBD Bulletin* 2/58 (2010), 6 ff.

25 Lahav, The Book of Galed (fn. 22), 192.

26 Cohen, Returning a Smile (fn. 22), 138 f.

27 Ibid.

cause they were less constrained by their Germanness, their identity work is more revealing of the functionality of this cultural baggage in the framework of the host society. As in the case of immigrant youth from the former USSR in 1990s Israel,²⁸ their primary collective »intelligentsia habitus,« however transformed and adjusted, served as an asset that contributed to the integration even of those who abandoned the middle-class liberal professions and lifestyle. »It is really amazing,« wrote Ursel Neumark (later Ginossar) to her future parents-in-law in Germany in 1935 from the pre-kibbutz camp of Hazorea, »that not only he [Hans Ginsburg, her future husband] but all our ›academics‹ [...] have found their place in physical work, so that I cannot imagine him as anything else but a worker.«²⁹

Rather than a default negative reaction of detachment in a stressful situation, the *Yekke* identity-work of this younger group thus reflected a resourceful acculturation strategy, in which a strong sense of Germanness provided individuals with symbolic capital within the given social setting. This perspective does not deny the authenticity of their German habitus which pertained to their very sense of self. To the contrary, my argument is that in many cases their German sensibilities even intensified in the given circumstances, without interfering with their integration. As studies show, a collective ethnic identity is often enhanced – even invented³⁰ – by an immigrant group so as to create a »panethnic solidarity« that affects the personal biographies of the individuals.³¹ It seems to be in much the same vein that, despite their heterogeneity, a *Yekke* identity unified the German-speaking Jewish immigrants and made them a more cohesive cultural group than they were before immigrating.

28 See, for example, Tamar Rapoport/Edna Lomsky-Feder, »Intelligentsia« as an Ethnic Habitus: The Inculcation and Restructuring of Intelligentsia among Russian Jews, in: *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23/2 (2002), 233-248; Eugene Tartakovsky, Cultural Identities of Adolescent Immigrants: A Three-Year Longitudinal Study Including the Pre-Migration Period, in: *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38/5 (2009), 654-671.

29 Ginossar, Letters (fn. 22), 16.

30 Kathleen Neils Conzen et al., The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A, in: *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12/1 (1992), 3-41; Herbert J. Gans, Comment: Ethnic Invention and Acculturation: A Bumpy-Line Approach, in: *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12/1 (1992), 42 ff.; Rina Neeman, Invented Ethnicity as Collective and Personal Text: An Association of Rumanian Israelis, in: *Anthropological Quarterly* 67/3 (1994), 135-149; Yancey/Ericksen/Juliani, Emergent Ethnicity (fn. 2).

31 Laurie Kay Sommers, Inventing Latinismo: The Creation of »Hispanic« Panethnicity in the United States, in: *Journal of American Folklore* 104/411 (1991), 32-53; Neeman, Invented Ethnicity (fn. 30).

The *Yekkes*' Levels of Germanization

The acculturation problem of the older *Yekkes* in Palestine is not entirely self-evident either, in view of the fact that a considerable part of this population included descendants of families who had emigrated from East European territories in increasing numbers in the preceding decades.³² Many of them were only second- or third- generation residents in Germany, or sometimes belonged themselves to the first generation. Their communities of origin in the East were usually lower class and Orthodox. They spoke mainly Yiddish, had received the basic traditional Jewish education and completed the first grades of elementary school, and made their living as small retailers or peddlers. In the urban centers in Germany they had to contend not only with the attitudes of the German population but mainly with those of their own »brethren« – the old-time Jews in Germany.³³ With the increasing flow of immigrants from the East, this encounter culminated in the well-known boundary drawn by the veteran German Jews between themselves and the *Ostjuden*, a term that signified their patronizing attitude to these more recent arrivals.³⁴

All this is common historical knowledge, but it is astonishingly omitted from the narrative of the *Yekkes* in Palestine. The acculturation of these immigrants from the East in Germany is usually described as rapid and complete. One cannot help being struck by the implied ease and flexibility with which they adapted to a modern, secular, highly cultured life, sometime within the span of one generation. An archetypal case is that of Salman Schocken, the son of a humble Orthodox Jewish shopkeeper in a provincial town in Posen, who arrived on his own as a working-class adolescent in 1880s Berlin to become a self-made owner of a department store chain in Saxony, an art collector, a publisher and a patron of Hebrew letters, a man who moved in the high echelons of society.³⁵ His is a striking but basically not atypical example. A similar self-fashioning trajectory emerges from many other biographical accounts of German Jews, including those of the *Yekkes* of Palestine. In most cases their hardships and inferiority feelings as unwanted im-

32 Avraham Barkai/Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, Munich 1996; Shulamit Volkov, *The Vicious Circle: Jews, Germans and Anti-Semites*, Tel Aviv 2002 [Hebrew]; Yfaat Weiss, *Citizenship and Ethnicity: German Jews and Polish Jews, 1933-1940*, Jerusalem 2000. [Hebrew]; Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany*, New York and Oxford 1987.

33 Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*, Madison, WI 1982.

34 See, for example, *ibid.*; Etan Bloom, What »The Father« Had in Mind: Arthur Ruppin (1876-1943), *Cultural Identity, Weltanschauung and Action*, in: *Journal for History of European Ideas* 33/3 (2007), 330-349.

35 Anthony David, *The Patron: A Life of Salman Schocken, 1877-1959*, New York 2003.

migrants (some of which is hinted at in Schocken's biography)³⁶ remain enigmatic. One such typical naturalizing story is that described by Cessi Rosenbluth (who arrived in Palestine in 1924), the daughter of a wealthy, highly educated Jewish family in Berlin, whose two grandfathers had come from provincial communities in Poland before 1900. She writes in her memoir:

»My mother's father was an orphan and brought up with the help of the community in an Orthodox Jewish town in Poland. When he was caught reading a secular book he was beaten [...]. He fled from this town and [...] assimilated. He was clever and gifted, and made a fortune [...]. He was a successful banker in the town of Hirschberg in Silesia [...] then decided to leave town and move to Berlin. There he became rich and highly venerable [...].«³⁷

Her description of her uncle (her father's brother) does not reveal the strenuous efforts to achieve »normality« as a fully emancipated, well-off German Jew, including the enormous investment in personal transformation that was required:

»He left his parents' home [in the Polish border area] at an early age. First he kept on with his father's business – a textile and haberdashery shop, and after some vacillations opened a large wholesale business of lacework and decoration, and moved most of his family – including my father – to Berlin. *He did not have the basic formal education, but his whole appearance and conduct were those of a refined nobleman. He was an expert in art, a perfect athlete, he particularly loved horseback riding.*«³⁸

Given this increasing mobility on the part of the newcomers, even though many of them remained in poor, lower-class enclaves, the veteran Jews aspiring to become German were under a constant threat to their status. This led to a »chase-and-flight« dynamics, typical of the relationship between »the established and the outsiders,«³⁹ which is alluded to in many autobiographical accounts. This status anxiety was not exclusive to highbrow urban German Jews, but was widespread throughout Jewish society. Gerda Cohen (formerly Treidel), a child of a petit-bourgeois retailer family in a provincial

36 Ibid.

37 Cessi Rosenbluth, *From Berlin to Ginegar: A Life Story*, Tel Aviv 1978 [Hebrew], 11 f.

38 Ibid., 20 ff. (emphasis added). Cf. Michael A. Meyer, *German Jewry's Path to Normality and Assimilation: Complexities, Ironies, Paradoxes*, in: Rainer Liedtke/David Rechter (eds.), *Towards Normality? Acculturation of Modern German Jewry*, London 2003, 13-26; Till van Rahden, *Jews and the Ambivalences of Civil Society in Germany, 1800-1933: Assessment and Reassessment*, in: *Journal of Modern History* 77/4 (2005), 1024-1047.

39 See Norbert Elias/John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems*, London 1994.

North Rhine-Westphalia town, with ancestral roots in rural Rhineland, describes German Jewry's efforts to distance themselves from the newcomers, which prevailed even as late as 1933, when Jewish children were already being expelled from German schools. »Parents looked for temporary solutions. There were also Jewish schools in the next big city,« she writes, but »they were attended mainly by children of the immigrants [...] and my mother did not like it [...]. The question where [her] children should go to school was very disturbing for her.«⁴⁰

A »patina principle« developed as a means of distinguishing the veterans from the newcomers, based on cultivating »ever dearer« forms of knowledge and practices that functioned as signs of belonging and demarcated the »real« from the »faked.«⁴¹ As in many similar situations, linguistic habits became a central manifestation of this intra-Jewish culture war, which later continued in Palestine. »Yiddish was despised and ridiculed and regarded as an aberration of German, far removed from poetry and literature,« Cohen writes:

»Most of the children [in the youth movement] were not entirely *Yekkes*, their parents had immigrated to Germany from Poland and brought along Yiddish and the books they loved. *But their children learned very quickly to feel embarrassed about the broken German of their parents; they, themselves, spoke and read only good German.*«⁴²

Yet these Germanized children from the East were also among the *Yekkes* who arrived in Palestine. For them it was the second immigration in their own or their parents' lifetime, but this time they were immigrants with symbolic capital, and Germanness was *their* own prime asset. Precisely because they were self-made Germans, they were reluctant to give it up. Writer Yoram Kaniuk's father, for instance, was one of them. Born in East Galicia (today Ukraine), he later studied at the universities of Prague and Berlin, from where he emigrated to Palestine in 1925. In his own autobiographical novel, *1948*, his son, a native of Palestine, ironizes his father's overacted self-fashioning as a *Yekke*, who »was indifferent to new countries in the Middle East and read books in German and listened to Beethoven's Quartets and Monteverdi's music, and dreamt in German about Berlin«; whose clothes were always »neat and made to measure by the tailor [...], who wore a tie even when he went to the toilet,« who never drank coffee other than that »he made by himself in a strange machine he had brought with him from Germany, and also hated tea because it was too Jewish,« and who pretended not to speak or understand Yiddish, and distanced himself from people from his

40 Cohen, *Returning a Smile* (fn. 22), 7.

41 Grant McCracken, »Ever Dearer in Our Thoughts«: Patina and the Representation of Status before and after the Eighteenth Century, in: idem, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, Bloomington, IN 1990, 31-43.

42 Cohen, *Returning a Smile* (fn. 22), 18 (emphasis added).

own town of origin, »with this hidden gleam of a Galician Jew who thought he was born in Berlin.«⁴³

While Kaniuk laments his father's split identity, the efforts of the latter, as an *Ostjude* icon, are censored by those who claim monopoly on being *Yekkes* in Palestine on the basis of the same patina anxiety with which *Ostjuden* were confronted by the old-time Jewry in Germany. In response to Kaniuk, Gabi Alexander, a descendant and proponent of the »*Yekke* legacy« in Israel, commented in *MB Yakinton* (the organ of the Association of Israelis of Central European Origin, founded in 1932):

»My parents, for instance, would have tagged him a pseudo-*Yekke*. Many of the residents in Rehavia [the archetypal *Yekke* neighborhood in Mandate Jerusalem], like my parents, who saw themselves as the »pure« *Yekkes*, the descendants of families who had lived in Germany and Austria for many decades, treated the pseudo-*Yekkes* with sarcasm.«⁴⁴

The *Yekke* identity thus appears as a scarce resource that was at stake in an ongoing social war between German-speaking Jews, which persisted in full force in Palestine. As the distinction between the real and the fake became more blurred, so the resistance to closing the gap intensified. The fact that this cultural antagonism did not wane in Palestine demonstrates, again, its functionality for these immigrants' acculturation.

2. *The Status of the Yekkes' Cultural Baggage in the Host Society*

The Local Cultural Infrastructure

Immigrants' acculturation strategies also depend on how they are viewed by the host society, and the value attributed to the resources they bring with them.⁴⁵ Ethnic minorities' cultures are often discriminated against and repressed. However, this was not the case of the *Yekkes* in Palestine. On the contrary, in the context of the nation-building project that was promoted in the public sphere, which was conceived in the spirit of European modernism, the German immigrants were credited for having brought modern professional knowledge and skills and for introducing efficiency and pragmatism, which were openly embraced by the host. This fact facilitated their occupational mobility and absorption in many fields – from commerce, industry and banking, to medicine and academia, to crafts and technical professions and

43 Yoram Kaniuk, 1948, Tel Aviv 2010, 25, 31, 33, 14 [Hebrew].

44 Gabi Alexander, *The Yekkes of the Novel 1948*, in: *MB Yakinton* 251 (2012) [Hebrew], online: <<http://www.irgun-jeckes.org/?CategoryID=472&ArticleID=2659&Page=>>. Cf. Gerson, *In Between States* (fn. 4) for a discussion of the claim to long-standing »German roots« by Jewish immigrants in the US.

45 Erel, *Migrating Cultural Capital* (fn. 6).

agriculture⁴⁶ – as well as their dispersion in the country and absorption in various types of community.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the *Yekkes* never succeeded in creating significant political power, beyond the important role played by certain prominent personalities within extant public systems (the legal field is a paradigmatic example).⁴⁸ This fact is commonly explained in terms of their cultural incompatibility with the hegemonic *Yishuv* culture, with its socialist agenda of creating a society of workers and agricultural settlers, as opposed to an urban capitalist, bourgeois society.

However, as recent studies recognize, there was a growing Jewish middle class in Palestine even before the Germans arrived.⁴⁹ In the 1920s, the majority of the Jewish community in Palestine (about 80 percent) already resided in towns. These were predominantly middle- and lower-middle-class people who came to Palestine in search of opportunities to improve their lives.⁵⁰ Many of them were educated or semi-educated merchants, craftspeople and service employees.⁵¹ Despite efforts on the part of the labor-oriented public discourse to delegitimize these sectors, the actual difference between them and the labor sector was quite blurred. Among the 20 percent of Jews who lived in the rural periphery,⁵² only small groups actually experimented with the consciously anti-bourgeois, socialist model of life as idealistic »pioneers«

46 Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3); Doron Niederland, *The Influence of Immigrant Medical Doctors from Germany on the Evolution of Medicine in Eretz-Israel*, in: *Cathedra* 30 (1984), 111-160 [Hebrew]; Getter, *The Immigration from Germany* (fn. 15); Stachel, *The Jewish Immigration from Germany* (fn. 12).

47 According to various sources, at least 15 percent of the German immigrants settled in rural communities. See, for example, Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3), 173-257, 317-384; Shlomo Erel, »Ha-Yekkim«: 50 Years of German-Speakers' Immigration, Jerusalem 1989 [Hebrew]. According to the *Palestine and Jewish Emigration from Germany Report of Keren Hayesod, Jerusalem 1939*, the numbers are 16,000 out of 50,000. Shlomo Erel cites sources reporting that 15 percent settled in kibbutzim and villages. *Ibid.*, 10. Their central role in the development of middle-class rural settlements is also acknowledged. Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3), 257-384.

48 See Sela-Sheffy, *Integration through Distinction* (fn. 11); *idem*, *High-Status Immigration* (fn. 11); and below.

49 Amir Ben-Porat, *The Bourgeoisie: The History of the Israeli Bourgeois*, Jerusalem 1999 [Hebrew]; Nahum Karlinsky, *Lawyers as an Infrastructure: Inductive Thoughts about »Jewish Bourgeoisie in Colonial Palestine«* in: *Israeli Sociology* 3/1 (2000), 155-166 [Hebrew].

50 Baruch Ben-Avram/Henry Near, *Studies in the Third Aliyah (1919-1924): Image and Reality*, Jerusalem 1995 [Hebrew].

51 For instance, in 1922, 68,622 out of the 83,749 Jews who lived in Palestine resided in towns; 19.9 percent of the working Jewish population worked in agriculture, 18.4 percent were employed in small factories, 14.5 percent in construction and 47.2 percent in the public services. *Ibid.*, 54.

52 In 1922 it amounted to roughly 18 percent of the Jewish population; from 1924, with the fourth *Aliyah*, the share of the Jewish urban population increased. *Ibid.*

(*halutzim*). Even the workers in the cities were usually petit bourgeois who shared the same expectations for a modern, European secular lifestyle that the German newcomers represented.⁵³ Tel Aviv was already a fashion-conscious city, with modern education and public health systems, as well as burgeoning leisure facilities and elite cultural institutions (such as theaters, an opera house, publishing houses, music and art schools) that had already been established by veteran immigrants from Eastern Europe during the 1920s.⁵⁴ Even if this modern spirit did not apply to the entire population, when the German immigrants arrived they were able to find in Palestine ambitious, educated people more or less like themselves.⁵⁵

This widespread civil-society ethos undoubtedly conflicted with the official labor-socialist ideology. Moreover, the exclusive groups of the pioneers enjoyed a cultural aura that created a model for the younger generations, mainly in the youth movements and the *kibbutzim*. They zealously promoted the ethos of the »native Hebrew youth« as an antithesis to their parents' bourgeois lifestyle. In these circles, forthrightness, asceticism and lack of refinement became a trendy cultural alternative that provided them with an elitist sense of in-group distinction (and earned them the nickname of the »Sabra« generation).⁵⁶ However, this cultural model was widely echoed by mainstream public discourse and literary writings far beyond its actual manifestation in the daily life of the *Yishuv*. In reality, the majority of this community was quite ambivalent towards the counter-culture of the »native sons.«⁵⁷

In the eyes of those circles of native-born youth, the *Yekkes*, who were a prominent component of the fifth *Aliyah*,⁵⁸ were naturally categorized as the epitomes of bourgeois »nerds,« so to speak. Ziona Rabau, a native of Palestine (b. 1906), contributes in her memoirs to this counter-bourgeois mythol-

53 Ibid.; cf. Ben-Porat, *Bourgeoisie* (fn. 49); Gur Alroey, *Immigrants: Jewish Immigration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century*, Jerusalem 2004 [Hebrew].

54 Anat Helman, *Urban Culture in 1920s and 1930s Tel Aviv*, Haifa 2007 [Hebrew]; Yaacov Shavit/Gideon Biger, *The History of Tel Aviv*, Vol. 2 (1936-1952), Tel Aviv 2007 [Hebrew].

55 See, for example, Joachim Schlör, *Tel Aviv: From Dream to City*, London 1999; Maoz Azaryahu/S. Ilan Troen (eds.), *Tel-Aviv, the First Century: Visions, Designs, Actualities*, Bloomington, IN 2012.

56 See Rachel Elboim-Dror, *He Is Coming from among Ourselves: The New Hebrew Person*, in: *Alpayim* 12 (1996), 104-135 [Hebrew]. See also Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, Berkeley, CA 2000.

57 Ibid.

58 The fifth *Aliyah* consisted of a massive wave of older, middle-class immigrants. Estimated to have numbered 245,000, it doubled the Jewish population in Palestine, which in 1933 amounted to roughly 250,000; see, for example, Eliav, *German Jews Share* (fn. 12). Although the *Yekkes* constituted only about 24 percent of this massive immigration wave, they were considered the dominant group in it. Ibid.; see also Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3).

ogy. Recounting her experience as a member of the rebellious generation of students at the Herzliya Gymnasium in Tel Aviv, she emphasizes her rejection of everything related to »civilized manners,« including elegant clothing. Accordingly, having eventually married a German-immigrant gynecologist from Berlin, she describes her difficult encounter with his *Yekke* lifestyle by emphasizing her failure to meet the expectations of her husband's family that she wear bourgeois clothing – especially a hat.⁵⁹ Evidently, as also emerges from many other anecdotes in her memoirs, for her, wearing a hat in particular symbolized the culture conflict between the »natives« and the German-bourgeois immigrants that she was eager to emphasize.

This counter-culture notwithstanding, on the whole, the *Yishuv* in Palestine expressed more admiration than resentment towards the *Yekkes'* cultural baggage (as also emerges from Rabbau's own narrative).⁶⁰ Despite the sympathy for the »savage natives,« Europeanism was a consensual model and the *Yekkes* were recognized as its proponents.⁶¹ Their collective identity was quite profitable in the local market of symbolic goods and therefore induced a dynamics of negotiating its price. Rather than marginalized, the German newcomers vied to retain their superiority in setting the cultural standards. Their love of music is one of the commonly cited cultural topoi illustrating this point. While musical life already thrived in Tel Aviv in the 1920s, fostered by musicians from Eastern and Central Europe (with the foundation of the first music school [1910] and the Palestine Opera [1923], and the emergence of an original Hebrew style in music), the *Yekkes* were recognized as the arbiters of musical connoisseurship. One of the many examples from Rabbau's memoirs divulges how musical rituals contributed to reinforcing the *Yekkes'* distinction: this was not so much about consuming music *per se* as it was a contest over the correct musical style and consumption habits:

»[The *Yekkes*] used to have »record evening« parties in their apartments where they listened with great concentration, motionless, to pieces by Schönberg or Bartók, who were regarded as modern composers in the avant-garde cultural world of those days. Once [...] I was invited to such a circle and was forced to listen to this music for a whole evening. Finally, I said naively: »why precisely Bartók on such a *hamsin* [hot, dry weather] evening, why not play a little bit of Mozart?« Well, they all raised their eyebrows, astonished, apparently, at my Sabra ignorance, and made their judgment, too, and as a result of my forthrightness I was never invited to this esteemed circle again.«⁶²

59 Tziona Rabbau, *I Am from Tel Aviv* (Memoirs), Tel Aviv 1984 [Hebrew], 118.

60 *Ibid.*, 99–138.

61 See, for example, Erel, »Ha-Yekkim« (fn. 47).

62 Rabbau, *I am from Tel Aviv* (fn. 59), 110–111.

Competition and Ambivalence

This was a power struggle between immigrant groups translated into a competition over cultural resources. Regardless of the hegemony of the veteran immigrants of East European origins in political and organizational functions, the *Yekke* newcomers retained their superiority in everything related to »culture«. This was a continuation of the chase-and-flight intra-Jewish relations in Germany, yet in Palestine it constituted an anomaly. Whereas in most cases it is the *Been-Heres* who develop a cultural mechanism to dissociate themselves from »invaders« (I am thinking of Norbert Elias's analysis of the relations between the established and the outsiders), in Palestine it was the *Come-Heres* who exercised distinction and claimed control over the culture market.⁶³ The veteran community, however, reacted with ambivalence: as much as the *Yekke* cultural profile was acknowledged and valued, it also aroused sarcasm, even antagonism.

This is evidenced by the many *Yekke* jokes and anecdotes that were rife at the time.⁶⁴ Ethnic jokes are a typical means of social control in periods of mass immigration, especially in reaction to groups who have difficulties, or resist, assimilating and remain different. Usually, such anecdotes and jokes, told by the dominant groups, indicate the marginal status of the ridiculed group. However, as Limor Shifman and Elihu Katz maintain, the *Yekkes* jokes were widespread in Palestine because they were embraced by the *Yekkes* themselves no less than by the veteran society. Unlike other cases of ethnic jokes, those about the *Yekkes* are not really stigmatizing or humiliating. Rather than scorn, they reflect ambivalence towards the *Yekkes'* overstated characteristics. While for the veteran community they conveyed their wavering between recognizing and delegitimizing the value of these traits, from the *Yekkes'* own perspective, these jokes served to confirm, though by understatement, their identity as the ultimate bearers of specific/superior cultural values.

The shared production of *Yekke* stereotypes, and the *Yekkes'* own willing embrace of them, were manifested in almost all areas of life. As mentioned above, linguistic habits are a paradigmatic example. Regardless of the flexibility demonstrated by many of them, the *Yekkes'* linguistic resistance, rationalized by their alleged inborn inability to learn Hebrew, is a major feature of their collective image, for good or for bad. Veterans complained about the alleged prevalence of the sound of the German language in public spaces, associating it with opportunism and indifference to the national culture-building project. A cartoon of 1935 by Arie Navon, a major cartoonist in the Labor Movement newspaper *Davar*, reads: »I'm only two months in the country

63 Daphne Spain, *Been-Heres Versus Come-Heres: Negotiating Conflicting Community Identities*, in: *Journal of the American Planning Association* 59/2 (1993), 156-171.

64 Limor Shifman/Elihu Katz, »Just Call Me Adonai«: A Case Study of Ethnic Humor and Immigrant Assimilation, in: *American Sociological Review* 70/5 (2005), 843-859.

and already can speak ... German!«⁶⁵ An article of 1939 in *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir* (the organ of the Labor Movement) protests, for instance: »[The German immigrants] arrogantly speak German, in cafés and on the bus, in shops, everywhere in public [...]. The desire for a new life and a Hebrew culture, which is the driving force of our life here, is absolutely alien to them.«⁶⁶

The same accusations of opportunism had already been leveled throughout the 1920s at petit-bourgeois immigrants from Eastern Europe.⁶⁷ Yet in the case of the *Yekkes*, they were directed towards their *cultural* habits. However, although the everyday linguistic landscape in Palestine during the 1930s and 1940s has not been comprehensively researched, all evidence shows that German was by no means the only language other than Hebrew that was frequently spoken by Jews. In addition to Arabic and the various traditional Jewish languages, Yiddish was one of the languages most heard as a daily vernacular.⁶⁸ For the *Yekkes*, it doubtlessly aroused a continuation of the *Ostjuden* syndrome. Asher Benari, who was among the founders of Kibbutz Hazorea (1935), comments in his memoirs: »We were newcomers [... still] knew very little Hebrew, and what was even worse – we did not speak Yiddish, the ordinary spoken language in the *Yishuv*, which at that time was composed predominantly of immigrants from Eastern Europe.«⁶⁹ In this context, the veterans' resentment was apparently targeted not so much at the *Yekkes'* avoidance of Hebrew as at their insistence on using German, perceived as a sign of snobbery.

At the same time, for the German-speaking newcomers, especially the older ones, overstating their incompetence in learning Hebrew was not embarrassing. To the contrary, it served as concrete proof of their alleged inextinguishable Germanness. I personally have heard the same generic story from two different people, forgivingly mocking their own *Yekke* mothers, who when asked: »Are you not ashamed that you have lived in Israel for so long without knowing Hebrew?« replied, »It is easier to be ashamed than to learn this language.«

This detachment tendency was not equally shared by all the *Yekkes*, yet as a general image it was very effective in affirming their monopoly, as a collectivity, on Europeanism in Jewish society in Palestine. But its effectiveness would not have been possible without an extant cultural infrastructure. The *Yekkes* in the 1930s were not the forerunners of the local modern bourgeoisie, but they conferred legitimation on it and enhanced its prestige. Their successful mobilization (and foregrounding) of their own old-country culture can be explained by the fact that this cultural repertoire was largely valued and

65 Arie Navon, Black on White [cartoons], Tel Aviv 1938 [Hebrew].

66 Arie Ben-David, For the German-Speaking Immigrants, in: *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*, March 14, 1939, 11 f. [Hebrew].

67 See, for example, Ben-Avram/Near, Studies in the Third *Aliyah* (fn. 50).

68 See, for example, introduction in Yael Chaver, What Must Be Forgotten: The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine, Syracuse, NY 2004.

69 Benari, Memories of a Halutz (fn. 22), 82 f.

aspired to by the veteran community, so that its acquisition was at stake in a status competition between the two dominant groups of immigrants.

Finally, as I have shown elsewhere,⁷⁰ the Hebrew legal profession in Palestine is highly revealing of this dynamics, if only because law-abiding citizenship and the practice of law were among the central elements of the *Yekke* stereotype. An interesting paradox emerges: although this profession was widespread among Jews in Germany,⁷¹ in Palestine the *Yekkes* were *not* the majority of Jewish legal practitioners. Not only was the number of lawyers who arrived in Palestine small as compared to their proportion in Germany, but many of those who came failed to integrate in the local system.⁷² And yet, even without actually practicing their profession, their self-perception – as well as the image imputed to them – as »professionals at heart« persevered. This was true for other professions as well, but there was a special aura attached to the legal profession, as an icon of the German bourgeoisie's bureaucratic liberalism,⁷³ that was intensified as a distinguishing trait of the *Yekkes* vis-à-vis the alleged East European hegemony in Palestine.

This image notwithstanding, the legal profession in Palestine served as a habitat for a bourgeois culture even without the intervention of the German immigrants. Despite the limited market for Jewish practitioners under British rule,⁷⁴ the Jewish lawyers, mainly of East European origin, formed a rapidly growing professional sector,⁷⁵ striving to establish a professionalized Hebrew legal system with Western standards. The leading personalities of this initiative were Zionist immigrants from Eastern Europe, including former members of the Moscow Society of Hebrew Law. However, while the

70 Sela-Sheffy, *Integration through Distinction* (fn. 11).

71 Konrad Jarausch notes that in Prussia their number amounted to 28.5 percent of the general population of lawyers. Konrad H. Jarausch, *Jewish Lawyers in Germany, 1848-1938: The Disintegration of a Profession*, in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 36 (1991), 71-190, here 176f.; in Berlin and Frankfurt it reached over 45 percent, and in Breslau it was 35.6 percent. Cf. Barkai/Mendes-Flohr, *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte* (fn. 32). On the proportion of academics and professionals among Jewish immigrants from Germany between the world wars, see Niederland, *German Jews* (fn. 3), 86f.

72 According to data published in *Ha-Poel ha-Tza'ir*, during 1933-1934 only 250 Jewish lawyers arrived in Palestine (out of 5,000 who lived in Germany, and 600 who left Germany until June 1934; see Niederland, *German Jews* [fn. 3], 73). Only 135 of them passed the local bar examinations or intended to take them; 175 underwent retraining, and the rest turned to farming. See Moshe Brachman, *The German Aliyah* in the Yishuv, in: *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*, November 12, 1934, 11-14 [Hebrew]; cf. Gelber, *A New Homeland* (fn. 3), 447ff.

73 Kenneth F. Ledford, *From General Estate to Special Interest: German Lawyers, 1878-1933*, Cambridge 1996.

74 Ronen Shamir, *Nation-Building and Colonialism: The Case of Jewish Lawyers in Palestine*, in: *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 8/2 (2001), 109-123.

75 Gabriel Strasman, *Wearing the Robes: History of the Lawyer's Profession in Palestine*, Tel Aviv 1984 [Hebrew].

demand for this profession grew from the 1930s, the national agenda of its leaders failed.⁷⁶

While German-born lawyers did not dominate the active legal community, there emerged an elite group from their ranks, who enjoyed, as individuals, a reputation as owners of most respectable law firms in Palestine.⁷⁷ Although they disregarded aspirations for a national Hebrew legal system, they were highly respected by the Jewish establishment as providers of professional expertise. Testimonies and biographies of these influential individuals indicate that they were aware of the value of their *Yekke* collective identity and capitalized on it as their distinguishing culture resource. »My client was a *Yekke*,« says Herman Cohen, »and it was inconceivable that he would not speak the truth.«⁷⁸ But their identity work was not combined with separation strategies. On the contrary, it furthered their entry into the local Jewish elite. Although their »pure professionalism« was attacked by the proponents of the Hebrew legal system, eventually it was they, and not the latter, that were called upon to occupy key positions in the legal system when the State of Israel was founded.

This example from the legal sphere places the German immigrants' sense of cultural alienation in perspective. The superiority of the German-speaking elite over that of the East Europeans in the legal field may seem an inversion of the Jewish sociopolitical balance of power in Palestine, but it was not entirely atypical. Beyond the particular political circumstances, it was precisely the already emerging civic-professional, European-oriented infrastructure that provided opportunities for German-born lawyers to take a leading role. Paradoxically, their strong bourgeois identity helped them to become recognized as the key actors of this profession.

3. Conclusions

The fact that the old-country repertoire is maintained by immigrants during their acculturation is almost trivial; the question is only to what extent and

76 Moshe Lissak, Occupational Structure, Occupational Mobility and Status Symbols in the New Jewish Community, 1918-1948, in: *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel* 4 (1994), 345-377 [Hebrew].

77 This leading group included Felix Rosenblüth (Pinchas Rosen), Israel's first Minister of Justice; Moshe Smoira, the first Chief President of the Supreme Court; Herman (Haim) Cohen, the first Attorney General; Rudolf Heinsheimer (Uri Yadin), the first head of the Legislation Department; and several well-known Supreme Court judges. See Fania Oz-Salzberger/Eli Salzberger, The Secret German Sources of the Israeli Supreme Court, in: *Israel Studies* 3/2 (1998), 159-192.

78 Michael Shashar/Haim Cohen, A Supreme Judge: Conversations with Michael Shashar, Jerusalem 1989 [Hebrew], 201; cf., for example, Ruth Bondy, Felix: Pinchas Rosen and His Time, Tel Aviv 1990 [Hebrew]; Uri Yadin, Uri Yadin's Diary [1948-1951], in: Aharon Barak/Tena Spanitz (eds.), The Book of Uri Yadin, Tel Aviv 1990, 17-63 [Hebrew].

for what purpose. As Itamar Even-Zohar has already established with regard to the emerging Hebrew culture in Palestine, even when deliberate efforts are made to construct a new culture such as this one, much of the native repertoire of its proponents still persists – if often unnoticed.⁷⁹ In the case of the *Yekkes*, their retention tendencies were amplified and foregrounded in a way that was beneficial to their absorption in the host society, because they augmented their prestige. Despite political marginalization, in the larger socio-cultural context, their adherence to their home culture as immigrants in Palestine thus seems to have been a resourceful strategy of »gaining a seat at the common table.«⁸⁰

This claim is supported by an analysis of two major aspects of their acculturation process: their pre-immigration habitus as Germans and the cultural atmosphere of the *Yishuv* with which they were confronted in 1930s Palestine. The accepted *Yekke* narrative, which emphasizes their alleged habitus-constrained conservatism as a barrier to assimilation, is problematic in view of at least two points:

- (a) The demographic heterogeneity of this immigrant group, which led to diverse strategies of acculturation, with young immigrants being more susceptible to integration, including a massive transformation of competencies and lifestyle (mainly by those who turned to agricultural and communal life); and
- (b) the uneven, relatively short – however rapid – process of becoming members of the German bourgeoisie that Jews underwent during the decades before emigrating to Palestine, since many of them were only first- or second-generation lower-class, Orthodox East European immigrants in Germany.

The blurred distinction between the »real« German Jewry and the *Ostjuden* generated a cultural chase-and-flight tension which was enhanced in Palestine, and in the context of which the *Yekkes'* cultural baggage constituted a scarce resource. Against this background, a unifying collective *Yekke* identity and their tendencies towards detachment seem to have been overstated and keenly promulgated by both the earlier (veteran) immigrants, and the *Yekke* newcomers alike, not because they were »objectively« different, but because they shared similar sociocultural aspirations and were competing over capitalizing on the same cultural resources.

79 Itamar Even-Zohar, The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine, 1882-1948, in: *Polysystem Studies* (= *Poetics Today* 11/1 [1990]), 175-191.

80 Pascal Boyer, Cultural Assimilation, in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. by Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, Amsterdam et al. 2001, 3032-3035; cf. Sela-Sheffy, *Integration through Distinction* (fn. 11).