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## BECOMING ISRAELI, BECOMING HEBREW – SOCIOLINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES OF ISRAEL



Discussions about the relations between state, language and nation often refer to the three models (see Fig. 1) which, among others, Roman Szul presented in his book (2009). However, it is important to establish the working definitions of the key concepts for the present paper as majority of them often seem to serve as umbrella terms which refer to various theories and traditions and which concern a phenomena of numerous aspects.

This paper is written in the theoretical framework of ethno-symbolism (Smith, 1999) and as such it views a nation as a result of mass mobilization under the auspices of its discursive tool. Although nation is a modern concept, its cultural roots reaches the times before modernity. For the sake of the present paper, I chose Kłoskowska's (2009) approach to the concept of *ethnic group* which resulted in splitting the term into three distinctive ones: *ethny*<sup>1</sup>, *ethnics*<sup>2</sup> and *ethnicity*<sup>3</sup>.

Following Schnapper's definition, a nation is viewed as a political community defined by a specific historic political project (Schnapper, 1994 cited in Canovan, 2008). It is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1983:6). Choosing these definitions, I have recognized the constructivist

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<sup>1</sup> Following Geertz's (1963) classification, the features distinguishing an ethny are as follows: assumed blood ties (quasi-kinship), race (understood as phenotypical physical features), language, region, religion and custom. Ethnies are of extrarational character and are primordial. An ethny is here understood as a community which is either tribal or whose existence is not dependant on its relation with a certain state.

<sup>2</sup> Defined as an urban ethnic community or ethnic group in pluralistic societies (Kłoskowska, 2009:11); the following features play a key role in the formation of such a group: genealogical knowledge (mythological kinship), reference to a fatherland (symbolic territory), cultural group symbols (coat-of-arms, historical events, art, etc.), language and religion. However, a distinction between *ethnics* and *diaspora* needs to be made. *Diaspora* communities are those who lost their homeland and their autonomy (Brubaker, 2005; Weiner 2010:75). A shared (i.e. collective) violent traumatic experience being the reason of their dispersion is also the basis of their identity. Moreover, they view themselves as a people-to-be-restored, victims on one hand and "the holy people" on the other (Smith, 1999:114-119).

<sup>3</sup> Defined as one's relation to one's ethnic group, i.e. the answer to the question "Where originally are your ancestors from?" or "Who are your ancestors?". It is of objective nature and does not depend on how one feels about it.

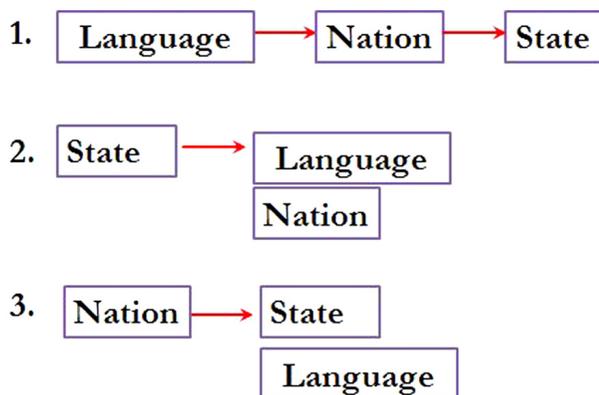


Fig. 1. Three models of the relations between language, state and nation  
source: Szul (2009)

approach to the nation as valid in the Israeli context. The modern Israeli nation is a result of a historical project which via mass mobilization aimed at the statehood.

Having analyzed the writings of various authors<sup>4</sup>, I have decided that the following features distinguish a nation from the ethnic group: national identity<sup>5</sup> and the ability to define it; deep emotional bonds with other members of the community, even those who lived in the past or will be born; a nationalist ideology and discourse; (reinterpreted) history with founding fathers, a pantheon of national heroes and a repertoire of key facts around which the national identity is woven; common material, behavioural, symbolic culture; territory – referred to by the community as the homeland. Other features (such as a common language or a specific mode of national education) may be useful for a fuller description of a particular nation but do not determine its existence.

Last but not least, *identity* is viewed as *sameness* to the same and *distinctiveness* from the Other<sup>6</sup> and will refer to the feeling of belonging based on ethnic, national and religious factors, a group's collective feeling of togetherness. Identity might be passive (identification by others) or active (self-identification) and it may happen that the two are incongruent. Moreover, as it is a feeling, it is viewed as an outcome of conscious identity policy and education and so it is constructed, created and discourse-based.

Let us get back to the Figure 1. In the first model it is the language that brings people together (or that actually makes the people) who in turn reach out for the statehood. In such a case language is viewed as a binding agent of the community and its sym-

<sup>4</sup> See Bell-Fialkoff, 1999; Canovan, 2008; Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1991; Burszta, 1998; Budyta-Budzyńska, 2010; Kłoskowska, 2009; Smith, 1999; Brubaker, 1995b;

<sup>5</sup> Comprising both positive (i.e. *Who are we?*) and negative (*Who are we not?*) form (Lasker, 1982:61).

<sup>6</sup> Or, as put by Erickson, identity is “sameness and distinctiveness” (1985, cited in Melchior, 1990:15).

bolic function is especially emphasized. “*He talks like us* is equivalent to saying *He is one of us*” (Sapir, 1933:160) and therefore it is the language that decides if a person is (viewed as) a member of a certain ethnic or national unit which primarily came to existence due to the group’s togetherness in language. This model is perfectly described by Johann Gottfried Herder’s view on nation. As Herder expressed in “Treatise on the Origin of Language” (1987), there are two components of so-called *Volkgeist*, nation’s soul<sup>7</sup>: language and culture. Language is what informs one’s way of thinking. Thought is limited by linguistic bonds: one can think only what one can verbalize. Therefore, nation is a community of people thinking in similar way. The incongruities and differences between two nations sharing language stem from the underlying hostility towards each other (p. 160-162). The second component of nation is its culture understood as a whole of traditions, behaviors and religion<sup>8</sup> which contributes to the shape of *Volksgeist* (Szymaniec, 2008:26). Michael Forster (2008) points out that from Herder’s perspective a nation develops from an ethnic group over the course of history. There are no class divisions, only the *Volk* (to which even the king belongs) as well as there is no *Favoritvolk*: all nations are equal and so are the individuals within nations. Nation should be a basis for a state, which in return should provide the people not only with wealth and security but also with the development of spirituality, arts, sciences and education and in this way support the survival of *Volkgeist* (Szymaniec, 2008:31). As Forster (2008) notes, Herder views the concept of multinational state as valid, providing that: a) nations constitute federations with their own local governments instead of being a part of a centralized state; and b) that respecting national groupings would not be in any way connected with military campaigns. The diversity of national groupings does not occur ad hoc and voluntarily – it can be achieved only through external coercion. If we take into consideration the history of Germany, it becomes clear that Herder’s national experience informed his view. The first model is exemplified by countries whose nations found a common denominator mainly in language: Germany and Italy. In these countries the institution of citizenship is based on so-called *ius sanguinis*: common origins, kinship, language and culture (Brubaker, 1995a). The nation is believed to be natural and age-old and the minorities do not assimilate easily, if at all.

In the second model it is the state that is the primary element which creates the people and imposes the language. It is the case of such countries as France or Spain

<sup>7</sup> *Volkgeist* might also be translated as “spirit of the people”, especially that both *Nationalgeist* (“nation’s soul”) and *Nationalcharakter* (“national character”) exist in German. However, as far as known to me the term was narrowed to “spirit of the nation” due to the popularity of such its use in the American anthropology (e.g. George W. Stocking’s “*Volkgeist* as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition”, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Later Ernest Gellner will also point out that nation is a community based on a common culture but he will understand culture as so-called *high culture*: “a standardized system of communication” (1991:143).

where the language policy aims at weakening local languages and strengthening the state one (Szul, 2009:163). In this type of state the membership of such a nation is voluntary and the nation is formed on the basis of *ius soli* (common territory) and *patria* (common political rights and duties). Nation is not perceived as natural; it is created and defined by the will of its members (Brubaker, 1995a). Because of that, the nation is inclusive and it may consist of various ethnicities and cultures, as long as its members fulfil their political duties. The second-generation of immigrants become French citizens by birth and subsequent residence in the country. The citizenry is therefore defined as a territorial community. Political inclusion involves cultural assimilation within the limits of the territory. Minorities are assimilated into the nation and their languages are not supported through e.g. education system.

In the third model, the nation gives a start to the state and the language. This model comes as problematic as the category of nation is not defined within or by this structure as it was in the case of the previous models. Szul (2009:127) points out that two types of nations apply to this model: multilingual and monolingual. The examples of monolingual nations are the post-colonial communities who chose the former colonist's language for the official one of the future state as it was in the case of the South American states for instance. As the name has it, the multilingual type would be those nations whose members for some reasons spoke different languages but maintained the consciousness of belonging together (i.e. common collective identity) even if being geographically scattered. Important to underline is the fact that such communities do not have a common language in either communicational or identifying function and such a language appears only around the time of the raise of nationalist movement (p. 128). It is very difficult to agree on any further generalization concerning the states of the third model so I will focus on Israel.

In scholarly works as well as in everyday conversations concerning the history of Israel, it is never certain whether one should start from modernity or the biblical times. Depending on the dialectic and rhetoric as well as the speaker's (political) stance, the argumentation may refer to three millennia or a century back. It is not the present paper scrutiny to decide which stance is (more) correct nor is it in my abilities to do so. For the present examination I decided to focus on the modern times<sup>9</sup>.

Being a diaspora community scattered around the world, the Jewish people persisted through the tumult of the history because they would not choose to assimilate with

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<sup>9</sup> I affiliate this thesis with the ethno-symbolic approach to the nation (Smith, 2009) and therefore, I view the Israeli and Jewish nations as constructs and the Jewish State (or the State of Israel) as a product of the Jewish nation and the beginning of the Israeli one. I acknowledge the fact that these constructs have historical-cultural basis and that this basis has been reinterpreted numerous times as it is the case with any nation.

the rest of the given society<sup>10</sup>. Instead, they lived in the ghettos or, in Eastern Europe, *shtetlekh* (Rothenberg, 1981) in which local leaders would influence the shape and borders of the community within which they cultivated their symbolic culture, religion and traditions. Such communities undoubtedly were an ethnies as the members were connected by “bed, blood, cult” and by language. However, as it will be discussed later, it is difficult to judge if one can talk about the Jewish people as a homogenous body.

Apart from the fact that each Jewish community spoke different Jewish language (or at least different dialect of Yiddish), their multilingualism had also another dimension. As Szul (2009:136) argues, Jews would use at least three languages on a daily basis: a local language for the contacts with the non-Jewish community; Yiddish (or another Jewish language) for the contacts within the Jewish community and in the folk art; and Hebrew as a liturgical, academic and literary language. Being sacred, Hebrew was taught in religious schools for boys (*yeshivas* and *cheders*) and so the knowledge of Hebrew among women was very poor. Very important to emphasize is the high prestige of Hebrew especially as compared to other Jewish languages used for everyday communication.

In the wake of the late nineteenth century pogroms in Europe<sup>11</sup>, many Jews emigrated to the USA while much smaller number fixed on their return to the motherland. The first dunes of land in Palestine were bought and first colonies (e.g. Zichron Yaakov, Hadera, Gadera) were established<sup>12</sup>. In 1894 Alfred Dreyfus, an assimilated Jew, was found guilty of treason and subsequently faced degradation and life deportation. The Dreyfus Affair as it became known when exposed in Emile Zola’s *J’accuse* (Zola, 1989) shocked the European Jewry as it provided evidence that even a completely assimilated Jew could not escape anti-Semitism. In this context, Theodor Herzl, a secular Jew and a young journalist organized a political and social movement, Zionism<sup>13</sup>, and in 1896, he published a milestone book, *Der Judenstaat*. In this utopian manifesto he claims that assimilation did not prove fruitful and instead of being a cure, it is a disease of

<sup>10</sup> “Alternatively, they could choose to divide themselves between private and public spheres, between religion and nationalism and to be Jewish by religion at home and German, say, by nationality in public” (Klimmering, 2005:21).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. 1881-1882 along the western border of the Russian Empire or the reduction of Jewish rights in Romania.

<sup>12</sup> This is known in the Zionist rhetoric as “the first wave of immigration”. Klimmering aptly notes that in this way it seems connected to the later, politically-driven, waves although this one was not organized and had no political connotations (2005:22).

<sup>13</sup> The name itself was proposed by the Jewish activist, Nathan Birnbaum in 1892. Although Zionism was a secular movement, its vocabulary referred to the already known religious symbols. The very name or the Zionist flag (later agreed as Israel’s flag) although officially connected with a political movement and political aims had their basis in the traditions. Zion refers to both “the Holy Land” and “Jerusalem”. Zionism therefore expresses the political aim (establishing the Jewish nation-state in Palestine) with reference to the Biblical tradition of the return of the Jews to the Promised Land, making it a coherent whole.

the Jewish people and therefore an independent Jewish state is needed. Being aware of linguistic and cultural differences between various Jewish communities, Herzl claims that the language of the future state should become the (Jewish)<sup>14</sup> language of the majority and specifically not Hebrew because nobody could “buy a train ticket using Hebrew” (Herzl, 2006:133). At that point Yiddish already had become a standardized language with its own high culture (Shmeruk, 1992)<sup>15</sup>.

However, as early as in 1881 a young Litvak, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, immigrates to Palestine and as a first person uses Hebrew also at home (Świdorska, 1984). His son, Ben-Zion<sup>16</sup> was the first native speaker of Hebrew (Blau, 1981:29). Ben-Yehuda starts coining words, as he said: “In order to supplement the deficiencies of the Hebrew language, the Committee coins words according to the rules of grammar and linguistic analogy from Semitic roots: Aramaic, Canaanite, Egyptian ones and especially from Arabic roots” (Blau, 1981:33). In 1890 he established *Vaad ha-lashon ha-Ivrit*, the Hebrew Language Committee (Bridger, Wolk, 1976:504), and soon the language was introduced to the first school.

After the First Zionist Congress, in 1901 the Jewish National Fund was created with the aim of purchasing the land and organizing new waves of the immigration to Palestine. Until 1948, the task of mass transfer of the European Jewry to Palestine was carried under the auspices of the British Mandate. The Jews immigrating to Palestine were convinced of their political and religious rights to the Promised Land (as from their perspective they were returning home). However, from the perspective of the Arabs inhabiting the territory, the Jews were strangers and colonizers. “Thus, while the Zionists considered their ‘return’ to be a solution to ‘the Jewish problem’, the Arabs saw themselves as victims paying the price for injustices committed by European Christianity” (Klimmering, 2005:26).

The second and third waves of immigrants were more of “practical Zionists” (Klimmering, 2005:27). Those were mostly young and well-educated individuals who were highly ideologized and politicized. The *kibbutzim*, agrarian communal settlements, were established with their own nationalist mythology and their own education system. The revived Hebrew language was taught among the second *aliya* (immigration wave) and soon, in 1922, was to be recognized by the British Mandate as one of the three official languages of the region (Laqueuer, 2003:281). The language was the binding agent of the new community: otherwise, they had no common language (Laqueuer, 2003:279). Moreover, it was a symbol of the revival of the Hebrew culture, a symbol of the Jews returning from the exile and the success of the Zionism. It became one of the

<sup>14</sup> Szul (2009:137) suggests that Herzl aimed at German language as a national one.

<sup>15</sup> In 1907 in Czernowice took place a Yiddish conference whose participants agreed that the Jews form a separate nation with Yiddish as their national language, country of origins as homeland and extraterritorial culture binding the people (Szul, 2009:137).

<sup>16</sup> Hebrew for “Son of Zion”.

identity building blocks of the Palestinian Jewry. “The Jews spoke their own language, a revitalized and modernized ancient biblical Hebrew, and built up a new national social identity, which emphasized the differences between them and Diaspora Jewry” (Klimmering, 2005:33). Moreover, their distinctiveness (and thus negative identity) was emphasized not only in relation to other Jews but also to the much orientalised Arabs<sup>17</sup>. *Kibbutzniks*, supported by the World Zionist Organization, became a community aware of their identity and able to reproduce themselves as such.

Soon the first school to teach only in Hebrew, Herzliya Hebrew High School, was established. Moreover, the official language of city administration was Hebrew. The foundations were laid for the Jewish University in Jerusalem (opened in 1925 as the Hebrew University) and the Jewish Technical School in Haifa (opened in 1912 as Technion – Israel Institute of Technology). The identity of the immigrants started being constructed: they were the pioneers of the future nation and they felt as unique from the World Jewry also thanks to the revival of Hebrew.

The prestige of Hebrew was marked and reinforced in various ways such as place naming of which Tel Aviv is one example. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, the city owns its name to the Hebrew translation of the title of *The Old New World* by Theodor Herzl<sup>18</sup>. In this way the name of the city reminds of at least three things: (1) it commemorates the nationalist hero, Theodor Herzl; (2) it shows the connection between Zionism and the beginnings of the Jewish State; (3) it shows that the Jewish heritage is inextricably connected with the “Promised Land”<sup>19</sup>. The name was chosen in 1910 from numerous propositions, including Herzliya, which later became a name of another city. There are more cities and settlements whose names come from the Bible either emphasizing the Jewish heritage<sup>20</sup> or directly informing that those were the places mentioned in the Torah<sup>21</sup>. Such naming is an example of Barthes’ myth and does not leave much space for questions. The message is clear: *we live here, we share*

<sup>17</sup> This is especially noticeable in films from the pioneer period available at The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive such as *The Land of Promise* (1935), *This is our Valley* (1947), *Israel Reborn* (1948a) or *Israel in Action* (1948b). Another example is *Israeli Society* by Shmuel N. Eisenstatd (1967). This analysis of the young Israeli country depicts Israel as a heroic, modern society built from scratch, that tries to “absorb” and modernize the immigrants from underdeveloped countries and that has to defend its borders from numerous enemies who seek to put an end to it.

<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel 3:15: „Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel Abib, that lived by the river Chebar, and to where they lived; and I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days”.

<sup>19</sup> Even more symbolism is to be found: “aviv” means “spring” and is commonly connected with the Jewish revival and “tel” means a man-made mound accumulating layers of civilization built and so it connects to the ancient times.

<sup>20</sup> Exemplary to this is Rishon LeZion (First to Zion) which name comes from Isaiah 41:27: “First to Zion are they, and I shall give herald to Jerusalem”.

<sup>21</sup> Here as an example may serve Shilo in the West Bank which was established in 1974. Its name refers to Tel Shilo, which “held a central place in the history of the Jewish people. During the period between capturing the Land and building the Temple, thousands of years ago in the days when Joshua divided the land among the 12 tribes, the Tabernacle resided in Shilo” (Jewish Virtual Library).

*Zionist and Jewish heritage, we are connected to our ancestors who were exiled from here.* In order to emphasize the Jewish heritage, in 2009 the Israeli transportation minister suggested that all the place names in Israel should be in Hebrew and transliterated into Arabic or English (BBC, 2009). Therefore, in each language it would read *Yerushalaim* (the Hebrew name) and not *Jerusalem* or *al Quds* (the Arabic name). In this way, the Jewish influence would be underlined and the Arabic heritage wiped out.

Over thirty years, the Jewish population in Palestine increased from 56,000 in 1917 to 640,000 in 1947 becoming one third of the overall population in Palestine (Klimmering, 2005:35). New immigrants learnt Hebrew during intensive language courses and the society was quite unified language-wise (Szul, 2009:139). In 1948 the State of Israel declared independence. Given the number of the Arabs inhabiting the territory of the new state and the rights which the Declaration of Independence granted them, Arabic became one of the two state languages of Israel.

Although the second and third *aliya* were already Hebrew-speaking and relatively unified, the subsequent waves of immigrants brought new languages and cultures to Israel and so the society became extremely divided. Nowadays the Israeli society is composed out of communities of different character. Almost 76% of the citizens are Jewish, Arabs constitute 18%, the Druze people 2% and others 4%<sup>22</sup>. There are two official languages in Israel, Hebrew and Arabic, and additionally English has a status of a state language<sup>23</sup>. Apart from them there are six common languages and in total twenty-eight are in use (Spolsky, Shohamy, 1999:157)<sup>24</sup>.

Israel's model of citizenship is a combination of the *ius soli* and *ius sanguis* models and so everyone who wants is welcome to become an Israeli citizen as long as they are Jewish. Such a mixture brings many problems difficult to solve. First of all, if being Jewish grants the citizenship, the nationalist component is undermined and so it results in e.g. one third of the society not speaking Hebrew or whole groups not relating to the national symbols. Secondly, if there is no clear definition of who a Jew is, also the ethnic component is challenged. In the case of Israel, the situation is even more complicated: the citizenship is granted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (secular and following state regulations) but the *Jewishness* is confirmed by the Chief Rabbinate (Ultra-Orthodox religious, following Halakhic laws). In such a way one simultaneously may be and maybe not a Jew and also may be entitled for citizenship but not fully (i.e. not be eligible for marriages or divorces, etc.). Additionally, the cases of the Arabs or secular Jews being deprived of citizenship do not make this social institution look particularly transparent, stable and reliable.

<sup>22</sup> based on Israel Central Bureau of Statistics: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> i.e. the city plates or official information will be provided in those three languages.

<sup>24</sup> However, the official website of Israel's Ministry of the Foreign Affairs on Israel's demographics reads that "[Israel is inhabited by] Jews from dozens of countries on every continent speaking over 100 different languages".

Over sixty-five years, the Jewish population in Israel have become very diverse both in terms of the religious affiliation (e.g. Haredim, Masortim) and the origins (e.g. Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi). Many of the Israeli Jews present strong connection to the countries of their (parents') origins. In many cases what is supposed to be the "second" national identity is virtually primary. One of such communities are the Russians. As Gordon (2007:71) argues, many of them had no relation to either Judaism or Zionism and came to Israel in escape from the regime of the Soviet Union. Israel was not their actual homeland so they had little motivation to acquire the new identity or even to learn the language. In 1990s' the total Russian population reached 20% of the society (Dowty, 2004:95) and, the population still remains big. According to Druckman (2013), about 26% of them do not speak Hebrew at all. The fact is that they do not have to, as Gordon (2007:79) puts it:

They speak only Russian to their children. They read one of the seven Russian-language newspapers that Russian-speakers have established, and they watch the private Russian TV station that has been set up in Israel and Russian stations abroad. Even after living years in Israel, hundreds of thousands of these Russian-speakers cannot carry on telephone conversation in Hebrew; many thousands of them cannot ask for directions in Hebrew. Despite these inconvenience, many Russian-speaker continue to reject the Hebrew language wherever and whenever they can.

As Spolsky and Shohamy (1999:236-238) argue, the situation of the Russian language is much stronger than Arabic. As an example may serve the fact that official manuals and instructions are issued in Russian and only as late as in August 2013 the Ministry of Education agreed to translate their instructions (concerning e.g. safety rules) into Arabic (Skop, 2013).

Another group which resists assimilation are Haredim, ultra-Orthodox Jews who regard other forms of Judaism as deviations. They are the fastest-growing community (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004) and according to Israel's Bureau of Statistics, by 2030 Haredim and Arabs will constitute 30% of the society. However, neither of them use Hebrew as a native language or participate in the mainstream culture or education. Haredim still live in the *shtetlekh*, strongly oppose Zionism and the idea of the State of Israel as such<sup>25</sup>.

Having taken it all into consideration, it comes as no surprise that a friend of mine, forty-year-old Yasha from Ramat Gan, describes himself as Hebrew. He explains that he is no longer Russian but he opposes the concept of *Israeliness* because it is too strictly

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<sup>25</sup> However, their religious political party Shas often forms coalition with governments: as of September 2013, Natenyahu's 74-member coalition depends on the support of 16 ultra-Orthodox members of the 120-seat parliament. Moreover, due to the agreement from the British Mandate times, they control the Chief Rabbinate (i.e. authority over the marriage, divorce and partly the citizenship).

connected with *Jewishness* and he is not Jewish. He has started to forget Russian and the only thing he wants to affiliate with is the Hebrew language (like e.g. Derrida did)<sup>26</sup>.

Over sixty-five years a relatively unified society has undergone strong changes both in terms of demographics and culture. In the light of the presented analysis, I would claim that the third model to which Israel has been ascribed should be revised. It is true that it was the (idea of) nation that gave the existence of the state and brought back the Hebrew language. However, the question to be asked is if that community remained a nation over the course of history. There is no definition of *Israeliness* or *Jewishness* in Israel – in fact, the discussion on the limits of the nation membership is ongoing and there still is no general reference point (whether it be legal framework or mass media discourse) on which a definition of a nation in the Israeli context could be anchored<sup>27</sup>. The nationalist discourse is challenged and rejected by many groups, Israel's social cohesion is low<sup>28</sup>, almost one third of the citizens do not speak Hebrew at all.

A nation should possess the following features: 1) a positive and negative self-identification, 2) deep emotional bonds with other members of the community, 3) a nationalist ideology and discourse, 4) secular mythology, 5) common material, behavioural, symbolic culture, 5) territory – inhabited by the community (or a part of it, at least) or referred to by them as the homeland. It is difficult to perceive the Israeli society as a nation, i.e. homogenous body. It is composed out of various rivalry groups some of whom do not perceive others as members of the nation or do not themselves identify with the nation. Because of cultural differences and exclusive social institutions<sup>29</sup>, the nationalist discourse, although apparent, does not reach or is strongly rejected by many. The secular mythology alongside with the national identity matrix were designed in the pioneer times and have not changed much although new waves of immigrants from all over the world find it difficult to relate to (Klimmering, 2005:304). A common culture is also under the question as Israel is a multi-ethnic, multinational and multicultural state and supranational culture, if exists, is not common to everybody. Drawing borders of the territory is an ongoing process and *homeland* has many denotations<sup>30</sup>.

Therefore, what I propose is that the model of the relations between the state, the language and the nation should be redrawn as presented in the Figure 2. The Jewish

<sup>26</sup> He claims that there are more people like him and they call themselves Hebrews. However, I have found no literature on that and did not manage to talk to more Hebrews.

<sup>27</sup> Just to give an example: the institution of citizenship although primarily designed for Jews has been opened also to their non-Jewish spouses who in turn are not accepted as Jews by the Chief Rabbinate.

<sup>28</sup> According to research conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation and Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany, Israel has one of the lowest rates of social cohesion among 34 countries in the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

<sup>29</sup> Such as four education systems (separate for Arabs and Haredim) or the military service from which the Arabs and Haredim are exempted.

<sup>30</sup> Compare „homeland” of Jews, Arabs and e.g. Russians or Falashas.

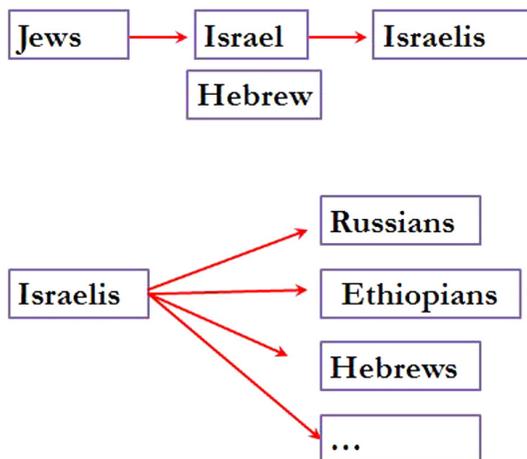


Fig. 2. A proposition of the third model redrawn for the Israeli context  
source: my own model

people mobilized by the nationalist discourse in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century gave a rise to both the state and the revival of the Hebrew language. This in turn created *the Israelis* by which I mean the relatively unified community of the second and third *aliya*. However, with the new waves of immigrants who brought new (Jewish and secular) cultures and languages and who could not relate to the national identity matrix designed in the pioneer times, the *Israeliness* became an unclear concept and so it split into new subgroups of different character (ethny, ethnics and nations).

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Sylwia Wodzińska

**Becoming Israeli, becoming Hebrew –  
sociolinguistic landscapes of Israel**

Summary

The present paper scrutinizes the relations between language, nation and state in the context of the Israeli society and its collective identity. A critical approach at a commonly-agreed model is taken and after the analysis of the history and present demographics of Israel, a revised model is suggested.