



CHAPTER 1

What, however, is social theory? It is easier to say what it is not. It is clearly not an articulated set of propositions subject to verification or falsification by experiment. . . . Social theory is the effort of a social group to reflect upon itself, not a record of experience alone but an effort to master it. The questions of historical subject and of public are not ancillary to the enterprise but constitutive of it.

—N. Birnbaum

Introduction *Content in Context*

This study inquires into the sociography of Israel. It draws the intellectual contours of Israeli sociological discourse and the images of Israeli society refracted through this prism. It charts the past trajectory and current layout of the sociological discourse in Israel, describing and interpreting its formation and subsequent transformations, and critically appraises the diverse depictions of Israeli society suggested in the discourse. It portrays the major contending sociological trends and the main controversies among them, situates them in their sociohistorical context, explicates their theoretical underpinnings, and discloses their ideological implications. It reconstructs the transition of the sociological discourse from an initial agenda concerned with nation-building and complacent to the national elite in the 1950s to the later inception of a critical agenda concerned with citizenship-formation and attentive to larger and diverse publics.

A change of agenda means a change in the issues and approaches that alternately chart the frontiers of the sociological landscape. Though in some respects an agenda resembles a “paradigm,” it implies—as is explained later on—a more open-ended and contested practice. Each of the substantial chapters of this study discusses a “moment” in the transformation of the Israeli sociological agenda and elucidates its various aspects; yet a major contribution made here is the interpretation of the trajectory of this discourse as a whole over time.

Three distinct arguments about the transformation of the sociological agenda in Israel are proposed. The first argument is that Israeli sociology has undergone a post-Kuhnian cycle. In its first phase, in the 1950s and 1960s, a "dominant paradigm" prevailed, the Jerusalem nation-building school; in its second phase, in the mid-1970s, a crisis set in this agenda and the status of the dominant school was challenged; in the third phase, since the late 1970s, a more varied and critical agenda has emerged in the field. The second argument is that these transformations have concurred with the social and political transformations in Israel and have been associated and congruent with the emergence of nondominant social groups and movements, the interests and identities of which they both express and articulate. The third argument is that as the result of these changes, one can discern in the sociological agenda in Israel seven major trends, which will be identified as follows: functionalism, revised and revisited functionalism, pluralism, elitism, Marxism, feminism, and colonization.

This study of the case of Israel rests on some general assumptions about sociological inquiry, social reality, and the relations between the two, which may be designated as historical-interpretive, in the broad sense of the term. It vindicates the view that sociology is a socially embedded practice, while at the same time the object-domain of sociology, society itself, is a culturally constructed entity. It is inspired in this sense from Marxist and Mannheimian sociology of knowledge (K. Mannheim, 1936; H. Kuklick, 1983; G. Radnitzky, 1970; P. Diesing, 1991); the postpositivist approach to scientific thought (C. J. Alexander, 1990; W. Outhwaite, 1991); and the "interpretive turn" in social theory in general (R. Bernstein, 1976, 1983; P. Rabinow & W. M. Sullivan 1987).

The historical-interpretive approach is one of three major current approaches to knowledge, the other two being scientific positivism and poststructuralist deconstructivism. Drawing on Bacon, Descartes, and other philosophical ancestors of the "scientific revolution" of the seventeenth century, the hallmark of positivist sociology is its belief in the objective, lawlike facticity of the social world and, in turn, in the accessibility of valid knowledge of it by quantitative measurement and empirical scientific procedures (see G. A. Bryant, 1983). As is abundantly demonstrated by all stripes of contemporary history, sociology and philosophy of science, these assumptions are untenable (see F. Suppe, 1977; F. R. Dallmayr & T. A. MaCarthy, 1977). A forceful alternative, or rather "subversive," approach to knowledge is deconstruction. Drawing particularly on Nietzschean insights, thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault (cf. M. Fou-

cault, 1970, 1972; J. Derrida, 1976, 1991; also see R. Harland, 1987) contend that science is suffused with rhetoric and that there is no way to pass beyond texts or the “signifying practices” and to reach “reality.” Reality is “always already” implicated in problems of language use and has been “textualized” to begin with. While this approach’s critique of “presentism” (the “reality” assumption) and “logocentrism” (the “scientific procedure” assumption) is praiseworthy, it represents an overblown relativistic position that lost its own analytical and normative sense of ground. While aiming to criticize some aspects of modernity—of which order, science, and control are centerpieces—it turns easily into a mere symptomatic attitude bereft of critical insights (D. LaCapra, 1983:69; also see J. Habermas, 1987).

The historical-interpretive approach shares with the positivist one the pursuit of “valid” knowledge, but it also shares with the deconstructivist approach the disbelief in an “objective” knowledge. Rather, it maintains that the underlying assumptions, and the criteria of validity, are anchored in broad historical and cultural contexts. Drawing on Hegelian-Marxist historicity and dialectic, which has been recently revived and modified by such thinkers as Gadamer and, in a more critical temper, Habermas (H.-G. Gadamer, 1975; J. Habermas, 1971, 1988; for review see J. Bleicher, 1982), this approach views scientific practices as embedded within cultural traditions and social contexts and guided by social and cognitive interests. In the reading of scientific texts, as LaCapra succinctly puts it, the interpretive approach

emphasizes the importance of determining central arguments, core meanings, dominant themes, prevalent codes, world views and deep structures. In relating text or other artifacts to contexts, it seeks some comprehensive, integrating paradigm: formally, by arguing that once texts “internalize” contexts, the latter are subjected to procedures ‘internal’ to the text; causally, by arguing that the very problems, or, indeed, the formal procedures operative in texts are themselves “caused” or generated by changes in the larger context; or structurally, by arguing that both texts and contexts attest to the agency of deeper forces homologous to them. (1983:68)

This “synoptic method” (D. LaCapra, 1983:33) is the approach employed here. Its great merit is in relating sociological text to social context in a nonreductive way and in acknowledging both the cognitive and communicative aspects of the social sciences. In this view social science is as much “social” as it is “science” and is as much “interpretive” as it is “analytic” (A. Giddens, 1979; J. Habermas, 1988). This study divulges how

the sociological understanding of Israeli society shifts with the changes in this society itself and how such changes, in turn, are induced by transformations in the perceptions of social actors, which are both reflected in and articulated by sociology.

To carry out this synoptic program, a schematic two-axial framework was adopted that conjoins various aspects of social-scientific practices into four basic dimensions, generated by the crossing of two axis: the external-internal axis and the social-intellectual axis (cf. J. Cole & S. Cole, 1973; G. Ritzer, 1988, 1991; R. H. Wells & J. S. Picou, 1981). This framework enables us to focus our study upon four clusters of questions. The first cluster of questions pertains to the external-social dimension: What are the social circumstances that constitute and generate transformations in the sociological agenda and that prompt the appearance on the agenda—or the displacement from it—of distinct trends? and what are the ideological implications of such transformations? The second cluster of questions pertains to the internal-social dimension: What is the institutional structure of the social-scientific community? What impact does it exert upon the intellectual output? and what were the changes in this regard over time? The third cluster of questions pertains to the external-intellectual dimension: What general sociological theories are employed by Israeli sociologies, and how do they frame the interpretations and images of Israeli society produced by them? and what changes have occurred in this regard over time? The fourth cluster of questions pertains to the internal-intellectual dimension: What are the divergent interpretations and images of the subject matter—Israeli society—produced by Israeli sociology? What are the major distinctions among them? and what changes occurred in this regard over time?

The ensuing discussion of the sociological discourse in Israel unfolds on two levels: that of the overall agenda and its transformation over time and that of the individual trends or perspectives of which this agenda consists. The study is organized by the various trends. Obviously, a certain measure of schematization is involved in the reconstruction and demarcation of the trends, and they should be viewed as no more than “analytical constructions” or “ideal types”, that is, “one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and . . . the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical construct*” (M. Weber, 1949:90).

The order of presentation of the study is as follows: Chapters 2 and 10 deal with the Israeli sociological discourse as a whole. Chapter 2 dis-

cusses the general nature of the transformation of the discourse, focusing upon its “context”: Israeli history and politics on the one hand and the structure of the sociological community on the other. Chapter 10 concludes the work with a recapitulation of its major themes and the epilogue provides a credo. Chapters 3 through 9 deal with the trends discerned in Israeli sociology. Each chapter examines the various aspects of the “context” and especially of the “text” of a trend, the circumstances of its emergence, its theoretical and methodological foundations, its particular interpretation of Israeli society, and its political and ideological implications. Each chapter ends with a critical appraisal.

The delimitations of the study ought to be underscored at the outset. *Period*: The study covers the period from the 1950s to the early 1990s. It does not consider the rudimentary shape of academic social studies in the pre-state period. *Scope*: The study does not survey Israeli sociology in its entirety. It discusses only works that offer a general theoretical perspective upon Israeli society, and even within this category it focuses upon selected exemplary works. Notably, it does not address the lot of quantitative research conducted by Israeli sociologists. *Topics*: Though several sociological topics are discussed in the body of the study—such as immigration, the elite, women, and education—this is not a study of any of these or other topics in and of themselves. The study is focused on theoretical-ideological trends or perspectives, not on thematical aspects of Israeli society (though these are certainly highlighted from this particular angle). *Goals*: This study aims at portraying the text-in-context of the Israeli sociological agenda. It is not a substitute for a much needed historical and institutional scrutiny of the sociological community itself, but rather a conceptual analysis and interpretation of its changing intellectual agenda in its changing social context.

Finally, by way of anticipation a concise outline is provided here of the major trends in Israeli sociology as explored by this study.

Functionalism. A trend dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, supportive of the Labor Movement’s state elite. It was based at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and led by S. N. Eisenstadt. It was inspired by the theory of Talcott Parsons and emanated an integrative, consensual, and evolutionary image of Israeli society.

Revised and Revisited Functionalism. Two subsequent offshoots of functionalism. The “revised” version of functionalism emerged in the late 1960s and offers micro- and meso-level modifications of the original

macro-perspective. The “revisited” version emerged in the 1980s as an attempt to grasp the radical changes in Israeli society within a modified functionalist perspective.

Elitism. A trend inspired by conflict sociology and by ideological liberalism. It emerged in the early 1970s at Tel Aviv University and was led by Yonathan Shapiro. It portrays an image of a society under the domination of an oligarchical Labor Party elite supported by a bureaucratic apparatus; in the late 1970s the emphasis was shifted to the populist-fascist “status politics” of the emergent right wing.

Pluralism. A trend that emerged in the mid-1970s at Haifa University and is led by Sammy Smooha. It is inspired by studies of postcolonial multiethnic states and depicts an image of ethnic and national heterogeneity, social inequality, and political hierarchy. It is sympathetic to the point of view of nondominant groups, especially *Mizrahi* (Oriental) Jews and Israeli Arabs, and supports a consociational and pluralistic democracy.

Marxism. A trend that emerged in the late 1970s at Haifa University and is led by Shlomo Swirski, Deborah Bernstein, Shulamit and Henry Rosenfeld, and others. It portrays an image of a class society composed of an ostensibly socialist *Ashkenazi* (European) elite, which had become a state bourgeoisie, and of a proletarianized *Mizrahi* population.

Feminism. A trend that emerged in the mid-1980s, following the appearance of a feminist movement in Israel in the mid-1970s, and in the beginning of the 1990s is being articulated as an intellectual agenda. It produces an image of a male-dominated patriarchal society, portrayed differently from liberal, Marxist, and radical angles, as articulated by scholars such as Dafna Izraeli, Deborah Bernstein, Barbara Swirski, and others.

Colonization. A trend that also started to emerge in the mid-1980s, notably with scholars Shlomo Swirski, Avishai Ehrlich, Gershon Shafir, and Baruch Kimmerling. It depicts Israel as a settler-colonial society driven by the needs of territorial acquisition and pressures of the labor market, and it regards the Israeli-Arab conflict as the most crucial determinant in the shaping of Israeli society.