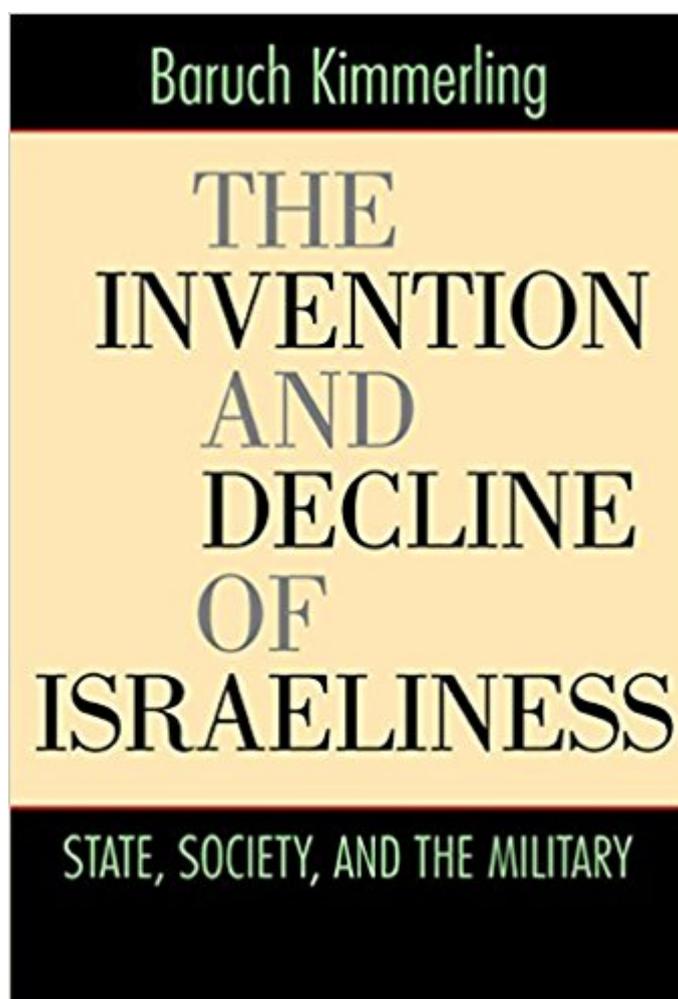


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# The Invention And Decline Of Israeliness: State, Society, And The Military



## Synopsis

This thought-provoking book, the first of its kind in the English language, reexamines the fifty-year-old nation of Israel in terms of its origins as a haven for a persecuted people and its evolution into a multi-cultural society. Arguing that the mono-cultural regime built during the 1950s is over, Baruch Kimmerling suggests that the Israeli state has divided into seven major cultures. These seven groups, he contends, have been challenging one another for control over resource distribution and the identity of the polity. Kimmerling, one of the most prominent social scientists and political analysts of Israel today, relies on a large body of sociological work on the state, civil society, and ethnicity to present an overview of the construction and deconstruction of the secular-Zionist national identity. He shows how Israeliness is becoming a prefix for other identities as well as a legal and political concept of citizen rights granted by the state, though not necessarily equally to different segments of society.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Baruch Kimmerling is an influential and controversial scholar whose books have set the agenda for contemporary Israel Studies.

"Like all of Baruch Kimmerling's work, this is a penetrating and provocative book. It offers a new paradigm for the current and future direction of Israeli society that will certainly become a central point of reference in the field. Kimmerling's explanation for the rise and fall of classic Labor Zionism is a seminal contribution to the ongoing debate over this central thread of the Israeli

experience."#151;Alan Dowty, author of *The Jewish State: A Century Later*"Baruch Kimmerling is an influential and controversial scholar whose books have set the agenda for contemporary Israel Studies. *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness* offers an original and provocative interpretation of the formation and transformation of Israeli national identity. Anyone seriously interested in Israeli society should read this book."#151;Derek Penslar, author of *Shylock's Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe*

Baruch Kimmerling is perhaps the most important Israeli sociologist of all time. He opened up frontiers in the field in Israel that still have not been examined since. This book starts about the role of the state in Israeli society. He describes how the identity of Israeliness came about and how it is falling apart. He makes many accurate descriptions that have panned out and are continuing to tear Israel apart. If you have any desire to understand the role of identity in Israel, its development, and ideas about the future, read this book.

The main problem with this work is that much of the information is exactly what one would expect. Israel is an immigrant society with a majority of the inhabitants being born outside of Israel's borders or being children or grandchildren of immigrants, and the way these immigrants came to Israel is bound to cause some major societal problems as well. With large and disparate groups coming into Israel in mass waves this, of course, created some deep fissures within Israel. With such divergent people from vastly different geographical and cultural areas as Eastern Europe to North Africa to the Middle East to Western Europe and everywhere in between the fact that this has not created a utopia or even a multicultural society is pretty much to be expected. With that said what makes this book really good is the deep exploration into how Israel functions as a society, and in so doing fleshing out the causes for the stratification of Israeli society as well as examining some potential reasons for how this place and these people have managed to create such a vibrant country. What the author does is show how the first Israelis tried to create a new culture (or Israeliness), and then show how that new identity conflicted with the thousands of immigrants that poured into the fledgling new country. The elites tried to shore up their own version of Israeliness and have the new immigrants conform to their vision. Instead of conforming many stuck to their own cultural norms, and, like most immigrant societies, they became their own version of Israelis. What the author posits is that, today, in Israel there exists several different versions of Israelis, and they are all competing as well as commingling, but they haven't been able to integrate fully into any version of Israeliness. This doesn't mean Israel is going to fall apart, but what it does is highlight some of the resulting

dysfunctionality of the state that results in this stratified society. This is illustrated perfectly in the problems of government, and how good governance is often times held hostage to small interest groups who have the power to shut down the state with very few elected members. It also highlights the fact that much of the cohesion of the state is based on war and the preparation for war. The military is the largest melting pot in the country and it bases its continued existence on the threats from outside. These threats have artificially held this country together and kept it from confronting some very real internal problems. From the war in 48 to today Israel has had some deep internal problems that have been pushed into a corner to be dealt with at another time due to the siege mentality that has reigned, but what might happen if and when that siege is lifted is anybody's guess. He also discusses the problems Israel has as a society and a democratic state with a large portion of its population excluded from much of the state. Whether it be the fact they are excluded from the military or ministerial positions or the fact that they live in a state that says it is a Jewish state for the Jewish people, there are huge problems facing the Palestinians and the Israeli state as regards its minorities and its obligations to those people. In the end I give this book high rating because if you are interested in deeper sociological examination of Israeli society then this is the book you want. Some of the information is to be expected, but what the author does well is to go much deeper and explain why and how Israel has developed. Lastly the book deserves four stars, but I gave it five because at the time of my review there are only two reviews. One of which is a one star review that doesn't actually discuss this book at all but is a political hatchet job directed at the author. I don't want people skipping a valuable work just because it has a low rating due not to the content of the actual work, but the political views of the reviewer.

Kimmerling has produced a brilliant account of the waning of Israel's hegemonic secular Zionist meta-culture and his meticulous analysis of the emergence of Israel's vibrant subcultures and countercultures is not to be missed. This is a highly influential work that in the past several years has been cited by other scholars. Highly useful for general readers as well as university classrooms!

Kimmerling is a political science with an agenda. For many years he has been a firm supporter of Palestinian Arab nationalism, and his writings continually work to undermine the state of Israel, and especially its Jewish character. In this work he ignores those researches which point to the fact that the overwhelming majority of Israel's citizens share basic values, as to the Jewish and democratic character of the state and tries to argue that Israel is falling apart into seven different socio-ethnic tribal groups. The real point is that Kimmerling aims at helping produce the disintegration he is

claiming exists. My suspicion however is that the state of Israel will be thriving long after Mr. Kimmerling is no longer available to deliver us his awkwardly written distortions.

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