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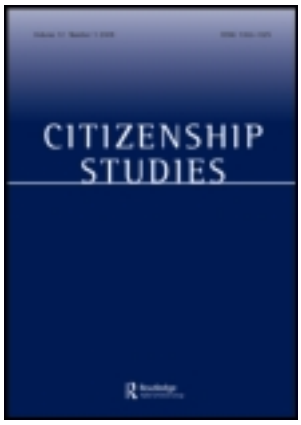

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Contemporary dilemmas of Israeli citizenship

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EDITORIAL
Contemporary dilemmas of Israeli citizenship

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Contemporary Israel is engaged in religious, national and ethnic struggles over the definition of citizenship, and this political struggle translates into a series of practical questions relating to identity, inclusion and rights. The dual commitment of the state of Israel as 'Jewish and democratic' presents a combined challenge to the balance between them (Jewishness and democracy) and a challenge to them separately. What is it that defines Jewish identity? What is it that defines the democratic character of modern Israel? Not only, therefore, does the presence of the Arab minority challenge the overall definition of the Jewish state and its ability to be democratic, but religious and secular Jews are also involved in a contest over the meaning of the Jewish state and the actual role of religion in the public sphere. To these relatively old debates there is now a number of new ingredients. First, there is a mass immigration from the former Soviet Union and, second, a rapid globalization of Israeli economy and society, which have been propelled into the liberal market of world capitalism. The presence of the Russian migrant complicates the debate about social groups struggling to define a place for themselves as citizens in Israeli society and the globalization of the Israeli economy transforms the essential meaning of citizenship and the rights it entails. Citizenship in Israel, the principal topic of this special issue of *Citizenship Studies*, is a site of contention that illuminates a variety of contemporary struggles between social groups and these struggles in turn raise problems about the legitimacy of the state and its institutions.

T.H. Marshall's classic theory of citizenship divided citizenship rights into three sets that evolved from the seventeenth century; these were a civil component for the achievement of individual freedoms, a political component of participation in the exercise of political power and a social component of welfare and security (Marshall 1950). However, the historical record shows that citizenship does not necessarily evolve in a uniform or gradual manner, because different groups can achieve different sets of rights, often unequally, with the result that citizenship becomes stratified (Shafir and Peled 2002). Consequently, cultural, ethnic and racial divisions can have an important affect on the construction of citizenship. Because citizenship is stratified and hierarchical in character, it is also a site of negotiation, contest and contention where, on the one hand, duties and obligations are made and, on the other hand, demands for rights and entitlements are presented.

Furthermore, citizenship is both an exclusionary process that involves some re-allocation of resources (and opportunities of political participation) and an exclusionary process of building identities on the basis of a common or imagined solidarity (Turner 2001). Citizenship, therefore, often delineates a hierarchy between and within social groups in the state and consequently it structures the opportunities afforded by the state to different people who are variously included, excluded and marginalized by the very definition of citizenship. It may also articulate ethnic identity and its political mobilization (Rothschild

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1981, p. 2, Brass 1985). The wider political manifestations of these effects are 'multiple traditions' of citizenship within a single polity producing a series of inclusions and exclusions. The overall result is social stratification (Shafir and Peled 2002, p. 7). Some selective inclusions can be achieved as the state develops new practices of inclusion and co-opts groups that had been previously left out. But exclusions can be re-inscribed when the state is challenged by internal conflicts or external pressures and chooses to forge social cohesion via the exclusion of some group not central to that particular conflict (Marx 2002).

Because citizenship is a set of processes for the allocation of entitlements, obligations and immunities, these rights and duties are typically acquired as a consequence of social and political struggles. These entitlements are in principle related to the contributions of the individual and the social group to society. Thus, demands for inclusion, or for the extension of entitlements, are often based on services to the state from which entitlements are expected. The relationship between the state and its citizens is characteristically defined by public service such as military service in which citizens are willing to sacrifice their lives (as soldiers) or by their financial contributions in which citizens are willing to sacrifice part of their income (as tax-payers). The defense of the territory on which the state exercises its sovereignty by bearing arms is perhaps the ultimate expression of citizenship. Thus, demands for inclusion, or for the extension of entitlements, are often based on services to the state, bearing the costs of war and the preparations for it in return for civil, social and political rights granted to them by the state (Levy, in this volume). Military service has been especially valued as a service to state and has been central to both state formation and the construction of the identity of the citizen (Burk 1995, Tilly 1997, pp. 193–215). This connection between the citizen-warrior and empowerment has often served to underscore the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of citizenship, there by marginalizing or wholly excluding women, ethnic minorities and the disabled, insofar as they are unable to or prevented from contributing to national defense. However, the simple fact of paying taxes without fraud or corruption is an equally important aspect of the exercise of citizenship in the everyday world. Serving in the military and paying taxes are the characteristic 'virtues' of the citizen (Turner 2008).

Citizenship has evolved as a set of rights around struggles for equality that have been waged by social groups who deem themselves to be excluded from such entitlements. While these inequalities of income and wealth have not disappeared in a capitalist society and while the political struggles for equality may have become no less relevant, the conditions that produce inequality have changed under the influence of multiculturalism and neo-liberalism. Contemporary states, contrary to their image of cultural homogeneity, must contend with a multicultural and, at times, multinational reality (Connor 1994, Tully 2001). Thus, cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities struggle, not only for equality but also for recognition and accommodation. This challenges not only 'ethnic states' that provide a national home for a dominant ethnic group 'trapped' between commitment to the dominant nation and to democracy (Rouhana 1998) but also liberal democracies where dominant majorities are confronted by the new demands of immigrant and indigenous groups to change the rules of the game. The question of citizenship is therefore not only one of inclusion that is a question of equal rights, but also one of recognition of special rights and needs.

Globalization and the associated rise of neo-liberal ideology have undermined the former consensus over the welfare state and how public utilities should be funded and delivered. Decisions among most advanced industrial societies to dis-embedded markets and to 'roll back' the state were influenced and supported by the dissemination of neo-liberal ideas that have made the market economy the optimal solution for social

problems and consequently legitimized policies of 'downsizing', 'outsourcing' and 'globalizing'. This roll-back of the state provided opportunities for marginalized groups to challenge the existing order, but also left significant decisions about social services to the unpredictable outcome of market forces. Thus, while more groups can demand equal social rights through the democratic process, much of the essence of citizenship, in both political participation and social claims against the state, has all but disappeared. The vacuum of governance is filled to some extent by voluntary associations that provide new opportunities for social participation and active citizenship over issues of human rights.

Long-standing inequalities, changing demographic characteristics and new political aspirations underscore the citizenship debate in contemporary Israel, which has been described as a society of enclaves that 'form around movements which act as secondary centers that mobilize and allocate resources and commitments, receiving continuity through socialization and indoctrination' (Horowitz and Lissak 1987, p. 28). This separation between the problem of resources and the question of identity has been the basis of some of the conflict resolution mechanisms of Israeli society, but it has also created a stratified citizenship which in turn is currently challenged by different groups demanding equality and recognition. Multicultural, settler and migrant societies such as Israel are inherently more difficult to govern than homogeneous societies, especially under the influence of global changes. If, in early years of establishing the state, governance was made effective by the combination of a dominant political party, a Jewish commitment to state and nation-building, political agreements and repression, then most of these factors no longer provide a buffer against the demands of marginalized and excluded groups. These groups, using different resources, tactics and strategies, aim to change the rules of the political game that has been embedded in Israel's citizenship regime.

The articles in this volume engage with different aspects of the changing field of Israeli citizenship. The opening article by S.N. Eisenstadt, Israel's leading sociologist, offers a wide-ranging perspective on the changes and transformations of public spheres, civil society and conceptions of citizenship in close connection with the crystallization of new processes of collective identity formation. These changes, he convincingly argues, entail far-reaching transformations of some aspects of what has been envisaged as the 'classical' nation-state or the decomposition of some of its components, and these have important consequences also for Israeli society. The continuous opening-up of political life in Israel, combined with a growing critical attitude to political institutions and their leaders, and growing demands for their accountability, have reinforced these democratic, potentially consensual, tendencies. But, these very processes gave rise to the development of strong conflictual tendencies – manifest in growing divisiveness between major sectors of Israeli society and an erosion or weakening of many of the political institutions and norms governing them. Ultimately, the scandals around many Israeli leaders, the erosion of trust in public institutions and the perception of significant political corruption have had a negative effect on public life in general.

Secular, Ashkenazi Jews were at the forefront of the Zionist enterprise and, as such, claimed social dominance in return for military sacrifice. This republican Equation (see Yagil Levy in this volume) has made the military a central institution through which the hierarchy of citizenship has been established. These social changes in Israeli society, which we have briefly described above, provided opportunities for social groups to re-negotiate their identities and status, often by circumventing the military. Stadler, Ben-Ari and Lomski-Feder demonstrate how *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox Jews) who reject military enlistment find different opportunities for participation, contribution and sacrifice for the state. *Haredi* fundamentalism in Israel challenges ideas of (secular) citizenship by using

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concepts from Jewish theology, relating, for example, to death and ideas about voluntarism and aid, to challenge accepted notions of the state and citizenship, and to develop new discourses and practices that are compatible with their beliefs and lifestyle.

Another challenge for the secular institutions of citizenship is presented by *Shas*, a religious party of predominantly Sephardic Jews formed in the early 1990s. Lehman and Ziebziner describe this strategy as one of self-exclusion which is paradoxically effective as a pathway ultimately to political recognition and inclusion. The strategy of self-exclusion implies the creation and intensification of social and symbolic barriers between the group and the rest of society, through a process of mobilization and effective leadership. *Shas* draws people into its orbit by self-exclusion, bringing them back to religion, and opting out of the secularized identity shared by most Israelis. They also distance themselves from the soft, undemanding, 'traditional' religiosity prevalent among Sephardim, thereby distinguishing themselves from the *Ashkenazi* sects and institutions which dominate ultra-Orthodoxy. This involves a complex strategy of overt self-exclusion together with a demand for recognition and inclusion. Their vote-gathering capacity is based on the pursuit of an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle and a demand for separate schooling of their followers' and sympathizers' children. *Shas* leaders enhance their claims and achieve social inclusion through a corporatist path that is tinged with ethnic particularism.

The military remains an important institution for the achievement of social status and citizenship rights. While some groups have opted out of the republican equation or have found alternative means of achieving status, other groups, as Yagil Levy demonstrates, grasped the opportunities that the military offered them in accordance with their capacity to utilize the resources that were at their disposal. The republican equation explains that, by differentially classifying social groups, military service not only determines uniform eligibility for citizenship, but also secures the social status that accompanies citizenship. The resources that groups can accumulate through their military service and the capacity to translate them into collective action, materially and culturally, determine the success of the collective actions of these groups. Secular Ashkenazim since the mid-1970s tried to exert pressure to reduce military sacrifice or increase the rewards from it by turning to more individual tactics. This development was manifest in the retreat from obligatory militarism, which saw compulsory military service as an unconditional contribution to the state, and the adoption of contractual militarism that is making service conditional on whether it satisfies individual ambitions and interests. However, other social groups, especially *Mizrachim* and national-religious groups, which had been asymmetrically rewarded for their military contribution, were also able to enter the political scene and increase their bargaining power, resulting in further changes in the republican equation.

The shadow of the occupation of the territories and the continuing armed conflict have trapped Israeli women in a set of discourses that are both national and gendered. Yet, as Herzog argues in this collection, the conflict is also a catalyst for the growth of alternative feminist knowledge and for the creation new alliances of women. The processes taking place in the feminist arena intersect with current social changes related to the consolidation of neo-liberal trends, privatization, the retreat from the welfare state and the expansion of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – occasionally referred to as the 'NGOization' of civil society. In Israel, as in the rest of the world, the neo-liberal structuring of civil society has been perceived in public and academic debate as a process of social rupture involving, among other changes, the depoliticization of social movements, including feminism. As a result, it has been claimed that the women's movement is being weakened as a socio-political force. Based on the history of the women's movement in Israel, the article demonstrates that the women's movement

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in Israel has not disappeared but rather has been restructured as a result of its 'NGOization' and that the movement's political message has remained intact. Others suggest that it has even been expanded to embrace questions of social justice, including novel thinking on matters of peace and security. Thus, various new ideas and practices have engaged women from new publics and expanded the boundaries of political discourse, infusing citizenship with new meanings and a revitalized significance.

The Arab citizens of Israel, who have been largely excluded from the republican equation described above, remain the most marginalized social group in Israeli society. The expansion of the Arab NGO sector, which is examined in Amal Jamal's article, can be described as an attempt to access the Israeli public sphere and influence its agenda, thereby compensating for their under-representation elsewhere. Arab activists and intellectuals, disillusioned by the prospects of Israeli democracy, have called upon the population to act outside the parliamentary framework through participation in social movements and NGOs, which facilitate their ability to engage in international lobbying. Arab NGOs provide services in different fields, such as education, health and planning. They also advocate and lobby for the rights of the Arab citizens inside Israel and internationally, and they provide information necessary for political mobilization, identity formation and cultural preservation. The Arab struggle for equality in Israel led by these NGOs has been reframed by an emphasis on the obligation of the state to recognize the Arabs as an indigenous national minority entitled to collective rights and to full citizenship equality. However, the Arab NGO sector has not managed significantly to democratize the orientation of the Israeli state towards Arab society. It is clear that the state has been reluctant to respect any efforts made to change its policies towards Arab society and the more the Arab NGO sector is active, the more the state is becoming more ethnically oriented.

Peace with the Palestinians and the end of occupation, it was often assumed, would also have positive effects on the Arab citizens of Israel. If the Jewish majority feels more secure and less threatened, then they would supposedly be more accommodating towards Arabs. At the same time, the Arabs would feel more comfortable about integration into Israeli society once occupation no longer represented such a stark moral dilemma. The trajectory of the peace process, however, as Ben-Porat's paper argues, raises serious doubts about the possibility of successful political and social integration. These doubts arise not only as the result of the collapse of the peace process, but also as a consequence of its dynamics and the 'demographic trade-off' between territorial compromise and a 'Jewish state'. The emphasis placed on partition as the peace process encountered difficulties, the discourse of demography, the commitment to a Jewish state and the attempts to foster Jewish unity combined to preclude any serious discussion of the status of Palestinian citizens. This 'inward turn' of the Jewish majority, which the article explores, was manifested not only in the political realm but also in civil society itself.

The immigrants from the former Soviet Union are the latest contributors to the citizenship debate and they have already had a large influence upon it. Demographically, Israel has been transformed since the 1990s by the mass immigration of Russian Jews resulting in the addition of more than a million people to Israeli society. This influx was one of the factors behind economic growth during this period. While this immigration has changed the demographic balance between Jew and Arab, and has supposedly strengthened the Jewish character of the state, it also had a significant secularizing influence. Their secular tradition and the fact that many of the immigrants were not in fact Jewish contributed to the ongoing debate about the Jewish character of the state and this Russian presence further challenged existing norms and institutions. The ability of these

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immigrants to organize themselves politically and to create their own services – in media, entertainment and education – ruled out the possibility of any rapid assimilation or the emergence of a 'melting pot'.

Yoav Peled's paper provides an overarching framework and a summary of the citizenship structure and the struggles that are involved. The differential allocation of entitlements, obligations and domination in Israel is embedded in three models of citizenship. First, a liberal idea of citizenship separates the Jewish and Palestinian citizens from the non-citizen Palestinians in the occupied territories. Second, an ethno-nationalist discourse separates the Jewish and Palestinian citizens within the state. And, third, a republican discourse is used to legitimate the different positions occupied by the major Jewish social groups: *Ashkenazim* vs. *Mizrachim*, males vs. females, and secular vs. religiously orthodox. The differentiated citizenship structure described so far resulted from, facilitated, and depended upon a highly intrusive but formally democratic state, engaged in intensive mobilization and control of societal resources. But, interrelated economic, social and political reforms in the 1990s – economic liberalization, global integration and the peace process – rooted in the liberal discourse of citizenship, undermined the ethno-republican discourse of pioneering civic virtue. But, both liberalization in general and the peace process in particular generated powerful opposing forces in Israeli society and consequently the two other discourses of citizenship have each become prominent in one area of social life – the liberal discourse in the economy and the ethno-nationalist discourse in politics. This duality has resulted in declining political stability and an intensified, and so far unresolved, debate over the actual meaning of citizenship.

In concluding our introduction, we can attempt to summarize the main features of Israeli society that emerge from these diverse articles. There is firstly a difficult tension between an essentially secular state that had originally a socialist justification and a multi-ethnic society in which the political aspirations of marginalized social groups appear to be connected to religion, especially the ultra-orthodox branches of contemporary Judaism. Second, there is a problem reconciling the commitment to equal citizenship in a democratic state with the exclusionary and hierarchical citizenship of a Jewish state. And, third, there is a question about what citizenship entails in terms of rights and duties. Thus, citizenship is both the solution (equal status for all and an equal share of collective resources) and the problem in that it creates exclusionary notions of membership and produces social tensions. In the past quarter century, social changes, often associated with new patterns of migration, have transformed Israel demographically, spatially, economically and politically. To a large extent Israel since the 1980s evolved into a different state and society riddled with existential questions: 'what is Israel?', 'who is an Israeli?' and 'what does it mean to be an Israeli?' These questions, which receive different answers reflecting the changing nature of Israeli society and its fragmentation into different social groups, are explored in this volume as a contribution to understanding the complexity of citizenship rights and duties in a society divided along religious and ethnic lines.

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