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Just Like Democracy: Ethnography of Realpolitik in a City of Immigrants

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Citizenship after Orientalism: The Case of Israeli Citizenship

Engin Isin, in his work "Citizenship after Orientalism: Ottoman Citizenship," offers a new paradigm for citizenship studies. Understanding citizenship after Orientalism begins with an inquiry into the kind of political culture that has emerged at the meeting point between immigrants and "imperial elites," and how this political culture reshaped both groups.[1] Following Isin's paradigm, the goal of this paper is to open a new space for understanding political culture in polycultural, liberal societies. This new space lies at the intersection of the official perception of democracy and citizenship with the mixture of political languages used by the common people (as opposed to that used by the elites). The main challenge in this paper is to offer an ethnography of realsociology: an ethnography that liberates itself from the Occidental interpretation of citizenship, on the one hand, and from the fundamental interpretations of religion and ethnicity on the other. The ethnography of realsociology can shed a new light on the notion of citizenship: citizenship *not* as it is envisaged in the political philosophy of a normative future, but citizenship in the concrete politics of everyday life.[2]

This article explores Israeli citizenship, neither as an Oriental nor an Occidental institution, via an analysis of the political culture of the Likud Party. Since the 1970s the Likud has enjoyed the support of Jews who immigrated to Israel from Arab countries during the 1950s and 1960s (henceforth, Mizrahi Jews). The unique political culture that was created in the Likud during the 1970s was widely presented in the Israeli media as irrational, corrupt, and vulgar. Through the 1980s,

political anthropologists offered an understanding of non-Occidental political cultures by attributing to them the emotional values of honor and shame.[3] During the 1990s researchers tried to shed light on the Likud political culture using the logic of Orientalism. They argued that immigrants from developing[4] countries had been subjected to years of oppression that had brought them to be what the imperial groups saw and expressed in a mixture of contempt and passion as: savage, emotional, warm, authentic, and irrational.[5]

The definition of the ideal type of citizenship, as it has been shaped by Occidental political philosophy, is of a "sovereign man (and much later woman) who is capable of judgment and being judged, transcending his (and much later her) tribal, kinship, and other primordial loyalties and belongingness."[6] The modernist project of citizenship invites its own tradition by arguing that the origin of the terms "citizenship," "city," and "democracy" can be traced to the Greek, Roman, and medieval cities.[7] The Orient, Isin argues, has never invented a similar concept of citizenship; rather, it has mimetically reproduced it with only limited success. In their work, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff offer an understanding of political philosophy that is encapsulated in the notion of citizenship as ideology: a structuring of a coherent story, molded through creative links between the past and present, in a manner that addresses the world's contradictions and existential issues.[8] Isin challenges the ongoing discourse of citizenship and asks "how one might approach citizenship without Orientalism."[9] He argues that postcolonial and citizenship studies have failed to explore the relationship between Orientalism and citizenship.[10] I find this statement too encompassing. Expanding on Isin, I will examine citizenship without Orientalism in cities of diversity—i.e., polycultural cities. My analysis follows three years of ethnographic research conducted between 2001 and 2004 at the Likud chapter in Ashdod. As immigrants from developing countries engage with citizenship as an ideal type, people mimic and utilize citizenship as a way to support their social mobility. During this process ideology becomes ID-ology[11] and stands at the center of a new political culture that is neither Occidental nor Oriental. This discussion has been conducted by leading political anthropologists in the field of postcolonial thought who have used the ideas of social standing and mobility to challenge the notion of citizenship.[12] My main contribution to this discussion concerns the manner in which new definitions of citizenship are created.

This article is an attempt to portray the character of a new type of citizenship by examining acts of citizenship in a local political chapter in the polycultural city of Ashdod.[13] Ashdod is a modern city inhabited primarily by immigrants—most of

them from developing countries.[14] As such, it offers a vibrant urban arena in which people struggle to gain recognition and social mobility. Ashdod is one of Israel's planned towns. It was founded in 1956 as part of a national plan, known as "the Sharon Plan," to disperse population to the periphery.[15] Intended to be a garden city with a population of 50,000 people, it is situated on over one hundred and seventy hectares just north of the Palestinian village of Isdud. The village was destroyed during the 1948 war, and its inhabitants fled to the Gaza Strip.

As of 2008 the town had 230,000 residents—an indication of how meticulously the urban plan has been implemented on a large scale. The urban plan was unique in that it allowed large groups of immigrants to congregate together in one neighborhood of the city and to carry their original social structures into their new environment. In contrast, development towns—where most of the immigrant Jews from Muslim countries settled—did not allow for this social structure. From a political culture perspective, this meant that the immigrants' power in Ashdod as an electorate was clear. While the first-generation immigrants from Arab countries did not become a part of the city leadership, internalizing their inferiority in education and experience, their descendants did. Another unique aspect of Ashdod was the fact that the small group of European Jews who had settled in the city did not continue to influence politics because most of their children left the city.

Ashdod's residents come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and the city continues to absorb new immigrants. Three active absorption centers for immigrants have welcomed waves of immigrants from North Africa (in the early 1960s), Iran, Romania, Soviet Georgia (in the mid-1970s), and more recently, from the former Soviet Union (in the 1990s; these immigrants now comprise 38 percent of the town's population). The town's demography continues to change: for example, during the years in which this research was conducted, numerous immigrants from Argentina and France arrived. Aside from Hebrew, a variety of languages can be heard in the streets: Russian, French, Moroccan, and increasingly, Spanish.

In the following I will describe the three stages in which a new culture of citizenship is being formed in Ashdod. In the first stage, immigrants from developing countries adopt and approve the Occidental perception of citizenship. In the second stage, the Likud party members distinguish between form and content: the "appropriate" definition of citizenship becomes loaded with new content and new ways of interpretation. This new way of giving meaning to things promotes the party members' goal of social mobilization for themselves and their taking over positions of power. In the third stage, new political cultures of citizenship occupy the city hall. The new notion of citizenship resembles Occidental citizenship but

uses a different toolbox for power accumulation in addition to the new methods of interpretation. While this new Israeli citizenship suffers from delegitimization by public opinion, its existence cannot be refuted: Likud members consume citizenship in accordance with the legal norms and standards of the Occidental definition of citizenship. Viewing the above-mentioned stages with the theory of citizenship used in this paper in mind, it can be seen that people guaranteed their social standing by gaining social mobility.

Citizenship as a Tool for Social Mobility in a Reality of Expanding Social Gaps

In the early years of the Israeli political system, municipal governments became a mobilization pathway[16]—a gateway through which immigrants found "their way in," in the words of an activist.[17] Thus, local governments turned into arenas for the public activity of new powers. Since 1965, and especially after 1969, the local governments have become one of the most welcoming places for new activists attempting to become involved in politics. The local government, although still dependent on the central government, controls many resources and therefore attracts immigrant groups.

In the case of Ashdod, the Likud has become the only political party that allows immigrant groups to participate in the political process. As one activist pointed out, "They do not understand that the Likud is the only place where you stand a chance. What chance do you have in Meretz or Shinui?[18] How can you get in? In the Likud you can see how you can become part of it, how you can get in."

In the context of the expanding social gaps in Israel, the political arena forms a facilitating framework for immigrants. The words of the activists testify to the existence of barricades and glass ceilings (whether one knows the party hymn or not), as well as the unique opportunity that the Likud offers for breaking through these barriers and paving the way to "get in."

Thus, local government turned into one of the pathways to mobility in Israeli society that, along with promotion in the army, sports, and private enterprise, became a pathway through which one could move up the social ladder and accumulate power instead of living at the margins, as mechanics and technicians did, with conditions that were just "good enough."[19] "Instead of being one of those that read the newspapers," as one of the activists told me, "to be the one that is mentioned in the newspapers; to be part of it." As Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled point out, there are only two social areas in which Mizrahi Jewish immigrants have arguably improved their status relative to immigrants of European origin: small business ownership and politics.[20]

As articulated by Alexis de Tocqueville, the association between democratic cultures and the opportunities available for individuals in society lies at the foundation of democratic philosophy.[21] Judith N. Shklar argues that the value of American citizenship has been defined in reference to those to whom full membership in society has been denied, as well as to those who were perceived as its "natural agents."[22] Citizenship in America, as she puts it, is a question of social standing, or sustainable social existence.

This connection between democratic values and the opportunities available for individuals is not uncommon in the political sociology of Israel. Many studies show that social gaps between the children of Mizrahi Jewish immigrants and other Israelis have not been diminished and, in some areas, have even increased.[23] Although Israeli sociologists have brought up the issue of the increasing gaps, there has been no academic discussion that asks what practices of citizenship emerge in a society where these gaps are increasing. In this paper the reader will find an attempt to address the question of what kind of political culture is being formed by the second and third generation descendants of the 1950s immigrants—those who could not escape the cycle of social inequality in terms of both class and status.

In Ashdod, second-generation residents of Mizrahi origin who have attained higher education or have specialized in public management tend to leave the city, both because of its poor image and in order to seek employment. This has led to a situation in which the political arena is left open to uneducated agents, the vast majority of whom are men who moved up via positions in labor unions and neighborhood councils. In this manner, the political arena has turned into an alternative pathway to mobility that allows access to public resources and spares the need to pass through the blocked hegemonic mobility channels.

Viewing citizenship as social standing, I found that ethnicity is the main building block of exclusion. This is the main reason why immigrants embody the facade of the Occidental understanding of citizenship but distinguish between tools and content; by doing so, they create a new culture of citizenship. Ethnicity became the building block of this new culture and the material with which social boundaries are built. Gaining social mobility thus became intertwined with ethnicity. That is why this discussion of realsociology of citizenship must take this theory of ethnicity into account.

In his paper "Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice and the Signs of Inequality," John L. Comaroff presents ethnicity as embedded in historical contexts and forces that are both structural and cultural.[24] This is in contrast to the Weberian tradition, which sees primordial links in ethnicity. Comaroff's ethnicity

results from the asymmetrical interactions between social groups that belong to a single political-economic system.[25] Although ethnicity is an inherently cultural category, embedded in the concrete context of time and space, it tends to present itself as a "natural," social law. As an ostensibly objective category, it has the power to influence the social context in which it has been established.

Ethnicity, Comaroff argues, arises everywhere, but an ethnic group consolidates when it feels threatened or is interested in accumulating power. The implications of this process for society lie mainly in generating social stratification and excluding certain groups from political and cultural resources. While the Weberian approach to ethnicity emphasizes the tendency of the subject toward social isolation, the Marxist approach focuses on the regulation of different groups to niches within the social division of labor. Comaroff argues that the ethnic definition results from the intersection of these two processes.

The essence of the explanation can be found in the hierarchical power of the ethnic category. The asymmetry inherent in the hierarchical structure yields inequalities in the interactions between the dominant and the subordinate classes—inequalities that are structured and represented in cultural terms. This approach renders the ethnic category devoid of its essentialist power and directs our attention to the mechanisms that generate the ethnic category. The party, the synagogue, the neighborhood, the union—all these are mechanisms that increase the importance of ethnicity in the urban arena of Ashdod.

A leading figure in Ashdod's Likud chapter supports the centrality of ethnicity and acknowledges its hidden mechanisms of power:

> The party provides the rules. What are the rules? The recruiting. When you recruit people it has roots in our social structure. It's the least of a bad lot. It's the best way to neutralize undemocratic influences. There is no alternative—it seems like the most democratic method in the country. We have to start somewhere. If we do primaries we'd lose the uniqueness of this movement. We must have a recruitment-based system; it's familial, sectorial, and cultural. Here begins the process that leads to selecting candidates on an ethnic basis. The main result is that it is never boring, always difficult, complicated, and intricate, and the decision is always made at the last minute.

It is impossible to understand, on theoretical grounds, the structure of opportunities available to immigrant groups—the social structuring of ethnicity—without understanding the urban space within which the individuals function. Ashdod as a case study provides the urban context for understanding the new culture of citizenship that emerges in a city of immigrants.

The fact that many people are active in both the local political arena and the public discourse that revolves around it is visible to visitors wandering Ashdod's neighborhoods. I focused my attention on the local leading party—the Likud—because unlike the local ethnic parties (for example, Ashdod Beiteinu that appeals to immigrants from the former Soviet Union), the Likud offers different groups an opportunity to influence, and move up to, the national arena.

In the mid-1960s, Jewish immigrants from Arab countries began supporting the Likud as an act of rebellion against the ruling Labor party that had discriminated against them and marginalized them politically, culturally, and socially. Since 1969 Ashdod has been one of the main strongholds of the Likud Party. Between 70 and 80 percent of voters in Ashdod voted for the Likud in national elections.[26]

In Ashdod in 2002, I expected to find a big building housing the activities of the local Likud chapter. However, the local chapter was shut down, deserted, and accumulating dust. Nothing was happening in this building. I held many conversations with local activists, but no party organization, building, or formal institutions could be found anywhere. Soon I realized that this was my first and most meaningful finding: the Likud was everywhere in the city and required no offices because it was in the coffee shops, the bowling alley on Friday afternoons, the marina hangouts, shoe stores, insurance agencies, and function halls. The Likud and the city were one.

My way into the Likud chapter as a field researcher was complicated—the level of suspicion among the chapter activists was very high. With great effort I managed to gain their trust, receive information about events, and sit with the right people at the right time in the right coffee shops. The political culture in the chapter, on which I elaborate below, created a particularly suspicious crowd of activists who were always convinced that someone was about to "stab them in the back." In this atmosphere, an anthropologist is not a welcome guest. In spite of such difficulties, this article, which is based on event analyses, formal and informal interviews, and press reports, illuminates the nature of the political system in Israel in the first years of the 2000s.

Ethnography of Realpolitik: Primaries at the Likud Chapter

In August 2003 the Likud candidates built makeshift canopies of green burlap on top of the sandstone ground. The area was crowded and saturated with candidates' posters, and the music was loud. On their posters, the candidates wore suits and formal expressions—the atmosphere resembled a national election. In reality, this was simply the primary election—the internal election of the Likud chapter members in which the party representative for mayor was selected. Under the

canopies, leading activists and their relatives (mostly relatives and employees of the candidates) were seated on plastic chairs, staring at endless lists, and holding cellular phones. The candidates' assistants, mostly women who also work at city hall, sat in the heat of the day with misty eyes. "That's how the system works . . . can't change it . . . must go with the flow," one said to me apologetically.

An elderly man told me: "Gabai[27] takes it big time. Didn't you see how many people he brought? Today there's a meeting of the city planning council, but who can think about that now?"

One of the candidates turned the place into a quasi-communication center, where his son monitored the flux of newcomers and constantly updated the reports that were streaming in from the ballot boxes.

In the early hours of the evening the place was already filled with life. It seemed as if the entire city was present, including those who did not have the right to vote in the primaries. It was the place for the political wheeler-dealers to see and be seen. As the sun went down, the leading activists gathered people for a *minyan* and said the evening prayers, in which more and more men joined, covering their heads with handkerchiefs.

When I asked the participants for their purpose in coming to the elections, one answered: "Me? To me this is of no interest. I know nothing about politics anyway. I'm doing a favor to a friend. I know that nothing good will come out of it for me. But if it helps him—that's good enough."

When I heard my name being called from a parked car, I looked and was glad to see M., an activist I had interviewed previously. I asked him why he was sitting there. His answer was: "I came to show myself. I'm in touch with a friend. He's a member of the Likud council. At 4:00 p.m. I will go back to the office. What else can I do until then?"

Another answer was: "[We come] happily to push forward someone we know. And not just anybody. I'm all set with a job, but when I turn for help for a family member, then we help wholeheartedly, happily, and that's important, we belong to someone, we know who to vote for."

Many noted to me that all the voters, especially the ones who came in the morning, were city hall employees—mostly preschool assistants and gardeners who are at the bottom of the pyramid and whose jobs depend on the personal connections they create at the municipality.

The candidates' headquarters worked according to the military system of divisions and division heads. A contact person was assigned to be the head of each division of fifty people, and it was this person's job to bring those people in to vote.

They were "his people." It was a test day for the middlemen, and they showed up with their crowd. They were expected to "deliver the goods," and indeed they were driving around in their cars bringing people in and aiding elderly women. "Write it down, write it down," they called out toward the makeshift tents, "here is Mrs. Aflallo with her son."

This report contains several crucial ingredients for analyzing the local political culture and practices of citizenship. The primaries are a central apparatus in the making of representative democracy. Yet the characteristics of the reported event indicate that new content had been embedded in the "proper model" of democracy and citizenship.

First, the city hall union was subjected to the power relations between the various candidates. The city hall employees felt obliged to come and support their superiors in order to ensure their own employment and promotion, and in order to have the option of asking for favors from that candidate in the future. The employees at the bottom of the pyramid are expected to work for their bosses. Second, there is no agenda at the macro level that distinguishes between the various candidates. The candidates do not represent this or that standpoint, and many maintain that it is not their place to create one. The constituents do not expect to see an agenda. Instead, they seek only to ensure themselves the support of a powerful ally in their day of need. Last, the constituents are considered "delivered goods." They do not have any bearing as individuals. They are part of someone else's "list." Their name is mentioned only for the purpose of putting a check mark next to their name on such a list.

Politics and the Tearing Eye

While sitting in the office of the deputy mayor—also a Likud member—waiting for an interview, I was exposed to the manner in which the public perceives its elected officials.

The deputy mayor's assistant was answering phone calls. Many people called to request a private meeting. The only available time was in August, three months later, they were told. "Everything is full," she apologized. When she hung up, she turned to me with frustration:

"He has an assistant whose only job is to deal with the public requests for him—but no, they want to see him and only him."

"With what sort of issues do they come to him?" I asked.

"Oh, anything. Lots of construction permits, business permits, lots of sick people who need help with the health care system.[28] What really annoys me is

that she [the other assistant] is just as capable of helping them—what might he do that she couldn't do?—but they want to come and spill their heart. They want this meeting as if it was their personal war. And they leave it triumphant—it doesn't even matter if they got what they wanted."

In Ashdod's political system, a public official is perceived as a de facto public servant. There is an expectation of personal attention and assistance—an opportunity to be heard—whatever the results of such a meeting may be.

During a formal interview I had with the mayor, two men in their thirties burst into the office and demanded his immediate attention. The mayor rose from his seat and informed them that he would not stay in the same room with them—either they had to leave or he would. Thus, their attempt to create an atmosphere of "overturning tables" failed—the mayor simply left through a side door. "I will help you," he said, "but at least make an appointment." The two men changed their strategy. They started begging for his cooperation and went outside to make an appointment with the secretary. It may be that episodes such as this one are the reason a guard had been stationed at the entrance to the offices of both the mayor and his deputy.

Helping individuals is a central apparatus in the political system in an immigrant city. Neither in conversations with leading activists, nor in observations I made of various interactions, was any political, social, or economic issue raised by any of the chapter activists. When I asked them why they turned to politics, the most common answer was, "I like helping people." Many even gave elaborate descriptions of the satisfaction that comes with seeing tears of joy and gratitude in the eyes of the needy. "A moment such as this," they repeatedly said, "is worth all the dirty politics." The public, as well, has internalized the notion that individual-based aid is the main contribution a public figure can offer them. In this context, a member of the Likud chapter and the city council for ten years told me that, "Eighty percent of the public appeals to you as an elected official are personal requests. Mostly 'transfer my child from this preschool to that preschool.'"

Another activist testifies to that: "Nobody here cares for ideology. Naturally, the influence of a Likud member on the character of the municipal education system is close to nil. He understands it and does not presume to make an impact. There's a higher clerical level. The chapter chairman understands that his influence on the city development plan, for example, is marginal. From what, then, does the power stem? From one thing: once every five years the chapter can determine who will be our representatives."

According to the chapter activists, their power lies in their ability to affect the composition of the representative list through their internal elections. The close-to-

nil impact that a Likud member has on the local education system, for example, is perceived as natural. The chapter members are not in conflict with the higher clerical sector, because they do not "presume to make an impact."

Many have told me that elected officials who give aid to the public keep a meticulous list of the people they help so that on the day of elections they can ask these people for their support at the ballot box. This is the most cynical manifestation of the relations between the public and its officials that I came across during my years of field research.

That the chapter was composed of a large group of children of immigrants from North Africa, as well as immigrants who came during the 1990s from the former Soviet Union, did not guarantee the formation of ethnic or class awareness among the chapter activists.[29] This phenomenon was manifested most tenaciously in a particular situation that required the chapter activists to have a clear ideological standpoint: voting in favor of the Gaza Unilateral Disengagement Plan in 2005. The referendum regarding this plan provided a rare opportunity to examine what happens when a political system founded on an agenda of individual-based aid for the needy is compelled to take an ideological stand with far-reaching consequences for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Likud members' referendum regarding the Gaza Disengagement Plan was the only episode defined by the chapter members as ideological to occur during this research period. The practice of member-recruitment is taken from the toolbox of citizenship. However, new content has been embedded in this tool by the manner in which the Likud members utilize it.

The End of Ideology? The Referendum for the Gaza Disengagement Plan

The referendum on the Gaza Disengagement Plan took place in a building in the industrial zone on May 2, 2004. The preparations by the parties involved resembled those for an election day. From the outset it was clear who was running the show: the event was organized entirely by the Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip. Informational material in the form of posters warned from afar: "Synagogues will be burned, settlements will be uprooted, the land of our fathers, never withdraw under fire." The on-site work was performed by children—dozens of teenage girls were running around with their long skirts rustling around them; families with babies in their carriages were sitting at the entrances; little children stood around handing out tomatoes grown by the Gaza settlers. The older girls wanted to speak and explain the reasons for their objections to the disengagement plan. They dragged journalists from one side of the venue to the other.

"Tell me the truth," the girls said to me, "You're from the opposite side, aren't you. You're not with us. At least let us present our side? Listen to us?" Before they presented their position they were already somewhere else, singing and creating a human chain leading to the ballot box. Suddenly they returned, holding empty card boxes, and started to collect the garbage that had been accumulating in the area. Likud activists lowered their eyes. They were ashamed.

"Compared to my daughters," one of the leading activists in the chapter told me, "they [he nodded toward the girls collecting garbage] really have an ideology. It's great to see them like that. The best thing that happened here for me so far was talking to two of these girls. Their understanding, their analytical ability, and faith. My girls? What have they got inside their heads other than cell phones and shopping malls?"

Another activist said: "Within this context [of the local power relations within the chapter] I had to put myself on the 'in favor' side, so I put on the 'in favor' shirt, and I even sat there [in the 'in favor' camp] for a few minutes. In the ballot box I put 'against' though. This is a conscience vote."

A longtime activist told me: "I came to vote 'in favor', but my hand was trembling and I couldn't. I voted 'against.'"

This episode reveals a situation in which there is a distinction between form and content. The chapter members did not relinquish their standpoint and voted according to their conscience. But, contrary to what might be expected from recruitment-system members, this standpoint was not perceived as relevant. The referendum regarding the Disengagement Plan was a yet another tool for accumulating power; it was another arena in which the party members could position themselves.

At some point in the afternoon, the news about a terror attack in Gush Katif was spread around. A pregnant woman and her four daughters, the Hatuel family, had been killed. The younger generation of the Ashdod activists was having difficulty processing the bitter news, and some of them stepped aside to cry. The father of the Hatuel family had been active in Ashdod all week and they knew him.

I found the chapter chairman sitting with other activists; he was subdued, exhausted, and wearing a shirt that said "in favor." "I'm in favor of the plan," he said, "but they [meaning the party leaders] made the same mistake again, asking L. to be the chief of staff. And where is he? Brought no one and nothing. He didn't even come here himself." The chairman made a few phone calls and explained with annoyance to someone on the other end of the line: "You let L. organize—but there's nothing here."

As soon as someone was appointed to preside over the referendum, the action shifted to the local power relations and broader socio-economic issues. It seemed that interest in who was appointed to be the chief of staff was greater than interest in advancing any standpoint regarding the Disengagement Plan.

Another leading activist testified to that effect:

> In order to understand what is happening here you need to see it through two processes: the "big picture" and the local conflicts. Where do they meet? We decided to use the issue for our own internal conflicts. Because B. announced that he is "in favor," we were also "in favor." But we are not with him. B. has been appointed by the central headquarters to coordinate the issue. We had put together independent headquarters. The Prime Minister [Ariel Sharon, head of the Likud Party at that time] will lose because of his way of doing things. He took political wheeler-dealers and appointed them in spite of people's sentiments and received a lot of opposition. Some of our people vote "against." Look at the guys of the Ashdod port, they vote "against" because they're hoping that if the Prime Minister fails he would get rid of Bibi[30] and go for national unity—this way they'd be able to stop Bibi and his privatizations.

This episode revealed the contradictions in the chapter members' actions. The chapter members made the distinction between their vote at the ballot box and their activity elsewhere—between the original meaning of the tool (the referendum regarding the Disengagement Plan) and the new content that they had embedded in it (social networks, privatizations, maintaining the status of governmental workers). Moreover, facing the demand to take an ideological stand, it became evident that the activists were lacking a language of presentation.[31] In conversations with leading activists from the "in favor camp" (here, too, there was no specific standpoint—in favor or against—but there was a "camp"), a strong sense of perplexity came across—a sense of a lack of words. The intense activity of the settlers put the chapter members in the midst of public turmoil that required their participation and response. "But he [the chairman of the branch] has nothing to say," they told me. It was evident from this situation that each of the Likud members of the Ashdod chapter had a clear standpoint regarding the Disengagement Plan, but that expressing it outside the ballot box was irrelevant to their political activity and, moreover, it would have compromised their strategic conduct.

At 4:00 p.m. the shirts of the "in favor camp" arrived. A group of men—city hall employees—gathered around the chief of staff and, with apparent embarrassment, put on the shirts and continued to stand idly by.

The next day, I called the chapter chairman and received the referendum results: 1,200 voted in favor and 2,013 voted against.

On the surface it looked as if this episode exposed the lack of ideology among the chapter members, a deficiency that was made especially conspicuous in contrast to the settlers' activity. Yet it turned out that the chapter members each had a clear standpoint regarding the withdrawal from Jewish settlements in Gaza. The chapter members made the distinction between their vote at the ballot box and their conduct away from the ballot box, making a separation between ideology and politics. Those chapter members who attempted to create a link between the two were lacking a "language of representation," an ability to create a coherent story. The rhetorical and organizational skills of the settlers further exacerbated the Likud activists' muteness. The only option left for the chapter members was to use the referendum activity as leverage for the sake of their local power relations, which they did.

Consistent Conflicts and the Loss of Trust

> The story of the Moroccans in Ashdod is that everything has been happening over their heads. The political meddling of "camp" and "deal"—this is what they do, this is what they feel is the purpose. (A social activist in Ashdod)

When attempting to be part of the political system, a subject experiences alienation and isolation. The camps, deals, and short-term alliances have created a lack of trust. The party, which once served as a source of community and safety, has turned into something to which, in the words of many of the activists with whom I have spoken, "you cannot turn your back."

The chapter chairman explained the concept of a "deal" as "the dirtiest thing—the same man who was against you yesterday is your friend today. The unbelievable is believable. A deal is when they form a coalition for the sake of mutual interests, not for the sake of the success of the chapter. Nobody tries to fight it. Everybody's happy this way."

When the constituents are the delivered goods and political support becomes an act of signing a private contract between individuals and a certain candidate, voting according to agreements made through a deal becomes "treachery," a breach of trust, and a violation of the give-and-take relationship. But it seems as if the nature of the interaction and its intensity—frequent betrayals and loss of trust among the members—has surprised even the chapter members themselves. This phenomenon has had severe consequences with regard to the sentiments and conduct of the chapter members.

One of the activists said: "A camp is created during the primaries. People bring in voters—every such group is a "camp." I live in a certain neighborhood, I know people there, and I sign them up. Then they expect me to serve them. Otherwise, why would they sign? They sign in order to be represented on the city council, to receive assistance, to have their problems solved, like taxes, etc. I signed up 350 people."

Another activist, of intermediate rank, said:

> Activists are a group of self-serving people who have an interest in promoting personal issues, promote their friends; people who want to run the show. I asked Yitzhak Deri, 'How did we lose two mandates?' He told me a story: 'When I was deputy mayor many people came to me—I'm unemployed, my daughter is sick—no problem, I got his wife a job as a preschool assistant.' Then the same man came to him, 'and what about my son?' So Deri told him: 'Maybe we'll give some to other activists, there are other people,' so that man told him, 'You're a son-of-a-bitch, I'll never vote for you again.' I'm saying there's nothing wrong with giving away jobs—it's our mission, to benefit the country and to benefit the activists. But on one condition—that the skills match the job.

The "camp" style, as befits the social structure and urban culture of Ashdod, has turned into an effective political configuration and thus also a dominant one. The physical and social structure of the city is pivotal in generating this formation.

"If all the dead had risen, they'd all vote for the mayor, because he has been to all of their funerals. There's no 'distance' here," Deri, the chapter chairman, told me, "and there is no recognition of the other's ability."

It is evident that most candidates are perceived, by themselves as well as by others, as being undeserving of and unsuited for leadership; this is also one of the central and most tragic characteristics of the political system in Ashdod. In the words of one activist, "The other one is me, he's like me, and anything he can do I can do, too. If he is a deserving man, then I am, too. But he is not a deserving man . . . and neither am I."

"We Need Someone Appropriate, and That Is Not Me"

Yonatan Shapiro explains how education and experience in public service serve as delineators—obstructions that exclude certain groups from holding the reins of government.[32] The first generation of Mizrahi Jewish immigrants did not have the opportunity to acquire either an education or social status. They stepped aside, leaving the senior positions to more "deserving" candidates. In the following

generation there has been a change. While this next generation did not have the privilege of acquiring an education and serving as CEOs and board members of governmental corporations, unlike their parents they were not willing to step aside. Nevertheless, they still carried feelings of inferiority. As a result of this ambivalent position, they continue to believe that they are not the "appropriate" leadership, all the while presenting their candidates as leading figures in the city's political arena.

I had a chance to witness the manner in which lists of candidates were put together—the process in which central issues were dissected and discussed. "Who is an appropriate man?" was the main question on the table. The frequent use of the word "appropriate" in the public arena caught my attention. I asked a chapter activist for his definition of "appropriate." The reply was: "Public activists who represent the community, lawyers, factory managers, it doesn't have to be professional politicians." Many others had this view as well: first of all, it is important to have managerial experience; education comes second.

The lack of education, otherwise an obstacle to a political career, was translated into a political advantage because education connoted an elitist stance. Yet, at the end of the day, many of the people whose claim to authority had been based on being part of "the people" ended up not running for a place on the list.

A leading activist and member of the city council for ten years, who had served in the army as captain of a commando unit and described himself as having been born and raised in an underprivileged neighborhood, told me in an interview: "I don't have the knowledge to run a city. It is a very complicated thing. It requires a man to rise above himself. I have the potential, but if I tried to be in the mayor's shoes, it would take me two years to gain all his knowledge. Even a professor cannot win the crowd as someone who walked off the market and started recruiting people." This activist marked the gap between political power, that "anyone off the market" can gain, and the knowledge required to lead a city. Between the two lies a wide river that even fifty years of city experience cannot bridge. These words serve as yet another manifestation of the disparity between form and content.

The distance between the "appropriate" and the "inappropriate" raises the point of the association between ethnicity and "being appropriate."

A chapter member who also serves as a neighborhood activist said:

> We, the Mizrahis, do not prove that we are better. A Mizrahi gets a job and instantly becomes "a beggar on horseback." The city hall is full of those. For forty years the city hall has been ruled by whom? Tzilker, a Russian-German. I have no problem with running the city hall. I can do it. I am one of the people.

Q: What makes you one of the people?
A: I'm not rich, I don't play dirty, I work hard, and I talk to people at eye level.

In the end, this activist did not run as the Likud representative in the city council. These remarks reflect the general sentiment in the chapter, expressing the frustration and defiance that are inherent in the declaration, "I am a deserving man," as well as the retreat shown by the fact that such activists usually do not actually run for office. As such, ethnicity becomes the building material with which the wall between the appropriate and the inappropriate is built.

What happens when someone "inappropriate" presents his candidacy and even succeeds in being elected as a member of parliament (the Knesset)? Danny Ben-Lulu, a member of the Likud's Ashdod branch, was elected to be a member of parliament. His successes were interpreted by many as the failure of the democratic system in Israel. He became the subject of mockery in a satirical television show. His friends were frustrated by the manner in which he was depicted in the media. "What has he done wrong? He had been elected in his own right. And anyone who's surprised doesn't know politics," one activist in the Ashdod Likud chapter said. "Ben-Lulu knows thousands of people. Netanyahu used to ask Ben-Lulu to join him in party conferences because he knows so many people. There are greater analphabets in the Knesset. What is Meretz if not a dictatorship? What is Shinui if not a dictatorship? Why is everybody aiming at the Likud? People did not break the law, maybe just borderline. People took advantage of the system. The problem is that the wrong people took advantage of the system."

Conclusion: "Just Like Democracy"

I have presented the ethnography of the political system in the planned immigrant city of Ashdod. This political form materialized in a paradoxical social reality in which the party and the chapter members in Ashdod were at the height of their power at times when political and economic crises had led to a widening of the social gap in Israel.[33]

Thus, the liberal ideology became what Comaroff and Comaroff call ID-ology.[34] That is, people adopt a new interpretation of the concept of citizenship—citizenship as an ideology of self-determination and power accumulation. In the context of increasing social inequalities, citizenship is not perceived as an ideal in its own right but as an effective tool for social mobility.

This analysis has the potential to become a critical tool for deconstructing the theory of citizenship. The empirical findings and the analytical framework

proposed here expose citizenship as a Eurocentric concept defined by social and political events of the Occidental world—although it derives its strength from its claim to universality as being an indisputable political "truth." In the urban context of multiple ethnicities and economic distress, a new definition of citizenship is created—one that encompasses new aspects, such as social mobility, and maintains socio-economic conditions, such as participation in the job market and fighting privatization.

Israeli citizenship after Orientalism is the result of the intersection of immigrant society and the Occidental perception of citizenship. An immigrant society appropriates the "proper models"—party, elections, member-recruitment—and embeds new meanings in them that go hand in hand with the city social structure. The chapter members, in the socio-economic framework within which they operate, are of the opinion that they are largely mediators—they place people's demands before the elected officials. But again, the all-embracing adoption of the system does not bring them to demand a change in priorities or to attempt to affect the public agenda. Instead, it has propelled them to tend to the individual needs of particular residents: transfer Mrs. Cohen's son from one preschool to another and get Mr. Levy's daughter a job as a preschool assistant.

Israeli citizenship after Orientalism assumed its current form when ethnic groups appropriated the Occidental citizenship framework and embedded new substance within it. Drawing on mimicry theory in its anthropological sense has allowed Michael Taussig to resolve the gap between Occidental ideas about citizenship and its reality among immigrant groups.[35] The act of mimicry, he argues, does not entail devaluation; on the contrary, mimicry is the act of recapturing. This conceptualization opens the door to a better understanding of the Likud's source of power in an immigrant society. There are two aspects of this recapturing: re-formulation of the system, and providing underprivileged social groups the opportunity to seize the reins of power. The mimicry, according to Taussig, affords a new presentation of citizenship.

Thus, it is possible to comprehend why such an act is interpreted as a threat by the hegemonic groups: social agents labeled as "inappropriate" adopt the "proper" tools and in that way manage to accumulate political power that paves the way into the heart of the state institutions of power.

Notes

1 Engin F. Isin, "Citizenship after Orientalism: Ottoman Citizenship," in *Challenges to Citizenship in a Globalizing World: European Questions and Turkish Experiences*, eds. F. Keyman and A. Icduygu (London: Routledge, 2005), 32.

2 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Reflections on Liberalism, Policulturalism, and ID-ology: Citizenship and Difference in South Africa," *Social Identities* 9, no. 4 (2003): 445–473.

3 Michael Herzfeld, "'As in Your Own House': Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. David D. Gilmore, Special Publication No. 22 (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 75–89.

4 The politically correct term to identify less developed countries has been a point of discussion in the past decades. While the terms "second" and "third world" countries were replaced by the terms "underdeveloped" or "developing," these terms have also suffered criticism.

5 This perspective was first suggested by Ella Shohat in her breakthrough research and was further formulated by Yehouda Shenhav in an attempt to understand Mizrahi Jews in Israel within the framework of postcolonial theory. See: Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims," *Social Text* 19/20 (Autumn, 1988): 1–35; Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

6 Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel," 31.

7 Ibid., 34.

8 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, eds., *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives, Problems, and Paradoxes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

9 Isin, "Citizenship after Orientalism," 40.

10 Ibid., 33.

11 Comaroff and Comaroff, "Reflections on Liberalism, Policulturalism, and ID-ology."

12 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa*; Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Reflections on Liberalism, Policulturalism, and ID-ology"; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity* (London: Routledge, 1993); Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

13 Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen, eds., *Acts of Citizenship* (London: Zed Books, 2008).

14 Meirav Aharon, "'It Will Be Quiet Enough When We're Dead—Now Is the Time to Live': Between Planning the Modern City and Living in It," *Planning Theory and Practice* 10, no. 2 (2009): 213–231.

15 Arieh Sharon, *Kibbutz + Bauhaus: An Architect's Way in a New Land* (Tel Aviv: Massada, 1976).

16 Lev Grinberg, *Peʿile tsibur ba-shilton ha-mekkomi uva-histadrut* [Activists in the municipal government and the labor union] (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1989).

17 The local government had been transferred to the hands of new immigrants gradually (1955: 25.6 percent; 1965: 46.8 percent; 1978: 47.5 percent; 1983: 51.4 percent) and under the close supervision of the political headquarters. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was authorized to determine when a settlement was "ready" to govern itself. Following the studies by Hanna Herzog, Grinberg argues that the only place where people could unionize on the basis of ethnicity and accumulate power was the large party in the local political constellation. During the 1950s, he says, there was a meek attempt by Asian African immigrants to establish independent parties, but it failed and completely dissipated by 1965. Both the dependency on the large parties and some ideological reasons contributed to the delegitimization of ethnicity as a basis for political entities.

18 Meretz and Shinui are centrist and leftist parties that are identified with the middle and upper classes in Israel.

19 Ephraim Yaar-Yuchtman, "Yazamut pratit ke-maslul le-niʿut sotsio-kalkalit: Heybet nosaf ʿal ha-ribud ha-ʿadti ba-Yisrael" [Entrepreneurship as a pathway to socio-economic mobility: another aspect of ethnic stratification in Israel], *Megamot: Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 29 (1986): 393–412.

20 Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). They do, however, emphasize what will become crucial for the following analysis: even though the Asian African immigrants came a long way in terms of entry into politics during some years, 1985–86 for example, they comprised only 19 percent of those in senior levels of public service.

21 Raymond Aron, *Tsiuney derech ba-hagut ha-sotsiologit* [Main currents in sociological thought], trans. Carla Perlstein (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1993), 225.

22 Shklar, *American Citizenship,* 14, 17–16; Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli*, 15. Shklar does not fall into the trap of romanticizing the excluded groups—slaves, white workers, natives, and women. Some of these underprivileged groups, notably white women and factory workers, justified their demand for rights in their desire to separate themselves from the slaves.

23 Yinon Cohen, "Hitpathut paʿarey sachar etniyim, le'umiyim ve-migdariyim be-Yisrael" [Developments of gender, ethnic and national earnings and educational gaps in Israel], in *'Ee/shivyon ba-Yisrael* [Inequality in Israel], eds. Uri Ram and Niza Berkowitz (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2008), 339–347; Sami Samuha, "Shesayim maʿmadiyim ve-leumiyim ve-demokratya be-Yisrael" [Class, origin and national differences and democracy in Israel], in *Ha-hevra ha-Yisraelit: hebetim bikortiyim* [Israeli society: critical aspects], ed. Uri Ram (Tel Aviv: Breirot, 1993).

24 John L. Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice and the Signs of Inequality," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 52, no. 3–4 (1987): 302.

25 Ibid., 307.

26 In the 1996 elections, Netanyahu received 70 percent of the votes. In the 2001 elections, Sharon received 75.43 percent.

27 One of the candidates running for the party leadership.

28 Dr. Yehiel Lasri, a physician by profession, has served as deputy mayor and currently serves as mayor.

29 Hanna Herzog had already made this argument in 1983 regarding the politics of Mizrahi immigrants and women. Hanna Herzog, "Ha-reshimot ha-ʿadatiyot le-ʿasifat ha-nivharim ve la-kneset (1920–1977): Ha-ʿomnam zehut politit ʿadatit?" [The ethnic lists in elections 1920–1977: an ethnic political identity?], (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1981); Hanna Herzog, "Politika shel nashim o politika ʿal yedey nashim: Haverot be-moʿetsat ʿiriyat Tel Aviv-Yafo" [Politics of women or politics by women: female members in the city council of Tel-Aviv-Yafo], in *Mehkarey Tel Aviv-Yafo: tahalichim hevratiyim ve-mediniut tsiburit* [Studies of Tel-Aviv-Yafo: social processes and public policy], eds. D. Nahmias and G. Menahem (Tel Aviv: Ramot, Tel Aviv University, 1997).

30 This refers to Benjamin Netanyahu, today the Prime Minister of Israel and at the time of this research the Minister of Finance in Ariel Sharon's government. While functioning as Minister of Finance, Netanyahu attempted to advance the privatization of the Ashdod port; the port had served as a substantial source of income for many of the party chapter leaders.

31 Eva Ilouz, "Why Cultural Studies Matter for a Theory of Justice: A Response to Richard Rorty, and Nissim Calderon," *Israeli Sociology* 3 no. 2 (2001): 395–419.

32 Yonathan Shapiro, *ʿElit lelo mamshichim: Dorot manhigim ba-hevra ha-Yisraelit* [An elite without successors: a generation of political leaders in Israel] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1984), 152.

33 The fieldwork took place during the second Intifada and the economic recession (the single-parents crisis, demonstrations regarding the Negev Law, etc.).

34 Comaroff and Comaroff, "Reflections on Liberalism, Policulturalism, and ID-ology."

35 Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity* (London: Routledge, 1993).