In or Out – Migrant Workers in Israel: Boundaries of Israeli Citizenship

Robin Harper, York College, City University of New York

Hani Zubida, Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya

‘Globalisation’ and ‘global village’ are common idioms in social science literature. However, feelings of belonging and exclusion are as important now as before the ‘global age’. One of the most important embodiments of belonging is citizenship. The discourse about citizenship, rights, and obligations has long reaching ramifications for individuals and societies. Citizenship has been, and still is, used to demarcate members and non-members from the citizenship collective. In the Israeli case - due to the fragmented nature of Israeli society - the issue of inclusion and exclusion is critical to understanding the modern Israeli state and society. In this paper, we explore the parameters of the citizenship discourse and engage them to understand the Israeli citizenship discourses and the complexity of the case of migrant workers. We illustrate the points of contention by analyzing the migrant worker experience and comparing it to other socio-political examples from contemporary Israel.

Citizenship…is one of the great Western definitions of what it is to be human. (Pocock in Gershon, S., 1998: 3)

Introduction

In a world that categorises and classifies insiders and outsiders, citizenship has become one of the most important identities a person can hold. Since the nation-state remains the dominant form of government throughout the world and rights and obligations derive from possessing nation-state citizenship, citizenship is nothing less than “the right to have rights” (Arendt, 1951). Citizenship, by its nature, erects barriers between members and foreigners and, since rights are tied to membership, belonging to a state is not a question of human rights and inclusion but also of legal rights and obligations and exclusion. How we define citizenship determines who may be considered a member and included. Conversely, as citizenship has frequently been used as a tool to separate, again, how we define citizenship determines who may be excluded from the body politic. The Israeli case is but one example of citizenship being used to include and exclude. However, we argue that recent political and demographic processes in Israel have morphed local dominant definitions of citizenship from a republican

1 We would like to thank the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, for its institutional support to fund this project. We thank EastBordNet COST IS0803 initiative 2010 meeting in Humboldt University, Berlin and the EastBordNet participants for insightful comments. We are indebted to Asher Arian and Aviva Zeltzer-Zubida for their helpful suggestions on earlier drafts. We also thank two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments. This entire project benefited from the indefatigable research assistance of Taly Peleg, Camille Ramos and Jared Stout. We are especially grateful to our interview partners for sharing their insights. All remaining errors are, of course, ours.

2 Authors are listed in alphabetic order.
citizenship discourse to one where the dominant Israeli citizenship definition is aligned with a liberal citizenship discourse and in so doing is changing who is included in the understanding of "Israeli." In this paper, we discuss changes in the perception of citizenship in Israel and the processes that gave rise to these changes. Additionally, we argue that this process remains contentious and incomplete, continuing to exclude some in Israeli society, specifically Arabs and migrant workers who do not, or cannot, enjoy this new liberalisation.

The concept of citizenship has been central to individuals, societies and social scientists since the French Revolution, which symbolized the transition from the monarchy era to the modern nation-state era. By setting boundaries and defining nation-states, meaning transforming ‘the people’ into the source of the state authority and sovereignty, the nation and its citizens became, according to Jacobson (1996:4) the "... all-encompassing expression of the common bond that unites all the basis of common citizenship. The state, within its domain... represents the one compulsory association." As national citizenship became compulsory, each individual was assigned to a state. Belonging to more than one -- or less than one -- state posed serious administrative and symbolic problems for the legibility and management of the state. In order for the system to work, individuals were not just assigned attachment but needed to remember to which state he belonged, developing a citizen identity (Scott, 1998). This identity became a tool of inclusion and/or exclusion for state activity and of provision of resources and benefits (Kymlicka, 1995; Stolcke, 1997; Juteau, 1997). Since maintaining citizenship was the marker of equal membership, citizenship identity was expected to foster egalitarianism. However, it did not and citizenship became a mechanism invoked to cultivate social injustices (Marshall, 1950 and 1964; Waters, 1989; Peled, 1992; Kerber, 1997; Scott, 1998; Castles, 2000).

Citizenship was used as a policy tool to separate groups from, and differentiate between, groups within the nation state, using that differentiation as a rationale for rationing rights, benefits and services (Brubaker, 1992; Marx, 1996; Brubaker, 1996; Davidson, 2000). Many scholars have explored how citizenship produced inequality. The major themes in the research of citizenship-generated inequalities, not in any order of importance, are: gender (Kerber, 1997; Shachar, 2000), class and social inequalities (Waters, 1989; Dahrendorf, 1996; Marshall, 1998) ethnic-national inequalities (Peled, 1992; Jacobson, 1996; Kymlicka, 1995; Castles, 2000; Kymlicka and Norman, 2000), immigrants (Pugliese, 1997; Castles and Davidson, 2000; Motomura, 2007; Kanstroom, 2008); and migrant workers (Neumann, 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007; Constable, 2007).

At the base of the inequality is an ‘imposed identity’, acquired most often by an "accident" of birth. That chance event can yield benefits that can even be transferred from parent to child, much like inheritance (Shachar, 2009). And, while citizenship may come with a disproportionate number of rights and almost no obligations, frequently, the rights of citizenship may be accompanied by a ‘burden’ of obligations that are not incumbent on noncitizens. Since the
noncitizens do not have these ‘burdens’ of obligation, they are deemed unentitled to many of the benefits afforded to citizens, who have earned them through performing their citizenship obligations. This is the dominant argument used for the citizen-solder where noncitizens may not serve in the military and thus, may not benefit from the spectrum of rights and entitlements of citizens. The state can use these rights and obligations as an exclusion mechanism to keep certain groups on the periphery of society. Even in democracies, this ‘package’ of rights is not distributed equally among all residents of the polity, both citizens and noncitizens, and, in our study, migrant-workers. In this paper, we aim to show that a change in the base of the definition of these rights and obligations might result in the change of membership definition. By changing the central narrative of the society – the citizenship definition - some disenfranchised groups can be included in the society. Yet, we argue, if the change is not expansive enough to encompass all groups, citizenship will be the tool of choice to prevent some groups from entering the given socio-national borders.

To explore this transformation of citizenship discourse and the ramifications for migrant workers and Israeli citizenship, we will look first at the main premises of two traditions of citizenship -- liberal and republican -- regarding the nature of citizenship. We consider the Israeli definition of citizenship. Then, we discuss the current situation in Israel and utilizing various data, reflect on the impact of migrant workers and other disenfranchised groups. Finally, we will use our findings to forecast some potential implications for Israeli society.

Exploring the Nature of Citizenship

Examining the nature of citizenship through only two lenses, liberal and republican traditions, might appear to be an oversimplification of the nature of citizenship. We believe, however, that the tension between these two traditions reveals much about the nature of citizenship in Israel. Simply, in the liberal tradition, citizenship can be described as a bundle of rights. Here, the nature of citizenship is largely dependent on the rights of the individual within the state and civil rights, and the state-citizen relationship is paramount. Heater (1999:4) describes liberal citizenship as, “…much less demanding of the individual. It involves a loosely committed relationship to the state, a relationship held in place in the main by a set of civil rights, honored by the state, which otherwise interferes as little as possible in the citizen’s life.”

Modern citizenship was born with the French Revolution. For the first time, the state took it upon itself to guarantee certain rights for its members. These civil rights fundamentally differed from the natural rights Locke (1962:87) introduced which every human inherently possessed “to preserve…his life, liberty, and estate.” This distinction is central, as it differentiates between citizens and other residents of the state -- like non-citizens -- who are not deemed members of
the state. Since citizenship, and not race, ethnicity, religion or any other primordial status made people members of the polity, the liberal tradition views civil rights, or the assurance of the equality of citizens, as a critical endeavor. Looking at the rights development historically we find that Marshall placed them within historical context “...civil (in which he incorporates the economic right to work) – eighteenth century; political – nineteenth century; social (in which he incorporates the right to education) – twentieth century” (Heater, 1999:13). As Heater (1999:16) asserts “Citizens’ rights are just that – rights; they are not matters for bargaining.”

Moreover, just because certain rights have been extended does not preclude the addition of more rights within that category or of adding additional citizenship rights. In addition to the civil, political, and economic rights that Marshall mentioned, increasingly we believe that there are environmental rights (Heater, 1999). Civil rights may expand with metamorphosing understandings of citizenship in different time periods and circumstances. Since, in the liberal tradition, the state’s main purpose is to protect the civil rights of its citizenry, the state has the obligation to protect its citizens from majorities passing illiberal laws, which might impinge the civil rights of minorities (Spinner, 1994). Moreover, the state is obligated to assure the fulfillment of its members. This makes the role of the state problematic, as the liberal tradition unequivocally asserts a minimalist state (Spinner, 1994; Dagger, 1997; Heater, 1999). How much the state should interfere in citizens’ lives and the levels to which that interference improves or detracts from citizens’ lives is a source of constant debate. Since the boundaries between state and citizen are permeable, and the needs of citizen groups vary, it is possible for the state to become a more dominant player than intended.

One way to curtail or prevent the emerging dominance of the state is civic virtues (Spinner, 1994; Dagger, 1997; Heater, 1999). Citizens have an obligation to renew the relationship with the state and undertake basic actions to remain bound to the nation-state and, more importantly, to renew and reassert their claims to their civil rights. Since liberal theory stresses the importance of rights and leaves little room for obligations, this discussion of civic virtues is problematic. Renshon (2005) caustically comments that the entire citizenship discourse has become one of rights and devoid of discussion of obligations. However, in recent years, there has been a growing call for a role for civic virtues as part of the liberal tradition discourse (Dagger, 1994; Heater, 1999).

The liberal tradition, to conclude, concentrates on the individual citizen, his relationship with the nation-state and his civil rights (Waters, 1989). It nurtures the notion of a minimalist state, and equally politically situated citizens. Recently, more scholars are introducing the notion of virtues to the liberal debate on citizenship (Waters, 1989; Dagger, 1997; Heater, 1999). However, most of them still find the role of virtues to be marginal, while others who disagree try

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3 This distinction between civil and natural rights is critical in the case of the status of the migrant workers and the attempts made to grant them at least some, if not all, citizenship rights.
to formulate a new framework for the nature of citizenship, for example, Dagger’s (1994) ‘republican liberalism.’

Though currently the liberal tradition is the dominant model for the modern state, the republican tradition has played, and continues to play, an important role in how citizenship is lived. If the liberal tradition of citizenship is chiefly concerned with rights, its opposite is the republican tradition with its main concept of active-citizenship. When analyzing the nature of citizenship through the prism of the republican tradition, citizenship identity is an active experience which carries within it not just rights, which play a secondary role, but duties. Republican citizenship’s goal is the active practice of citizenship, in the name of determining, protecting and promoting the common good in order to strengthen the basis of connections between members and with the state. (Oldfield, 1990; Peled, 1992; Heater, 1999). The focus of republican citizenship is the shared moral purpose, which originates a notion of civic virtue and criteria for membership in the community. The condition of citizenship is mediated by the will and capacity of participation and constitutes the individual’s civic virtue. While in the liberal discourse the notion of virtues is quite a marginal and recent development (Oldfield, 1990; Spinner, 1994; Dagger, 1997; Heater, 1999), in the republican tradition this aspect is the fundamental premise of the citizenship nature, traced back to early republican thinkers like: Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, Rousseau and others.

Here, civic virtue is a central component of citizenship. The first question is then how can an individual become more virtuous? According to Aristotle, virtuous (good) citizens were those who acted and committed themselves to the common good, mainly through political participation. In contrast, Cicero argues that by participating in public work and not withdrawing into the private a person fulfills his virtuous action, which means that the individual must be an active part of the community and the state. These two definitions of what virtues are capture the essence of the republican notion of virtues.

The major difference between the two traditions is that the liberal tradition views its citizens first and foremost as individuals, while the central tenet of the republican citizenship tradition is the community. In the republican tradition, the republic itself is the community to which every individual must contribute to the common good. The community may be organic or created and imposed, but regardless of its genesis, the community needs a binding identity that connects the individual to the whole and through which weaves the individual to the community of citizens (Schnapper, 1998) or the Andersonian (1991) “invisible community.” Through participation, individuals receive a membership identity to the larger unknowable community.

This new collective identity is usually a major component of the civic religion. By joining the nation (or accepting this identity) the individual becomes a part of something greater than himself and in the process, eliminates some of the individuality that is the source of his humanity. Anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1996:802) observed that “[t]he ‘nation’ is a grand generalisation
that does not discriminate among, and says nothing specific about, its individual members. By contrast, the individual is highly specific and is distinguished from other individuals in innumerable and very particular ways. Why then do individuals elect to identify themselves (to themselves as well as to others) in terms of the nation?" Heater (1999:53) would counter that this is a functional aspect of citizenship, and argues that according to the republican tradition as "[t]he purpose of citizenship is to connect the individual and the state in a symbiotic relationship so that a just and stable republican polity can be created and sustained and the individual citizen can enjoy freedom." Through the collective of the state, Le Republic, if both the state and the collective are strong and stable, then the individual rights and freedom are insured. However, individual rights and freedom, according to the republican tradition, should never precede the good of the community and/or the state. As Heater (1999:55) asserts "The republican style of political thinking places great emphasis above all on the necessity for the state and its citizens to be a community, an organic society, not merely a collection of individuals." Not infrequently power-stakeholders manipulate this new collective identity as a rationale for exclusion from membership, making foreign those whom it wishes to exclude, engaging its own logic to determine the basis on which exclusion takes place (Honig, 1998).

Civic religion, meaning religion that is at the service of the state (which can be drawn from any source – however it is filled with civic content – in the Israeli case the basis is the Jewish religion however the content is secular, i.e., menorah, flag, etc.) plays an important role in the republican tradition as a mechanism for socialisation and to cultivate a positive commitment to the state within the citizenry, as well as differentiate between those who belong to the collective and those who do not. Some have argued that civic and deistic religions were complementary, like Tocqueville, who argued that Christianity formed the best base for the civic religion. Still others, like Machiavelli and Rousseau, favored civic religion without the religious influences. Nonetheless, they all attributed the same role to the civic religion, educating citizens, strengthening the bond between citizens and the state, and making individuals better citizens.

In thinking about the fundamental difference between the two traditions, we return to the foundation of the two: the liberal tradition emerges from the Natural Rights thesis of Locke, while the republican tradition leans on the General Will theory of Rousseau. These two traditions represent two ends of a continuum of citizenship perception. Although examples of states that tend toward one or another end, we find that within societies, groups use their socio-political-cultural assets to pull the definition into different directions. As such, the definition of citizenship is a continuous state-society discourse.

In the Israeli case study, we would highlight three major elements which have been considered central to republican membership: sense of patriotism, military service and civic religion. These aspects of republican-based citizenship are intrinsically related to the idea of

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4 A central feature of the neo-republicanism comes as a reaction to criticism on the weak sense of community to which the liberal tradition led.
Israel not just as “the home for the Jews” but home for the “New Jew.” The founders of the state of Israel imagined a republican form of citizenship which would, through civic action and participation, construct what was lacking in the ghettos of Europe: a self-assured, “single identified” Jewish citizen who understood that the state, embodied in a physical place that was his permanent home. This connection was expected to inspire a love of country, patriotism, and would be fostered and inculcated through military service. The republican tradition is intrinsically related to the nation-state, as the state is perceived of as an organic home for the nation. In a state where security plays such a central role in survival and in politics, it is unremarkable that military service would be an integral part of republican citizenship. Here, again, the remaking of the “New Jew” as a soldier and not a defenseless victim is key, military participation is closed to some non-Jews, Arab-Israelis and foreign workers, because it is precisely through this civic virtue that socialisation and republic citizenship is asserted. Barriers to participation have historically been used to delimit citizenship rights, as Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) observe in the case of women. However, the expression of patriotism is not limited to military service but also to civic engagement. Citizens who work to ensure a strong state and good policies are implementing political judgment, which, to the citizen-civilian is exactly what courage is to the citizen-soldier. Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) note that beyond the traditional scope of citizen soldier, the woman contributes to the protection and propagation of the nation (and of the state) among other ways through their birthing and through their keeping of tradition and inculcating future generations in what it is to be a member of that society. In the Israeli case study analysis this spectrum of citizen behavior as part of the republican ideal is a focal point.

Citizenship Status in Israel

The Israeli case poses a unique case-study. On the one hand, the republican tradition appears a more appropriate prism for analysis in line with the Israeli-Zionist-Jewish-Ashkenazi perspective for Jewish citizenship (Cohen, 1989; Peled, 1992, Shafir and Peled, 1998; Kook, 2000). This approach to citizenship reflects the Zionist vision for a homeland in Israel for the Jews. Even within this paradigm, there is a privileged place for the Ashkenazi due to the history as founders of the modern state. This Israeli-Zionist-Jewish-Ashkenazi citizenship paradigm has been the dominant citizenship discourse predating even the establishment of the state of Israel. By creating an ethnic democracy, (Smooha, 1997) in which all Jews are privileged members with full access to rights (and responsibilities and thus earn citizenship rights through performance of obligations), all others, by virtue of their non-membership, even those who hold formal citizenship, are disadvantaged within the state. Those, like migrant workers, who do not hold even the vestiges of formal citizenship, are even more disadvantaged and cannot, through their

5 Ashkenazim are Jews who derive from European or North American descent.
virtue, gain additional rights or responsibilities, which could earn them more rights. The adoption of this Israeli citizenship definition yields tension within Israel between different stakeholder groups. For example, Arabs, perhaps the most disenfranchised group, hold formal citizenship rights and yet had to invent a niche within the dominant citizenship definition in the Jewish republican tradition.

This conflict stems from the major tension in the definition of Israeli citizenship as “Jewish and democratic.” The founding Zionist vision for the state of Israel was to create a Jewish state that would serve as “an ingathering of the Diaspora.” In everyday life, in almost every context, the Jewish aspect triumphs over the democratic, thus defining the core group of the Israeli society as Jewish. The Israeli elite is composed of Israeli-Zionist-Jewish-Ashkenazi (Kimmerling, 2004 and 2001; Shapiro, 1984). This group is the entitled group and is able to engage their “bundle of rights” through social capital and advocate the republican perception of citizenship as it reinforces both Israeli-Zionist-Jewish-Ashkenazi dominance and its version of the citizenship discourse. The inherent advantage that this group possesses directly stems from the fact that it is able to mobilize the Jewish identity trope, thus setting the Israeli society common identity, which, in a state with so many different ethnicities present is the exclusive linkage between members and reaffirms the reason for Jews coming to Israel. The state engages this trope to define the common identity and establish the civic religion of the collective. As a result, those who do not conform to this dominant discourse are marginalized and can only endeavor to prevail by broadening the citizenship definition and changing the citizenship discourse. Arabs, and in some cases Mizrachim, have attempted to shift the citizenship discourse to a liberal discourse based on rights and not on community membership, needs and cohesion.

The tension between republican and liberal citizenship is very much present in Israel. Yet, the socio-political composition of groups that advocate the two different definitions of citizenship have shifted. We argue that recent socio-demographic-political processes have mobilized previously marginalized (or not present) groups, especially Jewish sub-groups like Mizrachim and ‘new’ immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) (Jews and non-Jews alike), in favor of the liberal perspective of citizenship. They are challenging the dominant prevailing Israeli-Zionist-Jewish-Ashkenazi citizenship definition and discourse.

Since about 1990, Israel has experienced major socio-demographic-political changes which have impacted what it means to be an Israeli. Without question the mass FSU immigration was

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6 For the definition of Israel and “Jewish and democratic” see the Declaration of Establishment of State of Israel as well as its basic laws: The Knesset - 1958, Human Dignity and Liberty and Freedom of Occupation.

7 Mizrachim are Jews who ethnically derive from Asia or Africa.

8 This definition of ‘New’ immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU), relates to the last wave of immigrants that came to Israel from the FSU. This immigrant wave started at the beginning of the 1990s and eventually totaled about 800,000 new immigrants. However, the composition of this group is very problematic, since about half of the new immigrants are either (according to Jewish law) not Jewish or are, in fact, not Jewish but all are covered under the Law of Return because of their relationship to Jews (see Lustick, 1999), a fact that plays an important role in the discussion of ‘what is an Israeli’.
 unlike any known in Israel’s history and exacerbated the tension between Jewish secular and religious groups, mainly over the ‘who is a Jew?’ debate. This and the marked growth and visibility of foreign workers compelled a national debate over ‘what’s an Israeli?’

Between the late eighties and late nineties over 1 million new immigrants migrated to Israel from the FSU (Lissak and Leshem, 2001). Then, the new group comprised about one sixth of the entire Israeli population. This new wave of immigration differed significantly from previous migrants from Russia in the 1970s and from all other waves of immigration to the state of Israel.⁹

Unlike the previous waves, a sizeable portion of this newest group is considered non-Jewish (see Lustick, 1999) and yet, nonetheless, entitled to formal citizenship under the ‘Law of Return’¹⁰ and partial citizenship rights.¹¹ This law (which was enacted in 1950, and amended in 1970), is the formal Israeli nationality law. It is the central layer in the liberal-republican dual nature of the Israeli citizenship. The law guarantees the immediate rights - entry, residence, a spectrum of socio-political rights and obligations and, most importantly, citizenship on par with the rights available to all Israeli citizens - to every Jew who comes to Israel and expresses the will to settle in Israel. The law extends the citizenship rights under the Law of return to Jews and their non-Jewish family members in the name of protection from persecution and family integrity.

Until recently, the numbers of non-Jewish family members seeking Israeli citizenship was insignificant. However, the law, designed to foster the republican community effectively affords liberal rights to non-Jewish family members of Jews and opens the possibility for “Israeli citizen” to connote more than just “Jewish.”

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Party (rank of party size compared to all other parties)</th>
<th>Total number of Votes</th>
<th>Percent of total Vote share</th>
<th>Number of parliamentary seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Israel Be-Aliya (6/11)</td>
<td>174,944</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Israel Be-Aliya (5/15)</td>
<td>171,705</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003¹⁴</td>
<td>Yisrael Beiteinu (13/15)</td>
<td>86,153</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006¹⁵</td>
<td>Israel Be-Aliya (12/13)</td>
<td>67,719</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yisrael Beiteinu (5/12)</td>
<td>281,880</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁹ Here we would like to stress the importance of the differences between waves of immigration during the pre-state era and the post-state era 1948 and on.
¹⁰ For the complete “law of return” including the 1970 amendment please see: [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1950_1959/Law%20of%20Return%205710-1950](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1950_1959/Law%20of%20Return%205710-1950)
¹¹ These are partial rights because the ultraorthodox control many state institutions and deny civil services like marriage, burial and birth registration.
¹² The name is a play on words, ‘Israel Immigration’ or ‘Israel Ascending’ (with a religious as well as secular connotation.)
¹³ The name translates to ‘Israel Our Home.’
¹⁴ The party Israel Our Home joined a national front and did not run individually in this campaign.
This FSU group demonstrates new and unique characteristics altering the Israeli socio-political realm. The most significant characteristics include the size of this group, both in absolute numbers and relative to the existing population (Lissak and Leshem, 2001), the political organisation and political efficacy. It took this wave of immigrants less than a decade to form and launch a competitive political party that could hold its own at the national level. They entered national politics in the 1996 national campaign and since then, the ‘Russian-based’ party remains a fierce contender in the Israeli political system. During the 2009 campaign, the party rose to become one of the top three parties (see table 1). The impact is so profound that scholars refer to it as the “Russian revolution” in Israeli politics (Gitelman and Goldstein, 2002), examining the impact of this new electoral force on Israeli socio-political spheres (Horowitz, 2001; Gitelman and Goldstein, 2002; Goldstein and Gitelman, 2004).

Politically, as well as socially and from the citizenship perspective, the Russian party presented ambiguous positions: on the one hand, it lead the secular standpoint against the republican, religious definition of citizenship, meaning that the Russian party strove for a more liberal citizenship definition (Leshem, 2001); on the other, during the 2009 national electoral campaign Yisrael Beiteinu campaigned under a nationalist banner. The "Responsible Citizenship" campaign called on every citizen to pledge allegiance to the state of Israel as a Jewish state. Party leader and Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman stated:

In my adoption of an unapologetic stance on the duties of citizenship, I had strong role models from around the world. For example, Britain’s Home Office has recently drawn up new laws making responsible citizenship a requirement for those wishing to become UK nationals. Candidates will receive a probation period in which they must prove that they can contribute to the community. In the U.S., those requesting a Green Card must take an oath that they will fulfill the rights and duties of citizenship. Some journalists have emphasized that I am proposing criteria for citizenship that other countries apply only to naturalized citizens and not to those native-born. To these critics I respond that it is an irrelevant distinction to make when discussing responsible citizenship: For did not native-born British men carry out the 2005 London bombings? A commitment to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship should apply to all, irrespective of place of birth (Yisrael Beytenu Website, 2010; emphasis ours)\(^\text{17}\)

Lieberman’s own words propose to turn the national aspect of the citizenship into a republican one, one that deals with responsibilities and not rights. In contrast, when considering their positions through the secular-religious cleavage, a truly contentious divide in Israel, the new FSU migrants were one of the most adamant groups against a Halachic (Jewish religious law) definition of “Jew” to determine citizenship, the so-called ‘who’s a Jew’ debate. The result of this

\(^{15}\) Before this campaign, Israel Be-Aliya joined forces with Israel Beiteinu.

\(^{16}\) See the party’s web-site: http://www.beytenu.org/119/3161/article.html
debate is not just important for religious reasons but because the definition determines claims to a right of return and the concomitant benefits of being members of the privileged group in a republican ethnocracy. Clearly, the Russians supported a less Halachically stringent definition mainly due to the questionable Jewishness of a large portion within this group (Lissak and Leshem, 2001). The Russians gravitated to a definition of citizenship that was based more on Israeliness, deriving their rights from within the Jewish state, rather than from their status as Jews. The selected definition stemmed from the 'civic religion' (Liebman and Don-Yehiya, 1983) which was a midpoint between the Jewish religion and the new Israeli context. The basis of this definition of citizenship was rooted not in community membership, but in a discourse of rights, a classic liberal approach and not responsibilities, a republican approach. And yet, the presentation of the discourse was framed in terms of the Jewish aspects of it, as any other would be beyond the scope of palatable for Israeli Jews. This change in the discourse and the fact that it was novel and ambiguous had a profound impact on Israeli society and the perception of citizenship. The duality was perceived by some as a ray of hope in the attempt to break the hegemonic religious-Jewish discourse, and create a new discourse, a civic-Israeli one.

For migrant workers, however, this shift or opening in the citizenship discourse did not have a palpable effect on their status in Israel. The purpose for the establishment of the Israeli state was to be a permanent home for Jews. By definition, the migrant workers (known in Hebrew as “Ovedim Zarim” or “foreign workers”) are transient and not Jews and thus do not fit into the citizenship discourse easily. If they were truly migrant and in Israel for short stays, there would be little problem. But, as throughout the world, short term workers tend to have long term to permanent tenures, what Philip Martin (1994:86) has called the ‘iron law of labor migration’ meaning, “there is nothing more permanent than temporary workers.” Migrant workers were brought to Israel as a result of the lack of Palestinian workers in Israel once Israel closed the borders to the West Bank and Gaza after the first Palestinian Intifada or civic uprising in the occupied territories. First groups arrived during the late 1980s, to replace Palestinian workers shut out of Israel itself due to security concerns. The initial concern from construction companies was the need for labor to perform jobs formerly done by Palestinians, including building housing for the 1 million immigrants from the FSU (who were entitled to that housing based on their rights under the Law of Return). Since those early days, foreign workers have been imported from all over the world. Early on, most of the migrant workers employed in construction came from Eastern Europe, while agricultural workers and caregivers (childcare, eldercare, household workers) came from Asia. Now, workers are recruited and come illegally from across the globe.

Table 2
Distribution of 'Legal' Migrant Workers in Israel (2008)

18 For further information about Jewishness and Israeliness discourse see Pele, Shweid and the roundtable discussion in Palestine-Israel Journal Vol. 8(4) 2001 and Vol. 9(1) 2002; and in Shafir and Peled, 2002.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Total Number (in thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>114.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia(^{19}) Total</td>
<td>89.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>2.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
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<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa Total</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe Total</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSU(^{20})</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America Oceania Total</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics

Israel provides permits for workers in five categories, including agriculture, caregiving, construction and other "triple D work" (dirty, dangerous and demeaning/dull). According to official numbers there are 115,000 migrant workers with a work visa (legal workers), (see Table 2 for national distribution) and about the same number of migrant workers, many who are in Israel on a tourist visa and others who simply leave their employment which is tied to their residency permit, are referred to as "illegal." Official figures put this group at 350,000 members; there is a great deal of contention over the number of illegally-present foreign workers (reflecting the lack of governmental control). Unofficial figures estimate the number of illegal foreign workers between 300,000 and 400,000, meaning that the total number of foreign workers is somewhere between 350,000 to almost half a million migrant workers.

\(^{19}\) Includes Asian republics of FSU.

\(^{20}\) Includes only European republics of FSU.
In order to better understand who is included in the understanding of “Israeli,” in 2010, we conducted interviews with 22 temporary workers from 10 different countries about their thoughts, experiences, and opinions about life in Israel for foreign workers and opportunities for inclusion in and exclusion from the Israeli polity. The ratio of females to males was 3:1. Mean age was 34. The range of tenure was between 4 and 16 years, with a mean of 8.5 years. Most came from Asia (60 percent), then Africa (30 percent) and finally Latin America (10 percent). Half were caregivers; about a quarter were cleaners and the rest were a mix of construction workers/day laborers. Initial contact was made through postings and outreach at NGO’s and through referrals. Interview partners consented to be interviewed after reviewing their rights. All interviews took place in public places. All but three interviews were conducted in English; the remainder in Spanish. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and coded according to standard grounded theory practices (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998). We engaged interview data to see Israeli life through foreign workers’ eyes, since there are few studies that explore foreign workers’ experiences and foreign workers are hard to reach and the Israeli social and political scene is dynamic. This type of small N study is common in studies where there is limited available data and can serve as a basis for future quantitative theory testing.

Findings

Our findings revealed that the degree to which the citizenship definition would have to be stretched is quite substantial. Some major findings include invisibility/hypervisibility, religiosity, and respect. Our informants repeatedly used the term “invisible” to describe their place in Israeli society. One Colombian cleaner stated “they just don’t see me.” This was echoed by a Filipina caregiver who explained “It’s like I am invisible. Like not there. I am a human being!” This is ironic because physical and social group characteristics of the foreign workers mark foreign workers as outsiders. Their phenotypic difference which makes them hypervisible, renders them invisible. First, most foreign workers are non-white. This disadvantages them in the Israeli context, as in Jewish-Israeli society, where most people are white, with the exception of Ethiopian immigrants who compose only about two percent of the entire population and whose blackness was perceived as barrier to inclusion into the Israeli polity despite their Jewish roots (Kaplan, 1999).21 As a result, tolerance for racial difference has not been exercised and thus, acceptance levels are low.

Our informants reveal that they are regularly called derogatory names based on their racial and ethnic background. A South African female cleaner went to great lengths to explain how kind people had been to her and her Israeli-born son, but she noted that her son, whom she

21 The question of the Ethiopian migrants Jewishness remains an entrenched debate since their airlifted arrival 25 years ago.
described as having “taken an Israeli mentality,” calls her “Cushi” which she explained as “like black only not in a nice way.”

She says that her son “has and ‘feels Israeli’ and has no interest in Africa “Because only Cushis there in Africa. So there’s nothing nice.” Further, some Israelis assume that they are not clean or not intelligent. One Filipina observed:

People treat us disrespectfully, as if we don’t know what is our work. Why? We know what we are doing! This is the reason you brought us here. Let us do it! Do not talk to us as if we do not know anything, like we are mefagrim (mentally handicapped).

Secondly, and maybe even more significant in terms of impact over their social status, most of the members of this group are non-Jewish, and a large portion of them are practicing Christians. For many, their devotion to Christianity was the pivotal reason to come to Israel, the Holy Land, as their workplace. Through living in Israel, they hoped to find holiness and to spark religious revelation in themselves. Echoing many of the interviews, a Filipino caregiver explained when asked what she expected to find in Israel:

I was thinking really, because I am a Christian. I am a Christian and Israel is a holy place. So what I did expect is that I will find people who will be as good as what I have read from the Bible because of our religion. To be kind, to be always, to be God fearing and to be working like or doing good things, every good things they can do.

They were frustrated not just at being foreigners but confronting the profane in Israeli life. They expressed concern about the dissonance between their expectations for holiness and their reality of interaction with real — and obviously imperfect - Israelis. A Colombian female cleaner lamented:

...in Colombia, they talk about Israel as if it were such a holy country. Something different when I arrived. I saw girls walking almost naked on the street. That’s what was horrible. In a country supposedly a holy land, they walk almost naked! That’s horrible. That wasn’t cool. Because, it’s not what I expected. We study about Israel as something so holy; the way they teach us in Colombia about it being so holy.

A recurrent theme is respect and the denigration of the worker as less than human. Many discussed personally rewarding interactions with individual Israelis and sometimes even innocuous experiences with Israeli officials. However, when publicly perceived as ‘worker’ as opposed to ‘parent,’ ‘woman’ or ‘refugee’, etc. our interview partners repeated that they were treated as less than human. Being a worker trumped all other human characteristics and they became, most positively, invisible and most negatively denigrated through mean words, arbitrary or harsh treatment by Israeli officials and employers. A Colombian caregiver female noted that:

I had the luck and found very humane people, who have been in my country and so I can interact. In general, I don’t think the Israeli is bad, like everybody. There are many one can talk to and deal with and share...The police, how they treat the foreigner. I know they treat very harshly and as a delinquent, not like a person. Ask

for papers... They forget that we are also human and that they have to be respected. They treat like they want.

Despite these negative experiences, the foreign workers express a remarkable degree of attachment to Israel, especially for those who with Israeli-born children. One Filipina caregiver stated “We don’t have to be here. We stay because we want to stay in Israel.” As individuals with agency, they explained that even if they had been mistreated, that they could eventually leave if they so desired. Some explained that they would not stay in Israel; yet, all had stayed beyond their initial contract, reflecting at least some kind of satisfaction. Many described instances of inclusion and friendship. As might be expected, this was more likely to occur for (female) caregivers and cleaners who had direct contact with families. All described some private interaction with Israelis for holidays or as neighbors or coworkers; none had any personal interaction with Arabs. Further, those with children vicariously experienced their children’s attachment. As one Filipina expressed her son’s attachment, “My son is proud to be Israeli, he is a proud Israeli!” Some parents noted that although their children liked their national (Colombian, Togolese, or Filipino, etc.) food or customs, the children were Israelis in that they spoke Hebrew (none of the children of our informants were fluent in their parents’ native tongue, but all were fluent in Hebrew, far outstripping their parents’ Hebrew abilities), knew Jewish customs, and celebrated Jewish holidays. Some had even taken on Jewish prayer as a normal part of everyday life. A Colombian female cleaner explains how her son is closer to Israeli Jewish culture than even to his mother’s. She says

When the kids are asked where they are from, they say they are from Colombia. They always identify as Colombian. Always. In terms of religion? They need to study in a Jewish school… I understand they want to be Jewish rather than Catholic or Christian. Because when they get in home, and kiss the mezuzah, they say ‘Mom, let’s pray before eating.” My son puts on a yarmulke. So they are closer to the Jewish religion than mine.

Even the seemingly closed Jewish identity was an available one for these Israeli-born and socialized children. For their parents, being accepted or being Israeli would mean being treated as a human being and not just as a worker.

The migrant workers are in a precarious situation, due to their non-Jewish affiliation and even due to their intense non-Jewish religiosity. As such, in all ways, they remain outside the borders of the collective. They can neither join the secular Israelis in the search for liberal citizenship nor can they join the religious with a circumscribed sense of republican, ethno-Jewish citizenship. They are unlike the FSU migrants who, according to the law of return, are entitled to formal citizenship regardless of the question of their Jewishness. And, subsequently, the FSU migrants are entitled to most of the formal rights that are associated with the Israeli citizenship and are therefore able to bridge the difference between Israeliness and Jewishness in a way that simply is unavailable to the migrant workers. The FSU immigrants can create a new identity and still experience their Israeliness.
Conclusion

We argue that while there are two core identities competing for hegemony in Israeli society, Israeliness and Jewishness, and while some groups possess both and some groups possess one and not the other, the migrant workers do not possess any, and as a result are unable to penetrate the Israeli societal boundaries. Whereas it is clear that the Jewishness aspect, a potentially central part of Israeliness, is formally closed to the migrant workers, they are not the only group in Israel that is marginalized because of their non-Jewish religion. Arabs, Ethiopians especially those members of the Falash Mura (Ethiopians of Jewish descent who converted to Christianity but remained separate from Christians) and non-Jewish FSU migrants are also on the periphery of Israeli society as well. However, these groups over the last few decades are arguably at least marginally integrated into Israeli society, including the FSU migrants who were admitted under the Law of Return and are publicly practicing Christians. This acceptance, no matter how limited, of non-Jews into Israeli society opens the possibility to imagine, at some point, incorporating other groups – like the migrant workers - into the Israeli polity. This argument is based on the notion of Israeliness, which is a more inclusive category than Jewishness, and could be engaged to open the citizenship definitional boundaries of Israeli society.

Some of the migrant workers who came to Israel more than a decade ago, and had children in Israel argue that their children, regardless of the parents’ or children’s actual immigration and/or citizenship status, should be considered Israelis. There are about 1200 children born to foreign workers in Israel. Many are educated in Israeli schools and speak no language but Hebrew and some children come from countries where *jus soli*\(^{23}\) is practiced or where births must be registered in the country itself, and therefore, remain stateless. Some nongovernmental organisations have adopted this new competing construction of Israeli identity and decided to use this identity construction in their campaign against the attempt to deport migrant workers (see picture 1) and their children. For example, one organisation, Israeli Children,\(^ {24}\) mounted a public relations campaign to publicize the plight of migrant worker children. In a poignant video that opens by asking “who are we?,” children from different ethnic backgrounds speak in fluent Hebrew and explain that they are born and raised in Israel. They are asked what they love and in addition to what one would expect from young children – dolls or siblings – they mention Purim, a joyous Jewish holiday known for masquerades and abundant desserts. At the end of the clip, they implore the listener “Please do not deport me.”\(^ {25}\)

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\(^{23}\) *Jus soli* or ‘law of the soil’ means that citizenship is conferred to those born on national territory. The problem is, for example, if a child is born to foreign worker parents in Israel and the parents come from an *jus soli* country, since Israel provides no citizenship to foreign worker children, the child might have no way to attain citizenship and could become stateless.


\(^{25}\) To see examples of their campaign, please see video clip http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4VWX2pZHsQ&feature=related.
We argue that by revealing through public rhetoric and civic engagement as well as through the imaginations of foreign workers that these children are also “Israel’s children,” even if not “Israeli children,” that the Israeliness is emerging as a plausible liberal-based identity beyond the dominant republican-based Jewish identity. The perception of belonging and assertion of Israeli identity for these foreign workers and their children reveals prospects for incorporation and permanence as well as inter-generational construction. In the larger picture, it poses new challenges to the ‘new’ boundaries of Israeli citizenship, increasing the pressure between the poles of the citizenship identity discourse, between the liberal approach characterized by the Israeliness standpoint and on the other, the republican approach representing the Jewishness approach. These are the new boundaries; they are permeable and invisible, and yet, they construct a discourse of inclusion and exclusion, where the midpoint of the new discourse will be and what ‘Israeli’ will mean remains to be seen.

Epilogue

**Picture 1**

The situation in 2010 is particularly politically charged. The government threatened mass deportations only to rescind the policy and discuss opportunities for long term residency only to begin the mass deportation discussion anew. In the cover page of Ha-Ir (the city), a local Tel Aviv-Yaffo newspaper had the following picture with this question: “Where were you during the municipal cleaning operation?” The picture portrays one of the Tel Aviv-Yaffo municipal inspectors (violently) arresting an African migrant worker. The "operation" was entitled "clean streets" by the authorities. (Feb. 19th 2010).
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