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“Tel Aviv Is Not Foreign to You”: Urban Incorporation Policy on Labor Migrants in Israel¹

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This article addresses the growing disjuncture between urban and national policies regarding the incorporation of labor migrants in Israel. Drawing on fieldwork, in-depth interviews with Tel Aviv municipal officials, and archive analysis of Tel Aviv municipality minutes, we argue that urban migrant-directed policy elicits new understandings of membership and participation, other than those envisaged by national parameters, which bear important, even if unintended, consequences for the de facto incorporation of non-Jewish labor migrants. The crux of the Tel Aviv case is that its migrant-directed policy bears especially on undocumented labor migrants, who make up approximately 16 percent of the city's population and who are the most problematic category of resident from the state's point of view. In demanding recognition for the rights of migrant workers in the name of a territorial category of “residence,” and by activating channels of participation for migrant communities, local authorities in Tel Aviv are introducing definitions of “urban membership” for noncitizens which conflict sharply with the hegemonic ethnonational policy. We suggest that the disjuncture between urban and national incorporation policies on labor migrants in Israel is part of a general process of political realignment between the urban and the national taking place within a globalized context of labor migration.

Though a relatively recent phenomenon, overseas non-Jewish labor migration to Israel is already offering unique viewpoints for understanding the growing disjuncture between national and local politics as it has unfolded in the country during the last decade. A case in point is an event that took place

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in July 1999 in south Tel Aviv, where most of the undocumented migrant workers in Israel live. This is also the area in which, under the aegis of a harsh state policy of arrest and deportation, many migrants are brutalized daily and terrorized by the police (Fishbain, 2000). The participants in the event were representatives of the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipal council, headed by the mayor-elect, representatives of the Israeli press, members of various NGOs, academics, and curious neighbors, many of them migrants. Surrounded by a cordon of police, the participants listened attentively to Pentecostal hymns performed by a choir of undocumented African migrants. The occasion had all the trappings of a surrealist happening, since in contrast to what has become a daily routine in the area, this was not a police raid but the inauguration of a municipal body called the Aid and Information Center for the Foreign Community in Tel Aviv-Jaffa (hereafter MESILA). Its slogan declares clearly to the foreign worker, "Tel Aviv-Jaffa is not foreign to you." The straightforward recognition of the "new Tel Avivians" by the city authorities was further emphasized by the mayor: "This is our responsibility as a city that looks after its residents. This is our obligation as human beings who are confronted with human misery."

The city's recognition of labor migrants as residents stands in stark contrast to the state's declared policy on labor migrants. According to the state, Israel is not an "immigrant state" institutionally or ideologically; it is, rather, an "*aliyah* state" – meaning a state for Jewish immigration (literally, "going up" to Israel). Consequently, Israel has no interest in incorporating into its policy any measures that might be tantamount to recognizing the foreign workers as legitimate immigrants, to say nothing of recognizing them as legitimate residents of the nation-state.

So far, the state has formulated a clear migration control policy but has neglected any aspect related to the migrants' incorporation. From the state's point of view, "there are no migrants but only workers." This is not surprising, given the ethnonational character of the state regime. This state-led "migration policy without migrants" sets the stage for the creation of a "migration policy without the state," conducted by nonstate actors such as human rights organizations, grassroots migrant associations, and, most prominently, the local authorities of the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, who seek to develop alternative channels of incorporation for the inclusion of non-Jewish migrants within a Jewish state.

This article consists of five sections. The first elucidates the analytical framework for understanding the emergence of the city as a leading political actor in the politics of migration. The second section describes briefly the

development of the labor migration phenomenon in Israel. In the third section, we discuss the socioeconomic restructuring of Tel Aviv-Jaffa in the context of insertion of non-Jewish migrants. In the fourth section, we analyze the distinct incorporation strategies developed by the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality on labor migrants and their effect on the mobilization of migrant communities. The concluding section addresses the potential challenge inherent in the incorporation practices of the city of Tel Aviv in the face of an exclusionary state policy regarding non-Jewish migrants. We also consider the limitations of these practices.

“BRINGING THE CITY BACK IN”

While increasingly acknowledging the importance of transnational and supranational actors and regimes (*see, e.g.*, Joppke, 1998; Jacobson, 1996; Sassen, 1996; Soysal, 1994), the study of migration policy still suffers from the distorting lens of state-embedded analysis, ignoring the significance of subnational actors actively involved in the development of incorporation channels for migrants. However, in the wake of transnationalism, migration politics tends to be implosive, as its “center of gravity” moves from the outer borders of the state to the inner quarters of the cities (Holston and Appadurai, 1999).

Cities constitute the particular sites in which transnational flows of capital, information, technology, and people undergo localization and territorialization (Sassen, 1998; Castells, 1997). Cities become key actors in a globalized economy and acquire a “dual personality: as subordinate political units under particular nation states, and simultaneously, as command posts of an overarching world economy on which the future of those very nation states largely depends” (Portes, 2000:167). Do they also become political actors with their own particular visions and stakes in migration policymaking?

While the extensive literature dealing with the challenges posed to the nation-state in an era of global migration has underplayed the role of the cities, literature on cities has tended to overlook their ascendant political role in the realignment between the national and the global. Research on global or world cities has so far emphasized the economic rationale underlying the correlation between the “globalness” of cities, measured in terms of emerging labor needs of the metropolitan economy, and the concentration of foreign-

ers.² The economic urban restructuring processes that characterize the post-Fordist era – including the rise of a new service economy, a high concentration of multinational firms, the development of a large informal sector, and the demise of the manufacturing sector – are the conditions that fuel and perpetuate migration to big cities.

The concentration of international business in the metropolitan centers, adjacent to the inner cities where low-skilled migrants dwell and develop their communities, has given rise to two parallel processes of political significance. First, cities have become the command posts of financial markets that impose economic globalization “from above.” As a result, cities not only function as a link between their national economies and global circuits, they also develop their own distinctive agenda as they strive to set themselves apart from the national economy. In doing so, cities play a key role in the decentering of the national unit and the rescaling of national sovereignty (Sassen, 1999:177–194; Storper, 1997).

Second, cities have also become pivotal in the development of globalizing forces “from below.” The inflow of migrants of different ethnicities to major cities transforms those cities into contested terrain where the claims of noncitizen populations and emergent transnational communities are put forward (*see* Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999; Portes, 1999; Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Kemp, Rajjman, Resnik and Schammah, 2000). The migrants’ presence catalyzes processes that expand and erode the meanings and practices of citizenship. Thus, even though one of the main thrusts of nation-state building has been to dismantle the primacy of the urban center as a locus of citizenship, cities have remained the strategic arena for the development of substantive practices of participation and membership.

Cities have thus become very concrete sites where the claims of both the upper and lower circles of globalization are articulated. The implications of this articulation are not exclusively economic but also political. While

²“Global” or “world” cities are so called because they function to provide services of control and organization through which the contemporary world economy operates (*see, e.g.*, Taylor and Walker, 2001; Beaverstock, Smith and Taylor, 1999; Friedmann, 1986). While the literature on world cities focuses almost exclusively on the role of multinational firms that transform cities into the command centers of the global economy, it also acknowledges the globalizing processes that cities in general undergo when competing for investment. Thus, we can treat the term world city as a variable, allowing for different degrees of “globalness” (*see, e.g.*, Short, Breitbach, Buckman and Essex, 2000).

acknowledging the simultaneous presence of globalizing trends from “above” and “below,” research on world cities has tended to overlook the significance of the latter in transforming cities into prominent actors in the politics of migration.

Recently, the role of the city as an incubator for alternative definitions of membership has been brought to the fore by prominent scholars of globalization and citizenship (Sassen, 1998, 2002; Holston and Appadurai, 1999) and of migration and urban politics (Schmitter-Heisler, 1998; Portes, 2000, *MOST Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities* (MPCM), 1999; Rogers and Tillie, 2001). This body of research calls attention to the paradox-ridden situation that results from the nationalization of membership and border control: while states initiate and sustain migration flows, cities are doomed largely to absorb them. States are thus sovereign in controlling and sanctioning migration without necessarily shouldering the responsibility of incorporation, and cities bear direct responsibility for their residents without having sovereignty over migration policy (*see* Loveless, McCue, Surette and Norris Tirrel, 1996; Schmitter-Heisler, 1998; DeSipio and de la Garza, 1998). Moreover, local governments are often caught between their commitment to provide for the needs of all residents, including migrants, and overt public opposition to those who are perceived as a “dangerous population,” economically or socially, from the national viewpoint.

The new geography of centrality and marginality created by the global economy, of which migration flows are an intrinsic component, exacerbates the dilemmas faced by cities but does not find them helpless or passive. As they operate within increasingly transnationalized urban networks, cities engage in policy-learning processes that provide alternative models of urban governance (for an example of such transnational city-to-city networks where urban policymakers share experience and exchange information, *see* Alexander, 2001:4). Policy-learning processes that are not subjected to national configurations allow for the development of political agendas and patterns of migrant incorporation that take into account the reconfiguration of the urban ethnoscape.

Cities are not the only arena where traditional notions of membership are challenged, and certainly not all cities are autonomous to the same extent. But as they continue to be powerful magnets for migrants, substantive urban practices of membership may be opening new spaces, other than national spaces, for the inclusion of otherwise formally excluded groups and populations.

This article belongs to the burgeoning literature that calls for bringing the city "back into" the analysis of labor migration policy by regarding it as a meaningful political actor (rather than a mere background), engaged in the renegotiation of membership, democratic participation, and belonging in an era of transnational migration. The development of urban notions of membership and the concomitant inclusionary practices directed toward nonnationals, acquire special significance when they take place in the context of ethnonational migration regimes. Drawing on the West German case, Schmitter-Heisler (1998:26–27) shows how, in the 1960s and 1970s, many large German cities were at the forefront in taking the politically unpopular position that Germany had become a *de facto* country of immigration, often in direct opposition to federal and state ethnonational positions. According to Schmitter-Heisler, the active role assumed by local governments in financing and managing national welfare programs for large migrant populations in the Federal Republic of Germany was crucial in the recasting of national parameters of incorporation geared to non-Germans.

However, contrary to the ethnonational German context, where migrant communities comprised officially recruited migrant workers who were allowed to bring their families via family reunification, in the case of Tel Aviv the labor-migrant communities comprise mainly undocumented migrants (and their undocumented families). The corollary of this is that while in the German case migrants were entitled from the beginning to a full array of social rights, and the municipalities' struggles focused around resource allocation and funding for a growing migrant population, in the Israeli case the municipal authorities have to deal with migrants whose status as residents is totally unrecognized by the state authorities and who therefore lack basic social rights. This makes the Israeli case an even more powerful setting for understanding the growing disjuncture between state and local migration practices on labor migrants. We now describe the sociopolitical setting within which labor migration has taken place in Israel during the last decade.

LABOR MIGRATION IN ISRAEL

Labor migration from overseas countries is a relatively new phenomenon in Israel. It started in the early 1990s, when the government authorized the recruitment of a large number of labor migrants to replace Palestinian workers from the occupied territories (State Comptroller, 1996; Bartram, 1998; Rozenhek, 2000). The deterioration of the political and security situations generated by the *intifada* (which began at the end of 1987) brought about

a severe labor shortage in the construction and agriculture sectors, in which Palestinian workers had been concentrated since the early 1970s (Semyonov and Lewin Epstein, 1987).

However, it was not until the Israeli government decided to seal the border with the occupied territories, at the beginning of 1993, that the large-scale recruitment of overseas workers began, primarily from Rumania (construction sector), Thailand (agriculture), and the Philippines (geriatric care, nursing, and domestic services).

The recruitment of overseas workers was consistent with the interests of both the state and the employers, as it was considered a temporary, low-cost solution to a temporary problem (Bartram, 1998). The result was that in the 1990s the ground was prepared for the transformation of overseas labor migration from a negligible phenomenon – as it had been until then – into an institutionalized process.³ As in other countries, the official recruitment of labor migration brought about an influx of undocumented migrants. According to Interior Ministry data, non-Jewish undocumented foreign workers arrive in Israel from almost every corner of the world – though mainly from Eastern Europe, South Asia, Africa, and South America – and are employed primarily in the service sector. According to estimates of the Central Bureau of Statistics, there are some 240,000 labor migrants in Israel, about 40 percent of whom have work permits; together with Palestinian daily commuters they make up 13 percent of the total labor force in Israel (Ministry of Labor and Welfare Affairs, 2001:Figures 4, 11).

The pattern of formal labor recruitment in Israel has placed these migrants in a peculiar situation. Because work permits are granted to employers and not to employees, documented labor migrants become *de facto* a “captive labor force,” with all the flagrant violations of individual and civil liberties this entails (*see* Workers Hotline Reports: <www.kavlaoved.org.il>). The official recruitment of workers is conducted through manpower agencies and employers, to whom the permits are allocated. By this means the state is supposedly not party to the employment of the workers and therefore ostensibly bears no responsibility for their living conditions and terms of employment. Moreover, the rotation system does not allow for family reunion at any stage.

³In 1987, the Israeli Ministry of Labor issued 2,500 permits, a figure that gradually rose to 9,600 in 1993. The qualitative change occurred between 1993 and 1994, when the number of permits tripled. In 1996, the total number of valid work permits was estimated at about 103,000 (*see* Bartram, 1998, Table 3).

In contrast to their documented counterparts, undocumented migrant workers arrive haphazardly, some with their families. They enter the country on tourist visas valid for up to 90 days, which forbid them to work, and they become undocumented by overstaying it. This method is not the only path to illegality. A very common way for a worker to become undocumented is to leave the employer to whom he is "attached" through the "bondage" system. Undocumented status makes a migrant not only vulnerable to the authorities' persecution but also "invisible" in the eyes of state apparatuses in regard to social, political, and many civil rights. The lack of legal status and work permits has been a powerful catalyst for the development of informal patterns of organization and the emergence of new ethnic communities among undocumented migrants living in Tel Aviv-Jaffa (mainly from Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines). Indeed, labor migrants are not only changing the composition of the labor market, they are also reweaving the ethnic fabric of Israel's major metropolitan area.

Unlike Palestinian commuters – whose work in Israel did not entail changing their place of residence or the need to develop civil channels for their incorporation within Israeli society since they were from the very beginning under the jurisdiction of the military government – the entrance of overseas foreign workers raises many questions regarding their incorporation within institutional and social spheres beyond the labor market. By living within the "host" society, these workers become de facto residents, and many, although certainly not all, have become "permanent temporary residents." Thus, the "host" society, while benefiting from the migrant workers' participation in the production process, finds itself having to take responsibility for their "reproduction" costs as well, particularly in the areas of housing, health, and education.

Like other ethnonational regimes that draw mainly on the principle of *jus sanguinis* for granting citizenship, the Israeli state has not yet established a comprehensive policy on non-Jewish migrants despite their growing numbers. During the 1990s, successive Israeli governments failed to deal with the challenges to the limits of membership in democratic regimes posed by the formal and informal recruitment of labor migrants. Instead, they restricted state action to deportation as the main – and in fact only – means to reduce the number of undocumented migrants. Since the end of 1995, Israel's declared policy on migrant workers has been to reduce their numbers drastically, a policy aimed particularly at those who are undocumented, the "illegals." The overall target set by the Minister of Labor was to reduce the

proportion of migrant workers from 10 percent of the Israeli workforce to just 1 percent.

According to data from the Ministry of Labor's Manpower Authority, some 13,000 migrants were deported between 1995 and 1999 – a far smaller number than what the advocates of deportation had greatly hoped for – at an estimated monthly cost of \$1.7 million (NIS 7.2 million, NIS 200 per day per detainee) (Hotline for Migrant Workers Reports; for a further analysis on the deportation policy, *see* Kemp and Raijman, 2001). The deportation policy emerged as a patchwork affair and entailed the violation of basic human rights. Many migrants were deported when they tried to demand their rights from their employers or from the National Insurance Institute (social security); hundreds were held in detention for lengthy periods under harsh conditions and without being brought to trial; families fell apart after the father was apprehended, often in the presence of the children. Since September 2002, and upon the creation of the new Immigration Police, the deportation policy has become increasingly “efficient” as 14,500 undocumented migrant workers have been arrested and deported (Wergaft, 2003).

From a juridical point of view, Israel is signatory to international conventions such as that of the International Labor Organization on labor migration (1949), which the Israeli Knesset ratified in 1953, and the international convention for the protection of children. Moreover, Israel has enacted highly progressive laws on workers' rights, including minimum wage, work hours and conditions, and health (a patients' rights law). The territorial definition of these laws enables them to be applied without discrimination to all residents of Israel, whether they are citizens or not, and irrespective of their legal status in the country.

In practice, an immense gap exists between the contents of these laws, which are supposed to serve migrant workers, and their implementation (*see, e.g.,* Yanay and Borowosky, 1998). What in fact induces the violation of migrant workers' social and civil rights in Israel is not the absence of appropriate legislation, but the lack of an infrastructure, compounded by the state's lack of will to enforce the laws. A similar situation exists with regard to the availability of welfare services for migrant workers. The state ignores the special needs of this population since to acknowledge them would be to recognize foreign workers as legitimate residents of the nation-state. As a result of the state's withdrawal, the bulk of the responsibility for the migrants' welfare, education, and health needs devolves on the local govern-

ments as they find themselves "solving" immediate day-to-day problems of those living within their jurisdiction. A social worker from the Welfare Services Department of the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality summed up the situation concisely: "The state does not have a 'problem' of migrant workers. We [the local governments] do" (interview, 1998). By shirking its responsibilities to the migrants, the state has cleared the stage for the city to assume a leading role and has set in motion the localization processes that are underway in the politics of citizenship in Israel.

URBAN RESTRUCTURING IN TEL AVIV-JAFFA

The localization of the migrant worker issue in Israel, that is, its having become an integral item on the local agenda in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, has to be understood against the background of the city's urban restructuring. These processes began toward the end of the 1980s and were induced by three main factors: 1) the transition to a post-industrial economy, 2) changes in the ethnodemographic composition of the population, and 3) the recasting of the relations between the central government and local governments.

Like other urban centers in Western states, Tel Aviv-Jaffa has undergone significant changes caused by the decline of industry as the leading sector of the economy and a transition to financial, communications, and information services. Tel Aviv houses the headquarters of banks, insurance companies, and the stock exchange, and it is the country's financial and business center (Menahem, 2000). In the past decade, Tel Aviv has been characterized by cogent world city tendencies. According to the roster of world cities carried out by the Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network (GaWC), based on an analysis of 123 cities according to the level of advanced producer services (banking/finance, accountancy, advertising, and law), Tel Aviv showed strong evidence of world city formation in two main areas, accountancy and advertising (Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999; on Tel Aviv as a global city, *see* Kipnis, 2001)). The restructuring processes entail increasing polarization in the employment market, which has witnessed simultaneously a greater demand for highly qualified personnel and for low-level workers (particularly in the personal services sector), together with an exacerbation of class, ethnic, and racial tensions. All this has transformed Tel Aviv into a city where socioeconomic inequality is more marked (Menahem, 2000).

Globalized trends in Tel Aviv are not only expressed in the rapid economic development of the city but also in its cosmopolitan cultural

ambience. Within Israeli imagery, Tel Aviv epitomizes the profound transformation that is taking place in the structure, lifestyle, and ideology of Israel as a post-industrial society. The image of Tel Aviv as the locus of “cosmopolitanism” is often juxtaposed to that of Jerusalem as the place where social, political, and ideological cleavages jostle and become intensified. Abundant with restaurants and the entertainment business, festivals and a vibrant hotel industry, the banner of Tel Aviv as “the city that never sleeps” sheds light on the spirit of the metropolis, leaving behind “national” conflict-ridden Jerusalem. Aware of this distinction and the benefits it yields, Tel Aviv authorities invest tremendous effort in maintaining this image.

From the beginning of the 1960s until the late 1980s, Tel Aviv-Jaffa experienced substantial demographic changes, which had a major impact on the city’s ethnoclass fabric. In the wake of the massive immigration from the former Soviet Union (beginning at the end of 1989) and the huge influx of migrant workers (beginning in 1993), Tel Aviv-Jaffa was transformed from a city with an aging and declining population into an urban center whose population increased by 20 percent and where 9 percent of the population consisted of migrant workers. Within just a few years, certain neighborhoods in south Tel Aviv became new ethnic enclaves where families of undocumented migrant workers made their homes. The main reason for the concentration of migrant workers and their families in these neighborhoods is the availability of cheap apartments in run-down buildings that were abandoned in the 1970s and 1980s. These sociodemographic changes were accompanied by a redefinition of the relations between local government and the central government.

From Israel’s establishment in 1948 until the 1970s, one aspect of its centralist character was the structure of the ties between the local and the national. Local governments were dependent on the state economically and in the planning sphere, particularly with regard to education and social welfare. The change in the electoral system for local governments, combined with the state’s gradual withdrawal of its support and financial involvement on the local level created a situation in which local authorities became relatively autonomous (Ben Elia, 1993; Doron, 1995; Katan, 1997). By becoming less dependent on the central government for subsidization, Tel Aviv-Jaffa also gained greater independence to set its political agenda, including policy regarding the “new Tel Avivians.” This is the framework within which the great bulk of the non-Jewish migrant workers in Israeli society is concretized and localized.

*DEVELOPING A CHANNEL OF URBAN INCORPORATION FOR LABOR MIGRANTS**Localization of the Issue*

The issue of the migrant workers became localized by means of a three-stage process. The first stage was the avoidance and panic period, from the early 1990s until the beginning of 1996; the second was the consciousness-raising period, from 1996 until 1998; and the third was the recognition period, from late 1998, when the subject was upgraded from being handled on the professional level to being handled on the political level. As we show below, the process through which migrant workers were incorporated into the municipal agenda was the result of the interface between professional knowledge, political opportunity, and participation in transnational urban networks.

During the first stage (avoidance and panic period), the prevalent attitude of the municipal administration was that migrant workers posed a threat to the disadvantaged neighborhoods in which they were concentrated. In line with this approach, representatives of the city emphasized that their main concern was not with the needs of migrant workers and their emerging communities but with the welfare and quality of life of Tel Aviv's "legitimate" residents, and particularly the rehabilitation projects in the southern neighborhoods. The concentration of migrant workers around the old and new central bus stations in the city was portrayed as the "death blow" to an area that was earmarked for development. The municipality's political level fomented an atmosphere of moral panic when it declared that migrant workers posed a threat to day-to-day life in the city, with the result that "we could lose half of the city" (*see* protocols of the municipal committee on Foreign Workers, August 19, 1996).

The issues that were of concern to the municipal authorities, and which forced them to address the presence of the new "foreign" residents, revolved around subjects that pertained mainly to the jurisdiction of the Social Welfare and the Planning departments. Officials from both departments expressed similar concerns regarding a series of problems: the adverse effect on the weak population caused by competition with migrant workers for jobs; religious and other value-based problems (the establishment of Christian churches in a Jewish state); and incidences of crimes, violence, inebriation, and "social deviation" in general, including the development of commercial enterprises that specialize in satisfying such "deviations" (such as cheap hostels, massage parlors, brothels, and strip clubs). According to officials in the Planning Department, these businesses constituted "environ-

mental hazards,” as they encouraged drunken, raucous crowds to gather around kiosks, coffee shops, and grocery stores. However, the main concern of the municipality’s planners was the adverse effect the concentration of migrant workers would have on the renewal plan for south Tel Aviv (Plan 1900/Aleph). According to this plan, the old Central Bus Station area was earmarked for the development of “flagship projects,” to be financed by local government and big investors. As migrant workers moved into the area, the project lost momentum and the municipality found itself without outside financing for the plan (interview with the planning division official, 2000; Engineering Authority, 1996; “1900/Aleph S.O.S.”). One of the measures suggested by city planners to discourage migrant workers from moving into the area was to redefine the “household” unit, thereby limiting the number of persons entitled to live under one roof to a minimum. Although technical, such measures were considered potentially effective in expelling labor migrants from south Tel Aviv by making housing arrangements more expensive. However, reality proved otherwise. The Planning Department encountered numerous obstacles in enforcing the new measures, and in no time the rental market in south Tel Aviv became one of the most active and lucrative in the city.

The regulatory approach of the planning officials – which was in line with the political posture of Roni Milo, the mayor at the time – defined municipal policy on migrant workers as being congruent with state policy, that is, as a “non-policy” issue (City Engineer, 1996; Committee on Foreign Workers, 1996). Despite the mayor’s declared refusal to take any action liable to be construed as implying municipal recognition of the new residents, units subsidized by the municipal budget, such as schools and mother-and-child clinics, provided ongoing basic health and education services to the migrant workers and their children. All along, however, the municipality’s primary concern lay not with the needs of the migrant workers, but with preventing any deterioration in the quality of life of Tel Aviv’s “legitimate” residents (letter from the director of the Public Health Department to the deputy mayor of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, January 20, 1997).

During the second period (consciousness raising), from the end of 1996 to the municipal elections in November 1998, the city’s professional level, and more particularly the Social Welfare and the Planning departments, gradually became aware that the presence of tens of thousands of foreign workers within the city’s boundaries was not a temporary matter and that a policy on the subject had to be formulated. The turning point in the Planning Department’s attitude toward the migrant population followed the visit of a Dutch specialist on urban planning, hosted by the members of the

municipality's long-term planning unit in October 1996. Drawing on the Dutch experience, the unit submitted a proposal to the City Planner that reframed the migrant issue in "urban renewal" rather than "regulatory" terms. "We should take into consideration the positive contribution of the foreigners' presence," the proposal stated. "They are a young, healthy population, highly motivated to work and progress, and are highly adaptable. It would be a mistake to consider them a weak population only because of their weak economic position. Ethnic pluralism should be regarded as having the potential to strengthen the community, provided the municipal authorities create the proper conditions." (Engineering Authority, 1996; TABA, City Construction Plan 101935 6109. Division of Urban Planning and Construction, Nov. 27, 1996; TABA, City Construction Plan 5914 97810. Division of Urban Planning and Construction, Oct. 20).

The reframing of the labor migrant issue from a "burden" into a "potential" was to play a crucial role in future local policymaking so as to include labor migrants within the legitimate bounds of urban membership. Steps taken by the Welfare Department since 1997 gave evidence to the emergent policy of incorporation and the activation of new channels of participation for non-Jewish migrants. However, it was not until the political constellation at the local level changed in 1998 that municipal awareness was translated into an urban migrant-oriented policy (interview with the director of the Welfare Department, 2000).

In 1997, the municipal social welfare division appointed a community worker "to examine the subject." She became the first municipal official whose brief was to deal specifically with the migrant population, focusing especially on education, health, and at-risk children. It was her activity that brought about the direct encounter of the municipality's professional level with the day-to-day reality and distress of the migrants. However, awareness that the city was home to a large population of "permanent temporary residents" was not yet translated into the articulation of policy at the local political level. The politicians, led by Mayor Roni Milo (associated with the right-wing Likud party), insisted that the state must provide for the basic needs of the foreign residents, as the local government had neither the resources nor the tools.⁴

⁴A report conveyed to the chairman of the Knesset's Labor and Social Affairs Committee by the deputy director-general of the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality estimated that NIS 9.3 million would be needed annually to address the issue of the foreigners in the city. This would cover expenses for education, social welfare, and public health, as well as local services such as inspection, sanitation, and garbage removal (Deputy Director-General, Jan. 10, 1997).

The transformation of the migrant workers issue from a professional into a political one (the “recognition” stage) occurred after the municipal elections in October 1998, when the new mayor, Ron Huldai (associated with the left-wing Labor party), announced the establishment of the Forum for Foreign Workers. Chaired by the municipality’s director-general, the forum operated as a steering committee and consultative body for the mayor. One of its first moves was to establish the Aid and Information Center for the Foreign Community in Tel Aviv-Jaffa (MESILA in Hebrew). As noted above, MESILA was created in July 1999, about six months after the new mayor assumed office.

As we show below, once the question of the migrants’ incorporation became an integral item on the city’s political agenda, the stage was set for the development of urban channels of incorporation oriented to non-Jewish migrants in a Jewish state. These allowed for the allocation of social rights and services to migrants regardless of their formal status, as well as what the municipal actors call the “empowerment” of migrants through the provision of competencies to utilize those rights. Urban channels of incorporation stand in conflict with the state’s labor migration policy in two key modes. First, by allocating rights and services to undocumented migrants, local government “legalizes” unrecognized populations; second, local government is opening new spaces for participation (“empowering”) for the same individuals who are being persecuted by the state.

“Tel Aviv-Jaffa Is Not Foreign to You”

MESILA’s activity focuses on providing social welfare services and collecting information of vital importance to the foreign residents. In the sphere of education, its activity has consisted largely of locating clandestine kindergartens run by migrant workers in order to provide assistance and professional guidance, as well as to create a common base of trust between the migrants and the unit’s staff. Most critically, MESILA has organized training courses for kindergarten teachers in the various communities, conducted in their respective mother tongues.

The municipality’s active involvement in education matters has yielded significant results. Beginning in September 2001, three pre-school classes for foreign workers’ children operate in a south Tel Aviv public school, which has absorbed the largest number of migrant workers’ children. The classes are subsidized by both the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality and the Ministry of Education. Although the Compulsory Education Law makes it possible for

foreign children to attend public kindergartens, most of the parents were not aware of this, and the state authorities did nothing to inform them. It was not until May 2001, following a joint initiative by the municipality, members of the Knesset's Education Committee, and the school's principal, that the law was enforced to include migrants' children.

Besides pre-school education, the municipality has also invested considerable resources in primary and secondary schools, as almost 700 (reported) migrant children attend public schools in the southern neighborhoods of the city. In this area, the presence of migrant children is changing the ethnic composition of schools, which are being transformed into truly multicultural institutional settings. The most striking example is Bialik School, where migrant children make up one third of the school population. The municipality has also provided extracurricular activities such as summer camps, which offer a protective environment for otherwise unprotected children of migrant workers. Note that, until 2001, the Ministry of Education did not allocate additional resources to schools whose populations significantly increased through intake of migrant children.

Education has thus become a cogent example of the bottom-up policies developed by the city on labor migrants, mainly undocumented, that preempt national policies. As a result, the state often finds itself "legalizing" existing incorporation practices carried out by municipal agencies (interview with social worker, MESILA, 2001). No less important, education is one such an area in which local actors engage with the national in a continuous negotiation over resource allocation, services provision, and, more importantly in the case of undocumented migrants, over responsibility for and recognition of noncitizens as legitimate residents.

Another clear example of the way in which the city negotiates with the state over the terms of recognition of the migrant population is in the realm of violence in the family and children at risk. In October 2000, a support group for Latino (migrant) adolescents was created, under the joint auspices of MESILA and the Ministry of Public Security, to help them deal with identity issues and prevent criminal behavior. The irony of this effort is not only that its target population is "virtual" from the state's viewpoint, but also that it is being subsidized by the ministry that took the lead on the current arrest and deportation policy.

From the foregoing examples, the extension of rights and services carried out by the city evidently involves more than merely increasing and diversifying them. Its effect is to change the definition of who are rights-bearing subjects, hence the very conception of eligibility. In extending eli-

gibility to noncitizens on the basis of a territorial definition of membership (residence), the city is playing a central role in transforming migrants into “urban citizens,” that is, legitimate rights-bearing subjects within the local society. Thus, while the state attempts to behave as though there were no migrants, the city attempts to behave as though there were no state.

Urban definitions of membership geared to incorporating labor migrants are particularly interesting in light of the exclusionary migration regime prevalent in Israel with respect to non-Jewish migrants. While Jewish migrants are automatically accorded citizenship upon arrival, under the Law of Return it is all but impossible for non-Jewish migrants to obtain residence permits, let alone citizenship. Exclusionary trends have become more pronounced since the massive influx of foreign workers during the last decade transformed Israel into a de facto immigration country. However, the meaning of urban membership goes beyond the mere provision of welfare services to noncitizens. Indeed, from the perspective of the politics of labor migration as conducted in Israel since the 1990s, the most interesting development is what officials of the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality call the “empowerment” of the migrant communities (mainly the African, Filipino, and Latin American communities). This has been accomplished through the opening of new spaces for social, political, and cultural participation for otherwise publicly excluded social groups.

Mobilization of the Migrant Communities

City authorities (through MESILA) have encouraged labor migrants to organize and appoint representatives who will constitute a convenient and efficient mediating body between their communities and the authorities, as well as among the different communities. The cooperation between representatives of the Filipino, African, and Latin American migrants’ communities (most of them undocumented), under the aegis of the municipality, has resulted in the publication of the “Migrant Workers’ Rights Booklet,” which contains a detailed list of rights to which migrant workers in Israel are entitled in a variety of areas (ranging from housing to civil rights during police detention). Ironically, the guest of honor at the ceremony marking the booklet’s official publication was the Minister of Public Security, a strong advocate of the deportation policy.

One of the most important results of the mobilization activities led by the city has been the emergence of a local leadership within migrants’ communities, which until then had lacked a leadership, or the consolidation of

existing ones (such as the Filipino and African migrants' communities). An example of the former is the organization of the Latin American "leaders' group" by and through MESILA. The Latino migrants' earlier inability to create their own leadership was overcome by MESILA's initiative in organizing a "leaders' group" workshop in September 1999, which lasted several months, with the declared objective of "helping migrants help themselves." The significance of the municipality's activities, aimed at mobilizing migrants around a self-appointed leadership, should again be understood against the backdrop of state-led persecution practices. During 2001, the authorities arrested and deported Filipino and Latino activists with the clear objective of deterring undocumented migrants from further attempts at organizing and settling (*see* Algazy, 2001; Sinai, 2001).

The disjuncture between national and urban migration policies is further heightened by the fact that mobilization initiatives promoted by the Tel Aviv authorities have yielded a number of results. One is the creation of a Sunday school-like framework ("La Escuelita") operated by Latino migrants, which seeks to preserve the native culture and language among the second generation. This new space has been instrumental in the creation of other community-oriented activities, which further consolidate the newly "empowered" community (a mothers' support group and a community theater, among other things).

As mentioned above, the initial motive of the city authorities in encouraging the migrants to form a leadership was to create a mediating mechanism that would facilitate the city's efforts to "reach" the community. However, the unintended and unexpected result has been twofold. First, by encouraging the creation of migrant leadership along ethnic lines, the city is accelerating the politicization of migrants' identity. Second, the mobilization of migrants' communities opens opportunities for claim-making around issues that do not necessarily lie within the city's realm of interests. The search for autonomy by the migrants' leaders is, to a great extent, driven by a discrepancy between the migrants' expectations and MESILA's understanding of its mandate. While the migrants' representatives press the local authorities for legalization and urge them to intervene in matters of arrest and deportation as basic needs of the undocumented communities, MESILA prefers to focus on "the small but important things" of day-to-day life. "Our objectives derive from needs," the unit's director explained, and the idea is not to work for the regularization of the migrant's situation (interview with unit's director; *see also* Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality, October 2000). From this point of view, MESILA falls into the trap of the ideological dichotomy

that equates the “local” with the “apolitical” and the “national” with the “political.”

According to this dichotomous approach, the city’s tasks are limited to improving the residents’ living conditions, hence its activity is seemingly not “political”; whereas the state’s interest lies in the true realm of “politics,” which has to do with the “big” questions of deportation, quotas for work permits, and so forth. The city’s position prompts migrants to address other, mainly nongovernmental organizations in search of alternative spaces and sponsors for their initiatives.

In light of the discrepancy between the migrants’ expectations and the city’s understanding of its role, we need to determine the sociological significance of the incorporation channel created by the city regarding the migrant communities and the state. In the concluding section, we offer an analysis of the possibilities and the limitations of urban definitions of membership.

URBAN MEMBERSHIP: CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

As relations between nations themselves are changing in the present phase of global capitalism, so too are relations between nations and their cities (Holston and Appadurai, 1999). What is the nature of these emergent realignments in the sphere of migration policy?

Three main lessons can be drawn from our analysis regarding the political significance of cities in an era of global migration. First, the politics of labor migration are not conducted abstractly and uniformly throughout the national space. Second, the politics of labor migration are closely bound up with the politics of the city. Whereas the politics of the city inevitably deal with incorporation-related issues, the state often confines itself to dealing with migration control. Third, and most important, the migrant-oriented policy spearheaded by the city is not only a reaction to the dilemma of migration flows that it does not control, it is also part of the process whereby national/urban government relations are redefined and negotiated and through which the city becomes a key actor in broader, transnational processes (Portes, 2000).

Based on an analysis of the spheres of activity undertaken by the local government of Tel Aviv, it can be argued that the city is assuming a leading role on an unprecedented scale in the incorporation of unrecognized labor migrants as legitimate members of Israeli society. While city officials may sometimes choose not to engage in frontal entanglements with the state, by

defining their practices as "nonpolitical," for example, they develop a proactive "alternative politics" that bypasses the national system and at the same time brings pressure to bear on the state to amend longstanding policies. City-led "alternative politics" may produce different understandings of membership and participation, which clash with those propounded by the national state. The chain of reactions that followed what was known in Israel as the "Sheena case" exemplifies both the potential challenges latent in "alternative politics" to state definitions of membership and its limitations. Under the auspices of the Tel Aviv municipality Culture Division, Nigerian singer Peters Sheena and his band were invited to give a concert. Under standard procedure, municipal officials submitted a request for an entry permit to the Ministry of the Interior. The grounds for the request were that "[the concert is] a gesture to the African community (of labor migrants) to compensate for their longstanding cultural deprivation" (Mu'alam, 2001). However, the ministry refused to issue the permit, contending that the attempts of the Tel Aviv Municipality to improve the situation of undocumented communities not only subverts state policy but also encroaches upon official attempts to combat the settlement of undocumented communities. "Do we belong to two different governments?" the director of the Visa and Aliens Department asked rhetorically, emphasizing that her refusal did not reflect an "unenlightened" approach to migrants but was based strictly on compliance with the law. "We [the state] demand that the activities undertaken by Tel Aviv officials conform with the policy and laws of the state" (Mu'alam, 2001). Civil rights activists launched a campaign to pressure the government to retract its controversial position; at the same time, the campaign brought to the public's attention the existence of the underlying tension between national and urban policies on migrant workers.

The growing disjuncture between the national and the local labor migration policies is an inextricable part of the process whereby "wanna be" global cities like Tel Aviv become strategic arenas in which peripheral groups, including groups that are outside the boundaries of national citizenship, acquire legitimate platforms on which to present their needs and put forward their demands (Sassen, 1998). More importantly, it attests to the micro-mechanisms through which the city engenders new concepts of membership "without a passport" and assumes an active role in the de-centering of the state as the single source of migration policymaking.

As we have shown in this article, the disjuncture between national and local policies on labor migrants was the result of a number of factors: first, a high concentration of migrants within the urban center and the emergence

of new claim-making populations among them; second, a conspicuous resistance by the state to an incorporation-directed policy on non-Jews; third, the creation of a local political constellation that is not hostile to non-Jewish migrants; and fourth, a global vision of local authorities nurtured by increasing participation in transnational urban networks that provide role models for urban governance and for issue framing.

The realignment between the urban and the national on labor migration issues has been accomplished through three main mechanisms: the incorporation of the labor migrant issue into the local political agenda; the allocation of social rights to migrants regardless of their formal status, together with the competencies to utilize those rights; and the opening of new spaces for social, political, and cultural participation for otherwise publicly excluded social groups. From the perspective of unrecognized and wholly excluded migrants, these spaces are of tremendous significance, as they open to them public spheres of participation and recognition. However, our analysis also shows that by establishing alternative channels of incorporation and participation for non-Jewish migrants, the city does not necessarily seek to mount a frontal challenge to the state's authority as the sovereign entity that formulates migration and citizenship policies. So far, city representatives have chosen to limit themselves to spheres such as education and welfare, which the state has no interest in addressing in any case, and they have been hesitant about formulating a clear position on core issues such as deportation and legalization (Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality, October 2000).

The city's position in this regard is prompted by its problematic place as a public authority that enjoys considerable autonomy vis-à-vis the central government yet is also dependent on it. This situation of relative autonomy and partial dependence of the urban as against the national sphere naturally dictates the possible strategies of action that are available to the city in respect of the state. These strategies reside somewhere between adopting the role of mediator between unrecognized migrants and reluctant state authorities at one extreme and serving as a role model for the national (*see* Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality, 2000) at the other. This self-presentation neutralizes the political significance of the city's incorporative practices in several regards. To begin with, it overlooks the fact that the city's incorporative practices normalize the presence of migrants as legitimate residents of the city. By extending a variety of social rights and services to "noncitizen" and "non-Jewish" migrants, the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa is reformulating the criteria of "eligibility." As such, it is adopting, albeit unknowingly, a post-national definition of membership and entitlement that is in blatant conflict with the

ethnonational definitions that underlie the incorporation regime in Israel. Moreover, the city's incorporative practices are part of a more general development in which cities, along with various non-state actors, claim greater autonomy and involvement in areas that in the past were under the tight grip of the centralist state. In this sense, the inclusionary politics operated by the city toward noncitizens serves as a magnifying glass through which it becomes possible to understand the politics of the new migration and the shifting boundaries of participation in the Israeli state and society.

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