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The excluded citizenship identity: Palestinian/Arab Israeli young people negotiating their political identities

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This paper explores the ways in which Arab/Palestinian high school students in Israel negotiate their civic and national identities. The paper draws upon qualitative data that included semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 20 students in an Arab Muslim high school. It focuses on the ways in which they make sense of the notion of citizenship and negotiate their position as Arab/Palestinian Muslim citizens in a Jewish state. The paper attempts to go beyond common conceptualisations of political identities of the Arab/Palestinian minority in Israel. It suggests that Arab/Palestinian students are aware of the politics of citizenship in Israel and draw upon different discourses of citizenship and meanings of inclusion in defining their belongings.

Keywords: citizenship; political identity; inclusion; exclusion

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Introduction

A major concern today for citizenship education is how it can counter dividing practices, especially in multicultural and conflict-ridden societies. Similarly, in recent years citizenship education in Israel was undergoing changes, with the prospect of offering a more inclusive curriculum (Ministry of Education 1996). However, despite these intentions the current curriculum still employs mechanisms of exclusion, especially towards the Palestinian/Arab minority and their collective narrative (Pinson 2007). One such mechanism of exclusion is the failure of the curriculum to represent the complex political identities of Palestinian/Arab[1] youth in Israel.

This paper aims to use the voices of Palestinian/Arab high-school students to disrupt negative or oppressive conceptualisations of Palestinian/Arab citizens that describe their identity conflicts as a Zero-sum game of civic (Israeli) versus national (Palestinian/Arab) identity, while ignoring the agency of this group (Sa'di 2004). The present paper focuses on the complex ways in which one particular group of Palestinian/Arab Israeli youngsters negotiate their different political identities and how they adopt or resist different dominant discourses of citizenship and belonging in Israeli society.

This paper is based on a wider study that focused on the discursive formation of political identities and Israeli citizenship by young Israelis from diverse social groups. The analysis here represents one of the case studies – Palestinian/Arab young Israelis.[2] This is an instrumental case study (Punch 2005) that, while being aware of the limitation of its sample and the generalisations one can draw from it, still provides precious insights into the tensions and complexities faced by young Palestinian/Arab Israelis when negotiating their different identities. The study draws on individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 20 Palestinian/Arab Israeli Muslim

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high-school students, 16–17 years of age, from an exclusively Arab Muslim settlement at the centre of Israel. The interviews were conducted during spring 2001, shortly after the outburst of the Al-Aqusa intifadah. The semi-structured interviews focused on themes such as the meaning of citizenship, Israeli citizenship, belonging and the way they define their political identities. The focus groups were designed to give voice to the group and used their critique of citizenship education to trigger a discussion of their civic belongings. The interviews and focus groups were discursively analysed using Atlas.ti.

Citizenship, identity and belonging

Citizenship is one of these elusive, contested and multifaceted concepts, which is used to describe different phenomena (legal status, membership, political identity) and receives diverse meanings in different societies and eras. One of the difficulties in defining this concept is that it embodies tensions, between individual rights and responsibilities, between freedom and order, and between equality and difference (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999). To capture some of the challenges it embodies, especially in the context of the status of the Palestinian/Arab minority in Israel, two inter-related critical theoretical themes have informed my analysis: the need to re-think the assumed overlap between citizenship and nationhood, and the tension inherent in citizenship between its inclusionary and exclusionary nature.

Current critiques have raised the need to reconceptualise the link between nationality and citizenship that assumes an overlap between nationals and citizens (Isin and Wood 1999; Yuval-Davis 1999). Yuval-Davies (1999) argues that this alleged overlap is not only being challenged today by movements of immigration and growing trends towards multi-ethnic states, but also embodies some other problems such as giving the hegemonic group the right to exclude citizens who are not nationals. To challenge this link, we need to understand how and why the social space of citizenship is constructed as linked to national belonging and how this link is used as an exclusionary mechanism towards the 'other'.

Citizenship, by definition, is both exclusionary and inclusionary. On the one hand it is based on the principle of universality. However, at the same time, the process of determining who is a citizen and who is not entails exclusionary mechanism of defining the 'us' and the 'we' (Arnot and Dillabough 2000). The paradox between the inclusionary and exclusionary nature of citizenship also lies at the assumption that the principle of universality grants marginal groups entrance to citizenship. However, at the same time, using the same argument of universality, the 'otherness' of these marginal groups is denied entrance, excluded from what is assumed to be universal, and pushed into the so-called private sphere.

In order to capture the multifaceted and contested nature of citizenship, and in particular the complexities of the civic positions and belongings of Palestinian/Arab citizens in Israel, I adopt Hall and Held's (1990, 175) notion of the *politics of citizenship*, which they define as follows:

> … citizenship has entailed a discussion of, and a struggle over, the meaning of scope of membership of the community in which one lives … The issue around membership – who does and who does not belong – is where the *politics* of citizenship begins.

In other words, understanding the *politics of citizenship* is to understand the dynamic struggle over citizenship as a socially constructed space, the tension between inclusion and exclusion it entails, and the ways in which the link between citizenship and national belonging is constituted.

Arnot and Dillabough (2000, 2) add that the politics of citizenship and the struggle of individuals and groups to be included in a collective 'we' 'is also about the struggle for self-definition amidst conflicting and sometimes contested notions of state citizenship'. The struggle over the inclusion in a collective 'we' is a dynamic process. It is produced by, and reproduces, social relations and the positioning of individuals and groups within a socially constructed space. These

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processes of producing and reproduction of the space involve also the constitution of margins and centres, the construction of boundaries, of 'we' and 'them' – of 'otherness' (Gordon, Holland, and Lahelma 2000); the discursive formation of identity and belonging. In this respect, the analysis here adopts a non-essentialist concept of identity that understands it to be dynamic, formed and transformed (Benhabib 1996). It is a relational concept – the discursive construction of 'us' and 'them' (Isin and Wood 1999). Identity is a way of talking about self. It is a 'process of becoming, rather than being' (Hall 1996, 4), through which the individual acquire a sense of location; of where they belong (Weedon 2004). An interesting question is what happens when this process of 'becoming', the quest for belonging, is disrupted; when dis-identifications (Weedon 2004) emerge or what Bhabha (1990) refers to as counter-narratives.

Bhabha (1990), when discussing the nation-space – the *nation narrative* – points out that an analysis of this space can benefit from investigating not only the processes in which the centre is being shaped and the nation narrative is being constructed, but also by looking into the margins – the *counter-narratives*. In a slightly different account, Isin (2002, 275–276) suggests that when investigating the notion of citizenship we should focus on the point when it is 'becoming political'. 'Becoming political' is the moment of struggle, the moment when the positions of the marginal groups verses the dominant one are rethought; the point where the universality attributed to the view of the dominant groups is questioned. To gain a rich analytic account, one should look, for example, beyond the question of what and who is being included/excluded. Indeed, the aim of this paper is to explore the counter-narratives of Palestinian/Arab Israeli students, the moment they 'become political' through the ways in which they articulate the *politics of citizenship* in Israel on its inclusionarly/exclusionary nexus.

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The politics of citizenship in Israel

One of the most fundamental characteristics of Israel for understanding its *politics of citizenship* is the tensions embedded in its definition as both Jewish and democratic. As a democratic state, Israel is committed to provide equal individual rights to all its citizens, regardless of their nationality or religion. However, at the same time, the state of Israel has acted to maintain its Jewish character and to preserve its Jewish majority, at a symbolic level as well as by means of legislation and resource allocation (Bishara 2000). Therefore, its definition as a Jewish state means that membership in the Israeli civic collective is determined first and foremost in terms of membership in a national-ethnic group – the Jewish people – rather then according to universal civil criteria (Shachar 2000). In other words, the assumed overlap between Jewish nationality and Israeli citizenship is used to justify the disadvantage of non-Jewish groups. Indeed, Kimmerling (2001) argues that while the Palestinian/Arab minority in Israel might gain access to certain rights based on their individual status as citizens, as a group they are constantly excluded from participating in determining the common good.

Shafir and Peled (2002) suggest that the politics of citizenship in Israel is made up of a struggle between three different, and sometimes inter-related, political discourses: liberal-democratic, republican, and ethno-national. This struggle creates a hierarchical structure of membership in the polity. Whereas the liberal-democratic discourse is used to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, the republican discourse is used to determine the position of different Jewish groups based on their alleged contribution to the Zionist project. Finally, the ethno-national discourse is employed to create a distinction between Jewish citizens who belong to Israel as a collective, and Palestinian citizens who are included merely as individuals but excluded as a group.

Adopting a slightly different terminology, Jabareen (2003) argues that the 'language of rights', the democratic-liberal discourse, perpetuates the supremacy of the Jewish majority. This approach constitutes Palestinian Israelis as a 'migrant minority', which is only entitled to equal

civil–political rights, whereas they are in fact a 'homeland minority' with claims over the land. The Palestinian minority's aspiration that the land of Israel/Palestine would be recognised as a common homeland is seen by most of the Jewish majority as a threat, as a rejection of the Zionist ideal, and therefore as illegitimate (Peled 1993). Yet, the word citizenship in Arabic, *Mowateneh*, derives from the word *watan* that means homeland – hence it denotes a sense of belonging to a specific territory (Rouhana 1988). Therefore, the dominant political discourse in Israel that sees the Palestinian citizens merely as 'migrant minority' not only excludes their national narrative, but also deprives them of one possible meaning of their civic belonging.

The Palestinian citizens in Israel are caught between the illusion of inclusion derived from Israel's democratic regime and its discriminative characteristics embedded in its definition as a Jewish state. Caught in this tension, they are expected to accept their inferior status and to adopt a civic identity that politically rejects them and their collective memory.

When analysing the influence these perplexities have on the collective identity of Palestinian/Arab citizens in Israel, scholars often identify two processes that they have labelled *Israelization* and *Palestinization. Israelization* refers to the adaptation of an egalitarian discourse of citizenship and the aspiration to be integrated as active and equal citizens (Al-Haj 2000). *Palestinization*, on the other hand, indicates the strengthening of Palestinian national identity, which is associated with feelings such as pride and belonging (Bishara 2000). Many scholars understand these two processes to be mutually exclusive and conceptualise the relationship between the two as a zero-sum game (Amara and Schnell 2004). This lead to a research agenda that focuses on determining what direction the identity of the Palestinian/Arab citizens in Israel takes, whereas Israelization is often seen as a shift towards integration and Palestinianization as radicalisation (Sa'di 2004).

In recent years, the civic–national dichotomy in Palestinian/Arab Israelis' identities was criticised and more complex alternative analyses were offered. Rabinowitz's (2001) term 'trapped minority' is such an example. Rabinowitz (2001) suggests that Palestinian citizens in Israel often feel trapped – excluded twice, once by the Jewish majority in Israel and once by the majority of Palestinians who are not Israelis. However, while scholars such as Rabinowitiz (2001), Shafir and Peled (2002) and others have problematised the representation of Palestinian/Arab citizens and their political identities in mainstream sociology, they often still fail to give them voice, and especially to address questions such as: how Palestinian/Arab citizens deal with these complexities; how they reconcile different forms of exclusions; how they make sense of their belonging in a situation of double exclusion; how they make sense of the assumed link between nationhood and citizenship in Israel when it used to justify their marginalisation; and how and when they become political. The analysis offered in this paper is set to address these questions. Rather than focusing on the institution of citizenship in Israel and its mechanism of exclusions, it examines how young Palestinian/Arab Israelis understand these tensions. It explores the ways in which they negotiate their political identities in the context of their marginal position in Israeli society, the nationally segregated education system[3] they attend and the civic education they receive that reinforces the Zionist discourse of belonging to the State of Israel (Pinson 2007).

The excluded citizenship identity

Considering the social, political and educational contexts in which Palestinian/Arab young people shape their identities, it is hardly surprising that they experience difficulties in negotiating the meanings of being Israeli citizens and other identifications they hold. Drawing on a diversity of discourses they articulated different meanings of citizenship, inclusion and a verity of alternative political belongings. What remains common is their experience of exclusion.

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Citizenship: diversity of meaning

The responses of the Palestinian/Arab students interviewed for this project with the question 'what is citizenship?' suggest that behind what is reported in various studies as weak or strong civic identity lie a multiplicity of meanings. Many of the interviewees articulated a minimal notion of citizenship (McLaughlin 1992) in which civic identity and belonging are interpreted as a formal status:

> Citizenship is when you have an ID that says that you belong to a certain state, you are registered in this state. (Asad)

Slightly different, Souhad stressed other elements of the formal relationship between the state and its citizens when she explained that citizenship is 'what an individual owes to the state and what it owes to you'. However, while Souhad interpreted citizenship in terms of the rights–duties nexus, others referred to citizenship as one's obligation to obey the rules:

> Each citizen must know what citizenship is. Because if you don't know the rules and the laws of the citizenship in the state you live in you won't know how to behave, you won't know how to mange your life […] you won't be able to adapt yourself. (Aref)

To a large extent, Aref's response represents a minimal ideal of civic virtue as 'law abiding' (McLaughlin 1992, 236). Yet, his response might also be understood as a discourse of conformity. For many of the Arab/Palestinian students, as articulated by Aref, their status as citizens was not something that was taken for granted, it was not really theirs. They constructed themselves mainly as subjects, rather than citizens, who need to conform – to adapt themselves – to the expectations of the state.

Even though the main meaning of the concept of civic belonging articulated by the Palestinian/Arab students was the minimal one, other meanings were also found. Hackima, as some other students, explained that:

> Citizenship is maybe also when you feel from the inside that you are a citizen and that you are part of the society in this state. (Hackima)

Hackima drew on a republican discourse, or maximal ideal of citizenship, while defining citizenship as identifying and feeling part of a giving community. However, based on her experience she added: 'but you don't feel that you belong [here] because everyone stares at you when you walk with the veil, you are being seen as an Arab'. In so doing she positioned herself outside this discourse.

Another salient discourse, informing the students' responses, was the egalitarian one. Many of the interviewees, drawing on egalitarian discourse, often alongside other interpretations, constructed the notion of equality as central for understanding the meaning of citizenship and especially their position in relation to Israeli citizenship – as Kamal suggested: 'For me citizenship means equality. When you live in a state you must get all your rights, full rights'.

The egalitarian discourse became more prominent in the student's responses when the discussion has moved from the abstract notion of citizenship to the specific case of Israeli citizenship. Al-Haj (1994) argues that the search for equality and the egalitarian discourse used by Palestinian/Arab citizens is an indication for Israelization processes and the aspiration to be integrated as active and equal citizens in the state of Israel. Maen's response, however, challenges Al-Haj's assumption. It is, on the one hand, the centrality he ascribes to the notion of equality of rights, and, on the other, his experience of exclusion that led him to reject the relevance of Israeli civic identity in his life – to 'become political'.

> Citizenship? I don't know … Why should it matter to me? If I had lived in a different state it would have been important to me. But in Israel it isn't […] Because I don't get all my rights anyways right? I don't get what I should get.

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Indeed, no matter how they interpreted the notion of citizenship, when the Palestinian/Arab students articulated its meanings the main element that informed their understanding was the very powerful and daily experience of being discriminated against:

> I don't think I feel 100% Israeli, because of the discrimination. Look at this classroom. Are you looking? Look at what it looks like. If you go to another school, a Jewish school you see there they have classrooms with everything, really beautiful, nice buildings everything. (Mai)

> A citizen is someone who lives in the state. But in the State of Israel there are two types of citizens, Jews and Arabs […] and each has its own laws in the state. (Haysha)

> Here we notice the difference. Here they let us feel the difference […] They look at the Arabs like they are, like what are you doing here? I met many Jewish people that told me: who are you anyway? What are you doing here? This is our land, our country, and you must leave this place. (Jasmine)

When asked about the civic education curriculum, Abdalle commented:

> I don't find citizenship interesting. Because I don't get all my rights, I am Arab so why should I be interested in citizenship … It doesn't matter to me if I know or I won't know all this because anyway I don't get all my rights […] There is a discrimination here.

It is interesting to see, that even here, when the students expressed their common experience of marginalisation within Israeli society (which most probably would be translated in survey studies into a weak civic identity), they drew on different conceptions of citizenship. While Mai and Abdalle emphasised the ideal of equality of rights, Haysha stressed the element of formal civic status and Jasmine understood her exclusion to be a result of the dominant ethno-national discourse in Israel that defines membership in Israel in terms of belonging to the Jewish people.

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Different models of inclusion – the tourist and the other

The diversity of approaches was also found in the ways in which the Palestinian/Arab students articulated the meaning of inclusion/exclusion. Their responses to questions such as 'who is Israeli?' indicated that they were torn between two contradicting, but not mutually exclusive, tendencies. On the one hand, they wished to be included within Israeli society, at least in the sense of receiving equal rights. On the other, while realising that their identity, their difference, would continue to be excluded, they chose to position themselves outside what they understood as Israeli society and to emphasise other types of belongings. To a great extent they articulated two notions of inclusion/exclusion, two discourses of the politics of Israeli citizenship. One, drawing on what Shafir and Peled (2002), called a liberal discourse articulating a 'thin' idea of civic belonging based on equality of rights and the other on a 'thick' notion of national belonging.

In some cases, the Arab/Palestinian interviewees drew upon the notion of equality of rights in which case the main element that distinguishes someone who is an Israeli citizen from someone who is not – between the collective 'we' and the 'other' – was their access to full citizenship rights and obligations. As the following quotes indicate:

> I define a citizen in the state of Israel as a citizen who gets all his rights not only part of them […] this is a real Israeli […] I think it refers only to the Jewish citizens, it doesn't refer to all the citizens as equals […] *They* receive more than the Arabs […] I am an Israeli citizen but not like a Jewish person. (Othman)

> Who can define himself as Israeli? Someone who takes all his rights […] which is the Jew […] The tourist who comes to this state wanders around enjoying himself but he has no rights. I live here and I don't have rights. This is why I defined myself [only] as someone who lives in the state of Israel, not as Israeli. (Souhad)

Othman and Souhad defined a citizen as someone who enjoys full rights. Thus, the boundaries between those who belong to the Israeli collective and those who are positioned outside it were

constructed in terms of having access to the rights that are distributed by the state. However, based on their experience of being discriminated against, they did not see themselves as 'real' or 'full' Israelis. As Souhad put it, she was 'like a tourist'. The metaphor of being a tourist in one's own state is very interesting. Whereas a tourist is a temporary status, which has positive connotations, the 'tourist' in his/her own country, the 'outsider', is a less satisfactory position. However, the emphasis these responses put on access to rights as the main path for inclusion might suggest that there is a possibility for change, assuming a full access to rights will be granted to them. To some extent, we can argue that these responses adopt what Jabareen (2003) calls a migrant minority position.

Employing an ethno-national discourse of citizenship and drawing more rigid boundaries between 'us' and 'them', other responses emphasised the link between citizenship and nationhood in defining who is Israeli:

> The government, the Prime Minister, and the president are all Jewish, *they* want everything to be *theirs*, Jewish, they don't want the Arabs. I think that you don't want *us* to live in *your* state, you want to deport *us* from *your* state, this is what I think. […] I don't feel like an Israeli citizen, I don't define myself as such, absolutely not! I am an Arab who live in the State of Israel, not Israeli, not Jewish, […] The Israeli people includes only the Jews. If you talk about Arabs so you might talk about the Palestinian people which includes the Arab citizens […] I have Israeli ID but I don't feel I'm a citizen in the state of Israel […] Who is an Israeli citizen? First of all it is a Jewish person who lives in the state of Israel. (Wassilla).

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Wassila chose to reject her identification as an Israeli citizen while emphasising her Arab identity. The experience of being marginalised, her understanding that the reason for her exclusion was the definition of Israel as a Jewish state, and the ownership the Jewish people have over the state, led her to position herself as the 'Other' – to develop counter-identification (Weedon 2004) *vis-à-vis* her exclusion from the hegemonic discourse, defining Israeli citizenship and her identity as an Arab as contradicting each other. A similar view is expressed by Abdalla:

> What does it [being an Israeli citizen] mean to me? Nothing, nothing. I don't feel proud to be Israeli […] Because I'm not Israeli […] because my parents and my grandparents are Palestinians so how can I change and become Jewish? It is true that I have an Israeli citizenship but I am Palestinian and I'll stay Palestinian […] I told you that to be Israeli you must be Jewish, Israeli Jewish, not Durze and not and not and not.

Wassila and Abdalla constructed the notion of being Israeli as closely linked to, and in a way coinciding with, being Jewish. For them, negation the identification 'Israeli' is not a negation of a civic identity, but rather a negation of what they perceived as the Other's national identity. In so doing they employed an ethno-national discourse of citizenship, reinforcing the link between nationhood and citizenship. According to these students, inclusion is based on the principle of 'sameness'. To a large extent they employ the same logic of exclusionary practices that are derived from the hierarchical structure of Israeli citizenship. Wassilla defined herself as an Arab who belongs to the Palestinian people; she did not wish to be included in a collective that is occupied by a different nationality. When asked what will happen in a hypothetical situation of formal equality, she explains:

> If I was equal to everyone so I would have defined myself a little bit more Israeli citizen, but not completely, because you know *we* the Arabs, also those who live in the Palestinian state, I identify with them. You know why, right? Here you have a Jew who loves the other Jew, why? Not because they live in the same state. So this is the case with the Arabs, they are like *us* so I love them, I identify with them. (Wassila)

Asad expressed a similar view when he was asked whether he could see himself as an Israeli if there would be equality of rights: 'No! Does the Jew able to change and say he is Arab? I'm Arab, Arab!'

Abdalla, Asad and Wissila did not see themselves as passively pushed outside the boundaries of Israeli collective. On the contrary, in a way they are the ones who positioned themselves outside it. It is their national identity and their belonging to a different national/political community that prevents them from feeling Israelis. However, while this position could be seen as a form of resistance, of becoming political (Isin 2002), it can equally be argued that by so doing they reinforced the link between citizenship and nationhood, which acts as the main mechanism for their exclusion in Israeli society.

Who am I?

Bhabha (1990, 4) argues that 'identity is never *a priori,* nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an "image" of totality'. Indeed, the ways in which Arab/Palestinian students referred to their civic identity and its relationship to other identities is very much a question of the extent to which they felt they have access to these images. Similar to Rabinowitz's (2001) model of 'trapped minority', for many of the Arab/Palestinian students in this study a central element in defining themselves was the feeling that they were trapped between two 'centers of political gravity' (Rabinowitz 1998, 74), that they neither belong to the Israeli collective nor to the Palestinian.

> For the 1948's Arabs[4] it is really difficult. It is really difficult because on the one hand the Jews don't want them here. And on the other hand the Palestinians also say you are cream's Arabs[5] […] They tell us you forgot about Palestine you are not Palestinians. It is really difficult because the two sides from here and from there no one wants them. So where should we go to? (Mai)

Realising that they are trapped between their civic and national identities and their partial belonging to both, they found the task of defining who they are complex and often frustrating.

> For me it is really difficult, because I can't, you know I'm an Arab who lives in a state where everyone are Jewish. I also can't forget that I'm Palestinian […] and also where do I live? I live in the state of Israel […] But how I'm suppose to define myself in such a situation where I live in a Jewish state, In Israel, as a citizen of course, but in the inside I'm also Palestinian […] when they ask me who am I? How do you define yourself? So it is pretty difficult. (Janan)

Many of them find it complicated to define who they are. Such complexity is often solved by hyphenated identity, but this too, as Othman suggested, embodies some tensions:

> I don't define myself as Arab-Palestinian or as Arab-Israel-Jewish, or as Arab-Israeli. I can't define myself, *I don't know what I am*. If I am Arab-Israeli, or Arab-Palestinian […] about a year ago, I went to Jordan. They asked me if I'm Israeli or Arab, what could I say about this? I'm both Israeli an Arab, but I couldn't say that I'm Arab-Israeli because they would had thought that I'm Jewish. So I told them that I'm Arab-Palestinian [laughing]. When we were at the boarder control between Israel and Jordan I told the Jews that were there that I'm Israeli, I couldn't tell them that I'm Arab-Palestinian.

These young people are aware of the complex task of defining who they are. The solutions they offer are in some cases living with these uncertainties, by articulating a complex relational identity, such as Othman, or by defining different meanings of belonging in an attempt to reconcile the tension between their civic and national identities. Maen and Janan, for example, created a distinction between formal belonging – that of having a formal status – and a belonging that is from the 'inside' and is defined in terms of 'sameness'. While it is difficult, they both co-exist.

> Here we belong to Israel, we belong in the sense of our ID and all other things ok? And you have the Palestinian that we and they are the same. So like when you dissemble a boom, we cannot neutralise this side or the other. We are in the middle. (Maen)

Somewhat differently, Hanin turned to construct a notion of multiple identities.

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> Once I wrote a composition in Arabic with the title 'a small boy asking where is his mum'. You know what? The little boy is me, me and any other Arab in the state of Israel. This is his problem how to define himself […] But I found the solution. I'm Muslim, Arab, Palestinian who lives in the state of Israel.

The tension the Arab/Palestinian students in this study experienced between their civic and national belongings was often 'solved' when they chose to emphasise other identities that were understood to be less problematic and free of the tensions they associated with being Palestinian or Israeli – identities that offer a sense of inclusion that they felt was missing from 'being Israeli' or 'being Palestinian' and to which they felt they have access. Al-Haj (2000) suggests that, in the age of growing frustration and tensions between civic and national identity, many Palestinian citizens turn to traditional structures and religious affiliation. Many of them describe themselves first and foremost in terms of their religious identity attributing importance to their Muslim identity:

> I prefer to first define myself as Muslim and than to start talking about the things which are more complicated to me. (Asad)

> I think that I'm first of all Muslim. I don't mind about being Arab and what language I speak, I'm first of all Muslim and Arab and also from Palestine and also Israeli […] But here in Israel they see us as Arab and in the Arab world they see us as Jews and they don't call us Arab-Israelis. We are between this and that, Arab-Israelis […] [so] First of all I'm Muslim because this is a religion that is everywhere in the world everybody knows that there is such a religion and they accept it. So the religion is the thing that makes me most honourable and this is why it is most important to me. (Hackima)

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Hackima solved the problem of feeling marginalised both by the Israelis and by the Palestinians by stressing her religious identity. As opposed to the civic or national identities, being Muslim gave her a secure sense of location – because 'everyone knows what it means'. It is interesting to see that she perceived her belonging to the Islamic world in a way as a supranational identity. To a great extent, it can be argued that she used supranational identity to bridge the gap between her national and civic ones.

Finally, for many other Arab/Palestinian students, the sense of being a 'trapped minority' is translated to a strong relation to the land. They might not feel they belong to the state of Israel but, nevertheless, this need to be included is replaced by a sense of ownership and belonging to the land:

> Sometimes you can belong to a place that no one wants you there just because you feel part of the land […] When I live in my village I think of my village as my state, the place where I live, so I can't leave my state, to leave my village, my country, my relatives, my land […] I can tell you that I don't define Israel as my state ok? But it doesn't say that I don't really feel it is mine. Not because it is the state of Israel and Jewish people live here, but because I'm here for many years, and I live here and I'm going a head. (Janan)

While distinguishing between belonging to the state of Israel and to the land, Janan chose to emphasise the latter over the former. Some scholars (Jamal 2003; Nassar 2003) suggest that the discursive meaning of Palestinian identity has changed over time. Before 1948, the dominant interpretation was in terms of connection to the land, to the local community; after 1948, with the uprooting of the majority of Palestinians from their lands, the discourse has become more nationalistic, drawing on the image of the refugee as the ideal type. This of course led also to the marginalisation of the Palestinians who remained in Israel. Perhaps the emphasis on the connection to the land as the main source of belonging as reflected in Janan's response suggest that there is an attempt, by some of the interviewees, to reclaim those definitions in the face of the double exclusion.

Concluding remarks

The exploration into the ways in which Arab/Palestinian high-school students in Israel negotiate their political identities was offered as an attempt to go beyond common dichotomisations of

Israelization and Palestinization processes. The variety of discourses of citizenship employed by the youngsters interviewed for this project and their different conceptions of inclusion/exclusion suggests that the picture is much more complex than the image of weak versus strong civic or national identifications that emerges from survey studies. This diversity of responses and different meanings they denote demonstrates that the Arab/Palestinian students are aware of the politics of citizenship in Israel and the struggle between different discourses it entails.

Two notions of inclusion/exclusion were found in the ways in which the students rearticulated the politics of citizenship in Israel. One based on the principle of *equality of rights* and the other, drawing on ethno-national discourses and reinforcing the assumed overlap between citizenship and nationhood, on the idea of *sameness*. While the former can be seen as what Jabareen (2003) calls a migrant minority position, the latter can be interpreted as a form of resistance. However, it can also be seen as an indication to the power the imagined linkage between civic belonging and belonging to the Jewish people in Israel has, even for those it excludes.

Isin (2002) defines the moment when a group 'becomes political', when they understand the false universality of the collective 'we' constructed by the dominant group and search for alternative narratives. Feeling excluded (whether based on perception of difference and sameness or lack of equality) both by the citizenry collective and by the Palestinian, the Palestinian/Arab students in this study sought to define an alternative collective 'we' to which they might belong. In so doing some adopted supranational identities such as belonging to the Muslim world, and others emphasised their belonging to the land.

In such a complex situation, one should ask what forms of citizenship education we should offer for these students. I have argued elsewhere (Pinson 2007) that Arab/Palestinian students might benefit from a curriculum that will built on their alternative definition of political belonging.

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Notes

1. The use of the term 'Palestinian citizens' is controversial. It is often used by scholars who see themselves as critical sociologists (myself included), signifying the acknowledgment of the right of the Arab/Palestinian citizens in Israel to be recognised as a national minority (Rosenhenk 1998). Yet, some of my interviewees felt unease with such identification, and preferred to identify themselves as Arab. Being committed to the principle of voice-giving I decided to use the somewhat 'clumsy' term 'Palestinian/Arab Israelis'.
2. The wider study included three case studies: secular Jews, Zionist-religious Jews, and Palestinian/Arab Israelis.
3. The state education system is divided into Jewish and Arab schools. The majority of Palestinian/Arab schoolchildren attend separate schools. The Arab schools suffer from a disproportionate level of state investments (Geraby and Levy 2000) and from a limited autonomy as regards the content of its curricula.
4. The 1948 Arabs is an expression used to describe the Palestinians who remained after the 1948 war in the territory of the state of Israel and received Israeli citizenship.
5. Cream's Arabs is a denomination used by Palestinians in the occupied territory and the diasporas to mock the Palestinian citizens of Israel and to refer to their westernised lifestyle.

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