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## Citizenship at work in the Israeli periphery: the case of Peri Ha'Galil

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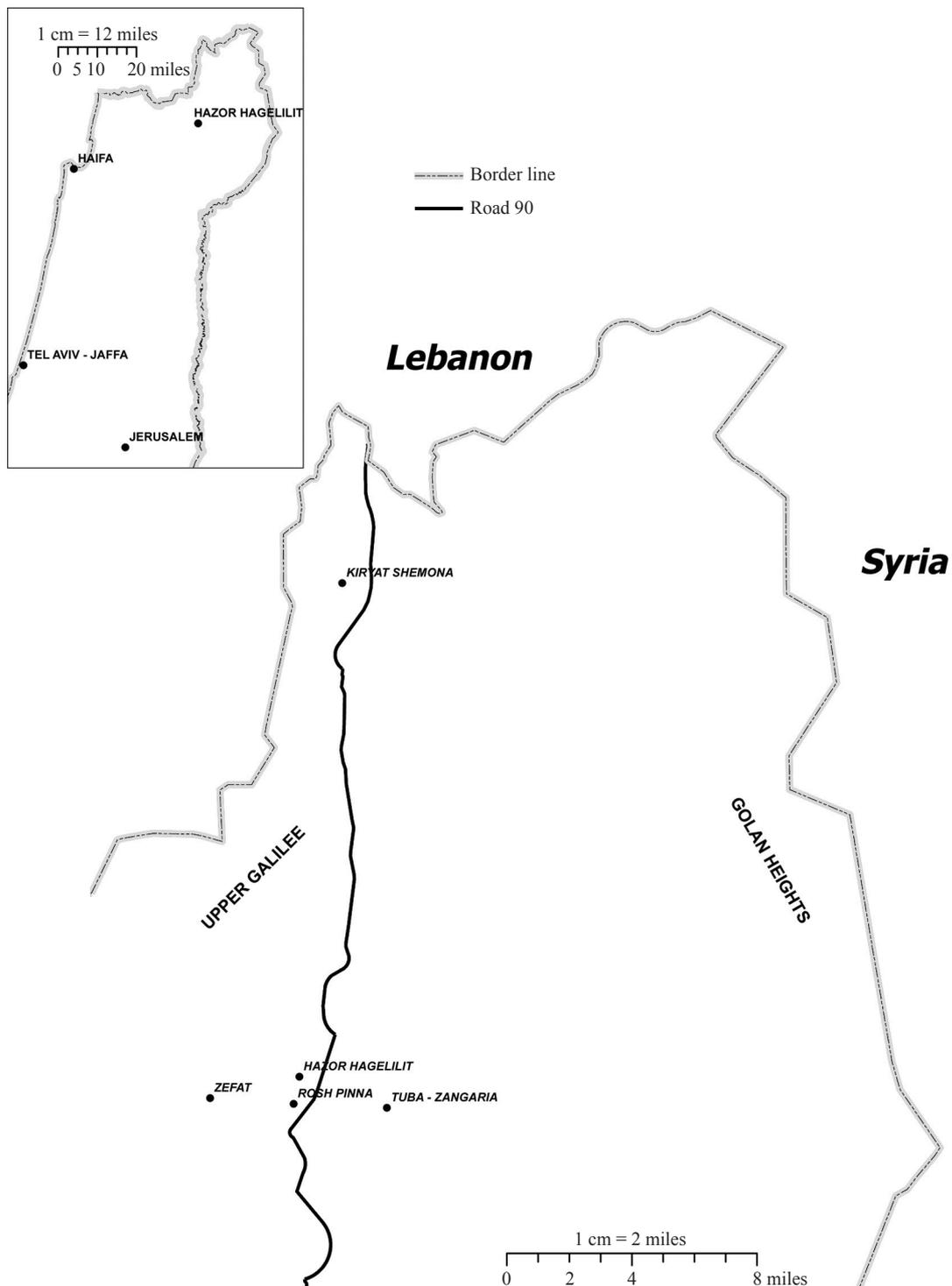
**Abstract.** In this paper we examine a struggle waged by production line workers at a formerly state-owned factory located in Israel's northern periphery. Initially an attempt to prevent the closure of the privatized factory, it soon became an all-out struggle through which production line workers deployed their peripheral location and ethno-class identities to make claims for and enact their citizenship (at work). Drawing on two years of ethnographic research, we argue that despite—or perhaps because of—years of persistent labor market reforms traditional industrial factories remain critical spaces for the constitution of citizenship in Israel. In contrast to the past, in which state-sponsored industrial employment created a perfect congruence between labor market participation and citizenship ('I work therefore I am a citizen'), recent processes aimed at enhancing labor market flexibility have fundamentally altered these relations. Under constant threats of downsizing, precariatized industrial workers in privatized factories experience a restless citizenship, a ceaseless battle to secure their jobs through what might be called the *work of citizenship*.

**Keywords:** periphery, deindustrialization, neoliberalization, citizenship, Israel, labor regime

### Introduction

During a visit to the Upper Galilee in October 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was awarded an 'honorary residency' by the town of Hatzor Ha'Gelilit ('Hatzor', see figure 1). Described by the head of the local council as 'a true friend of Hatzor', Mr Netanyahu thanked its residents and promised to turn the small development town into a full fledged city. He stressed the importance of strengthening the Israeli periphery by allowing workers a shorter commute time through a network of train and highways and reiterated his plan to 'cancel the periphery' in Israel (Buchnik, 2011; see also *Ynet* 2013).

A week later, outside Peri Ha'Galil (literally, the fruit of Galilee), a food processing factory and Hatzor's largest employer, hundreds of workers gathered to protest against the management's plan to lay off fifty of them, in light of what its CEO described as the state's failure to deliver a grant of eighteen million NIS (Parliamentary Committee of Economics, 2012). Taken aback by the announcement, Moti Haziza, the chairman of the workers' board, commented bitterly, "Netanyahu has already been honored by Hatzor, but he doesn't honor us." The following day, leading a group of fired-up workers to the Parliamentary Committee of Economics, he urged its members to approve the transfer of funds to the new owners in order to resolve the looming crisis, the third since 2008. Blaming the state for abandoning the periphery, he asked:



**Figure 1.** Map of the upper Galilee (source: authors)

“Are we, Hatzor, not human beings? Do we not belong to the periphery of the State of Israel? Perhaps we belong to the Syrian or Egyptian periphery? Who do we belong to? ... give [us] the minimal thing, give the worker the right to work in the State of Israel. Is it so hard? What did we ask? Give us the right to work” (Parliamentary Committee of Economics, 2012, pages 10–11).

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A few days later, having received renewed financial assurances from the state to support the factory, the owners agreed to reverse their plan and employees returned to work.

These two seemingly unrelated events clearly have much in common. Both the premier's celebratory remarks and the chairman's agonizing questions reflect a new type of citizenship in the Israeli periphery, which centers on the labor market. Oscillating between grandiose infrastructural projects, which seek to cancel the periphery, and an ongoing divestment of public support away from labor-intensive industries, which reproduces the periphery by exacerbating its socioeconomic marginalization, this new *citizenship at work* is at the center of this paper. By studying the case of Peri Ha'Galil, it explores traditional industries in the Israeli periphery as spaces in which the active constitution of citizenship at work takes place.

The paper makes two claims: first, contrary to voices bemoaning the declining importance of industrial factories in a postindustrial era, we argue that they in fact remain meaningful. Despite, or perhaps because of, three decades of economic restructuring and deindustrialization in Israel, factories have become increasingly important to the process of citizenship-making. Exposed to the predatory rules of the free market, precariatized (Standing, 2011, pages 16–18) workers in these factories, located historically by the state in the peripheral areas of the Negev and Galilee, have (re)produced them as spaces through which to formulate and enact claims for dignified citizenship. In contrast to the past, in which state-sponsored industrial employment maintained congruence between labor market participation and citizenship, recent processes of neoliberalization have fundamentally altered these relations. Privatization, outsourcing, and other changes in Israel's labor regimes have diluted the social contract between state and workers, in which employment security was guaranteed in exchange for political acquiescence, formally untying the links between work and citizenship. Job-related securities traditionally enjoyed by laborers in industrial, state-owned enterprises have been replaced by fundamental insecurities associated with the precarious employment (Vosko, 2006) of the industrial sector. Consequently, under constant threats of downsizing, industry workers in privatized factories experience a restless citizenship, a ceaseless battle to secure their *citizenship at work* through what we term the *work of citizenship*.

Secondly, we argue that the work of citizenship requires the instrumental utilization of workers' sociospatial marginality. Specifically, the factory's peripheral location and the social identities of its worker-residents become important attributes in the process. Embroiled in "livelihood struggles" (Lee, 2007, pages 29–30) against formidable political economic structural forces, laborers make purposive use of their collective ethnoclass identities. The deployment of marginality is a dual process of underscoring both its positive and negative qualities. A Janus-faced construct, simultaneously denoting powerfulness and powerlessness, centrality and marginality, inclusion and exclusion, 'the periphery'—and its ethnoclass signifiers—feature prominently in the work of citizenship. Through the enactment of a broad range of acts (Isin and Nielsen, 2008)—infusing invisible laborers with agency, however constrained (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011)—the work of citizenship draws heavily on the strengths and weaknesses of peripheral spaces, places, and peoples.

The paper proceeds as follows: we first survey the literature on the work and (social) citizenship nexus. We focus primarily on the changing face of citizenship in a postindustrial, neoliberal context and the rampant forms of precarious employment it gives rise to. We then contextualize peripheral industries in Israel against the backdrop of transformations in its labor regime. We argue that the gradual neoliberalization of the Israeli economy has yielded a negative differential effect on the peripheral economy, notably its traditional industrial sector. Though it was once a solid base of lower-middle-class employment and a key marker of the Israeli welfare state, recent processes of privatization have diminished the industry's workforce and weakened its capacity to secure their citizenship. The untying of the intricate

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relations between employment and citizenship was met with fierce resistance by workers wishing to replace their dwindling industrial citizenship with a new conception of citizenship at work. Finally, we analyze the “battle” at Peri Ha’Galil. Drawing on ethnographic data, we examine the factory as a citizenship-mediating space and illustrate the dual enactment of the periphery in the workers’ battle. We conclude by drawing some key lessons from the Israeli case.

### **From industrial citizenship to citizenship at work**

The citizenship–work nexus is rooted in the democratic trajectory of the industrial revolution era in Europe and North America, which articulated the connection between wage labor and political rights (Montgomery, 1993). Yet contemporary scholarship often uses Marshall’s (1950) work as a theoretical point of departure to trace the evolution of the three sets of rights that make up modern citizenship. Civil rights deemed critical for individual liberty such as freedom of speech, thought, faith, and property ownership were followed by political rights, which allowed individuals to partake in the exercising of political power through such practices of voting and being elected. Social rights, acquired within the context of the post-1945 Keynesian-inspired welfare state, extended “an ever-widening net of social policies that provided each citizen with a modicum of economic security and opportunities for social mobility” (Brodie, 2002, page 378). Famously termed ‘from cradle to grave’, social rights were meant to enable individuals “to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standard prevailing in the society” (Marshall, 1950, page 30). These rights, bestowed upon a quickly urbanizing population in order to mitigate the adverse inequalities instigated by market forces, were meant to decommodify labor by introducing a social safety net and a basic set of labor standards to cushion (mostly industrial) workers from the harshness of the capitalist market (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Marshall’s brief reference to trade unionism as “a secondary system of industrial citizenship parallel with and supplementary to the system of political citizenship” sparked a debate on the nature of industrial citizenship. Though Marshall himself conceptualized industrial rights—namely employees’ rights to form trade unions, negotiate collectively with employers, and strike when failing to achieve improved conditions at the workplace (eg, wages, working hours, or safety measures)—as a subset of civil rights, more recent scholarship has challenged this. Critics have argued that while collective bargaining allows industrial workers an improved position within the labor market, it requires group formation, thereby undermining workers’ civic ability to act individually when negotiating with employers. It follows that exercising industrial rights “may be injurious to the civil rights of individual workers”, both trade unionists and employees (Barbalet, 1988, page 26). Moreover, the articulation of industrial citizenship as a system operating exclusively outside government institutions was seen as relevant only to a certain period in British history (1945–1973). After this time, the rights of industrial workers have often been protected by the state rather than being left exclusively for market power (Crouch, 1998).

Recent attempts to disentangle industrial citizenship from its traditional realms have drawn attention to global political economic changes, including the redefinition of the role of the state in most industrialized and, later, transitional economies and the subsequent formation of new industrial spaces of flexible accumulation (Peck, 1996; Scott, 1988, pages 120–134), as well as the affirmation of new socioprofessional identities, new organizational models of production, and the feminization and transnationalization of labor (Whitehouse and Zeitlin, 1999). A growing body of work has highlighted the role of these labor market changes in the formation of multiple forms of precarious employment (Vosko, 2006). Alternatively known as ‘contingent’ or ‘atypical’, precarious employment refers to remunerated jobs characterized

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by “uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements” (Vosko, 2010, page 2), and those holding them have come to be known as a distinctively new class, the precariat (Standing, 2011). This deviates from the ‘Standard Employment Relations’ (SER) model, which regulated the mutual obligations of employers and mostly blue—and, later white—collar male employees (Fudge and Vosko, 2001) and provided them with professional training, regulatory protections, and “a social wage sufficient to support a man and his family” (Vosko, 2010, page 3), and from a specific conception of membership in the territorial community which entitled them to make claims on the state (Stasilius and Bakan, 2005). Exposed to low degrees of employment security, regulatory ineffectiveness, low control over the labor process, and inadequate income packages, precarious laborers who are excluded from the normative ‘social contract’, have lost their capacity to achieve a dignified lifestyle and a sense of belonging to a community grounded in professional standards, ethical codes, and mutual respect, and, consequently, their rights to full and equal citizenship (Vosko, 2010).

These changes prompted critics to call for more refined articulations of the work–citizenship nexus (Fudge, 2005). These were to recognize the (uneven) neoliberalization of market relations, the demise of the SER, and the incipient forms of workers’ identities and spaces of negotiations, and to formalize the idea that “labor is not a commodity, that it is invested of human agency and ... [that it] must be recognized in the ways that ... social actors create norms, procedures and rules about work” (Coutu and Murray, 2005, page 618). An alternative to the new (labor) market citizenship, which is characterized by “rampant individualism, the permeability of social safety nets and the commercialization of work” and the emergence of the individual-worker who is alone responsible for his or her work-related rights (Coates, 2006; Durand, 2007; Root, 2007), came in the form of citizenship at work (Coutu and Murray, 2005). It emphasizes the need to transcend classic ‘employment’ and identify a broader range of nonmarket, work-based practices including socially necessary labor and unpaid domestic work (Fudge, 2005). Seeking to decommodify labor and reflect the needs and interests of workers, this form of citizenship abandons ‘labor’ as the profit-driven and efficiency-maximizing site where “[t]he economic imperative rules”, and which is devoid of human agency, centering instead on ‘work’—“the positive side of productive, reproductive and creative activity”, which brings forth the positive elements of contemplation, personal development, and liberating flexibility (Standing, 2009, page 7; Gordon and Lenhardt, 2007). Citizenship at work thus extricates individuals from the restraints of the market, where they “do not fit easily into managerially preferred conceptions of workers as ‘human resources’” (Casey, 2009, page 172) and imbues them with the active qualities of agents of change. These new understandings of citizenship (at work) resonate with more general discussions on citizenship, which conceptualize it as a set of practices that enable one to turn himself or herself from a passive subject into an active claimant of rights. These practices, or acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen, 2008), do not just change individuals; rather, they “transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (claimants of rights and responsibilities) through creating new sites and scales of struggle” (Isin, 2008, page 39).

Calls for a more nuanced analysis of the actor-citizen also emerged within labor geography, where workers’ strategies to transform capitalist relations in their favor (resistance), improve conditions of existence (reworking), or simply mitigate its adverse impact on their everyday lives (resilience) were highlighted (Cumbers et al, 2010; Katz, 2004). Recent scholarship has highlighted the need to ‘make space for labor’ (Coe, 2013) by examining the spatially uneven power structures that exacerbate (or ameliorate) them while remaining cognizant of networks of social relations that impact on (precarious) employment in different

geographical contexts (Arnold and Pickles, 2011). In this context, attention has been paid to the multiple identities, scales, and spatial strategies labor makes use of in order to combat the ‘geographies of oppression’ (Valentine, 2010) embedded in the capital-skewed labor relations imposed by neoliberal states (Herod, 2001; Lier, 2007). The constant friction between these forces in the context of the workplace is best encapsulated in Coe and Jurdhus-Lier’s (2011) notion of ‘constrained agency’. Only an analysis, they argue, that juxtaposes workers’ various subject positions and grounds their agencies in specific structural limitations (eg, state and community politics) would allow workers to be seen as “complex beings, with multiple identities that go far beyond the workplace”, and determine the extent to which their struggle against ‘precariousness’ would be successful (page 229).

The changing faces of struggles for citizenship at work have been documented in a range of dwindling industries around the world (Desai and Idson, 2000; Hathaway, 2010; Salzinger, 2003). While, as Lee (2007, page 235) convincingly argues, both “the closing of a still mill in the American Midwest in the 1980s”, and “the bankruptcy of a state-owned textile factory in northeastern China in the 1990s” has “inflicted similar collective injuries on blue-collar communities”, the local context was shown to have played an important part in workers’ struggles to prevent plant closings and their chosen strategies if and when failed (Jonas, 1995; Herod, 2001). Geographers in particular have underscored the spatiality of specific struggles and examined labor responses to different processes of economic restructuring, including the politics of unions in deindustrialized regions (Castree, 2000; Tonkin, 2000). Studies have shown that while the flexibilization of labor markets has differentially precariatized socially marginalized workers, they have often managed to draw on new personal and communal resources in order to lessen its disproportionately adverse effects. From Indonesian workers’ new modes of collective organization in the face of state-led labor outsourcing (Tjandraningsih, 2013) through to the new worker-initiated support networks used by rural migrants in Vietnam as a way to overcome their work-based precariousness (Arnold, 2013), both socially and spatially peripheral communities have resourcefully drawn on their locally based assets as part of a politics of precarity (Lee and Kofman, 2012) that is geared towards the refashioning of the work–citizenship matrix (Goldring and Landolt, 2011).

Despite this voluminous literature, in the Israeli context there have been no attempts to study the links between economic restructuring, precarity, and local labor struggles. Particularly in peripheral development towns where rampant deindustrialization has precariatized whole communities, there is a need to examine both place-specific manifestations of the new fragility and the responses it has generated.

### **State and industrial periphery in Israel: from building to dwindling**

The Israeli periphery has long been an object of inquiry (Shachar, 1971). Research has traditionally attempted to explain the increasing socioeconomic disparities between core and periphery (Gradus, 1983). Despite important variations in theories used to explain regional inequalities,<sup>(1)</sup> scholars agree on the critical role played by state policies in amplifying and mitigating them. A large number of studies have traced the historical roots of the two most important periphery-oriented state policies: namely, population and industrial dispersions (Razin and Schwartz, 1992).

Both policies, conceived during the 1950s, were instrumental in the state project of settling and strengthening the new national frontiers (Yiftachel, 2006). Population dispersion was associated with the Sharon Plan of 1950, which sought to rectify the overconcentration of the population in Tel Aviv. The plan aimed to change the hierarchy of settlements by

<sup>(1)</sup>For an excellent discussion of the three main approaches, namely modernist–functionalist, neo-Marxist and postcolonialist, including their critiques, see Tzfadia and Yacobi (2011, chapter 1).

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establishing dozens of midsize urban centers mostly in the periphery—in accordance with social, economic, and national security considerations—to which new Jewish immigrants would be sent (Efrat, 1987). For reasons discussed at length elsewhere (Yiftachel, 2000), development towns were overwhelmingly settled by Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries (*Mizrahim*). By 1964 they were home to some 400 000 residents (16% of the total Israeli population), over three quarters of whom were Mizrahim, primarily from North Africa (Picard, 2009).

Creating viable sources of public services and primarily employment was essential for the survival of development towns, given their remote location and isolation from large cities. The industrialization of development towns was meant to ensure their sustainability by providing residents with an anchor of employment opportunity. This anchor was usually in the form of a single industrial plant (or a handful of them), which turned many of them into ‘company towns’. The next decade (1955–65) witnessed dozens of plants opening up in peripheral development towns, increasing the total number of employees from 5 000 to 47 000 (Greenberg, 2009). Since their main objective was to absorb as many working hands as possible, a majority of factories were of labor-intensive industries. Chief among these were textile and food processing, though other factories specialized in metal processing, petrochemicals, and automobiles.

Peripheral industrialization was a public–private partnership; while mostly privately financed, it received substantial government funding (Gradus et al, 1993). A large number of factories were owned by the *Histadrut* (Labour Union), whose strong political links to the ruling party MAPAY enabled it easy access to state support. Both privately owned and Histadrut-owned factories enjoyed a broad range of financial incentives. The 1950 Law for the Encouragement of Capital Investments, and its additional spatial element (1959) became major instruments in the state policy of industrial peripheralization.<sup>(2)</sup> As a result, the share of industrial workers in northern and southern peripheries climbed from 3.9% and 3.1% (1956) to 9.2% and 9.0% (1967) to 13.3% and 11.9% (1977), respectively (Greenberg, 2005).

The seeds of the crisis in peripheral industries were sown during this period, known as ‘the golden era of industrialization in the periphery’ (Gradus et al, 1993). Studies have shown that the efficiency and effectiveness of place-based incentives were rather limited (Schwartz, 1989). Incentives made it beneficial for some firms to invest in peripheral industries only for a short period, after which they relocated elsewhere. Moreover, owing to a special provision of the law, owners were allowed to reapply for subsidized funding for purposes of long-term investments in factories (Razin, 1986). Many factories relied upon state funds, and relations of dependency developed such that for most of the 1960s and 1970s, the state kept supporting failing factories in exchange for their owners’ avoiding significant downsizing and mass layoffs. Amounting to what one journalist termed ‘a shady deal’ between state and periphery (Ben Simon, 2002), these relations were a mixed blessing for development towns; while they helped sustain artificially low levels of unemployment, they simultaneously ‘blocked’ the entry of more advanced industries to the periphery (Greenberg, 2005).

The gradual diversion of resources from the periphery to the occupied territories following the 1967 war, and the preferential treatment now given to advanced, export-oriented sectors at the expense of traditional industries, has adversely effected peripheral communities (Gradus et al, 1993; Swirski, 2005). A massive process of economic neoliberalization from the 1980s turned dozens of state-owned and Histadrut-owned firms and factories into private entities (Hasson, 2006). While the ensuing adverse effects—including labor unorganization

<sup>(2)</sup>The 1959 addendum states that an ‘approved factory’ (*Mifal Meushar*) located in a peripheral region is entitled to additional place-based benefits.

and disunionization, abuse of workers' rights, and massive layoffs—were felt throughout the country, peripheral communities were particularly hard hit. The widening geographical unevenness has been attributed to the 'dwindling of periphery', which has become one of the key manifestations of Israel's privatization regime (Gutvein, 2011). This process entailed both major reductions in direct governmental involvement in peripheral economies and the imposition of indirect limitations on public entrepreneurship. As the state abandoned peripheral industries, private investors slowly moved in, taking over dozens of imperiled factories and exposing large segments of the local labor force to the predatory 'rule of the market'.

Peri Ha'Galil illustrates the adverse effects of the changing political economies of peripheral Israeli industries. Established in 1962 by Kur Industries, the Histadrut-owned conglomerate,<sup>(3)</sup> it soon became the town's largest employer. It currently employs 350 (tenured and seasonal) workers from Hatzor and nearby towns, and constitutes a main source of (in)direct employment for 1500 households from the entire Upper Galilee region. In the 1990s, as part of the privatization of Kur Industries, it was sold to 3I, a British-owned holding company specializing in "purchasing and rehabilitating failing peripheral factories" (Golan, 2009). A series of unsuccessful mergers under the new management further damaged the factory, which was described as "an infant forced to carry on his back several sick old men". Even the appointment of Avram Burg, a well-connected former politician, as Chairman of the Board, and generous loans provided by 'the fund for aiding distressed factories' were insufficient to save the troubled factory. In January 2009, with overdue debts totalling 260 million NIS, its two largest debtors petitioned the district court to appoint a receiver or otherwise order the sale of the factory to another party. The next few months witnessed intense negotiations between representatives of the workers, the Histadrut (now in its role as a labor union only), government ministries, as well as potential industrial investors. Among the solutions tabled were factory dissolution and general layoffs, provision of state warranties—in the form of subsidized loans and grants—to allow the resumption of production under the current management, and selling the factory to another company in the food conservation sector. In April 2009, an agreement was reached to sell the factory to a major food wholesaler who undertook to rehire the entire workforce, raise wages by 5%, and uphold all collective agreements concerning workers' rights. In exchange, the state made the new owners several grants totalling 18 million NIS.

The deliberations received considerable attention from the media, which scrutinized the workers' battle to protect their source of employment. Emotions often ran high as workers warned against the grave effects factory closure would have on their everyday lives, the town of Hatzor, and the social and geographic periphery of the Upper Galilee. Drawing on its sociospatial marginality, employees have made the factory a pivotal space through which to claim and enact their citizenship at work.

### **'No one listens, we're too far off': citizenship at work in the periphery**

The peripheral location of Hatzor dominated the public discourse during the crisis. Politicians and workers alike underscored the likely outcomes of mass layoffs in a remote town where alternative employment opportunities were scarce. The term 'company town' was used to create congruence between the two, or, as one worker called it, "to put Hatzor in a tuna can". Voices cautioning against the discursive construction of 'misery' were often rejected and 'No Factory, No Hatzor' became the main slogan. Mr Haziza, the chairman of the board,

<sup>(3)</sup>It should be noted that until 1989 the conglomerate operated as a clearing center to which profits from factories were transferred and then reallocated on a needs basis. Thus, while Peri Ha'Galil has always showed solid profits, they were often used to offset losses incurred by other Kur-owned firms.

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explained that mobilizing the periphery was instrumental to positioning their battle within the context of uneven labor geographies in Israel.

“This factory *is* Hatzor. Every person in this town either works—or has relatives working—in it. It’s the town’s symbol, so we must use it. Hatzor is a development town in the periphery, and we must use it as well. This is our only ammunition. We have nothing else, and so our message must be loud and clear, so that the media in Tel Aviv and politicians in Jerusalem hear us out and ... save us, since we’re fighting for our livelihoods.”

The battle was not about increasing salaries or upgrading working conditions. Workers insisted they were not greedy, but solely interested in maintaining their *only* source of livelihood. This was important in order to explain the qualitatively different meaning of work in the periphery. The abundance of employment opportunities in ‘the center of the country’ was contrasted with the chronic shortage of jobs in Hatzor. Losing a job in Tel Aviv amounted to ‘a small pothole in one’s road’, but was described as a life-changing event in the periphery. The situation was particularly problematic for older, manual laborers, a socioprofessional profile fitting many of the factory’s workers. With slim chances of being hired elsewhere, losing their job was likened to losing their ability to earn a living indefinitely and, consequently, to the end of one’s dignified life. A senior manager provided a grim description of one such scenario.

“Look at this guy. He’s fifty three, has four children and a mortgage. He’s been working in the factory since he was seventeen. What will he do if they let him go? Where will he go? He’s got nowhere to go. This is Hatzor for God’s sake, not Tel Aviv. There if people lose their jobs—they have other factories they can work for. But here? At his age, with no job? It will be the end of his life.”

The periphery was mobilized to explain the state’s geographically differentiated approach towards work-based crises. As one worker noted, “If this [crisis] had happened to a bank in Tel Aviv, they [the state] would already have poured in billions [to save it].” Though it was privately owned, the state was repeatedly blamed for the factory’s fate. Not only did it fail to restrain the debtors (two partly state-owned banks) and introduce guarantees against the factory’s outstanding loans, but it later lingered in providing the new owners with the promised grants. The bureaucratic foot-dragging was evidence of a tradition of discriminatory practices towards peripheral workfare, dating back to the early days of statehood. The state, as one worker claimed, “Does not care about us ... because we live in the periphery. It has always been like that. But this time [we tell them] ‘enough’. We’re no different from other citizens. We must find ways to make them listen to our pain.” These words exemplify the twofold challenge peripheral workers face in their battle for citizenship at work, namely to be recognized as legitimate subjects *and* to create an appropriate arena in which to voice their legitimate claims.

Both challenges proved daunting in previous cases. Between 2009 and 2012 more than a dozen peripheral factories were shut down or lost large segments of their labor force. While all belonged to traditional industries (eg, textiles, glass manufacturing), none became a symbol of peripheral struggle like Peri Ha’Galil. Attributing their failure to workers’ acquiescent approach, Mr Haziza argued, “screaming in the periphery is futile. No one listens, we’re too far off. So you must act all the time. Work with the media, with the public, and make sure you always draw attention.” Adopting a dynamic stance not only enabled workers to transform themselves from subjects to claimants and from passive spectators to actors in an a priori site, but allowed them to be “actually engaging in its creation” (Isin, 2008, page 27).

To create sites, workers formed close relationships with media outlets. Channel 2’s reporter, known as ‘our reporter in the north’ was referred to as ‘our best ally’ in many interviews. He befriended workers, helping them to convey the desired message more legibly

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and, in many respects, made their battle his own. His neutral position notwithstanding, he highlighted Hatzor's prime selling point: its miseries.

"People in the Center think the Upper Galilee is National Geographic. We're in only when the cranes pass through [on their way to Africa). My job is to make the periphery appealing to people in other parts of the country. I must show them images that would break their hearts and make them care. I must show them images of Haziza as a person who suffers in the periphery but takes pride in himself and the place. I give them the best of the periphery through the worst of it."

His words capture the dualist essence of the peripheral work of citizenship. Remoteness and social fragility make the periphery a powerless object, deprived of state attention, while simultaneously allowing its reinvention as a coveted public product. A weapon of the weak (Scott, 2008), it is the broadcasted disempowerment of the periphery that becomes its most important source of power in making itself visible. Images of workers presenting their minimum-wage paystubs or standing in white aprons in front of giant peeling machines became nightly spectacles on national news programs. Radio stations too transmitted the breaking voices of workers receiving the 'pink slip' or admitting they could no longer pay their children's university tuition.

Alongside these images of misery, workers continuously underscored the strengths of the periphery, mobilizing it as a symbol of resilience, of steadfastness against all odds. "They will not break us", and "we won't leave home no matter what" were sentences used to denote workers' innate connection to the region. While many admitted they encouraged their children to seek a better future away from the periphery, they vowed not to abandon Hatzor. Surprisingly, it was not just native Israelis who used these trajectories of innate place-based ties; new Jewish immigrants who had been living and working in Hatzor for a decade or less were amongst the most vociferous in highlighting the upsides of the periphery, articulating a strong sense of loyalty to their gateway town.

"Leaving is not an option for me, but not just because of money. I mean, it's tough here, but its home. Look at the people. They are so warm and giving and helpful. This is not Tel Aviv where everyone cares about himself; we get benefits, hot meals, people care about each other, they attend each other's weddings. It's like a family. This is why we keep on fighting. Where else would we have such a feeling of togetherness?"

To sustain their togetherness in the face of formidable structural changes workers were bound to take action in new ways regularly. These aimed at reproducing their deep sense of marginalization and simultaneously proving their determination to change the natural "order of things" (Isin, 2008, page 27). Locking the factory to prevent entry of owners, suppliers, clients, and government representatives alike was a common act in the struggle. In one instance, workers set up tents and camped in the factory yard during the weekend, refusing to let anyone in. On another occasion, they allowed representatives of the owners into the factory only to tear their dismissal letters in their presence. These acts were meant to signal that red lines had been crossed and that all means would be used to avert future layoffs. In the words of Haziza, "We realized this was it. If we give up now, we will all go home. This wasn't a fight for our jobs. We were fighting for our homes." The fear of losing one's home, both physical and metaphorical, was a recurrent theme in many interviews, as was the determination to find the strength to avert removal from one's home. These articulations of the peripheral home as a shaky site from which one could be arbitrarily removed, and as a source of grounded pride from which to launch resistance to abort these threats, were emblematic of the dual construction of the periphery in the battle.

On several occasions disgruntled workers physically blocked Highway 90, the Upper Galilee's main route and Hatzor's only outlet. A symbolic act lasting several minutes, the

blockade exploited the spatial vulnerability—or vulnerable spatiality—of the town and the entire periphery, while proving the resourcefulness and steadfastness of its residents. Interestingly, drivers were quite patient, many beeping their horns at protesting workers as signs of identification and encouragement. In addition to drawing considerable public attention by setting tires ablaze and disrupting the regular flow of highway traffic, this illustrated the ease with which orderly social relations in the periphery could be unsettled. Workers likened the momentary act of disturbance to their own continuous economic insecurity emerging from their position as peripheral employees. In this respect, the act was emblematic of both the weakness emanating from the chronic shortage of possibilities in the periphery and residential empowerment to change the natural order of things if just temporarily. As one worker noted, “we close the intersection and paralyze the whole Galilee. Closing the factory will do the same.”

Drawing a perfect parallel between the periphery’s major veins—of employment and transportation—the blockade allowed workers to rearticulate their terms of engagement with the state. Within this new context, the battle over one’s place of work became an entire region’s battle to be legitimized and empowered as claim-making subjects. The clearest illustration of the latter took place when in October 2011 social activists in the border city of Kiryat Shemona took to the streets in protest of the government’s neglect of the northern periphery. In a well-orchestrated act, they distributed national passports of ‘The State of the Periphery, District of the Upper Galilee’. The fake documents contained twisted versions of symbols and texts appearing on formal Israeli passports, officially announcing the establishment of the State of the Periphery in the Northern Galilee. Activists explained their decision to found an independent state in terms of severe interregional disparities, including massive inequality in job opportunities, and called upon the Israeli state ‘to send the new country a shipment of aid’. An act of reciprocal disengagement, declaring regional independence built on the familiar duality of peripheral (dis)empowerment, which shows sufficient resilience to seek citizenship beyond the motherland, alongside desperate calls for aid.

In sum, the periphery was a major resource in the workers’ work of citizenship. At once a symbol of desperation and disenfranchisement *and* an icon of pride and steadfastness, it was neither simply the background against which the battle was waged nor a passive state of affairs to be come to terms with. Rather, it was a formidable social construction, turned and twisted as the crisis unfolded and enacted through a series of acts. It is to ethnicity and class, the other two construction workers have drawn upon, that we now turn.

### **‘The real face of the periphery’: ethnoclass and the work of citizenship**

“They can’t put my picture in the newspaper or interview me for Channel 2. I’m an Ashkenazi who makes 20000 shekels a month and drives a brand new car. It would damage the battle because I am not the real face of the periphery.” Histadrut Official

The success of the battle of Peri Ha’Galil was puzzling. As scores of peripheral industrial factories had been privatized and shut down (or downsized) in recent years, few believed its fate would be any different. The fact that it involved a low-tech industrial labor force composed of ethnic minorities, both Jewish (Mizrahim and FSU immigrants) and Arab (Bedouins), perceived as lesser citizens in the Israeli polity (Shafir and Peled, 2002), was unpromising. However, marginalized ethnoclass identities became critical instruments in the workers’ battle, functioning as the social platform upon which ‘citizenship at work’ was enacted.

Much like peripherality, ‘authentic’ ethnoclass identities were carefully mobilized as simultaneously symbols of strength and weakness.<sup>(4)</sup>

From the outset, the three different groups informally agreed to create an interethnic coalition, with each group to be spoken for by one of its members. Since the veteran group Mizrahim is the most dominant in the workforce, both numerically and hierarchically, it was its representatives who coordinated activities. In contrast to other struggles in which workers’ ethnicities were regarded as unimportant, or harmful to their cause,<sup>(5)</sup> the workers of Peri Ha’Galil underscored their ‘otherness’, brought it to the fore, used it discursively, and often performed it. It was thus mostly working-class Mizrahi and Arab men or Russian women who were sent to speak in public. Their ‘authentic’ qualities (eg, guttural speech) and vulnerable status as ethnoclass minorities living in the periphery were critical components in the overall strategy.

A more prosaic reason for the coethnic coalition formation was the workers’ belief that, given their ‘mentality’, each group had to play a different role in the battle. Mizrahi men were often the spokespersons of the battle, Russian women were its embodied images, and Bedouin youngsters carried out most acts of resistance. As one worker described it, “we [Mizrahim] were the voice, Russians were the face, and Arabs were the hands.” Whether or not such clear ‘division of labor’ indeed existed, putting the variegated skills of the ethnic groups to work was essential to the embodiment of human agency in the battle. As Haziza claims,

“We [Mizrahim] cooperated [with the other ethnic groups]. The Russians are knowledgeable, but too old and the Bedouins are enthusiastic, but too young. So, we had to lead the way, and use their expertise all the time. You have Russian workers, so you speak in the Russian channel and that’s how you get to more people. We were also in touch with Al Jazeera, because we have the [Arab-speaking Bedouin] workers from Tuba [Zangaria]. They [young Bedouins] were also the ones that locked up the gates of the factory.”

It is important to note, however, that this coalition was far from being an equal social space; on the contrary, workers of both Jewish and Arab descent were frank about the ethnic inequality which characterized social relations throughout their campaign, and workplace relations more generally. As an Arab worker confessed, “discrimination in the factory inevitably exists. A [Jewish] worker from Hatzor gets more of everything than a [Bedouin Arab] worker from Tuba. Just look at the number of Arab temp workers.” His words point to the still strong correlation between one’s ethnic origin and employment status in the factory, and the Israeli job market more generally.

Work-based discrimination notwithstanding, the solid coethnic coalition remained an important asset throughout the battle, sustained by feelings of coethnic marginality and, more importantly, working class status. While ethnicity and class are clearly bound up in Israeli public discourse, separating them out was essential to highlight the dominance of class. Here, too, dual images of working-class people who are perfectly content despite their hard working conditions and barely minimum wage earnings were displayed in the media. As a local journalist noted, these were images of “ordinary people whose shifts start at 4 AM,

<sup>(4)</sup>We do not essentialize ethnicity (or class); rather we see it dialectically, as an effective category that is seen as ‘natural’ (Comaroff, 1987)—marked in one’s skin color, facial characteristics, or country of birth. As such, it is nurtured by both powerful ‘outsiders’ to reinforce social marginalization of the ethnic ‘other’, but also by ‘inside’ group members who use it resourcefully to further their political and economic objectives (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). This is ‘the iron cage’ of ethnicity, which simultaneously enchains and liberates the disempowered (Aharon-Gutman, 2013). We thus accept the postcolonial critique of *authenticity* as an Orientalizing mechanism of domination yet value its performative qualities, which workers drew on instrumentally in their battle to gain material and symbolic capital.

<sup>(5)</sup>During the 2011 unrest protesters in Tel Aviv were often delegitimized by the media, which presented them as young, spoiled Ashkenazim who were unwilling to settle in more peripheral communities where the cost of living (including housing) is significantly lower.

who work in these horrible refrigerators or in front of these large ovens, who make minimum wages, and are still happy about it". The legitimization of the battle of these 'working-class heroes' stood in sharp contrast to the Tel-Aviv-based middle classes who were protesting against the rising prices in the market at around the same time.<sup>(6)</sup> The concurrency revealed a major paradox in Israel's political economy as two entirely different ethnoclasses struggled against the neoliberal state that had abandoned them. The links between young, middle-class Ashkenazim who could not afford an apartment in Tel Aviv and older, working-class Mizrahim, Russians and Arabs who fought for a respectable job in the periphery were made obvious. Representatives of both protesting groups even collaborated for a short while since, as Haziza put it, "we needed each other, since the state betrayed both of us".

Pride in class position was evident throughout our research. When asked to present themselves, individuals frequently began by giving their age and the year in which they began working in the factory. Lacking high-school education and, often, not having done military service, their work in the factory has become their only defining characteristic. As one noted, "I live half of my life at home and the other half here [in the factory]." Given such inextricable links between individuals and their place of work it is not surprising that much of their self-worth is gauged against the success of the latter. Interviewees at the bottom of the professional hierarchy had in-depth knowledge of factory data, religiously citing seasonal yields, the quality of products and the countries to which they are exported, and even technical specifications of recently acquired machinery. Workers' positive identification with the factory was unanimous and we were repeatedly dared to find "better corn" or "a house without our products" as a way to prove its industrial superiority.

Within this context of extreme identification with the factory, questions of ownership often arose. Employees suggested that the factory may officially belong to its private owners, but their own hard work and long years of sacrifice made them its real owners. These assertions should not be read as simplistic socialist-type aspirations; rather, in the face of frequent changes of ownership, they reflect a deep conviction among workers that, as one of them put it, "we are the only permanent thing here". Against their loss of faith in private owners seeking a quick profit, workers once again turned their gaze to the only 'invisible hand' that is capable of securing jobs, namely the state. Thus, while it was private ownership whose speculative behavior brought the factory to the brink of collapse, it was the state that was to save it by providing its subjects with work, the only thing which would give them back full and equal citizenship.

## Conclusions

Recent scholarship on the nexus of work and citizenship has highlighted the structural deficiencies of the neoliberalizing labor markets of advanced economies in Europe and North America. Studies have suggested that the corporatization of the new global job market has weakened, if not entirely annulled, industrial citizenship, namely workers' long-possessed ability to organize collectively and bargain with the state. The impacts of this process have been particularly adverse, it has been argued, in traditional industries—widely considered the hardest hit by economic globalization. Industrial factories, which welfare states were decreasingly willing to rescue, have been losing their cardinal role as citizenship-constituting spaces, exposing their workers to the predatory rules of the free market. Still, an emerging body of research has suggested a conceptual alternative by which 'work' should remain the basis for labor force membership, and consequently for social and economic entitlements (Fudge, 2005).

<sup>(6)</sup>The original crisis at Peri Ha'Galil broke out in December 2008 and was temporarily resolved in April 2009 when the new ownership took over. However, job insecurity lingered and workers' struggles have erupted several times since, in August 2011 (in parallel to the social protest in Tel Aviv), February 2012, and most recently in August 2012.

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Taking this normative articulation as a starting point, our paper has sought to attain two objectives. First, to understand traditional industries in the Israeli periphery as spaces in which the active and continuous constitution of citizenship (at work) takes place. Using the case of Peri Ha'Galil, we have sought to (re)embed the work of citizenship within changing political and economic conditions in Israel's peripheral industries. Specifically, we have argued that the transfer from public to private ownership of traditional industrial factories has had considerably different effects on workers in peripheral regions as compared with those in more central locations. Subjected to neoliberal practices, which aim to make the labor force more flexible, and deprived of any meaningful alternative employment opportunities, peripheral workers are precariatized. Under state ownership the work of citizenship was waged at the factory's threshold, and centered on one's quest to land a stable job, which was to allow one a respectable if modest standard of living. When full citizenship was associated with having a job (in industry), it was only the unemployed who lacked it. Yet, as the neoliberal order crept in, this logic soon changed; unstable jobs, now the norm throughout peripheral industries, forced their holders to struggle for work—and citizenship—on a daily basis. Blurring the historically clear-cut division between jobholders and the jobless, the work of citizenship in the precarious context of peripheral industries now unfolds *in* the factory and implicates ever-growing numbers of working individuals.

Our second goal in this paper has been to examine the extent to which the agency of labor has been enacted within the context of the battle for citizenship at work at Peri Ha'Galil. We have illustrated how workers' identities—as working-class, minority, peripheral agents—have been resourcefully drawn upon and mobilized in their quest for dignified work-based citizenship. In contrast to traditional articulations, which see them as sociospatial constructs representing exclusion, marginalization, and powerlessness, we have analyzed their dual and sometimes contradictory deployment. Using them simultaneously as attributes of centrality and marginality, powerfulness and powerlessness, inclusion and exclusion, we have considered periphery, ethnicity, and class as symbolic and material resources that help subjects to attain strong leverage in their struggle against the changing geographies of labor. We have further shown how the formation of a coethnic coalition helped workers in their process of negotiation with the state. A strategic manifestation of (constrained) agency (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011), the coalition has oscillated between an effective aggregation of minority identities, through which to engage in the politics of 'authentic' ethnic misery, and the functional disaggregation and enactment of group strengths and skills.

Notwithstanding the particularities of our case, key lessons may be carried over to other contexts. Three are worth mentioning here in brief. First, our analysis has brought socio-spatial marginality to the fore and questioned the one-dimensional image of the periphery and its residents. Yet, given the idiosyncrasies of Peri Ha'Galil, our findings cannot easily be extrapolated to other cases in which the work of citizenship in and around the industrial factory has yielded better outcomes. To follow up on promising accounts of cross-national research (Lee, 2007), future studies of (precarious) labor struggles should adopt a comparative methodology. This will enable a better understanding of the (dis)similarities between industrial and national contexts and their role in advancing (more or less) successful battles.

Secondly, the temporarily successful outcome of the battle of Peri Ha'Galil is evidence to the importance of group action in the work of citizenship. In the face of workplace fragmentation instigated by states through market citizenship (Fudge, 2005), effective coalition-making was key to the articulation of claims by workers. Such coalitions, however, should not be read as unproblematic structures of collective action smoothing away internal differences; rather, they should be seen as mechanisms for negotiating differences amongst subjects who share local spaces. These mechanisms are critical for what Amin (2004) has

famously called the ‘politics of propinquity’: namely, the negotiation of difference between culturally distinct groups who share a particular region. These negotiations are not based on regional intimacy, but center on the challenges which various groups face when sharing public spaces in housing, work, education, and so on.

Finally, though place-based coethnic coalitions were instrumental to the success of their battle, it was workers’ capacity to transcend the local—or use others who could help them do so—in order to transmit a dual image to the general public that proved particularly useful. Through shrewd use of the media and recurrent meetings with politicians in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, workers and their representatives managed to stir public discourse so that it remained focused on their battle for extended periods. While the selling power of ‘authenticity’ could not be ignored, as we have shown, exogenous links with others beyond the periphery, which workers in other factories did not possess, played an important role in the process. These links were not merely useful connections that made Peri Ha’Galil a favorite of the political establishment or the media in Israel (although such connections indeed exist); instead, we suggest, they reflect the politics of connectivity (Amin, 2004) that made Peri Ha’Galil a crosscutting, nationwide symbol of the Israeli periphery that individuals and groups elsewhere in the country—and beyond—could identify with. Signs held up by social activists in Tel Aviv reading, “we are all Peri Ha’Galil” best exemplify the recognition of the periphery as a rallying point of interests, both near and far. It is the construction of the periphery as a sociospatial intersection for those endogenous and exogenous to it that is a partial explanation for the overwhelming support received by the workers, and the successful outcome of their battle.

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