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Affirmation and hostility in Beer Sheva

Oren Yiftachel, Ravit Goldhaber, and Roy Nuriel

What we ask from you is simple: just observe the law; if you do this, everybody will benefit: you will have well-planned, serviced, and recognized towns, and we'll safeguard the last tracts of vacant land for the Jewish people around the world, and particularly for those who stayed for the time being in the ex-Soviet Union, for a possible day of crisis.

(Ze’ev Boym, Minister for Housing, Beer Sheva, June 14, 2006)

The context of this quote is the unresolved land and planning disputes between the Bedouin Arabs surrounding the city of Beer Sheva and the Israeli state. The minister asks the indigenous Bedouin in no uncertain terms to leave their ancestors’ land, where they reside in “unrecognized” (and in the eyes of most Israeli planners “illegal”) villages and towns, and relocate into modernized, legal, and well-serviced localities.

Beyond the colonialist disregard of indigenous rights embedded in the minister’s vision, he unwittingly exposed a dilemma about recognition—widely accepted as “positive” in discussions about spatial justice. His comments invoked a type of recognition which works against, not for, group rights and social justice. At the same time, he extended privileged recognition to potential Jewish immigrants. This differentiation provides a puzzling aspect to our thinking about urban justice and group rights rarely addressed by planning theorists. Should we, can we, “open up” the Pandora’s box of recognition?

This chapter explores the relations between recognition and justice. We analyze the treatment of various immigrant and indigenous groups by state and urban authorities, and highlight the manner in which various types of recognition guide urban policy. Our central argument takes issue with the mainstream view of recognition as a necessarily positive element in the pursuit of urban justice. Instead, we view it as a multifaceted socio-political process, ranging between positive affirmation, marginalizing indifference and exclusive hostility, with a multitude of possibilities in between these poles. We argue that the “gradients” of recognition are linked to significant changes in the urban fabric. Not only are they clearly associated with socioeconomic
(class) stratification but also with phenomena we identify as new “urban colonialism,” “creeping urban apartheid,” and the formation of “gray” (informal) spaces.

We thus seek to advance the discussion on spatial justice by opening up the rubric of recognition. We maintain that a more sophisticated and critical understanding of this concept is needed, and that recognition, or lack thereof, may enhance or harm social and spatial justice. Recognition should thus be viewed as a continuum, and governing bodies should be aware of the damaging possibilities of marginalizing indifference or exclusive hostility as well as the positive possibilities of affirmative recognition.

Following a theoretical discussion, a conceptual scheme is used to analyze the impact of planning on various groups in the Beer Sheva region. We trace the formulation of differential policies: affirmative recognition is extended to “Russian” immigrants (denoting Russian-speakers hailing from the former USSR); “marginalizing indifference” is prevalent in the policies towards Mizrahim (Jews arriving from the Middle East and their descendants); and hostile recognition is evident vis-à-vis most Arabs in the region. The claims of Palestinian refugees are totally absent from the planning discourse, while potential Jewish migrants, as noted in the minister’s statement, cast a distant but ever-present shadow over the allocation of space in the region.

This chapter aims to rethink social justice under conditions of variegated recognition. We briefly suggest below the “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1991, 1996; Mitchell 2003) as a possible guiding principle for combining recognition and spatial justice, while avoiding the colonial pitfalls of planning for different types of recognition. This requires politicization and specialization of the abstract concept and critical engagement with mainstream liberal literature on urban justice.

**PLANNING, JUSTICE, AND DIFFERENCE**

The story planners are often told paints the profession as rising out of the desperate chaos of the exploding industrial city in order to introduce order, public health, urban organization, and livability. The heroes of this history are men of great vision, who combine new forms of urban living with social agendas of equality, modernity, community, and a new moral and professional zeal (for reviews see Cherry 1988; Hall 1988; Friedmann 2001). It was not until the 1970s that the story was seriously challenged by new political economic analyses of planning, which drew attention to the structural links between planning, economic structure, and development capital. This led to the exploitation of planning by capital at the expense of weaker social groups (Castells 1978; Hague 1984). Some studies have focused on the role of planning as a legitimacy mechanism for the uneven manifestation of the capitalist state (Dear 1981). Others have drawn attention to the social
geography of planned cities still deeply fragmented by class, forming the foundation for long-term inequalities (Marcuse 1978; Troy 1981; Badcock 1984). A common theme links the state, and hence planning, with a privileged facilitation of capitalist demands, and a purposeful neglect of social needs, in what Marcuse (1978) perceptively termed “the myth of the benevolent state.”

It was on the basis of such critical analyses that an “urban” justice literature began to emerge as an attempt to rethink the links between space, development, power, and planning. David Harvey’s (1973) Social Justice and the City and Manuel Castells’ (1978) The Urban Question served as inspiring texts for a new generation of urban researchers seeking ways to realize “a just distribution, justly arrived at” (Harvey 1973: 97). Claims advanced by the new “justice literature” caused intense, often bitter, debates among planning and urban scholars, especially between Marxist and rationalist/liberal thinkers. Yet both camps agreed that planning was essentially about the process of distributing material resources.

However, the apparent agreement over the parameters of just planning did not last. During the 1980s and 1990s, new claims for a Just City began to appear, challenging previous accounts and taking the analysis of urban justice to new spheres. In the main, three related and partially overlapping perspectives informed these challenges: identity, feminism, and postmodernism. The new wave gave rise to seminal works such as Iris Marian Young’s Justice and the Politics of Difference (1991); Leonie Sandercock’s Cosmopolis (2003), and Jane Jacobs’ Edge of Empire (1996). These works demonstrated the necessity of accounting for issues of difference and identity in order to both understand the emerging urban order and to reformulate visions of urban and spatial justice.

Other studies during this wave took planning theory outside the liberal West and highlighted the close links between ethno-nationalism, religion, the state, and the making of cities and regions. They explored the critical role of urban policy in shaping not only class but also ethnic, cultural, and racial relations, in which space is a critical axis (Falah 1989; Yiftachel 1991; Thomas 1995; Bollen 1999, 2007). This is particularly so in “ethnocratic” regimes, which work to enhance the position of a dominant ethnic group while actively marginalizing minorities and peripheral ethno-classes (see Kedar 2003; Yiftachel 2007). Other studies have shown the centrality of race to urban structure and segregation and from these to notions of corrective justice and improved terms of collective coexistence (Thomas 1993; Sandercock 1995; Massey 2007).

The main consequence of this discussion was the introduction of new categories and entities into the vocabulary and imagination of the Just City concept, most notably “recognition,” “diversity,” “difference,” and “multiculturalism.” Urban and planning theorists did not have to travel far in search of inspiring texts, with the works of Taylor (1992), Hall (1991), Hall (1994), and Kymlicka (1995) offering new philosophical and political foundations for rethinking the just multicultural city.
RECOGNITION AND REDISTRIBUTION

Nancy Fraser’s now classic 1996 essay brought the debate on justice and recognition to new heights. She reconceptualized much of the above discussion by arguing that claims for justice can be organized on two major structural axes—distribution and recognition—that constantly interact, but are not reducible to one another. Within each axis, she added, approaches to justice range between “affirmative” and “transformative” measures. Affirmative measures denote relatively cosmetic steps with a temporary effect on injustices, which tend to reproduce in the long-run the unequal capitalist/nationalist and male-dominated settings. Transformative measures, on the other hand, have more profound effects by challenging the social systems that produce the hierarchical order of classes, genders, “races,” and ethnic entities. Fraser’s intervention and the debates that ensued (see Young 1997; Fraser 2003) further entrenched recognition as a major category in the pursuit of social and urban justice (see Sandercock 2003).

Fraser’s work included a profound critique of mainstream liberalism and of the increasingly popular procedural approaches to social justice (Fraser 1996). Her work had another effect—a welcome return to (refined) structuralism following a period in which Western theoretical debates were dominated by postmodernism and post-structuralism (see Soja 1995; Dear and Flusty 1998, 2002; Huxley and Yiftachel 2000). Postmodernism has also profoundly influenced planning, primarily through an apparent “communicative turn” that steered leading scholars (e.g., Forester 1993; Hillier 1993; Innes 1995; Healey 1997) towards micro-level investigations of the communicative (and chiefly procedural) interaction of planners and their working environments. It focused on the pursuit of Habermasian-inspired “communicative action” as the key to just and effective “deliberative” planning at the expense of more structural, material or critical approaches (for a critique, see Yiftachel and Huxley 2000).

As noted by Fainstein (2005), at that stage the various camps in urban and planning theory, apart from radical Marxian and libertarian voices, agreed that recognition of diversity must be included in any consideration of a Just City. Questions remain on the right manner to approach difference and incorporate its various aspects into the planning process, but it was agreed by nearly all theorists that supporting diversity is “good,” thereby providing a “new orthodoxy” for planning theory (Fainstein 2005: 1).

Yet, and this is our main theoretical point, it appears as if recognition was adopted somewhat uncritically. For most Western scholars, especially those advocating communicative or liberal-procedural approaches to justice, recognition became a catch-all phrase for the act of including minority or weakened groups, allowing them a “voice” in the policy process. Recognition was to be accepted as the liberal or civil “right” to be heard, to be counted and represented. Beyond a general support of inclusion and participation, we wish to advance three main lines of critique to this approach. First, recognition
as a “right” presupposes a benign state and political setting and an operating constitutional democracy where rights can be secured through an independent judiciary. As observed by Fainstein (2005) who draws on Nussbaum (2002), rights alone are not enough and should be supplemented by “capabilities” in order to progress towards a Just City. Second, the emphasis and operationalization of liberal recognition is chiefly procedural; that is, focusing on participation and inclusion, but paying little attention to the material, economic, and concrete power aspects of planning recognition. There have been numerous accounts of this “thin” type of recognition, which often neglects and is therefore blind to material inequalities and oppressions (see McLoughlin 1992; Marcuse 2000).

Third and most importantly, liberal multicultural recognition tends to overlook the possibility that the marking of distinct groups may also harbor a range of negative consequences beyond the neglect implied by the previous point. As shown by various studies dealing with minorities, recognition may lead to a process of “othering” and may bear distinctively unjust material and political consequences. In other words, the institutional and legal “tagging” of a group as distinct, without strong civil constitutional foundations, may lead to outcomes very different from the inclusion and democratization sought by liberal scholars (see Samaddar 2005). This negative potential often surfaces in situations of ethnic, national, religious, and racial conflict, in which dominant groups are keen to reinforce the difference of weakened groups in order to perpetuate their disempowerment. The ethnic and racial elites may build on the existence of “deep difference” and “use” formal recognition to enable an ongoing process of exploitation and dispossession, now ostensibly achieved by an “inclusive process” (see Howitt 1998; Watson 2006).

**URBAN NEOCOLONIALISM**

The main point behind the need to reconceptualize recognition is the growing evidence of emerging urban neocolonial relations, which put in motion a pervasive process we define as “creeping apartheid” and the widespread emergence of “gray” (informal) space as part of today’s urbanity. Urban colonialism sees dominant elites, whose privilege draws upon their identity, class, and location, utilize the contemporary city to advance three main dimensions of colonial relations: (1) expansion (of material or power position); (2) exploitation (of labor and/or resources); and (3) segregation (construction of hierarchical and essentialized difference).

To be sure, these dimensions operate today in geopolitical conditions very different from classical European colonialism. Most strikingly, the global European conquest and settlement is now reversed, with a flow of disenfranchised, often statusless, immigrants and indigenous peoples into the world’s major cities. The economic power of the urban elites and the weakness and deep difference of immigrants (whether from rural regions or overseas)
create patterns of ethno-class segregation and economic disparities that often resemble the traditional colonial city (King 1990; see al-Sayyad 1996). This urban order is most prevalent in liberalizing, ethnocentric states, which structurally privilege particular identities, while marginalizing minorities through both identity and economic regimes (see Law-Yone and Kalus 2001; Roy 2007; Tzfadia 2008).

These colonial-type urban relations are linked to the condition we term “creeping apartheid,” in which groups enjoy vastly differing packages of rights and capabilities under the same urban regime, drawing on their class, identity, and place of residence. The order is “creeping” because it is never declared and is only partially institutionalized. Profound discrimination and inequality are based on both de jure and de facto mechanisms, which are commonly identified as “temporary.” One of the most conspicuous “temporary” phenomena is the emergence of “gray” spaces composed of informal, often illegal, development and populations (see al-Sayyad 2004). Most typically, indigenous and immigrant minorities, squeezed between the various state and identity regulatory mechanisms, occupy and develop these gray spaces into a major component of today’s metropolis, thereby augmenting the entrenchment of “creeping apartheid” (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2004). Hence, despite its putative “temporariness,” this exploitative and uneven urban order has been intensifying for decades, and the population of disenfranchised urban residents and workers has grown significantly, often into the millions (Roy 2005; Davis 2006). In some cases, such as Dubai, Lagos, and Lima, the informal population has even become an urban majority (Davies 2006).

A variety of urban colonial relations are recorded by recent works emerging from, or about, non-Western cities, in which the majority of the world’s urban population now resides (see Perera 2002; Robinson 2006). But this urban order, needless to say, is not confined to the global South, and is increasingly traced in cities of the developed world, mainly in focal points of mass immigration and economic growth, such as Paris and Los Angeles (see Marcuse 2000; Sassen 2006). Most of these studies find that identity and class inequalities are frequently connected, and that consequently, recognition and distribution intertwine in claims of social and spatial justice. Yet, identity and class also present different bases for human organization, which may undermine one another in the process of political mobilization. Hence they are not reducible to one another, requiring a more sophisticated treatment of policies allocating spatial resources, as does planning. As shown by Watson (2005), Robinson (2006), Huxley (2007), and Roy (2007), the role of space is pivotal, as both identity and class are actively shaped and reshaped through the ongoing production of urban space (e.g., high-rise development, suburbia, ghettoization, public housing, and immigration restrictions).

Given the above, we claim that the rubric of “identity,” “diversity,” “difference,” and the catch-all “multiculturalism” are often too vague and at times confused in the current urban literature. We offer a conceptual way forward
by sketching a continuum of recognition types, with three main “ideal
types:” affirmative, indifferent, and hostile. These can assist in a more sys-
tematic analysis of the interaction between policy and identity.

**Affirmative recognition** entails recognition of a group’s identity with the
associated cultural and material needs and aspirations; allocation of a fair
share of power and resources. There are two main sub-types: proportional
and privileged recognition, reflecting the group’s power and importance in
the policy arenas. Affirmative recognition often leads to the constitution of
amicable multicultural relations and inter-group integration in the city,
although it may cause some tension with marginalized minorities, who may
object to the advantageous position of privileged groups.

**Indifference** means the passive existence of the distinct group in the
policy process. It entails non-recognition of the group’s specific identity and
its associated needs and demands, with official acceptance of its members
as formally equal members of the urban community. Indifference leads to
implicit and covert types of group domination and discrimination, deriving
from the inability of minorities to pinpoint their discrimination in the absence
of clear categories about their existence as a group. This often prevents
them from setting legitimate collective goals. Sub-types include benign and
marginalizing indifference, the first being typical of liberal regimes where the
promise of individual mobility tempers group grievances, while the latter typifies
illiberal conditions, where group assimilation is coerced without strong
commitment to civil rights. The consequences depend on specific geopolitical
and economic conditions, although in general conflict levels are relatively
low. The main focus of urban politics revolves around class and place, while
identity politics is nudged to the periphery of the policy process.

**Hostile recognition** means the acknowledgment of group identity in
policy-making, with a concurrent framing of its demands in a range of
negative images to the dominant perception of a good city. Hostile recogni-
tion constructs the group in question as a nuisance or threat. Subtypes vary
between implicit and explicit hostility, which in turn fluctuates according to
the nature of the groups in question. The consequences of hostile recognition
also vary according to the group type, size, and setting, but they com-
monly cause the emergence of “gray” spaces of informal development and
generate a dynamic of antagonism and polarization. Levels of conflict are
highest when national or religious minorities with strong historical claims
to the city are subject to this type of policy.

Notably, the above categories, and those used later in the essay, pro-
vide an analytical grid which cannot capture the complexity of the policy-
recognition nexus. We suggest here a conceptual map to help discern and
organize the complex field, with full awareness that all categories are
socially constructed and are never stable or complete. The application of each
type of recognition depends on a range of historical and political factors negoti-
ated and determined in a wide range of societal spheres and struggles. They
also depend on the variegated nature of group identities, which vary in their
depth and future goals, ranging between separation, autonomy, integration, and assimilation.

Within this context, it is vital to remember that spatial policy is not a mere reflector of political forces imported from the “outside,” but an important actor itself, which determines much of the way groups are treated in the public arena. While clearly set within an active political sphere, urban policy can assist in changing group position from marginalization and hostility towards recognition and equality, and vice versa, as depicted in Figure 7.1.

With this conceptual framework in mind, let us proceed to the planning of the Beer Sheva region and examine the ability of this framework to shed light on the connection between planning, justice, and the city.

**PLANNING AND RECOGNITION(S) IN BEER SHEVA**

Beer Sheva (Be’er Sheva’ and Bi’r Saba’a in Hebrew and Arabic, respectively) is the main urban center of the Negev/Naqab region and a city of significant mythological and religious importance. It appears early in the Bible as the first town settled in the “promised land” by Abraham—the mythical father of Jews and Muslims. Today Beer Sheva accommodates a population of 186,000 in the city and some 560,000 in the metropolitan area (BSCC 2007). The modern city was rebuilt by the Ottoman Empire as an urban service and control center for surrounding Bedouin tribes, and this function continued during the British Mandate period, remaining a small and predominantly Arab town (Luz 2008).

Like other parts of Israel/Palestine, Beer Sheva became embroiled in the Zionist–Palestinian conflict. The 1947 UN partition plan included it under
future Palestinian sovereignty, but the city was captured by Israel, which drove out its Arab population. During the 1948–49 war, some 70 to 80 percent of Arabs of the Naqab region were forced to leave, mainly going to Gaza, Egypt, the West Bank, and Jordan. Those 11,000 who remained were awarded Israeli citizenship, but were concentrated in a special military controlled zone known as “the siyag” (“the limit” or “fence,” in Arabic “siyyaj”) as depicted in Figure 7.2.

The ensuing decades saw the first wave of concerted Israeli effort to Judaize the previously Arab Naqab, using a combination of deeply ethnocentric land, development, housing, and planning policies. Israel nationalized nearly all Bedouin land (leaving about 15 percent of the region still under legal dispute), built eight new Jewish towns and some 105 rural Jewish settlements (see Falah 1994; Kedar 2003; Meir 2007). Masses of Jewish refugees and immigrants—mainly Mizrahim (“Eastern Jews”) fleeing a hostile Arab
world—were housed in large public housing estates that were portrayed in the state planning discourses as the “national frontier” (Law-Yone and Kallus 2002).

In a few short years, however, the frontier, including Beer Sheva, turned into a marginalized periphery, in what was termed the “frontiphery” process (Yiftachel 2006). Subsequently, the Beer Sheva region became characterized by social and economic underdevelopment, mediocre levels of education and health, and a stigma deriving from its Mizrahi (Eastern) character (see Meir 2004; Cohen 2005). This was most conspicuous in the “development towns”—Israel’s version of new town policy aimed at housing immigrants and creating new urban communities.

Eight such towns were built in the Beer Sheva region during the implementation of one of Israel’s most ambitious planning projects. The towns housed large numbers of Mizrahim during the 1950s and 1960s, creating what Gradus and Stern (1980) called a southern “regiopolis.” Small groups of immigrants continued to arrive during the 1970s and 1980s, mainly from the Soviet Union, France, and South and North America, although they did not significantly alter the region’s Mizrahi character.

The next dramatic change occurred during the 1990s with a massive influx of mainly Russian-speaking immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

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Figure 7.3 Main ethnic areas in the city of Beer Sheva
(hereafter “Russians”) and some groups of Ethiopians. The city of Beer Sheva, like other localities in the region, welcomed the new influx, which facilitated large-scale development for accommodating the new housing demand, and adopted a new planning and public discourse of a “globalizing city” (see Gradus 2008; Markovich and Urieli 2008). This demand used the vast reserves of low-value state land, relaxed planning controls, and generous state incentives for large scale housing developments (see Alterman 1999; Tzfadia and Yacobi 2007; Shadar 2008).

The last wave of immigration resulted in a new ethnic composition. In 2007 the city population was composed of Mizrahim (41 percent), Russians (31 percent), Ashkenazim (8 percent), Ethiopians (4 percent) and Arabs (3 percent), and six other small groups. In the wider metropolitan region, Mizrahim also constitute the largest group (29 percent), while Russians (24 percent) and Bedouin-Arabs (27 percent) also hold substantial proportions. The other groups are all smaller than four percent (NCRD 2007).

**APPROACH**

For this project we have attempted to analyze the overall impact of spatial policies on the main cultural groups in the Beer Sheva metropolitan region. To this end, we analyzed the plans affecting the city and region, which include: the 1952 national outline plan (later known as TAMA 1); the 1978 southern district plan (Plan 4/1); the 1991 national plan (TAMA 31); the 1996 development plan for Beer Sheva (non-statutory); the 1998 metropolitan plan for Beer Sheva region (Plan 4-14); the 2005 national plan (TAMA 35); the 2007 metropolitan plan (Amendment Plan 4-14-23); and supporting urban housing, land, and cultural policies of the Beer Sheva City Council.

These plans were developed by the ministries of Housing, Interior, and Infrastructure, and the Israel Land Authority, and they all attempt to create a major (Jewish) regional center in Beer Sheva. As noted by Gradus (1993), the above efforts have been only partially successful. Though the (Jewish) Beer Sheva region has become central to national and regional planning debates, which have led to significant new development, it has remained a peripheral urban region in terms of its economic, political, and cultural standing within Israeli/Palestinian space.

During this period of debate over the region, Israel implemented an urbanization planning strategy for the region’s Bedouin Arabs. This has involved an attempt to concentrate the Bedouins into seven modern towns surrounding, but not part of, Jewish Beer Sheva (see Figure 7.2). This policy relocated about half the Arabs of the south (some 85,000 in 2007) and mainly those with no land claims, through the lure of modern infrastructure and prospects of modernization. However, despite some development, the towns became known for their marginality, unemployment, deprivation, and crime (Yiftachel 2002; abu-Saad and Lithwick 2003). The remaining Bedouins,
estimated at 80–90,000, have steadfastly stayed on their disputed land in some 45 unrecognized (shanty) towns and villages (Figure 7.2). A protracted land dispute over this “gray” space has persisted for decades.

The combination of these plans and policies as well as the accompanying discourses, regulations, and development initiatives are the subject of our analysis. We focus mainly on local and district plans and pay special attention to the implications of these plans for the region’s main ethnic communities: Russian, Mizrahi, and Arab. We gain further insights by conducting a series of interviews with six key policy makers in the region, as well as 11 in-depth interviews with members of the communities in question.

PLANNING AND AFFIRMATIVE RECOGNITION: “RUSSIAN” IMMIGRANTS

Planning for immigrants from the former USSR in Beer Sheva has generally been marked by a benign attitude, premised on generous distribution and affirmative recognition, and couched within a long-term expectation of Russian integration into the Israeli-Jewish culture and society. The policy has been promoted jointly by an active state government and by urban authorities interested in accommodating the immigrants. The role of the Beer Sheva municipality has been central to this policy by actively luring these new immigrants, while some powerful urban centers in Israel, such as Tel-Aviv, Ra’anana, Ramat Gan, and Rishon Letzion, were indifferent and at times antagonistic to their entry (Tzfadia and Yacobi 2007).

The main thrust of urban policy towards the Russians, as reflected in National Plan No. 31 and the various Beer Sheva development plans, was the rapid provision of housing, first temporary and then permanent (see Alterman 1998; Gradus 2008). In parallel, the Israeli housing and planning systems thoroughly reorganized themselves and sped up the approval process, released previously protected agricultural land for urban development and provided generous subsidies and incentives for both immigrants and developers. A level of 65 percent home ownership was achieved in 2005, a mere 10–15 years after their mass arrival with meager financial or property resources (Tzfadia 2004).

The influx of over 40,000 Russian immigrants to Beer Sheva during the 1990s, and a corresponding period of rapid economic growth, spawned large scale new housing and office construction. To illustrate, during 1989–2006 the city’s population rose by 67 percent and the number of dwelling units rose by 86 percent, while office space increased by 51 percent (BSCC 2007). This caused large-scale residential relocations, and significant vacancy chains, with many veteran residents upgrading their housing due to the availability of new government-assisted projects. Some housing vacancies were filled by the new immigrants, although most preferred to purchase new apartments due to the nature of government subsidies, which privileged new construction over existing housing stock.
Initially, the mass arrival caused economic and social concerns, because the population was relatively old and relied heavily on the city’s welfare services. However, within a decade, the economic benefits to the city outweighed the social costs, as the combination of social benefits and human skills propelled large sections within the Russian communities into the city’s middle classes (Alias and Chaburstatianov 2008; Gradus and Meir-Glitzenstein 2008).

City planning revisions created three large new neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city: Ramot, Nahal A’shan and Neve Zev/Nahal Beka (Figure 7.3). The latter two are characterized by their high percentage of Russians and their predominance in shaping the local landscape and institutions. The city council looked at the phenomenon favorably, as noted in an interview by Tal El-Al, a city councilor and member of the planning committee:

The Russians are a blessing to our city; it’s true that some needy population and social problems have arrived with them, but in the main they are a major asset to the city of Beer Sheva: educated, powerful and urban . . . the city will continue do all it can to absorb them in the best possible manner.

With regard to culture, state and city authorities, as well as market forces, combined to make a strong imprint on the urban environment in attempts to accommodate Russian immigrants. Large parts of Beer Sheva’s urban landscape have been “Russified,” with signs, institutions, and businesses catering to their growing demand for Russian products (especially food, drinks, and sex). Alias and Chaburstatianov (2008) surveyed the Russian cultural scene in Beer Sheva and discovered 11 bookstores, nine libraries, active theaters and community halls, and afternoon schooling in Russian. A Russian cultural enclave has been created, with Beer Sheva authorities providing support, finance and planning.

This has also been reflected in Russian political organization, which formed several local parties—often associated with Russian state-parties. These created conspicuous levels of collective Russian political representation in City Hall, ranging between three to six seats in the city’s 25-seat council. In parallel, Russian professionals were elected to City Hall seats. This was reflected by the appointment of a Russian City Engineer and coordinator of City Planning services in 2006.

It is important to frame the Russian enclave—and the benign and affirmative recognition extended to that community—within the larger Israeli Palestinian context. Russians are still expected by the majority of Israelis to integrate and eventually assimilate into the mainstream Jewish community. Israel has not adopted an open multicultural approach and denies the rights to separate Russian-language education and to separate legislation or institutions for autonomous governance. Partial Russian autonomy is created “from below” by communities, markets, and local governments, and this cultural autonomy is thriving due to the population’s overall development in accordance.
with the Zionist state and its Judaization project. Even the large segments of this community who are not religiously Jewish (an issue of some concern in Israeli-Jewish circles) are also expected to integrate into the Israeli-Hebrew culture in a process termed elsewhere “the ethnicization of Zionism” (see Lustick 1999; Yiftachel 2006: chapter 5).

Yet, in planning terms, one can conceptualize the treatment of Russian immigrants as “a light side of planning,” showing the ability of urban policies to effectively combine material distribution and benign cultural recognition and to extend justice-oriented policies towards an incoming low-income population. This is colorfully articulated by local Russian-Israeli poet, Victoria Orti:

We came with fear and hope. The new country had a mystique, but also mountains and rivers of difficulties we had to cross. It appears like, after 15 years, that the mountains have lowered and the rivers have become shallower, and we are here—a struggling, but also thriving Russian community, with our identity, places and neighborhoods. We are well entrenched in our own state. We are here to stay.

PLANNING AND (MARGINALIZING) INDIFFERENCE: THE MIZRAHIM

The backbone of Beer Sheva’s population is made up of the Mizrahim (Eastern Jews) who arrived en masse to the region during the 1950s and 1960s. The treatment of these migrants by urban authorities can be termed “marginalizing indifference.”

From the outset, the Mizrahim were the “step children” of Zionism (Shohat 2001), having been mobilized to join the Jewish national movement after the horrific consequences of the Nazi holocaust of the 1940s. As Zionist–Palestinian tensions rose, Arab regimes and Islamic societies became increasingly hostile to Middle Eastern Jewry, causing a mass exodus during the late 1940s and early 1950s (Behar 2007). Most of these Jews arrived in Israel and were housed by the state, first in temporary camps and later in mostly peripheral urban centers. Beer Sheva was one of the largest centers to accommodate Mizrahi immigration, with the city population rising six fold between 1950 and 1970.

But the type of recognition extended to the Mizrahim was condescending and marginalizing. Their inclusion into the Zionist project was premised on their Judaism, but at the same time on a denial of their Eastern and Arab cultural affiliation. The state attempted to rebuild Jewish identity in the vision set by European secular elites. To that end, the masses of Mizrahim, who became a majority among Israel’s Jews in the mid-1950s, had to be westernized, secularized and de-Arabized (Swirsky 1989; Shenhav 2006).

In Beer Sheva, as noted, Mizrahim quickly made a decisive majority, accounting for over 70 percent of the population. However, the city leadership remained predominantly Ashkenazi (western Jewish), headed by the
“founding” and long-serving mayor of Israeli Beer Sheva, David Tuviyahu. The Ashkenazi–Mizrahi tension marked much of the local political scene during the first three decades of the state, but no genuine Mizrahi leadership could prevail at this time.

Over the years, Israel’s national leadership has been keen to avoid severe ethnic riots in Beer Sheva, like those that earlier shook Haifa and Jerusalem. Therefore the Labor party appointed a Mizrahi mayor, Eliyahu Nawy, who headed the city administration for nearly a decade during the 1970s. However, as noted by Meir (2004) and Cohen (2006), Nawy was selected precisely because he was a “soft” Mizrahi who could appease the masses in the predominantly Mizrahi city without threatening the state’s Ashkenazi dominance in its peripheries. Following Nawy, and with the influx of Russian immigrants, the Mizrahi “threat” was blunted. The two long-serving mayors who followed, Yisrael Ragger and Yaakov Turner (the incumbent), came from the traditional Ashkenazi elites, preventing city Mizrahi communities from receiving open, public recognition.

Urban planning initiatives for the Mizrahi immigrants involved dense, modernist public housing developments located in a dozen centrally planned “garden city” type neighborhoods across the city (Figure 7.3). During the last two decades, several new, low-density neighborhoods and three suburban “satellite” towns have attracted most of Beer Sheva’s (small) Ashkenazi population and those Mizrahim who moved into the middle classes. A degree of benign ethnic mixing began to occur in these localities, as it did in middle-class neighborhoods within the city limits. Large groups of Mizrahim still remain in the stigmatized inner city neighborhoods. Their employment was predominantly in labor-intensive industries and the low- to medium-level public sector, as well as in small trade and local business. This created a conspicuous overlap between their Mizrahi ethnicity and working and lower middle-class position (see Yonah and Saporta 2003).

Mizrahi local politics, which often reflected national trends, shifted over time from supporting the Labor party, associated with early Zionism and state building, to the Rightist and nationalist Likud, and most recently to the Orthodox-Mizrahi Shas movement (Meir 2004; Tzfadia 2004). Critically for the issue of recognition, the organization of Mizrahi parties was constantly undermined by the state and city leadership and portrayed as “divisive” and harmful to the Israeli state project (see Peled 2002; Grinberg 2007). This was reflected in the identity and activity of the city mayors, as noted above (see Cohen 2006; Meir-Glitzerstein 2008). The lack of Mizrahi political organization stands in contrast to other ethnic parties, such as those representing Russian and Orthodox Jews, and later Arabs, who were accepted as legitimate by the Israeli elites and public. The local Mizrahi majority did attempt to form a political block on several occasions during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, but was continuously thwarted by the concerted campaign to delegitimize Mizrahi “divisive” mobilization (Meir 2004; Cohen 2006).
The lack of political recognition was mirrored in the cultural sphere. During Israel’s early decades, Mizrahi culture was stigmatized in Israel and, by implication, in Beer Sheva. Most aspects of Mizrahi identity—family, dress, language, music, dwelling, and even religion—were silenced or ridiculed in the public discourse, education system, cinema, and popular culture (Shohat 2001). “Levantine” became synonymous with “primitive,” leaving strong Mizrahi localities like Beer Sheva in a deep identity crisis. In Beer Sheva, due to the sheer size of the Mizrahi population, the public culture inevitably bore many Mizrahi features, but as Cohen (2006: 5) summarizes:

The depth of Beer Sheva’s stigma . . . derives directly from its open Levantine character. The denial of the city’s Levantine culture is central to Israel’s Eurocentric discourse, which places European Jews at the center of the Zionist project. . . . The self-portrayal of most Israelis as “Westerners” requires stigmatizing Beer Sheva by stressing negatively both its Arab past and a Mizrahi present.

But this critical self-observation remains on the periphery of the public debate, and the marginalizing indifference among the elites by and large continued until the late 1980s. During the last two decades, some change can be traced, termed earlier “multiculturalism from below.” The more liberal attitudes of recent years has yielded a measure of cultural recognition, revolving around Mizrahi holidays, music, food, and cultural events, although these are more typically assigned to sub-groups (e.g., “Moroccan” or “Yemenite”) than to a general Mizrahi identity. This liberalization serves to further highlight the lack of political organization and Mizrahi narrative in the urban public sphere. The city leadership continues to gloss over difference between Jewish ethnicities, as noted by city planner Offer Ilan:

. . . the question of the city’s Mizrahim has never fully arisen in planning and policy circles. We have other categories, such as “new immigrants,” “low income,” “religious” and “ultra-orthodox.” All of these are addressed by our planning and development strategies. But Mizrahim? I cannot see the relevance. I am a Mizrahi, too, and it has little to do with urban planning; it’s time to understand that the Mizrahim have integrated into Israeli society, including Beer Sheva. Sure, they have problems, but not as Mizrahim.

PLANNING AND HOSTILE RECOGNITION: BEDOUIN ARABS

One central aspect of spatial policy in the Beer Sheva metropolitan region has been the hostile recognition extended to the region’s Bedouin Arab community. A bitter land conflict has developed with the state, which has continuously denied the Bedouins indigenous land rights, and as a result declared them “invaders” to their own historic localities. In an effort to force
them to relocate, the state has refused to recognize their land claims and has prevented the supply of most services, including roads, electricity, clinics, and planning. House demolition campaigns are launched on a regular basis (see Meir 2005; Yiftachel 2006).

Levels of poverty, child mortality, and crime are the worst in Israel/Palestine and create a metropolitan geography of stark ethno-class contrast to the well-serviced adjacent Jewish localities. The Beer Sheva metropolis has come to resemble many Third World cities that comprise a well-developed, modern urban core and a range of peripheral, informal localities suffering severe poverty and deprivation. It is here that the process of urban colonialism and “creeping apartheid” noted above are most evident.

Expressions of urban colonialism have therefore been pervasive in the Beer Sheva region, but less confrontational than in internationally known cases like Hebron and Jerusalem. Arab campaigns against deprivation have highlighted both equality and identity, focusing on the right to reasonable material conditions as well as cultural preservation (see Meir 2005). In recent years, religion has played an increasing part in Arab urban campaigns, especially around education and places of worship.

Bedouin Arab representation in urban and regional planning affairs has ranged between non-existent and negligible. Despite being the indigenous inhabitants of the region and constituting nearly a third of its current population, Bedouin presence in planning bodies has been meager and random. During the last decade, for example, only two Bedouins have sat on the district planning council (each in turn being one amongst 13 Jews on the council), and not even one Bedouin is represented on the Beer Sheva city council. Other planning bodies, such as the Israel Land Authority and the Ministry of Housing, Welfare, and Education, have occasionally included a single Arab member, but always in a position of distinct minority.

The combination of land, cultural, and material deprivations and a lack of representation, has bolstered antagonism towards the state and spurred the Bedouin Arabs to form their own institutions. The Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages (RCUV) was formed in 1997 to combine the various localities surrounding Beer Sheva and to present an alternative planning approach based on full recognition of indigenous rights and equality. This form of “insurgent planning” (see Meir 2005) rallied a group of notable NGOs to support the new (unrecognized) council and caused some change in the public discourse. It is no longer possible to ignore the Bedouins as mere “invaders” or “outsiders” to the metropolitan region, and their demands are heard continuously in the media and in administrative and professional circles.

The authorities have also been forced to recognize nine of the 45 unrecognized villages, although no infrastructure, such as running water, roads, and permanent schools, has been allocated to these localities yet. Insurgent indigenous planning practices and the prevailing attitude of “hostile recognition” has clashed in recent years to cause spiraling polarization between Bedouins and authorities, with little progress towards resolving the conflict.
seen (see Yiftachel 2006). One such issue revolves around the renowned and architecturally significant Beer Sheva mosque, which was built by the Ottomans to serve the region’s population. Despite constant Arab demands, the city refuses to open it for Muslim worship, with one powerful councilor of the ruling coalition, Eli Bokker, claiming that “the region has dozens of mosques in Bedouin localities and towns, and Beer Sheva is now a Jewish city with the right to protect this urban character.”

As a result, the Mosque has been lying idle for decades and is now in an advanced state of architectural deterioration. Following a recent appeal by several NGOs, the Israeli high court ruled in favor of opening the mosque for “Arab cultural uses.” Despite the latest ruling, the city is steadfast in its refusal and has now condemned the building as too dangerous for human use. Those against opening the mosque were members of the nationalist Likud Party and the (mainly Russian) Yisrael Beiteenu and Mizrahi religious parties. Yaacov Margi, a Beer Sheva Shas leader claimed:

This high court decision could be the last nail in the Beer Sheva coffin. . . . [W]e have been increasingly surrounded by Bedouins from all sides, and they now attempt to penetrate the heart of our city by opening their mosque. . . . Let us never forget: Beer Sheva is where Abraham’s wells are still in existence after 4,000 years. We should continue and drink the wisdom of our Tora like the water from these wells and remember that one of these wisdoms is to never, but never, let the Amalek [hostile nations] raise their heads!

Margi’s statement is a reminder of the powerful narratives framing urban colonialism and the resultant politics of denial, fear, and hostile recognition. In this process, termed “creeping apartheid,” a distant mythical Jewish past and vague future (of possible immigration) are fully recognized, while the current needs of Moslem residents are actively denied.
IMPACT AND REFLECTION

The foregoing shows that, indeed, groups are recognized in very different ways by the urban policy process. One clear question that arises from this is what the long-term impact of such uneven recognition is, although its systematic examination must await a different context.

Still, it is not difficult to intuitively associate negative types of recognition with socioeconomic marginalization and political weakness. This is supported by a cursory look at the socioeconomic standing of urban communities in the Beer Sheva region. We can take, for example, the “quality of life” index of localities prepared by the Israel Bureau of Statistics, which is based on a combination of socioeconomic characteristics (CBS 2006). In the 2005 survey, the typical Russian neighborhood of Neve Ze’ev received a score of 12 (in a 1–20 range), while a decade earlier it received only a score of eight. Another concentration of Russians, Nahal A’shan, received the score of nine against six a decade earlier.

Such change was not the case in typical Mizrahi neighborhoods, such as Schuna Gimmel, which received a score of eight in 2006 and nine in 1995, and Schuna Tet, a more middle-class neighborhood with large Mizrahi concentration, which had the same score of 13 in both years. The Bedouin Arab localities surrounding Beer Sheva, Tel Sheva, and Laqiyya scored three and four, respectively in 2005, and two and three a decade earlier. These scores indicate the significant improvement of localities identified with Russians, as opposed to the stagnation characterizing localities with Mizrahi and Arab majorities. They also highlight notable differences within each cultural group, indicating that other forces are at work in the stratification process. Needless to say, the link between recognition and development requires a more in-depth investigation. This cursory look confirms, however, the importance of considering the specific type of recognition as a key element in theorizing justice and oppression in the city.

Our understanding of spatial justice has indeed been complicated in recent years by the introduction of “recognition” as a major philosophical axis for justice claims and by the mobilization of politics of identity. Recognition claims interact in complex ways with the well-established call for fair distribution of material and political resources and fairness in decision-making processes. The nature of this interaction is further complicated by our main argument in this essay, namely, that recognition has to be studied critically and that it may work for or against the group in question.

Clearly, the questions raised in this essay present a major challenge to the justice literature and need to be explored further, both theoretically and empirically. The need for this investigation is reinforced in the rapidly changing urban world, where diversity, hierarchy, and identity politics are rewritten within a globalizing economy, and within new regimes of uneven citizenship. We plan to continue the current exploration both comparatively, examining various types of ethnically divided cities, and theoretically, engaging new
debates over spatial justice which emerge from changing urban and political environments.

A promising, if understudied, way forward may be found in the further development of the Lefebvrian notion of “the right to the city.” As Fainstein (2005) rightly notes, Lefebvre’s work is highly abstract, lacking in specific details on the precise nature and applicability of this right. But perhaps precisely because of its abstraction, the main plank in Lefebvre’s framework, the right to use and appropriate the city’s main features of centrality and difference, can now be injected with new meanings, reflecting a need to extend benign forms of recognition to all groups residing in the city. In such settings, urban colonialism and “creeping apartheid” may be transformed into new forms of urban federalism based on equality, autonomy and redistribution. The translation of this idealistic vision into urban policies appears to be an appropriate challenge for students of the future Just City.

NOTE

1 Sheva (local newspaper), May 9, 2005; a similar statement was made by Bokker in Kolbi (another local paper) on May 8, 1998.

REFERENCES


