CHAPTER FIVE

FROM CITIZENSHIP TO STATELESS CITIZENSHIP

When we say 'Jewish independence' or 'Jewish state' we mean Jewish country, Jewish soil, we mean Jewish labour, we mean Jewish economy, Jewish agriculture, Jewish industry, Jewish sea. We mean Jewish safety, security, independence, complete independence, as for any other free people.

David Ben-Gurion, 1947, before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine (quoted in Lustick 1980, 88).

Negotiations and bargaining over citizenship, or patterns of inclusiveness and exclusiveness, are, as Israeli political scientist Baruch Kimmerling says, “not only related to who gets what but also to who is what and who can decide who is what” (Kimmerling 2002b, 181–195). The complex dynamic of citizenship and its ability to contribute to the formation of socio-civic and political identities resurfaced in an important debate covered by Kimmerling. This debate took place in 1985 between writer and Arab citizen of Israel, Anton Shammas, and Jewish-Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua, and was later revisited by the two in 1992. Addressing the question of the Jewishness of Israeli identity and citizenship, and in a response to Shammas’s accusation against Israel that it marginalized the Arab population’s collective identity, along with its social, cultural and political spheres, Yehoshua asserted:

I am suggesting to you ... that if you want to exercise your full identity, if you want to live in a state that has a Palestinian character with a genuine Palestinian culture, arise, take your chattels, and move yourself one hundred yards eastward, into the independent Palestinian state, that will be established alongside Israel (Kimmerling 2002b, 181–182).

To this, Shammas responds “I have no intention to leave my motherland and my father’s home, for the country Yehoshua will show me,” and goes on to describe his political (and indeed, personal) project:

What I’m trying to do – mulishly, it seems – is to un-Jew the Hebrew language, to make it more Israeli and less Jewish, thus bringing it back to its Semitic origins, to its place. This is a parallel to what I think the state should be (Kimmerling 2002b, 182).
Kimmerling explains that this project continues six years later in a second debate, as Shammas, once again faced with Yehoshua, states:

You see Israeliness as total Jewishness, and I don’t see where you fit me, the Arab, into that Israeliness. Under the rug? In some corner of the kitchen? .... France and Frenchness come from the same root. But Judaism and Israeliness are a different matter. That’s why I advocate the de-Judaization and de-Zionization of Israel .... I am asking you for a new definition of the term ‘Israeli’, so that it will include me as well, a definition in territorial terms that you distort, because you’re looking at it from the Jewish point of view .... (Kimmerling 2002b, 183).

With this we learn that rather than demolishing the State of Israel, Shammas’s project, as outlined above, is instead to provoke and confront ensconced Jewish control in Israel. In doing so, Shammas intends to formulate the parameters of an identity, accessible to both Palestinian-Arabs and Jews in Israel, grounded upon state representation, shared territory and genuine citizenship. Important for our purposes is the familiar structure of Shammas’s critique of Israeli national homogeneity. Similar to other prominent Arab and Jewish intellectuals, the argument contends that as a result of the regime’s multifaceted manifestation of Jewish dominance, Palestinian-Arabs in Israel are denied equal citizenship. And, as we will see below, for the most part, this is where the existing scholarly literature stops. This chapter begins with an outline of the effects of the basic and inherent contradictions in the Israeli incorporation regime through a comparative sample of the notable social science research conducted on Arabs in Israel and their respective and various formulations of what Palestinian citizenship entails or lacks. From here, the paradigm of stateless citizenship is introduced alongside the existing scholarship as part of a response to the yet unanswered question of how Palestinian citizenship came to embody its existing exclusionary dynamics.

‘Israeli’ and ‘Palestinian’ as Incomplete Identities

Basic and inherent contradictions of Israeli citizenship are by no means a new issue within Israeli political and social discourse. Often a comparative approach that places Israeli citizenship alongside its European and North American variants of state-citizen relations is adopted to critique and address these contradictions. Kimmerling makes use of such a comparative analysis when discussing the structure of identity in the Jewish state and writes: