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MULTICULTURALISM, NATIONALISM, AND THE POLITICS OF THE ISRAELI CITY

This article examines the prospect of urban multiculturalism in the Israeli city of Ashdod against the intricate metrics of modernism and ethnonationalism. This prospect is sometimes endorsed by the city's leaders, but at the same time it answers the logic of ethnonationalism that not only works toward cultivating a homogenous collective and homogenous space but also endorses Western and Eurocentric biases. This logic facilitates practices of social inclusion and exclusion both materially and symbolically. Furthermore, we argue that in Ashdod, ethnonationalism is intertwined with the logic of the market, encouraging social hierarchies and stratifications that carry the stamp of "ethnoclassism" along First and Third World dichotomies. Yet, these processes do not completely foreclose the prospect of multiculturalism, because they cannot completely forestall "bottom-up" forces that promote it either intentionally or inadvertently. The assessment of Ashdod as a potential site of urban multiculturalism becomes nuanced and intriguing as we take into account city planning that considers a modern vision of the city and ethnonational logic, on the one hand, and forces of bottom-up initiatives, on the other. All in all, the city fails the multicultural challenge if by this challenge we understand the establishment of institutional arrangements that guarantee the right to the city—or equal access to all benefits that the city may offer—while allowing residents to cultivate and maintain their cultural uniqueness.