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GIBUSH: A STUDY IN ISRAELI CULTURAL SEMANTICS*

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the cultural semantics of the term *gibush* 'crystallization' as a root metaphor in contemporary Israeli discourse, highlighting major features of Israeli folk sociology and folk psychology. Constraints on the application of the term in various semantic domains are considered within a broader interpretive cultural frame, and the working of the crystallization metaphor is illustrated in relation to some of the descriptive devices found in an Israeli novel which makes implicit use of the image of *gibush* as a cultural resource.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK. In her paper on "key symbols" Ortner (1973) elaborates on the "by no means novel idea that each culture has certain key elements which, in an ill-defined way, are crucial to its distinctive organization" (p. 1338). The conceptual framework she develops provides a useful vocabulary for considering the symbolic and ideological dimensions of language use. In the present study I apply her formulations in an attempt to elucidate the cultural meanings and evaluative accents that attend a verbal sign which I have identified as central to Israeli cultural discourse -- the term *gibush* 'crystallization' and its derivatives, such as *megubash* 'crystallized', *legabesh* 'to bring about a state of crystallization' or the reflexive verb *lehitgabesh* 'to become crystallized'. Since my concern is with the ideological dimensions of language use, a focus on a lexical item as a key cultural symbol is justified. As Volosinov ([1929] 1986) has pointed out, "the word is the ideological phenomenon par excellence" (p. 13), and it "sensitively reflects the slightest variations in social existence" (p. 23). Studying words as ideological signs that serve as key symbols for a given cultural group is therefore a primary source for understanding the "behavioral ideology" of a group, a termed coined by Volosinov to capture "that atmosphere of unsystematized and unfixed inner and outer speech which endows our every

instance of behavior and action and our every 'conscious' state with meaning" (p. 91).

The distinctive tonalities attending the notion of *gibush* in Israeli ideological discourse have initially come to my attention in listening to massive doses of talk about social problems in school classes in which I was making observations as part of an educational project. Very often, the problems teachers and children were having were described as difficulties in attaining *gibush* in the class. Clearly, the ideal of a 'crystallized school class' *kita megubeshet* was generally accepted as the desired end-state in Israeli social education. In an earlier paper (Katriel and Nesher 1986), we have explored the cultural and behavioral implications of the use of the crystallization metaphor in understanding the image of sociality promoted in Israeli school culture. This, however, is only part of the story. The term *gibush* is much more broadly employed, and I believe that tracing the uses of *gibush* as it typically occurs in Israeli discursive practices can provide some important insights into central domains of Israeli cultural organization.

Before I do so, however, let me return to Ortner's conceptualizations. Her discussion of key symbols addresses two issues: (1) the question of how one determines the key status of a symbol, and (2) the nature of symbols with respect to the ways in which they operate in relation to cultural thought and action. Ortner offers a (nonexhaustive) list of "indicators of cultural interest" which suggest the key position of a cultural element. The term *gibush* thus seems to qualify: it comes up in a variety of semantic contexts and is subject to discursive elaboration; cultural members consider it as important, and it carries strong evaluative accents.

Ortner further distinguishes between two major categories of symbols, which she conceives as ordered along a continuum, whose two ends are "summarizing" versus "elaborating" symbols:

(1) Summarizing symbols -- these are symbols "which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them" (p. 1339). This condensation of meanings into symbolic forms is the hallmark of the domain of the sacred in the broadest sense of the term (e.g., the cross, the

flag, etc.), and it speaks primarily to the shaping of attitudes to the crystallization of commitment.

(2) Elaborating symbols -- these symbols are essentially analytic, providing "vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action" (p. 1340). The key status of these symbols is predicated upon their capacity to order experience, and is indicated by their recurrence in cultural behavior or cultural symbolic systems, not by the sacred aura attending them. Ortner further distinguishes between two modes in which symbols can have elaborating power: "They may have primarily conceptual elaborating power; that is, they are valued as a source of categories for conceptualizing the order of the world. Or they may have primarily action-elaborating power; that is, they are valued as implying mechanisms for successful social action" (p. 1340). A prime example of symbols with great conceptual elaborating power, Ortner argues, are the "root metaphors" which have an integrative function within a cultural system, i.e., they formulate the unity, or coherence, of a cultural orientation by virtue of the fact that central aspects of experience can be likened to it. Ortner says: "A root metaphor, then, is one type of key symbol in the elaborating mode, i.e., a symbol which operates to sort out experience, to place it in cultural categories, and to help us think about how it all hangs together. They are symbols which are 'good to think' ... in that one can conceptualize the interrelationships among phenomena by analogy to the interrelations among the parts of the root metaphor" (p. 1341).

In my reading of it, the term *gibush*, as it is employed in Israeli cultural discourse, operates mainly as a key symbol in the elaborating mode. It is a root metaphor which anchors members' discourses of self and society, of intentional action as well as of artistic expression. Moreover, the *gibush* metaphor serves not only to conceptualize the order of cultural domains and the relations between them, but also has action-elaborating power, at least in some of the cultural domains in which it figures. Specifically, in Israeli ethnosociology the *gibush* metaphor offers not only an image of order but also what Ortner calls "key scenarios", which suggest socially valued modes of action designed to promote *gibush*. In what follows

I will elaborate on this claim, and probe into the cultural understandings it can yield. I begin with a closer examination of the semantic domains in which the term *gibush* is typically found in Israeli discourse; the systematic exploration of the discursive uses of *gibush*, in which attention will be paid to both its contexts of occurrence and to domains in which its non-applicability is instructive, will serve to identify themes that are central to Israeli ethnosociology and ethnopsychology. By way of conclusion I will offer a cultural, necessarily partial, reading of a novel by an Israeli author (*Daniel's Trials* [1973] (1986), by Yitshak Orpaz), showing that a fuller appreciation of its symbolism can be gained through a recognition of the cultural force of the *gibush* metaphor.

2. G↓BUSH AS AN ETHNOSOCIOLOGICAL NOTION. As noted earlier, the notion of *gibush* is commonly applied to the school class, which can be said to be *megubeshet* 'adj., feminine inflection', or to be lacking in *gibush*, or the like. This usage is vividly illustrated in a psychologist's advice found in a national children's monthly magazine to a child's question of how to deal with conflicts and violence among the children in his class (*Mashehu*, September 1988:51): "In your case, the best way would be to approach your homeroom teacher, tell her about the tension in the class, and together plan some activities designed to promote better gibush and cohesion in the class, and to create a more pleasant atmosphere. It is important to note that, in approaching her, you should avoid accusations and simply ask her to help 'crystallize' the social group in which you study and spend time."

The term *gibush*, however, is routinely applied to other social groupings as well. It can be used in the causative form of the verb to apply, for example, to a work team: *legabesh et hatsevet* 'to crystallize the work team'; or one can use the reflexive form to speak of the spontaneous crystallization of a team: *hatsevet hitgabesh bli be'ajot* 'the work team became crystallized without any problems'. I have also heard the term applied to such a loose unit as a friendship network (*xavurat jedidim megubeshet*, 'a crystallized group of friends'), and to such highly institutionalized groupings as military units (*maxlaka/pluga megubeshet*).

Finally, one can find moralistic statements in the press and in speeches by public figures concerning the need to generate *gibush* in the nation at large, as a remedy to problems of low morale. In all such contexts, the crystallization metaphor refers to either a valorized social end-state or to a valorized social process.

Given its applicability to such a wide range of social groupings, one cannot but note that it is jarring, if not semantically anomalous, to speak of a 'crystallized family' *mishpaxa megubeshet*, or the need to 'crystallize the family' *legabesh et hamishpaxa*, or even about a spontaneous process of crystallization vis-a-vis the family *(hamishpaxa hitgabsha* 'the family became crystallized'). One is, rather, likely to speak of a warm family, of the need to bring family members closer together, and to apply organismic metaphors to it (family branches, roots, etc.). This exclusion of the family from the discursive domain of *gibush* as a social metaphor does not seem to be incidental. Indeed, it indicates that the family unit as a social grouping has a special place in the cultural imagination. Basically, it is considered as a sociocultural given rather than as being subject to the making-and-shaping spirit of an ever-precarious social enterprise. The cultural force of this discursive distribution of the term can be better appreciated if we attend to its metaphorical implications.

In our earlier paper (Katriel and Nesher 1986) we have spelled out the implications of this metaphor when used in reference to the school class as a social unit. Briefly, a social unit whose ideal structure is envisioned in analogy with a crystal implies well-boundedness, solidity, stability, and nondifferentiation among its equidistanced particles. At the same time, it implies a strong potential for erosion along its edges and around weak internal spots so that social integration can never be fully taken for granted.

The social state of *gibush* is characterized by absence of conflict, good will, and a sense of equality among members of a social unit sharing common beliefs, values, and patterns of sentiment. That is, it involves social integration oriented towards "mechanical solidarity", in Durkheim's (1964:70-110) terms. Ideally, *gibush* will be spontaneously generated among group members in contexts considered key scenarios, either as a

result of engaging in shared activities, or of sharing stressful experiences which require intense mutual engagement and cooperation, or, alternatively, through moments of ritual exaltation. The generation of *gibush* within a group is an essentially unreliable process so that its attainment often requires some social engineering. Like some other states of being, e.g., like being spontaneous, it cannot be willed into existence. In Elster's (1983) terms, there are states which are "essentially by-products", states that cannot be brought about by deliberate attempts to promote them. Thus, the ever-present tension between the solidity of the crystal and the danger of its disintegration is further compounded by the uncertain interplay between planned cultivation and the contingent, spontaneous emergence of a state of *gibush*. This tension and the unreliability of outcome are at the heart of the crystallization metaphor. Its particular aptness is indeed striking, since, as scientists tell us,[1] the initiation of the process of crystal formation is still one of nature's mysteries: no specification of initial conditions in given cases can predict whether the formation of a crystal will be initiated or not. Thus, in the cultural sphere, the root metaphor of *gibush* grounds Israeli folk sociology in an image of society that is "an ideal that can never be fulfilled but that we must always strive for", in the words of one of our teenage informants. It is a symbol that has shifted from serving a primarily elaborating, to serving a primarily summarizing role. In other words, it is a metaphor that incorporates and mediates the pragmatic sense of making and shaping one's world on the one hand, and the utopian spirit of boundless, spontaneous "communitas" on the other (Turner 1969:96-7), both of which have been central to Israeli ethos (Katriel 1986).

Given the valorization of the state of *gibush*, the extent to which *gibush* has been attained within a social grouping has become a measure of its quality. The goal of attaining *gibush*, conceived as "a value in itself" in the wording of a school administrator, has thus taken on the role of an important test of quality for the pedagogical process as a whole. In school, the attainment of *gibush* in a class, or its failure, is attributed both to the children and to their 'homeroom teacher' *mexanex/et* who, as charismatic

leader, is expected to help generate *gibush*. In the army, the term *gibush* is used in a similar way, but it has also been extended in usage in such a way that its test semantics becomes its central meaning feature. In this specialized sense, *gibush* refers to a period of concentrated training during which youngsters who wish to join volunteer units are tested for their suitability. "Passing the *gibush*" implies acceptance to the unit of choice. The extent to which the term has become naturalized in this sense is indicated by the fact that a shorter testing-training session of this kind, lasting only three or four days, has come to be called *gibushon*, with the diminutive suffix *on* appended to it. Unlike the case of the school class, where attaining *gibush* is a collective enterprise and a collective test, in this case it is the individual who is tested in terms of his (and not her) ability to fit in within a crystallized unit, as assessed by commanders, but mainly through the use of peer-ratings (numerous examples of this usage are found in Lieblich's (1987) account of military service, which she based on conversations with young Israeli men).

It is not surprising that the shift from a collective to an individual focus in the semantics of *gibush* has gone largely unnoticed. The semantic extension of the notion of *gibush* from a collective to an individual focus, however, does not cover its full range of meanings. Alongside its use as an attribute of social groupings the term is also used as an attribute of personal identity, partially grounding the Israeli semantics of personhood, to which we now turn.

3. GIBUSH AS AN ETHNOPSYCHOLOGICAL NOTION. Life's learnings, experiences, and tribulations are believed to help crystallize a person's identity or personality. Thus, the *gibush* metaphor serves as a conceptual guide for the culture's image of the well-formed, mature person -- that is, a person, as informants put it, who "knows what he wants", "whose two feet are on the ground", one "who doesn't bend with every wind". The properties of personal strength stemming from a well-formed, solid inner core, of decisiveness, trustworthiness, and of realism are all considered part of having a crystallized identity. A crystallized 'identity' *zehut* or 'personality' *ishijut*

is felt to be the end-state of a long maturing process, a goal to be attained in early adulthood, when durability and steadfastness become the desired goals. Thus, just as it is comical to talk about the crystallized identity of a child or baby, it is considered childish and undignified and a mark of weakness for an adult to be highly undecided and changeable. Whereas in the case of the Kaluli (Feld and Schieffelin 1981), 'hardness' is metaphorically associated with a stage of maturity, and is valorized as such; in this case it is the solidity of the well-formed crystal that carries the metaphorical burden. Both metaphors differ in similar ways from the organismic metaphor implied by the notion of continuous self-growth or development found in some contemporary American discourse (Katriel and Philipsen 1981; Bellah et al. 1985).

Notably, while deliberate efforts to promote *gibush* in social groups are common, no such efforts are made in the intrapersonal domain. The crystallization of personality or identity is considered a gradual, spontaneous process that does not lend itself to similar degrees of manipulation. The social engineering machinery, so to speak, stops short of penetrating the psychic domain. Talk about the crystallization of personality is often cast in the past tense, as a comment about an attained state, as in "His personality became crystallized during the war," or in the present as a state not yet achieved, as in "His personality is not yet crystallized; he may yet change his mind three times", said by way of comforting a friend whose son had just made what appeared to be a rash career choice. The implication was that this was an inevitable passing phase, which, equally inevitable, would come to its end as part of a natural maturation process. This process may take a myriad of forms, and be accomplished at different rates and at varying degrees, so that one of the crucial issues felt to affect the shape of a personality is the question of the conditions under which it had become crystallized. The sense of precariousness associated with a state of *gibush* in the social sphere, and the activistic orientation towards promoting it, are not part of the ethnopsychological image of the crystallized self; but this is not because it is felt that the process of maturation can be fully controlled but rather because it is felt to be beyond control, part of the spontaneous life process. Linguistically,

this conception is reflected in the simple observation that one speaks of the crystallization of personality using the reflexive form (*lehitgabesh*) rather than the causative (*legabesh*) when referring to a well-formed personality.

A further elucidation of this folk-psychological notion can be gained from a closer examination of the uses of *gibush* in relation to psychological states and processes. Thus, a person may have a 'crystallized world view' *hashkafat olam megubeshet*; a person or a team may work at 'crystallizing opinions, plans, policies, proposals', etc., *legabesh de'a/toxnijot/medinijuit/hatsa'ot*. The ability to do so is a measure of one's competence as an actor in the world, since stable opinions and well-formulated plans serve as antecedents for effective action. In this intrapersonal domain of will and action, the products of internal processes -- whether cognitive or volitional (plans, opinions, intentions) -- are spoken of as deliberate outcomes of the process of crystallizing, of forming opinions, making plans, preparing programs for action.

Notably, the notion of *gibush* is not applicable to the realm of emotions --one cannot say the 'x has crystallized emotions' **regashot megubashim* or that one's 'emotions became crystallized' **regashot hitgabshu* during the war, as one might say about opinions or world view. Thus it seems that the process of self-crystallization consists in forming one's opinions and world view, and in shaping one's will.

This is not to say that the social state of *gibush* is affectively neutral. Its affectivity, however, refers to a "social emotion" (Brenneis n.d.), to the sense of togetherness natively known as *hajaxad*.[2] Whereas this social-emotional state has the status of a cultural ideal and is considered part of that domain of cultural life that can be promoted and shaped, personal feelings are left beyond the pale of the culture's semantics of order -- they are nonsocial, natural, spontaneous. Clearly, a much more detailed consideration of the language of emotion in Israeli cultural discourse is required. For our purposes, it is interesting to note the parallelism between the exclusion of the family as a social unit and of personal feelings as a psychological domain. This points to the central affective and expressive role of the family as the seat of personal emotion in Israeli culture,

as is suggested by such other linguistic practices as the use of nicknames among family members (Katriel and Blum-Kulka 1986).

Another link between the *gibush* metaphor and the domain of public expressive conduct is its inclusion as part of the critical vocabulary of art critics in commentaries about works of art of all sorts. Valuing a work of art as having attained a state of *gibush* is a recognition of its distinctiveness of style, its well-formedness and maturity. Personal expression can thus be brought within the ordered domain of a (potentially) well-crystallized world either by being channeled into the social domain or by being sifted through a formalizing artistic endeavor.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS. As the foregoing exploration of the semantics of *gibush* has indicated, speaking of the crystallized group or the crystallized person suggests the attainment of some idealized standard of form and order. The *gibush* metaphor implies a movement of solidification, of ingathering from a scattered state of atomized particles to a state of well-integrated stability. A significant differentiating feature in the semantics of the term relates to its use in denoting a spontaneous process and its use in denoting a deliberate process. As noted, *gibush* is regularly used as a transitive verb (*legabesh*) in the discourse about groups as well as in the discourse about volitional, intentional action. In the ethnopsychological description of the process of self formation, it is used as a reflexive verb, implying an undirected spontaneous process. The seat of spontaneity and naturalness, as we have seen -- the affective domain -- is excluded from the discourse of *gibush*. This discourse, thus, grounds the cultural semantics of sociality and personhood and, moreover, provides a metaphorical language through which these two experiential domains resonate. This metaphorical usage reveals a cultural conception whereby the individual and the community are placed, so to speak, in an echoing relationship to each other. This relation of mutual articulation is in tune with both traditional Jewish understandings of the individual/community dialectic (Prell-Foldes 1980), and with the Utopian conceptions of community cultivated in the nation-building ethos of modern Israel (Katriel 1986). It is radically different from the modern Western conception of the individual/society opposition.

A very imaginative and effective literary allusion of the notion of *gibush* as an underlying cultural metaphor can be found in a widely read Israeli novel, *Daniel's Trials* (Orpaz [1973] 1986), in which the depiction of the protagonist's journey of self-discovery is rendered both intelligible and compelling through indirect reference to the crystallization metaphor and the symbolic world associated with it.[3] Let me then conclude by offering a reading of this novel as a "cultural text" (Varenne 1977), whose artistic effectiveness is, I believe, enhanced by -- is not predicated upon -- its implicit reference to the root metaphor of *gibush*.

The novel was written following the 1967 war and tells the story of Daniel, a young Tel-Aviv student whose participation in the war culminates in a traumatic experience -- he kills an enemy soldier at short range -- and, upon his return, all shaken and despondent, he interrupts his studies and runs away from home. Searching for new bearings, he hides away on a desolate stretch of Tel-Aviv beach, a liminal place-out-of-place, where he undergoes an extraordinary experience of self-transformation, emerging not only with a renewed sense of self, but also invested with the power to heal.

The bulk of the novel is devoted to the depiction of Daniel's internal journey. For our purposes, it is interesting to note that it does so, inter alia, through the use of landscape imagery, which, as I will try to show, harks back to the cultural imagery underlying the *gibush* metaphor, and therby helps readers interpret Daniel's rather outlandish rite of passage in terms that are commensurate with cultural conceptions of the self-formation process. Indeed, the novel unfolds between the two dominant poles that demarcate its scene -- between the daunting legend-laced rock in the sea that stands immutable off the coastline on the one hand, and the ever-restless, shifty sands of the beach on the other. The solid rock and the scattered grains of sand may be said to represent the two poles of the crystallization process that Daniel must undergo.

Thus, Daniel's movement of identity formation -- his pulling himself together, as it were -- is conveyed through a literalization, or de-metaphorization, of the cultural metaphor of *gibush* translated into a concrete language of scenery (Burke 1945).[4]

When Daniel first arrives at the beach, he tries to swim to the rock, the pole of solidity that would mark the end-point of his journey, but he is painfully unsuccessful: the piece of rock he tries to hang on to disintegrates in his hand and he finds himself thrown onto the sand, exhausted and delirious. As he recuperates and begins to make a home for himself on the sands of the beach, he realizes "that the rock would not come to him and that he had to go to the rock. And his journey had only just begun" (Orpaz [1973] 1986:71).

The culmination of this journey is punctuated by a mystical experience in and through which the process of the crystallizing of identity is both affirmed and transcended: "His hand was stretched in front of him and a few grains of sand were left in it. He fixed his eyes on one of them, and it grew and became larger and larger. And as it became larger, it opened up to the sun, as a crystal, and the light was streaming through it and breaking into a thousand shapes, and then streaming again into these shapes. And Daniel's thoughts, as transparent as a crystal, began to move as well..." (Orpaz [1973] 1986:136).

Looking at the grain of sand he feels himself becoming a grain of sand, and in so doing he both embraces and transcends the polarities between which his beach existence -- just like the metaphor of *gibush* -- plays itself out. At that moment of illumination he is able to affirm that there is flow in fixity, eternity in the passing moment, rocklike solidity in the frailty of the grain of sand. He emerges from the experience a reformed person -- and finds he is now able to swim to the rock, to come in touch with its newfound solidity, which now resonates with his newfound sense of self. The movement of personal crystallization has thus been metaphorically completed, and Daniel is ready to go home, to forge his new place in society, healed and giving.

That Daniel's journey of self-discovery naturally leads him back to society is a statement that makes good cultural sense in an ideational context permeated with the *gibush* metaphor, with both its personal and social ramifications. Finding oneself and finding one's social vocation are conceived of as one and the same process, a process tellingly translated

into a language of place and scene, as captioned also by the epigraph Orpaz ([1973] 1986) has chosen, which reads: "Sooner or later we must face ourselves, and start our journey home." This is a conception well understood and consistently cultivated in Israeli cultural discourse whether articulated in its official rhetoric, in everyday discourse, or in artistic expressions. The process of self formation, in this conception implies a movement between sands and rock, one leading both to personal knowledge and to a sense of social purpose. In my reading of *Daniel's Trials*, then, it is through the implicit use of the *gibush* metaphor that the author places the protagonist's journey within a culturally intelligible frame. Part of what makes the story of Daniel so compelling is that, by invoking the root metaphor of crystallization, the author articulates the possibility and shape of the innermost process of self formation in a cultural idiom that is both credible and resonant for Israeli readers. While in its everyday discursive uses *gibush* has lost much of its metaphorical aura (it has, in the wording of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) title, become a metaphor Israelis live by), its artistic exploitation in this novel may serve to revitalize it by bringing into relief the two poles of self-contained solidity and open-ended dispersal, order and chaos, in a concrete language of visual imagery, the rock and the sand. In this, the novel functions in true liminoid fashion (Turner 1982) -- as we accompany Daniel on his transformative journey, his rite of passage, we are both instructed in how to think and feel about major categories of experiences and in how to recognize their dialectical coexistence.

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NOTES

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1. Jacob Katriel (personal communication).

2. Cf. Brenneis' (forthcoming) illuminating discussion of social aesthetics and emotion theory in Bhatgaon discourse, particularly the analysis of the native term *prembhaw*, which designates the situation of interpersonal amity, the experience of that state and amiable demeanor which embodies it.

3. *Daniel's Trials* (Orpaz [1973] 1986) has been introduced into the senior high school literature curriculum, and has thus reached many young readers. It is now in its fourth printing. The title in the original is *Masa Daniel*. The word *masa* is a homonym -- three different words pronounced the same but spelled differently. The word as it appears in the original title means 'journey' rather than 'trials', as given in the English translation. The third meaning for *masa* would be 'burden'. Of course, all three meanings capture some of the journey/burden/trials that make up Daniel's tale, a multiplicity of meanings lost in translation.

4. Orpaz is exceptionally sensitive to literary uses of scenic language, as is amply indicated in his own critical reading of literary works in his book entitled *The Secular Pilgram* (1982), a title that could aptly describe Daniel's journey as well.