

Being an *Oleh* in a Global World: From Local Ethnic Community to Transnational Community

LISA ANTEBY-YEMINI

(CNRS, Centre de Recherche Français de Jérusalem)

ABSTRACT : *The following article looks at two immigrant groups in Israel and suggests new approaches to the study of olim, or Jewish returnees to Israel, endeavoring to see them as migrants, similar to other countries in the world, with features such as transnationalism and globalization.*

This article¹ examines two very different population groups that have arrived in Israel in the last decade: immigrants from Ethiopia, numbering today over 65,000, and from the former Soviet Union, close to 722,000 of whom came between 1989 and 1997. They represent the last major immigration waves to Israel at the end of the twentieth century. I will endeavor to show in which ways these immigrants, who are granted immediate citizenship, participate in Israeli civil society, yet, at the same time develop diverging patterns of ethnicity linked to post-national models. Some of these global identities challenge the basic foundations of Zionism, suggesting a new type of *aliyah*.

The first part compares integration processes and segregation strategies at work among the Ethiopian and Russian immigrants² in Israel by looking at features such as native language, communal organization and political participation. These two groups, considered to be “identical” to the host population because of a common Jewish heritage, develop ways of being “different” by constructing themselves as distinct ethnic communities while becoming Israelis.

The second section focuses on the various ways of reworking ethnicity or race in Israel for immigrants who preserve close ties with their country of origin, who maintain strong links with other co-ethnics worldwide and who participate in global cultures. In this sense, this article suggests a new framework for studying migration in Israel that challenges the assumption that *olim* (“those who ascend” i.e. immigrate to Israel) are Jewish

¹ A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 6th Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies, Toledo, Spain, July 1998.

² The term “Ethiopians” and “Russians” follow the Hebrew usage *etiopim* and *russim*, even though I am aware of their limitations as well as the generalization they imply, given that we are dealing with such heterogeneous groups. Ethiopian Jews originate from Tigray and Gondar provinces, for example, while Russians are composed of immigrants from the Caucasus, Central Asia or the Ukraine.

immigrants returning to their homeland, and would rather see them as “transmigrants”, as in other countries of immigration, where immigrants are more and more considered as “transmigrants” who “develop and maintain multiple relations - familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political - that span borders.” (Glick-Schiller *et al*, 1992)

Participating in Israeli Society - Between Integration and Segregation

At first glance, Ethiopian and Russian immigrants in Israel appear to represent two extremes: the former is a rural, mostly illiterate population from the northern Ethiopian highlands who maintained a strong religious and ethnic identity over the centuries; the latter is a mainly urban, highly educated population, who could not always preserve religious practices under the Russian communist regime. Because of these characteristics, diverging integration policies were applied to each group by the Israeli authorities.

Following what was termed “indirect absorption,” Ethiopian immigrants remained for at least one year (but often more) in an absorption center (*merkaz klita*), a facility that provided lodging as well as Hebrew language classes and various administrative offices on the premises. This framework offered most of the health, educational and bureaucratic services that the newcomers needed in the first stages of adaptation to life in Israel. Such a “total institution” with its underlying paternalism, was designed to help these immigrants for a transitional period that sometimes extended beyond the intended time-span, turning temporary dwellings into permanent ones and support into dependence. To encourage Ethiopians to live on their own, in 1993 the Israeli government launched a special mortgage program enabling families to purchase apartments (subsidies averaging \$80,000 - or the equivalent of 90% of the price of an apartment - were offered, as well as interest-free loans for the remaining amount). Today, most immigrants live in permanent housing scattered around the country, but voluntarily clustered in ethnic enclaves.

“Direct absorption,” on the other hand, was implemented for the Russian immigrants, which meant that upon arrival they received an “absorption basket” (*sal klita*) including an allowance for living costs, rental and mortgage subsidies, and educational expenses averaging \$10,000 for the first year. They used this financial aid to find housing, purchase goods and survive on their own, instead of having the government manage their needs. This policy, which allowed the newcomers to be more or less in charge of their own integration, also made it more difficult to provide government services to this delocalized and decentralized population.³ Furthermore, the

³ This article only refers to the recent wave of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who began arriving in 1989 and not to the prior immigration of the 70s,

Russians deeply resented the benefits granted to the Ethiopians, particularly in the area of housing, which they viewed as “positive discrimination” in their disfavor.

In addition, the presence of a community of *vatikim* (veteran immigrants) from the USSR and from Ethiopia, who had already set up communal structures, helped the newcomers upon arrival and eased their integration process. They also shaped the way the newcomers would participate in Israeli polity and society.

New Speech Communities

One aspect that characterizes both groups is the maintenance of their native languages, in which the indigenous media (television, radio and press) that have emerged in the last decade play a major role. In fact, both Russian and Amharic, the two vernaculars most widely used among Russians and Ethiopians respectively, show signs of ethnolinguistic vitality in Israel. The development of daily Russian and Amharic broadcasts on Israeli radio, as well as programs on public television, draw large audiences among the new immigrants. In particular, the establishment of a Russian-language press, numbering some 50 newspapers and magazines, constitutes one of the most important phenomena characterizing this immigrant group (Zilberg and Leshem, 1996). At its peak, in 1991-1992, the total circulation of the Russian immigrant press reached close to one million copies per week. Local publishers also issue books of prose and poetry as well as literary almanacs for Russian readers, and prominent Russian writers living in Israel continue to publish in their mother-tongue (Remennick, 1999). This wide-spread use of native-language media provides a major source of information and entertainment for the older generation who does not understand Hebrew and leads to the construction of an “imagined community” of audiences speaking the same language inside Israel.

Furthermore, the circulation of videotapes and music cassettes from Ethiopia and an increase in the audience of Russian cable television channels, reinforce the ethnic identity of the newcomers and links to their country of origin. These new communication practices also bear heavily on the reconstruction of images of the “home country”, as is witnessed for example, by the cultural appropriation and idealization conveyed through video movies from Ethiopia (Anteby, 1998). In addition, certain educational frameworks (e.g. Russian extra-curricular classes, Amharic language tests for the matriculation exam at the end of high school) allow the second generation an opportunity to continue being fluent in their mother-tongue even though a separate education system in Russian or Amharic is not available. If

whose socio-demographic characteristics and motivations were vastly different. On the absorption policies concerning these two groups cf. S. Adler (1997).

bilingualism is on the rise among the younger generation from the former Soviet Union, who often prefer to use Russian, even though they acquire Hebrew successfully (Ben-Rafael *et al*, 1998), Amharic seems to be weakening among the second generation as most Ethiopian youngsters speak mainly Hebrew amongst themselves.

In sum, native-language is still being preserved even when Hebrew is mastered, creating segregated speech communities that challenge the linguistic hegemony of a Hebrew-speaking state. Indeed, the creation of linguistic boundaries and the multilingual situation that results from this (as was clear in the last electoral campaign with television ads and posters both in Russian and Amharic) points towards a resistance to dominant Israeli culture and a refusal of social integration. Yet, at the same time, these new immigrants construct themselves as Russian and Amharic speaking communities specifically situated in Israel, using a Hebraized Russian (Markowitz, 1993) and Amharic. To this extent, they form Russian-Israeli or Ethiopian-Israeli local communities that differ from Russian or Amharic linguistic groups in Europe or the USA. These double processes of separatism and integration will also become clear in the communal organization of Ethiopians and Russians in Israel.

Towards Communalization

One of the first questions the immigrants confront upon arriving in Israel concerns their membership in the Jewish ethno-national identity. If belonging to the Jewish nation (or the Jewish people) allowed Ethiopians and Russians to acquire citizenship by virtue of the Law of Return, their first encounter with Israeli Judaism is nothing more than foreign for both groups, albeit for different reasons.

As far as the Ethiopians are concerned, their Jewish practices often differ from those of normative Judaism, their language of prayer used to be Ge'ez, an ancient Ethiopic language, and their religious leaders, the *kessotch*, have still not been recognized as such by the Israeli authorities. Furthermore, their personal status as Jews has also been questioned, even though as a community they were recognized in 1975 by the Israeli Rabbinate as descendants of the lost tribe of Dan, and thus considered "full-fledged Jews" to whom the Law of Return could apply. However, because the code of Jewish Law (the *Halakhah*) was unknown in Ethiopia, marriage, divorce and conversions were not performed according to Rabbinic Judaism and some individuals still undergo ritual immersion before marrying in Israel.⁴ Paradoxically, Ethiopian children were sent to state religious schools

⁴ Until 1985, a longer form of symbolic conversion (*giyur le-humra*), including re-circumcision (*hatafat dam brit*), ritual immersion and acceptance of the commandments, was required to remove any doubt concerning the personal status of Ethiopian immigrants.

(*mamlakhti-dati*) during their first year in Israel, and the majority continue in this framework, where they are taught normative Jewish practices, which often estrange them from their parents. Therefore, Ethiopians, confronted with a new language of prayer, a new corpus of texts and new religious rites, as a whole choose not to adopt them and form separate religious communities, while the younger generation either distances itself from religion or identifies with Israeli religious-nationalist models. The recent immigration of the Falashmoras, a group of Ethiopian Jews converted to Christianity, entering Israel under a family reunification policy, also complicates the status of the Ethiopian community in Israel.

The Russians, on the other hand, are often unfamiliar with basic Judaism because of assimilation, intermarriage and the lack of religious freedom under the Soviet regime. However, since 1989, an increasing number of Russian non-Jews have also entered Israel according to the Law of Return as family members of Jews. Given the high number of mixed marriages in the former Soviet Union, figures become inflated with regard to the personal status of the newcomers, since an estimated 27% of Russian immigrants to Israel are not considered Jews according to *Halakha*, i.e. they were not born to a Jewish mother. In light of the fact that in the Soviet Union Jews were unable to perform certain religious prescriptions (relating to marriage, divorce, circumcisions), the Israeli Rabbinate has ruled that some of the immigrants, or their children, must undergo conversion in order to marry under the auspices of the religious authorities in Israel. However, the vast majority of Russians are secular and prefer, in any case, to marry in a civil framework; some are also being buried in non-Jewish cemeteries. Finally, they send their children to secular schools (*hiloni*), thus refraining from integration in religious communities as well.

The failure of religious incorporation and the doubts regarding the immigrants' personal status as Jews, besides challenging the very equation between religion and nationality in the Israeli state, encourages both groups to view themselves as "Others" and not fully identify with the religious-ethnic national identity of their new homeland. This is also true, to some extent, with regard to social integration. Even though serving in the army, going to school or to university and entering the workplace are the traditional socialization frameworks for achieving "absorption" in the host society, Russians and Ethiopians still remain marginalized from the wider Israeli population. As a result, the rate of endogamy still remains high for both groups and social networks and ties tend to develop mostly among other co-ethnics across Israel. Taking, for example, the case of the Ethiopians, these immigrants recreate, on the neighborhood level, some of their village's social and economic structures such as credit associations, collective meat buying groups, burial associations and counsels of elders (Anteby, 1997), thus reinforcing ethnic identity by recreating a new sense of locality that is

simultaneously an “Ethiopian space” and an “Israeli place”. The Russians operate similar processes of territorialization, leading to the emergence of spatial enclaves, e.g. the majority of emigrants from Derbent (Daghestan) moved to Hadera, the ones from Gomel (Belarus) to Nahariah, and the ones from Central Asia to southern areas of Tel Aviv (Berthomière, 1996). The concentrations of both immigrant groups also function as a thriving place for entrepreneurial niches and for a flourishing “ethnic business”, whether it is Russian, non-kosher groceries or Ethiopian spice stores, reconstituting a new geography of identity in the Israeli environment that enables cultural practices to be maintained and specific services to be offered in the native-language.

More significantly, Russians and Ethiopians have established a tight network of associations and organizations, on both local and national scales, that help their members with housing or employment problems, defend their rights or that are directed at specific populations (e.g. youth at risk, Falashmoras, victims of domestic violence). If we turn to the Ethiopian immigrants, the number of associations has skyrocketed to nearly 100, according to Weil (1997), set up by young leaders who skillfully stage strikes and demonstrations (such as the one directed towards the Rabbinate in 1985, or in response to the blood scandal in 1996). Among the immigrants from the former Soviet Union, numerous associations exist, ranging from cultural clubs, *Landmanschaften*, a Russian library, self-help institutions and interest groups. Concurrently, a class of new leaders has emerged, challenging a certain balance of power inside the community, but also raising issues of representativity and legitimacy, as is apparent in the contested leadership of the umbrella organizations (be it the Zionist Forum of Soviet Jewry or the United Ethiopian Jewish Organization) officially representing these two communities vis-à-vis the Israeli authorities. Be that as it may, this communal organization points to specific modes of incorporation into Israeli society by which cultural claims as an ethnic group are asserted through the channels of Israeli civil society. In this sense, Russian and Ethiopian Jews, who lacked communal structures and leaders in their countries of origin, are now organized as a “community” that can bring about group mobilization in times of crisis. However, they are also constructing themselves as a “local community” of Russians and Ethiopians on the national Israeli level, thus, at the same time, adopting a collective identity as Russian-Israelis or Ethiopian-Israelis. This will become even clearer through the political mobilization of these new citizens.

Creating an ethnic space in the Israeli polity

Both immigrant groups participated widely in the May 1999 elections, with a voting rate close to that of veteran Israelis, demonstrating that they are keen on using their first right as new citizens. By their sheer numbers, the Russian electorate weighs heavily on the results of the elections,

whereas the voting power of the Ethiopians still remains very limited. While both groups had little experience of civil society in their countries of origin, they seem to have rapidly adapted to the new political culture in Israel, learning to make use of their political rights and their mobilizing power in the civic sphere. This active performance of citizenship attest to their feelings of belonging to their new homeland and their involvement in its politics, yet each group chose a different path.

Prior to the 1996 elections, the Russians established a political party (*Israel b'Aliyah*) and before the more recent elections in 1999, a second ethnic party was created (*Israel Beitenu*), reflecting the divergences and power struggles inside the Russian community. The first party, headed by Nathan Sharansky, obtained six parliamentary seats in the Knesset and the second party, headed by Avigdor Lieberman, gained four seats in the 1999 elections. As a result, Nathan Sharansky was appointed Minister of Interior (a key-position in determining matters of personal status and citizenship, among other things), and a second vice-ministerial post in the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption was given to a candidate of *Israel b'Aliyah*. Hence, most immigrants voted for the ethnic parties and not the Israeli ones, entering the political arena through ethnicizing their representation. As for electing a Prime Minister, a majority of Russians voted for Benjamin Netanyahu, the candidate of the *Likud*, while far fewer voted for Ehud Barak, the candidate of the Labor party, *Avoda*. The voting patterns of the Russian electorate seem to depend more on their satisfaction with the government's policies concerning immigrant absorption than on a definite political orientation.

The Ethiopians, on their part, preferred to cast their votes for the election of Knesset members mainly towards the *Likud* candidates and to a lesser extent towards the national and religious parties, at the right of the political spectrum. Two Ethiopian candidates were on the list of *Israel b'Aliyah* (albeit in remote positions) revealing an interesting alliance here with the Russian immigrants whom they otherwise do not align with. Another candidate, Addisu Messale, ran on the list of the left-wing Workers' party (he had formerly been the first Ethiopian to become a Member of the Knesset on behalf of the Labor party). None were elected; furthermore, the Ethiopians have not succeeded in forming an ethnic party and in 1999, they also lost their only representative in the Parliament. As for electing the Prime Minister, they overwhelmingly supported Benjamin Netanyahu, expressing a deep nationalist commitment to their new country. In the 1998 municipal elections some independent Ethiopian parties formed, but the candidates were not elected because of divisions inside the community; some members preferred to vote for Israeli candidates rather than their own.

These patterns are relevant as to ethnicity in politics. On the basis of Ben-Rafael's (1982) classification of former immigrant waves, one could

predict that Russians will make up a “for-itself” group, developing a community of interests and a political consciousness, in other words institutionalizing ethnicity in the polity. In opposition, the Ethiopians can be seen as an “in-itself” group, unwilling to articulate an ethnic political ticket, leading to their marginalization in the political sphere. However, both groups, in particular the Russians, demonstrate that through communalization they are able to integrate in the political system of their new country and possess the power to change the outcome of local and national elections and influence decision-making and political agendas at the state level. Furthermore, by activating their citizen rights as participants in civil society, the newcomers acquire a strong national identity as Israelis as they construct a new sense of membership in the nation-state and give new meaning to citizenship.

Despite their dissimilarities, Ethiopians and Russians use the same modes of incorporation in Israeli society to simultaneously maintain segregation and pursue assimilation. In other words, from the point of view of native language, indigenous media, communal organization and political participation, the two groups view themselves as ethnic communities, which was never the case in their countries of origin, and are perceived as such by the Israelis as well; yet, these are also the very strategies allowing them to fully enter Israeli society. In sum, by reconstructing new communities and behaving as “ethnics”, they are becoming Israelis. However, if these patterns of participating “ethnically” in Israeli society demonstrate that Russians and Ethiopians form separate local communities rooted in a strong national identity as Israeli citizens, this does not exclude that they also identify with “new ethnicities” beyond the borders of their new homeland.

Participating in Global Culture - Building Transnational Communities

In Israel of the 1990s, there existed various ways of negotiating and reconstructing ethnicities. Over the last several decades, the melting-pot model of immigrant “absorption” in Israel has been challenged, mainly due to two factors. First, the Zionist ideal of the fusion of exiles (*mizug galuyot*) into a homogeneous society with a unified national and cultural identity (i.e. that of the “Jewish people”) has failed, as the gap between the “two Israels” widens and inequalities persist. Second, the *olim* of today, as opposed to those of the 50s and 60s, are no longer willing to give up their ethnic specificities, particularly when faced with Others (i.e. Israelis) who are supposed to be the Same (i.e. Jews) and in fact turn out to be very “different” from the newcomers. Therefore, Russian and Ethiopian immigrants are presently fully participating in Israeli life without the desocialization and resocialization required in the earlier years of nation-building, as new patterns of ethnic legitimation and new modes of incorporation ensure membership in Israeli

society. In the past, most immigrant groups aspired to assimilate as quickly as they could and become “Israelis”; today, it rather seems that the newcomers strive to remain “ethnics” as long as they can. What, in this case, become the markers of otherness and how are the group’s boundaries of the group redefined?

A Transnational Russian Jewish Community

The immigrants from the former Soviet Union continue to transmit and re-create a Russian culture and language in Israel, especially since it is the only means for the intellectual elite, the *intelligentsia*, to maintain any kind of identity. Russians established an institutional system to foster various aspects of Russian culture and form a Russian-Israeli cultural enclave “wavering between integration and ghettoization” as Lissak and Leshem put it (1995: 24). One witnesses the formation of a new community of “Russian-speaking Jews in Israel” who wish to maintain an image of elitists and cosmopolitans⁵. Indeed, they think of themselves as belonging to a Russian “high culture,” seen as superior to both Western culture and even more so to Israeli culture, dismissed as “Oriental” (Kimmerling, 1998: 271). In this respect Russian-language media plays a major role in maintaining, among the newcomers, this strong identification with the language and the culture of their home country. Israelis interpret this emergence of a “Russian subculture” as resistance to integration and as cultural separatism (Lissak and Leshem, 1995); yet, this new “Russian ethnicity” development among the immigrants rather suggests that incorporation in Israeli society can combine the processes of ethnicization and israelization.

Furthermore, Russian immigrants maintain close ties with their country of origin as well as with other Russians in America and Europe, thus developing transnational social, economic and cultural networks around the world. Many have also kept their passports from the former Soviet Union. For instance, over 20% of the working age immigrants own small businesses in their home country, or work for a Russian company in Israel, or are otherwise involved in joint ventures (Remennick, 1999). Travel patterns also account for the rise in exchanges between countries where Russian Jewish immigrants reside, since, according to Remennick (*ibid.*), about 20% of Russian Israelis make annual trips to their home cities in the former Soviet Union and over 40% visit there every two to four years; some still own apartments in their country of origin and return there for several months every year. Remennick (*ibid.*) also estimates that about three-quarters have received relatives and other co-ethnic guests in their homes from various countries at least once in

⁵ Kimmerling calls this group “Russian-speaking immigrants” and considers them, above all, a linguistic-cultural group rather than an ethnic group *per se* (1998: 270).

the course of their residence in Israel. When they do not travel, Russians in Israel keep in contact with relatives in Moscow, New York or Berlin by phone, fax or e-mail; finally, Russian cable television also exposes the immigrants to information flows from their home country, thus playing a special role in the formation of a transnational consciousness. (Remennick, *ibid.*)

These exchanges between the former Soviet Union, Israel, the United States and European countries that become “centers” for this new diaspora, lead to the emergence of a transnational Russian Jewish community. As Markowitz defines it,

this community, unimagined (cf. Anderson), unintended, and obviously without a bounded territory, rests on a social base of kinship and friendship ties across the continents; on the emotional bases of a common understanding of what it was like to have lived as Jews in the USSR; on a positive valuation of Russian high culture and the Russian language; on an orientation toward intellectualism and professionalism; and on the necessity of adjusting these values, beliefs, and life patterns to a different, non-Soviet reality. (1995: 207-208)

The development of a transnational identity together with a growing national Israeli identity among Russians also appears in a different form among the Ethiopian immigrants.

A New Black Diaspora

In conjunction with secularization and modernity, Ethiopian Jews are growing more aware of their black identity among the white host population, in a way re-discovering their blackness or their *négritude* (Anteby, 1999). To these new racial categories encountered in Israel, one must also add the constructions of race that the immigrants are exposed to through modern media, which often convey the American model of black/white interactions as well as global representations of Black diasporas. Thus, one observes in the claims of Ethiopian immigrants, particularly in the political arena, new uses of blackness and references to the discourse of race relations, usually to condemn Israeli policies as “discrimination” and “racism”⁶. A recent blood scandal that resulted in violent reactions on the part of the Ethiopian

⁶ This is of course reminiscent of the Black Panthers, the movement of young Moroccan Jews who in the 1970s contested the discriminatory policies of the Ashkenazi establishment towards the immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East. Recently, the then Ethiopian-Israeli member of Knesset, Addisu Messale, also made use of such accusations against the Labor Party whom he left before the 1999 elections.

community brought to the fore these racial rhetorics, turning inter-ethnic relations into inter-racial relations (Anteby, 1997). This reformulation of ethnicity in terms of color consciousness is also manifest among a minority of the youth who adopt Afro-American models and international black symbols (in their music, hairstyle, clothing). Kimmerling even mentions the threat of a “Black counter-culture” at the margins of Israeli society (1998: 306). However, this identification remains in the realm of the symbolic since there is no contact or affiliation in Israel with other groups such as the Black Hebrews of Dimona or the foreign workers from Africa.

In addition, many Ethiopian immigrants travel back and forth to Ethiopia. Some take trips to visit relatives, others to cure health problems and a growing number of young people are importing goods to Israel (clothes, food, music and video tapes). These close links with Ethiopia compel a population who rarely left their native villages before emigrating to Israel to completely rethink geographical space and integrate the model of a globalized world in their spatial constructions. Furthermore, these frequent trips to Addis Ababa and the encounter with its urban African culture, which the rural immigrant population in Israel hardly knew, allow for cultural exchanges and circulation of new identity models that offer these new Israeli citizens different self-images. Indeed, traveling back to their home country enables them to participate in several different racial systems simultaneously, affecting their concepts of race, as is the case for other migrant groups (Glick-Schiller et al, 1992). This leads to new ways of thinking about group boundaries that differ from the models of the elders that are still based on religion and especially on purity and impurity (Anteby, 1997). These frameworks of ethnic reconstruction of blackness, Jewishness, Ethiopianess and Israeliness account for the forging of a new collective identity, which could be, coined “Black-Ethiopian-Jewish-Israeli ethnicity.” A process of “ethnicization” of color makes it a strategic “new ethnicity” socially and politically constructed, representing for these immigrants a way of negotiating their racial identity in a white Jewish Israeli society.

Global Olim’?

These two examples suggest that a first set of identity references stem from the country of origin with which the immigrants still maintain strong bonds through modern media, travel and business, enabling them to continue to actively participate in their former society. These transnational networks and cultural flows allow for a circulation of commodities and people, books and images and music and food between Israel and Ethiopia and between various Russian Jewish Diasporas in the former Soviet Union, the United States and Europe. This involvement in the home and host societies, as well as other centers where co-ethnics reside, is a central element of transnationalism, a social process in which migrants establish social fields

that cross geographic, cultural and political borders (Glick-Schiller *et al*, 1992). A second set of identity constructs derives from wider global models brought by modern media such as cable TV and music culture. In this respect, a certain number of Ethiopian immigrants now feel that they belong to a new “imagined community” of Blacks around the world, whereas Russian immigrants develop a transnational identity as a new worldwide diaspora. This reflects the situation of a growing number of migrants today, for whom, as Appadurai points out, “the landscapes of group identity - the ethnoscares - around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous.” (1991: 191)

These observations demonstrate that one can live in Israel today and still remain “Russian” or “Ethiopian” in addition to several other identities one can choose from. New ethnic options, such as identifying as “Blacks” or associating oneself with “Russian high culture” may perhaps become the most important features of the immigrants’ “visibility” and their main strategies of differentiation from the host population. Nonetheless, this interplay between the local Israeli context, the former society of origin, and the global dimension of “world culture” should not be viewed as a sign of the failure of their absorption. On the contrary, I suggest that these trends may well represent a new form of participating in Israeli society, which combines national, transnational and global identities. In other words, belonging to an “imagined” Black transnational community and re-appropriating African-American symbols in terms of Israeli ethnicity or using the Russian language for daily life in Israel and belonging to a “real” diasporic community around the world makes the newcomers simultaneously Israeli and transnational, local and global.

Conclusion

Both the crumbling Zionist ideology in Israel, as well as the characteristics of the Russian and Ethiopian immigrants, (i.e. their social and political incorporation in Israeli society, the ethnic options they choose in relation to global identities) account for new patterns of membership in Israeli society. These “new Israelis” are developing ethnic subcultures and identities, which constitute quasi-autonomous entities close to what Uri Ram calls “local neo-ethnic communities”. The newcomers construct symbolic separations (low rate of intermarriage, segregated housing, distinct speech communities, opposite lifestyles) that some see as challenging the very definition of “Israeli culture” and “Israeli identity” (Kimmerling, 1998: 264-265). At the same time, the immigrants have constructed new ethnicities and new forms of

identification that are not connected to Israel nor to the Zionist model, but rather to transnational communities and global identities. They are in fact, combining different cultural references and reworking multiple identities, in a sense becoming “emergent diasporas” and questioning the very definition of *olim* as “Jewish returnees” coming back to their “homeland”.

Is this two-way dynamic of ethnicization and globalization a threat to national Israeli identity? In fact, one should see it more in terms of the limits of Zionism, since the ideal of a homogeneous society with a unique cultural identity is no longer operational and new ethnic options are becoming more and more prevalent as ways in which *olim* can rebuild a new identity and form of belonging to Israeli society. Furthermore, this trend does not go against the concept of citizenship, but should be seen as attesting to the “normalization” of Israeli society in which allegiance to the nation-state does not exclude other ethnic affiliations, just as other countries are striving towards post-national citizenship while simultaneously experiencing the hardening of ethnic identities. Indeed, as in Europe where one observes a reconfiguration of membership in the nation-state that complicates and contests the national order of citizenship (Soysal, 1994); Israel is also confronted with shifts in the model of citizenship and modes of belonging beyond the confines of national boundaries. In this context, one must also rethink the specific category of the *oleh* for Israel since, on the one hand, a growing number of immigrants are non-Jews (Russian Christians and Ethiopian Falashmoras) and, on the other hand, more and more *olim* are becoming transmigrants, resembling deterritorialized populations in other countries of the world.

Finally, what some may see, following Uri Ram’s work, as the “post-Zionization of the *olim*” may, in fact, simply be a form of “israelization” that allows immigrants to participate in the public sphere and integrate the local civil society while undermining the cultural and hegemonic domination of the Zionist state, thus suggesting an alternative way of constructing Israeli nationhood. The combined processes of neo-ethnicization, transnationalization and nationalization allow Ethiopians and Russians in Israel to recreate local identities as ethnic communities in Israel, national identities as Israeli citizens and global identities as members of transnational networks, opening a new dimension of Israeli citizenship that could be coined “post-Zionist citizenship.”

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