

Chapter 8

Jewish Immigrants in Israel: Disintegration Within Integration?



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8.1 Introduction

In Europe and North America, boundaries of belonging—the abstract lines that define the limit of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) – seem to be drawn through new frames of *deservingness* (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014; Faist 2013; Soysal 2012). Recent research shows that the country of origin becomes secondary in the determination of whether or not an individual can become part of society and is gradually being replaced by his or her perceived economic utility and ability to actively participate in society.

While the main debate around this issue takes place in North America and Europe today, the reframing of the categories of immigrant settling in Israel is relatively absent in the scientific immigration debate. Indeed, the strong ethnonational ideology underlying the Law of Return – Israel’s national immigration policy – and the stability of this policy over time, leaves questions of belonging unchallenged. However, I argue that several changes have taken place since the Law of Return was promulgated in 1950 and I scrutinise their impact on immigrant integration frames in this chapter.

First of all, Israel’s immigration landscape is beginning to resemble that of certain post-industrial countries (Berthomière 1996, 2004; Elias and Kemp 2010). The beneficiaries of the Law of Return have become more ethnically diverse and the large immigration flows from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, in particular, have raised new questions of race and religion (Yonah 2005). The globalisation of Israel’s economy has led to the entry of a non-Jewish workforce from Asia and Eastern Europe, within the frame of a policy that resembles the guest-worker programmes implemented by several European countries after World War

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II. Additionally, Israel has seen an increase in the number of asylum-seekers whose presence is criminalised by the Government.¹

Secondly, Israel's semi-socialist economy has experienced a drastic shift towards neoliberalism, as exemplified by deregulation, privatisation and the increasing withdrawal of the welfare state, in parallel with the adoption of a free market economy, the growing prestige of business careers and so on. Although Israel is still characterised by a somewhat centralised administration, municipalities take on more and more responsibilities towards their residents and the future development of the local economy.

In this context, I focus on one type of immigration – Jewish immigration as framed by the Law of Return – and the growing role of municipalities in their integration. This chapter aims to determine the extent to which urban logics under neoliberal reforms reframe immigrant 'deservingness' (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas 2014). Has the 'economic utility' (Faist 2013) of Jewish immigrants become a new criterion determining the efforts which local governments put into attracting certain new immigrants while dissuading others?

The main objective is therefore to unpack the immigrant policies of Israel, as they are interpreted and adapted at the municipal level. A substantial aspect of the changes I detail below lies in the tensions between new frames of deservingness and persisting ethnonational state logics. It is not the first time in history that Israel has limited the immigration of Jews in favour of categories perceived as more desirable. However, the political and socioeconomic context has seen the emergence of new frames through which these categories are justified. This chapter contributes to the developing scholarship on deservingness by reconnecting neoliberalisation processes at the global level with national identity politics and micro-processes of change produced at the local level. Confronting global, national and local frames therefore sheds light on how *disintegration*, as a process of latent (or sometimes even intentional) exclusion of certain groups, takes place and affects society as a whole (see Collyer et al. 2020).

The chapter is based on a research conducted in four peripheral cities in Israel from 2013 to 2017. It is organised as follows: firstly, I define the concepts of *desirability* and *deservingness* that underlie immigrant policies. Secondly, I address the history of the 'absorption' of Jewish immigrants, concomitant to nation-building in Israel. Immigrant absorption has changed, together with the neoliberalisation of the country, which has introduced tensions between the state, the city and the immigrants. Focusing on local immigration and integration policies formed by Israeli cities' municipalities, I show how ethnonational and neoliberal logics are intertwined – in fact, my enquiry reveals the tensions resulting from national ethnic preference on the one hand and economic desirability as pushed forward at municipal level on the other. To conclude, I compare my empirical results with the desirable versus deserving debate, observed under neoliberalisation processes.

¹In this chapter, Government with a capital letter refers to the central administration, including its elected officials and its managerial and technical agents.

8.2 Immigrant Integration: Desirability Versus Deservingness

Immigration and citizenship policies are the set of rules that fix access to a national territory and its formal membership. Therefore, scholars who attempt to unpack immigration policies often focus on the underlying logics determining who can be part of the national community and who cannot. While some nation-states prevent access to formal membership entirely if the applicant cannot prove ethnic ascendancy (*jus sanguinis*), others permit access to formal membership to any individual born within the boundaries of the country (*jus solis*), even when s/he cannot prove his or her ethnic ascendancy. In the second case, membership may be granted with the condition of quick assimilation into the polity or following a more pluralist attitude.

However, over recent decades, the entangled processes of globalisation, expanded free market economy and rescaling of governance have greatly challenged nation-states' management of these issues (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Sassen 2005). The heterogeneity of immigrant situations and the concomitant heterogeneity of regulations and policies have led to a rather fragmented management of immigration, which even includes the deliberate undermining of integration processes (Collyer et al. 2020). Additionally, economic criteria have gained substantial weight in determining the desirability of certain individuals (immigrants or not) over others. Immigration becomes an important stake for the globalised market economy, and 'immigration policy – the power of the state to exclude, admit, and expel – is productively deployed not only as a tool of statecraft but as a tool for neoliberal capital accumulation via the constitution of neoliberal subjects' (Varsanyi 2008, p. 883).

Whereas 'migrants contribute to neoliberal governance by encouraging a form of subjectivity that reinforces the ethos of the self-reliant, enterprising individual' (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2010, p. 16), they face the increasing requirement that they take responsibility for their own integration, including continuous training and proactive integration in the labour market, in order to be recognised as 'active, participatory and productive citizens' (Soysal 2012). This injunction falls particularly on immigrants but is also increasingly true for all citizens (see also Karolak 2020; Samuk 2020). As Thomas Faist points out: 'It is not only the categorization of people along nationality/citizenship and thus the accident of birthplace, but also their distinction with respect to economic utility and social adaptation that make a difference to the life chances of many individuals' (Faist 2013, p. 1644).

In this context of tensions between globalisation and neoliberalisation on the one hand and the trends of nationalism and the militarisation of borders on the other, the tendency of nation-states is to 'leav[e] the messy and costly details of servicing and policing expanding noncitizen populations to state² and local governments' (Varsanyi 2008, p. 879). Indeed, local governments – such as municipalities – have

²In this case, regional and not federal state.

been recognised as emerging actors in the governance of immigration. More than a merely pragmatic response to immigrants' settlement in their cities, municipalities are forced to respond to the demographic changes. As Neil Brenner argues, post-Keynesian competition states mobilise diverse institutional realignments and regulatory strategies to '[enhance] fiscal constraints and competitive pressures upon cities and regions, impelling their regulatory institutions to privilege the goals of local economic development and territorial competitiveness over traditional welfare, redistributive priorities' (Brenner 2004, p. 176).

Sometimes, 'interlocality competition' (Brenner 2004) has permitted a more positive embracing of the settlement of foreign-born populations in cities. In fact, municipalities increasingly tend to consider immigration as a potential catalyst for city development. Immigrants are seen as potential members of the 'creative class' (Florida 2003) or – formulated from a more critical perspective – as the neoliberal agents of urban restructuring (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2010). Municipalities engaged in 'remaking, reimagining and marketing' their city (*ibid.*, p. 2) favour immigrants whom they perceive as having more to contribute. Martin Jørgensen, when studying this issue in Denmark, states: 'Cities compete to attract the most skilled and creative migrants, and the [rural] municipalities are responsible for poorly skilled and less resourceful immigrants and descendants' (Jørgensen 2012, p. 245).

However, empirically, municipal policies include immigrants with very heterogeneous social and human capital and therefore very differently perceived probabilities of succeeding in integrating autonomously into the various institutions of the host country. 'Sanctuary cities' (see Hinger 2020) have developed access to local membership and sets of integration policies for immigrants of all backgrounds, including those with precarious or no legal status. An interesting contribution to our understanding of who is perceived as deserving is that of Sébastien Chauvin and Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas (2012, 2014). In their analyses, immigrants gain the attention of policymakers when their economic performance is positive, when they actively participate in the community or when they fall into the category of vulnerability. The last category, vulnerability, is often offered by the state in exchange for the migrant's renunciation of agency in the process of proving his vulnerability. In other words, the denial of agency is artificial and, on the contrary, produces self-narratives that respond to the state's expectations of passive victims.

This chapter brings empirical grounding to this debate: the case of Israel presents a strong ethnonational definition of belonging and access to citizenship. However, with the recent involvement of municipalities, new tensions appear which may lead to further instability in immigration policymaking. My objective is to analyse the role of Israeli municipalities in producing or reproducing frames of access to community membership.

8.3 The Absorption of Jewish Immigrants and Nation-Building

The Law of Return, ratified by the Israeli parliament in 1950, is Israel's only immigration policy. It is conceived not only as a return migration policy but also as an immigrant settlement policy. Indeed, it states that every Jew who expresses the desire to immigrate to Israel, identified as the 'ancestral homeland', can do so. As the Israeli sociologists Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled state, '[The Law of Return] became the most important legal expression of Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state. It established an ethno-nationalist citizenship that, in principle, encompassed all Jews, and only Jews, by virtue of their ethnic descent' (Shafir and Peled 2004). In 1952, the state ratified a second law, the Nationality Law, granting beneficiaries of the Law of Return immediate access to Israeli citizenship.

From the beginning and despite the all-encompassing framing of the Law of Return, immigration to Israel and integration after settlement never included all Jews equally. The first waves of immigrants who settled in Ottoman Palestine had to prove their capacity to sustain themselves, without the support of Zionist institutions (Shilo 1994). 'Penniless Jews' were prevented from immigrating and the ideal newcomer was young, able to work and had at least a small amount of capital. Zionist organisations revised the rescuing/refuge purpose of the settlement in Palestine and advised the careful, organised building of the settlement (*ibid.*). The first organised immigration of 'penniless' Yemenite Jews occurred in 1911 but was of equal 'economic value' (*ibid.*, p. 611) since their settlement was meant to replace that of Arab labourers and provide a cheap Jewish labour force in Palestine (*ibid.*).

In 1948, Israel declared itself open to the mass migration of Jews in the Diaspora but, following the arrival of more than 687,000 Jewish immigrants between the second half of 1948 and the end of 1951 (CBS 2016), the Government and its operative arm, the Jewish Agency, had to rethink their plan. In 1952, the Government and the Jewish Agency both stopped supporting immigration unless applicants were under 35 or were refugees in immediate danger (Sitton 1962). Candidates for immigration who were not 'desirable' as workers nor 'deserving' in the context of the establishment of Israel as a haven for threatened Jews in the Diaspora had to bear the cost of their immigration and settlement themselves.

For those who made it to the country, equal integration into the new nation was far from a reality. In fact, the absorption policy – the set of policies governing immigrants' settlement in Israel – was conceived along a two-path ethnicised integration approach. Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, founder of the Israeli School of Sociology and its leader until the 1970s, had developed the basis of the state immigration policy. As stated in the introduction to this volume, the role of academia in influencing politics of (dis)integration is clear to see (Collyer et al. 2020). Hence, Eisenstadt (1954) suggests that: 'To each *aliya*³ is assigned a specific functional contribution in the nation-building process and a consequent location on the centre-periphery

³A Hebrew term meaning ascent and referring to Jewish immigration to Israel.

continuum' (Ram 1995, p. 31). In Eisenstadt's model, immigration from the end of the nineteenth century represents the core of the 'social system' necessary for modernisation, while the mass migration of the 1950s represents the periphery. The 'centre' is ethnically Russian and Polish and bears the universal interests of society at large whereas the periphery is mostly made up of non-European Jews from Africa and Asia. As such, the latter has a marginal role in nation-building: its members are meant to be assimilated within the core culture in order to create a 'unified and homogeneous nation' (Frankenstein 1953, cited by Ram 1995, p. 38).

Eisenstadt (1954) viewed three aspects of the successful transformation of 'traditional' immigrants into 'modern Jews':

Acculturation – learning of the various norms, roles, and customs of the absorbing society; personal adjustment – strengthening of the mental makeup of the immigrants, building confidence and satisfaction in them; and institutional dispersion – the proportional dispersion of immigrants in the various institutional spheres, residential locations, and so forth (Eisenstadt 1954, pp. 10, 15).

Absorption was designated in terms of the 'diffusion' of values, norms, and roles, from the modern absorbing society to the traditional immigrants, until they were entirely immersed (*ibid.*, p. 38).

'The proportional dispersion of immigrants in the various institutional spheres, residential locations, and so forth' (Eisenstadt 1954, pp. 10, 15) refers to an actual geographical dispersion of immigrants (Lipshitz 1991). In fact, the central administration planned the establishment of new cities called development towns, located at the frontiers of the new state. With the saturation of older urban centres, new immigrants from Africa and Asia⁴ were forced to settle in development towns.

Non-European Jews were therefore doubly excluded from the core of the new nation. Socio-culturally, they were considered as peripheral and needing to integrate within Ashkenazi⁵ modern society in order to differentiate themselves from the Arab culture⁶ (Chetrit 2000; Ram 2000; Smooha and Peretz 1982; Tzfadia and Yacobi 2011; Yiftachel 2000). Geographically, they were directed to the borders, where they suffered effective segregation on the part of the state (Khazzoom 2005; Lipshitz 1991, 1998; Shama and Iris 1977; Tzfadia 2006; Yiftachel 2000).

The resentment of African and Asian immigrants from development towns and peripheral neighbourhoods in larger cities grew when Soviet Jews entered Israel in the 1970s. Associated with national political crises (which I describe in the next section), the preferential treatment given to these new immigrants exacerbated the divide and led to social unrest. A socio-political movement emerged in that period and African and Asian immigrants gathered around a Mizrahi⁷ identity. The

⁴Immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe were also directed towards development towns; however, due to their better social networks and higher levels of capital, they could re-emigrate to the centre quite shortly after their arrival.

⁵*Ashkenazi* means Jew of European origin.

⁶Even though I refer to 'African and Asian Jews', the majority of these immigrants came from North Africa and the Middle East, where they had co-habited with Muslim and Christian Arabs in Morocco, Yemen, Libya, Egypt and Lebanon etc. – a minority came from India, for instance.

⁷A Hebrew term meaning Easterner.

Ashkenazi–Mizrahi divide was reinforced again 20 years later with the fall of the USSR, when more than 800,000 Former Soviet Union immigrants made their way to Israel between 1989 and 2000 (Berthomière 2004).

The ‘Russians’ were not the only ones who alimented the Ashkenazi–Mizrahi gap. At the other end of the spectrum, Israel received a new group of racialised immigrants: Ethiopian Jews (Anteby 1998; Djerrahian 2015; Elias and Kemp 2010). Thirty years after Governmental operations to bring them to Israel, Ethiopian Jews⁸ still suffer from high rates of poverty, lower achievement in the education system and the labour market, institutional racism and more. At the time of my fieldwork (2015–2016), as European Jewish communities were increasingly afraid of becoming the target of terrorist attacks, following those in France and beyond, the state once more privileged Western immigrants over the settlement of new Ethiopian immigrants, triggering protests among Ethiopian Israelis (Lior 2016; Lis 2016).

Whether it be the prevention of ‘penniless Jews’ from settling during the pre-state period, the differentiated immigration possibilities of (perceived) non-productive, non-refugee Jews in the 1950s or the preferential immigration of ‘Western’ Ashkenazi immigrants over ‘Eastern’ Mizrahi immigrants today, Jews who should have benefitted from the support of the state have been categorised either as economically useful or as vulnerable refugees for more than a century. However, this distinction has taken a new turn since the late 1970s and the neoliberalisation at work in Israel.

8.4 Towards Neoliberalisation: Tensions Between the State, the City and the Immigrants

The 1970s represented an important rupture for the state and the beginning of the progressive liberalisation of Israel’s economy and politics. In the 1970s, Israel saw the infiltration of a ‘new right’ ideology from the UK and the USA (Kay 2012). In 1977, Likud rose to power in the Israeli parliament and Menachem Begin became Prime Minister. In fact, the 1973 war and the growing resentment among African and Asian immigrants led to the delegitimation of the Mapai (Labour) camp.⁹ This

⁸ Between November 1984 and January 1985, 7000 Beta Israel or Ethiopian Jews were transferred to Israel during the so-called ‘Moses operation’. Even though 6000 Ethiopian Jews had already made it to Israel before them, this first operation heralds the symbolic start of Ethiopian immigration to Israel. 11,000 new Ethiopian immigrants arrived in Israel after this operation. Lastly, in May 1991, Israel conducted the second operation, the ‘Solomon operation’, an airlift which brought 14,300 Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 36 h (Anteby 1998; Berthomière 1996).

⁹ The Mapai (an acronym for the Party of Eretz Israel Workers), led by David Ben-Gurion, dominated Israeli politics from 1949 to 1968 and instituted a semi-socialist economy in Israel, characterised by a centralised planned economy, the monopoly of state corporations such as the construction company Solel Bone, the housing company Amidar and the national Union *Histadrut*, collective settlements such as the *kibbutz* and state-planned immigration settlement, etc. Mapai then became *Avoda* (Labour).

election initiated the shift from a founding Labour Zionist bloc to the more neoZionist, neoliberal Likud party (Shafir and Peled 2004) – and a more complex stratification of Israel society along socioeconomic, political, ethnic and religious divisions (Berthomière 2004). Yet the real neoliberal turn, which led to the actual withdrawal of the state and reduced public expenditure, occurred in 1985, under pressure from the US Government (Kay 2012).

The country's shift to a more neoliberal approach to government and the economy still holds today. The elections that took place when I started my doctoral research in 2013 confirmed this trend. The winning coalition was made up of parties that all believed in a free market, the reduction of taxes, the cutting of welfare subsidies, the weakening labour unions and, in general, supporting the withdrawal of the state (Rubin et al. 2014). However, the neoliberalisation of Israel does not mean that other ideologies do not subsist.

The impact of these reforms on Israel's immigration policy has been two-fold: first, since the 1980s, immigrant integration shifted from being the responsibility of the state to self-responsibility through the implementation of 'direct absorption' (Doron and Kargar 1993); second, *de facto* decentralisation meant an increased role of cities in different planning domains (Ben-Elia 2006; Razin 2003).

The direct absorption policy stipulates that new immigrants receive a six-month allocation from the state, as well as different discounts for residential, local and income taxes, the purchase of cars or electric appliances, and university fees; these various entitlements are known as the 'absorption basket'. Most immigrants are no longer directed to state housing nor employed in state enterprises but are free to choose where to settle and must rely on their own networks to find a job. In that context, the Government had to find new incentives – notably through housing projects – to attract newcomers to the peripheral cities suffering from out-migration (Berthomière 2002). The direct absorption policy mostly concerns Western immigrants – those from Ethiopia or India, for instance, are still directed to absorption centres and receive support for access to housing in specific neighbourhoods listed by the Government (Anteby 1998).

Decentralisation has meant that municipalities, including those in development towns, increased their autonomy when it came to immigrant settlement (Auerbach 2001, 2011; Desille 2017; Tzfadia 2005, 2006; Yacobi and Tzfadia 2009). In this sense, municipal immigrant integration policies are the result of three types of logics which are in tension: state logics, immigrant logics (represented by certain political parties such as Shas¹⁰ and Israel Beitenu¹¹ for instance) and the interests of the cities themselves (Desille 2017).

¹⁰ 'Shas (Sephardic Guardians of the Torah) was originally formed in Jerusalem in 1983 with the support of Rabbi Schach, and led by Rabbis Ovadia Yosef and Aryeh Deri. Shas aimed at representing Sephardic Jews in Israel, as well as facilitating their access to resources to carry out their activities. It has a social agenda, particularly successful in a context of welfare vacuum. Their success surprised the leaders themselves. But Shas has been extremely resilient and has managed to secure a diverse base of voters up to today' (Desille 2017, p. 138).

¹¹ 'In 1995, *refuznik* and Soviet immigrant from the 1970s Natan Sharansky founded the Russian right-wing party *Israel beAliyah* (a pun meaning 'Israel on the rise' as well as 'Israel in immigration'). At the 1996 elections, half of FSU immigrants voted for this party, securing seven seats in

8.5 Description of the Study

To understand the underlying logics leading to the development and framing of local immigrant integration policies, I have selected four development towns (established or expanded in the 1950s to absorb new immigrants and secure the new borders of the state): Acre, Arad, Kiryat Gat and Kiryat Shmona, located on the map in Fig. 8.1.

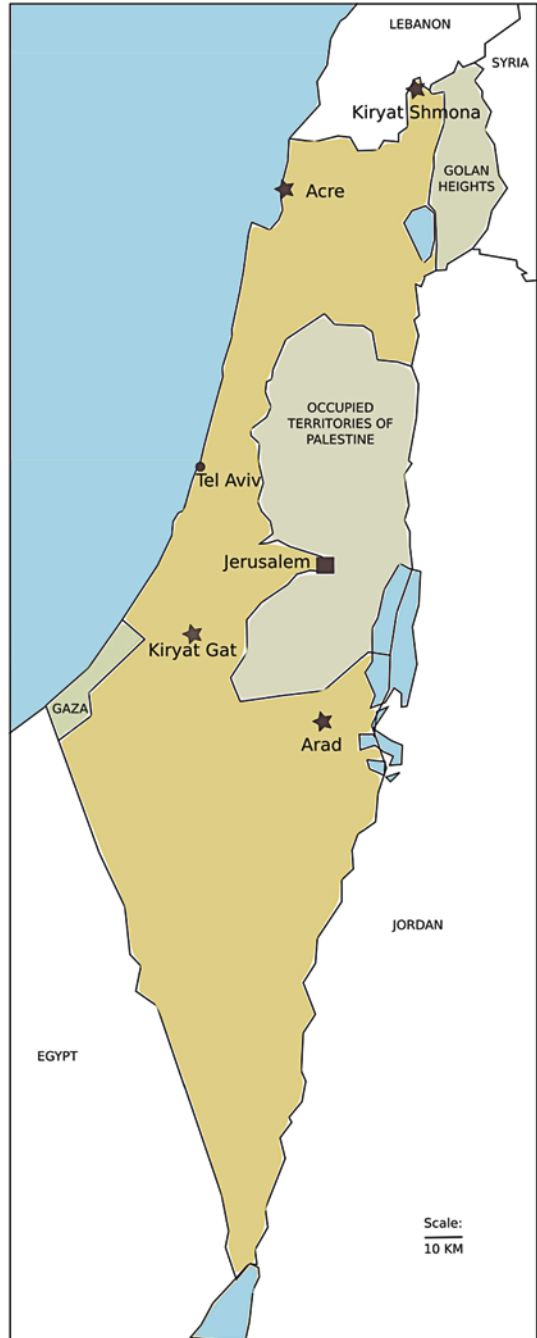
The four cities belong to the same urban hierarchy: they are middle-sized cities (20,000 to 50,000 residents), remote from the Tel Aviv–Jerusalem axis, economically depressed (with an indicator of 4 or 5 on a scale of 10),¹² and have some regional function, notably in terms of service delivery. Second, the local political landscape of each city is quite similar, with the same political parties dominating local politics: Likud, national religious and religious parties, and Israel Beitenu party (Israel Beitenu council members are usually in charge of immigration issues). Finally, the cities residential bases are similar, constituted, as they are, mostly of African and Asian immigrants and their descendants from the 1950s onwards' waves of immigration, as well as a large group of former-USSR immigrants (between 16 and 40%).

However, their planning and development followed different rationales. Acre is not explicitly a city established for immigration settlement purposes, since it is a very ancient site and was a Palestinian settlement until 1948. However, it has been greatly expanded to receive immigrants from the 1950s onwards. Today, it represents the most proactive city among the four under scrutiny when it comes to immigration settlement issues. Kiryat Shmona was established in 1949 and Kiryat Gat in 1955 for the settlement of new immigrants. Both development towns were established on the sites of Palestinian villages which were entirely destroyed; however, unlike Acre, there are no Palestinian residents in these cities. Arad, a second-generation new town, was established in 1962, with new planning criteria to overcome the socioeconomic issues that quickly surfaced in development towns such as Kiryat Gat and Kiryat Shmona. Although Kiryat Gat and Arad have formulated

the parliament. Following political conflicts, *Israel beAliyah* was to disappear to leave *Israel Beitenu* (Israel our house) to enter the political scene. The Moldavian immigrant Avigdor Lieberman founded *Israel Beitenu* in 1999. It represents Russian-speaking immigrants and is primarily secular, nationalist, Zionist and adopts a hawkish position with regard to the conflict" (Desille 2017, p. 139).

¹²The socio-economic rank is calculated for each city depending on the financial resources of the residents (from work, benefits etc.). These are housing (the density, quality, and other components of this aspect), home appliances (e.g. air conditioners, personal computers and VCRs), the motorisation level (quantitative and qualitative), schooling and education, employment and unemployment profile, various types of socio-economic distress and demographic characteristics. 1/10 indicates cities in distress while 10/10 indicates well-off one. Based on these indicators, budgets, national transfers and staff decisions impacting on local governments are taken by the Ministry of the Interior.

Fig. 8.1 Map of Israel



some local immigration policies, Kiryat Shmona remains reluctant to direct its limited municipal resources towards new immigrants.

Additionally, their leadership, in the sense of the political style of the mayor and the city council (administrative bureaucracy, New Public Management, intermediary/hybrid), is also different. Acre and Kiryat Gat have adopted a more managerial approach, characterised by partnerships with the private sector and the business-like management of several public issues. Both the history of the places as well as the motivation and management style of their leaders are major causes leading local immigration policies to diverge (Desille 2017).

Whether they were involved or not in immigration settlement, political representatives and technical staff in all four cities formulated some definition of integration during our encounters. Based on 60 interviews, I analysed the narratives and discourses underlying the concept of immigrant integration, with the aim of providing a grounded theory to this loaded concept. As Rinus Penninx (2013, p. 18) suggests:

The essence of policies is their intention to guide and steer processes in society – in our case processes of immigrant integration. Explicit policies are part of a political process of a normative nature in which the topic of integration is formulated as problem. The problem is given a normative framing (What do we want to be the outcome of the integration process?) and concrete actions are designed and developed to reach the desired outcome. Therefore, the systematic study of policies should investigate the framing and normative elements as well as practice and what relation these have (or do not have) with the process of integration as empirically measured. Ideally, this should be done using a terminology that is independent of policy concepts.

Through in-depth encounters, I sought to reveal the ideas and beliefs that framed municipal immigrant integration policies in the cities, aside from the definition provided by the more explicit national policies I have mentioned in the earlier sections (the Law of Return, the direct absorption policy and the community absorption policy). My results show that ethnonational frames of citizenship, elaborated at the national level, persist and are reproduced at the local level. However, the rescaling of integration policies also has two effects; it permits local governments to have a wider margin for manoeuvre to include a multicultural agenda whereby immigrants are given more freedom to preserve their sociocultural practices while, at the same time, privileging the settlement of immigrants who are perceived as more contributing or desirable based on their so-called economic utility (a process similar to that in certain European countries, shown by Hinger 2020).

8.6 The Ethnicisation of Integration Paths: Between Moral Obligations and Economic Development Imperatives

On the topic of immigrant integration, participants in my research identified several opportunities linked with immigration. First and foremost – and based on a Zionist ideology – the incoming of Jewish individuals is associated with an ideal of territo-

rial and community regeneration. For these depressed cities, immigrants hold the promise of ‘new blood’, a ‘revolution’. This promise is concretely operationalised through five ideas: (1) they not only enable socioeconomic development, (2) a demographic boost in areas suffering from out-migration and (3) cultural diversity but also (4) increase the political weight of previous immigrant groups and (5) provide new channels for public funds.

The active involvement of certain municipalities in reaching out to potential Jewish immigrants allows these cities to gain a degree of control over the profile of those who settle there. In particular and in order to contribute to the various aspects I have cited above (economic development, demographics, cultural diversity), immigrants targeted by these policies are expected to have a high level of education, to be of working age and to bring ‘culture’ (which implies the dual meaning of Western liberal attitudes and knowledge of the arts – music, literature, theatre and so on). In this context, the best-suited candidates are usually ‘Western’ *Ashkenazi* immigrants and, more particularly here, Former Soviet Union (FSU) immigrants (since these cities already host large numbers of the latter).

FSU immigration is highly correlated with educational credentials. Interviewees mentioned a wide array of topics in which FSU immigrants are believed to excel: the sciences, university teaching and research, but also applied technology, maths, chemistry and physics. As the director of the municipal economic corporation of Kiryat Shmona argues: ‘All the teachers of maths, music, chemistry and physics are immigrants. They did something great to Kiryat Shmona’.¹³ They are perceived as having higher numbers of trained individuals in the fields of medicine, computing and engineering. It is, in fact, true that FSU immigrants are relatively better educated: the Central Bureau of Statistics reports that 50 per cent of the FSU immigrants who arrived after 1990 hold academic degrees (CBS 2013). Nevertheless, many degrees are not automatically recognised and their holders have to sit equivalent exams on arrival in Israel, leading many of them to give up on their previous career. Similarly, some professions are absent from the Israeli labour market, including types of engineering (forestry, heavy metal) which are virtually non-existent in Israel. Altogether, it is estimated that only 34 per cent of newcomers continue to work in the same profession as in their home countries (CBS 2013). In this sense, Jewish immigration to Israel meets similar challenges to those confronted by other types of return migration, such as those discussed by Karolak in this volume.

The second dimension associated with FSU immigrants, and Western immigrants in general, is culture, including music, literature, cinema and even sport. In the 1990s, FSU immigrants, particularly the *intelligentsia* (understood as members of a cultural and literary elite back in Russia) and supported by state institutions, therefore invested considerable efforts in fostering a vibrant cultural environment, which was usually segregated and Russian-speaking (Remennick 2003; Storper-Perez 1998). Daniele Storper-Perez has documented these initiatives in Jerusalem and, while large cities were certainly hosting more of these initiatives than the small

¹³ Interview conducted on 21 January 2015 with the director of the economic corporation, Kiryat Shmona.

cities of the periphery, I have met members of the *intelligentsia* who have invested time and effort in activating their contacts with Russian-speaking artists and recreating their homeland cultural life in Israeli development towns (including the organisation of weekly salons, from the 1990s onwards, dedicated to poetry recitals, concerts and other cultural events). Nowadays, providing cultural activities in their native tongue to Russian-speaking immigrants is one of the main tasks which municipal departments for immigration and integration take upon themselves and for which they can easily obtain state funding. Arad's community worker explains:

If you want to attract more immigrants, you organise lectures that are not in Hebrew. Most of the immigrants here are FSU immigrants, from Russia, who are Russian-speakers. If you want to attract them, you need something in their language. Among all these immigrants, there are many elderly people who don't even speak Hebrew. They speak only Russian. So for the Golden Age month, we organise activities that target this population.¹⁴

Closely concomitant with the pressure on individuals to be productive, their ability and willingness to participate in the workforce was highly appreciated by my interviewees. FSU immigrants are perceived as possessing such attributes – they are hard workers with a serious work ethic who do not mind the downward mobility often experienced by immigrants on arrival. Acre's deputy mayor argues:

They taught us what it is to come to work or not to come to work. People used to come to work, just to be at work. They came to work. They jumped on every job. They worked in everything to keep going.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the capacity of FSU immigrants to enter the labour market – compared to previous waves of immigration – seems to be concomitant not with a so-called natural inclination for hard work but with the accession of Israel to the circle of industrialised countries. The Israeli economy of the 1990s offered better opportunities than that of the 1950s and 1960s. Secondly, FSU immigrants benefited from the direct absorption policy, whereby they could, at least in theory, choose where to live and move closer to economic centres. Thirdly, family structure was also a factor, as FSU immigrants belong to smaller, usually multigenerational families in which the elderly can take care of the children, providing more possibilities for parents to participate in the labour market (Lewin-Epstein et al. 2003; Lipshitz 1998; Tzfadia 2006).

Although there are considerable differences between FSU immigrants in terms of their geographic origin (ranging from Ukraine to Uzbekistan), their education, their previous occupations etc., the 'Russians' have a fairly stereotyped profile and are perceived to be educated, consumers of cultural activities, hardworking, 'people of the system' with high representation in the politics of Israel etc. In short, the 'Russians' are idealised as 'active, participatory and productive individuals' (Soysal 2012, p. 11). In a world that promotes lifelong education, employment at any cost and self-involvement in civil society (*ibid.*), such individuals could ultimately replace the state where it has withdrawn. As Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2010, p. 17)

¹⁴Interview conducted on 02 June 2015 with a community worker, Arad municipality.

¹⁵Interview 3 conducted on 07 January 2015 with the Deputy Mayor, Acre municipality.

state: ‘Local authorities upheld migrants as models of self-reliant survival without support from state services and programmes’.

What is striking, though, and strongly differs from the narratives collected, is that local governments do not put in place specific mechanisms, infrastructure or support systems to enabling them to benefit from immigration (such as providing efficient entrepreneurship training (only available in Hebrew today), making available commercial spaces, easing bureaucratic processes, etc.). A naïve belief in an ‘in-place economy’¹⁶ persists in which immigrants are mere taxpayers. On top of paying taxes, immigrants constitute a demographic boost in those ‘shrinking cities’ suffering from out-migration. Their presence enables the maintenance of public services and the channelling of new resources for the municipality.

However, the cities also host quite considerable numbers of Jews who immigrated recently from Africa and Asia, especially Ethiopian and Indian Jews and FSU immigrants from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan. In Acre – and in Kiryat Gat in particular – interviews with the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and the city’s spokesperson show that these cities are open to Jewish immigrants from the Global South. For instance, the Mayor of Acre is proud of the achievements of the population of Mountain Jews — immigrants from Azerbaijan who, in other cities, usually fall into the category of undesirable immigrants. He confirms that the mechanisms set up to facilitate their participation in the various city institutions have worked: pupils excel in schools and adults participate in the workforce.¹⁷ However, this type of immigration is usually associated with the moral obligation incumbent upon the Jewish people: cities must provide for those residents, based on solidarity which stems from their belonging to ‘one people’. Here, the vulnerability narrative that I exposed in the first section of this chapter becomes more prominent.

At the policy level, the integration of immigrants from the Global South is conceived of somewhat differently: instead of direct absorption, these immigrants have to settle in absorption centres before they can rent a home or access property. They usually undergo a conversion to Orthodox Judaism if their practice is not considered proper by the religious authorities. In general, they are the objects of an assimilationist approach, with the absorption of the group rather than the individual and with similar logics of renunciation of agency which I described earlier. Finally, the immigrant status is ‘inherited’ and second-generation immigrants continue to benefit from special entitlements (discounts in education and enrolment in special units in the army in particular). In addition to the variation in the absorption approach, when it comes to discourses, the perceived benefits of these immigrants are linked to the potential funding which local governments can obtain to serve these populations.

In general, there is a trade-off between economic performance and multiculturalism – understood as individual choice over socio-cultural life. In fact, individuals

¹⁶Coined by French geographers Christophe Terrier and Laurent Davezies in the expression ‘*économie présenteielle*’ or ‘*économie résidentielle*’ which we translated as ‘in-place economy’, the approach implies focusing on the area’s residents, who produce and consume, rather than on the industrial economy.

¹⁷Interview conducted on 10 February 2015 with Shimon Lancry, Mayor of Acre.

perceived as economically useful can ‘buy’ their cultural freedom, whereas groups from the Global South accepted by the cities are framed according to their potential vulnerability and strongly racialised. It is precisely this vulnerability that makes them deserving but it also means that the assimilationist injunction is stronger. In this sense, it seems to fit Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas’ (2014) concept of deservingness. Moreover, it points to a certain neoliberalisation of Israel’s integration frames, such as Will Kimlycka’s ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’ (2015) in which immigration is seen as positive for groups who do not threaten the redistributive systems of the states hosting them.

By actively categorising African and Asian Jewish immigrants as vulnerable, these policies and the discourses they are based on participate in their continuous exclusion from a new model of integration in Israel. Ethiopian and Indian new immigrants undergo a similar process of disintegration as the *Mizrahi* did some decades earlier. This fragmented integration governance has effects on urban society as a whole. For instance, police violence and limited immigration quotas have triggered important protests in Tel Aviv, in Jerusalem and in cities with a significant group of Ethiopian Israelis (such as Kiryat Gat) in 2016. In parallel, the criminalisation of other racialised groups, such as asylum-seekers from Sudan and Eritrea, has again encouraged debates on ethnicisation and integration.

8.7 Conclusion: Reframing of the Deserving vs Desirable Dichotomy under Neoliberalisation Processes

Israel’s immigration policy and the concomitant integration policies elaborated by the state since the 1950s, have always borne exclusion mechanisms. Firstly, it completely excludes non-Jewish immigrants from access to the national community. Even the goal of the ‘encompassing of all Jews’ has always been restricted to individuals who could prove that they would quickly participate in building the ‘Jewish home’. Individuals who were not perceived to be economically useful could enter the country if they were under immediate threat – thereby fitting instead the definition of refugee – and were accepted because of their very vulnerability and obliged to assimilate with the European *Ashkenazi* model. This was true before the establishment of Israel – when the first groups of Jews arranged to reach mandatory Palestine at the establishment of the state – and is still true today. However, what makes the last decade different is the justification of this limitation: the rationale behind this *disintegration within inclusion* is increasingly linked to neoliberal reforms of governance.

Although Berthomière (2002) suggests that the FSU immigration in the 1990s, after Israel had shifted to a free market economy, would reveal the tensions between state logics and immigrant logics, I argue that the devolution of responsibilities to the city level, and the rescaling of power, had an equally important weight on the reframing of the integration paradigm. The logics at work are therefore threefold:

the state, the city and the immigrants. In fact, the development imperative that falls on municipalities, in a context of ‘interlocality competition’ (Brenner 2004) for resources, residents and more, has sanctioned immigration as a potential lever for development. The ethnicisation of Israel’s integration policies is dissimulated under an injunction to local economic development, where municipalities privilege certain immigrants because of their perceived economic utility. More insidious still, the neoliberal approach to integration participates in the reinforcement of ethnicisation, rather than its transformation. As Collyer et al. (2020) argue in the introduction of this volume, ‘the perception and practices of integration depend on the dominant perception of nationhood. [...] this also works the other way around – integration policies that officially target only specific groups or individuals often serve as an arena in which the broader issue of belonging (or not) to the nation is (re)negotiated’ (p. 12).

With this in mind, some local governments proactively design programmes to reach out to immigrants whom they perceive as ‘desirable’ and able to integrate better and faster in the local community and the local economy. In this sense, the Law of Return, when interpreted at the local level, includes a criterion of economic performance and self-responsibility for integration, whereby immigrants rely on their own capacity to learn the language (Hebrew courses are still subsidised) and look for housing and employment (including being involved in professional retraining if necessary). Western immigrants, and particularly, here, FSU immigrants, are believed to have sufficient social and human capital to deal effectively with their settlement and contribute to the city’s growth.

However, this does not mean that the ethnonational frame of integration, the belonging to the Jewish people, is no longer a fundamental aspect of immigrant integration: ethnonationalist frames persist. In this context, at the national level, all Jewish candidates for immigration are legitimate but the less they are perceived as net contributors – and therefore the more they are seen as vulnerable – the more they are subjected to an assimilationist injunction. There is still an economic aspect to welcoming groups from Ethiopia or India for instance: municipalities are assured of receiving substantial funds to support the groups’ integration, thereby effectively gaining money. However, the ministry officers and the municipal agents I interviewed adopt a much less pluralist attitude towards them. The national ideological frame of integration is more prevalent for groups who go through absorption centres and do not benefit from direct absorption.

The case of Israel’s development towns brings some elements to the understanding of *politics of (dis)integration*, as addressed in this collective volume. Firstly, new actors in the governance of immigrant integration – here local government’s officials and public service workers – actively participate in reframing integration. Secondly, even in the conception of a return policy, strongly justified by ethnonational criteria, integration is conceived differently based on country of origin and assumed economic utility. Ethnicity, and the strong stereotyping associated with it, is the only determinant for the Jewish Agency, the ministry in charge of immigration matters and the municipalities to decide whether or not an immigrant is ‘desirable’

and will therefore benefit from ‘direct absorption’ – which ensures the migrant’s free choice of sociocultural practice, geographical settlement and employment – or ‘deserving’ and hence subject to community absorption, often associated with religious coercion, group professional retraining and job placement, as well as restricted choice of residence.

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