The role of established immigrants within institutionalised immigrant integration in Israel

El papel de los inmigrantes establecidos en la institucionalización de la integración en Israel

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Abstract

To which extent does the participation of 'co-ethnics' in immigrant integration policy implementation enable a more accommodating approach towards newcomers? Whereas immigrant integration policymaking has usually been envisaged through a host/stranger prism, Israel municipal departments for "Aliyah and absorption" (that is for Jewish immigration, and the integration of new Jewish immigrants) provides an interesting case: the last decades, they have primarily recruited established first-generation immigrants to cater for the newest Jewish immigrants settling in their cities. This article offers some new insights regarding the participation of these established immigrants in the implementation of Israel immigrant integration policies. On the one hand, these municipal service workers, and other local actors working towards immigrant integration, have permitted a more pluralist approach to socio-cultural integration; on the other hand, the rather partial diversity of these established immigrants –mostly Western Russian-speaking immigrants–, has limited the potential for an alternative, less 'ethno-centred' approach to immigrant settlement to develop.

Keywords: immigrant integration, Israel, local governments, policy implementation, street-level bureaucrats

Resumen

¿En qué medida la participación de "co-etnicos" en la implementación de una política de integración de inmigrantes permite un enfoque más complaciente hacia los recién llegados? Mientras que la formulación de políticas de integración generalmente se ha previsto a través del prisma de anfitrión/huésped, los departamentos municipales de Israel por "la Aliyah y el absorción" (o, en otras palabras, la inmigración judía y la integración de nuevos inmigrantes judíos) ofrecen un caso interesante: en las últimas décadas, reclutaron principalmente inmigrantes de primera generación para atender a los nuevos inmigrantes judíos que se establecieron en sus ciudades. Este artículo ofrece algunas ideas nuevas sobre la participación de estos inmigrantes establecidos en la implementación de las políticas de integración de Israel. Por un lado, estos trabajadores de servicio municipal, y otros actores locales que trabajan para la integración de los inmigrantes, han permitido un enfoque más pluralista a nivel sociocultural; por otro lado, la diversidad más bien parcial de estos inmigrantes establecidos, en su mayoría inmigrantes ruso-hablantes, ha limitado el potencial de un enfoque alternativo, para que se desarrolle un asentamiento menos "etnocéntrico" de los inmigrantes.

Palabras Clave: integración, Israel, gobiernos locales, implementación de políticas públicas, trabajadores del servicio público

1. Introduction

> Despite difficulty in terms of fieldwork, more research is also needed on policy implementation practices. Comparisons of these will enable us to elucidate and understand important differences between policies as written and policies as practised as well as to identify and explain trends of convergence in this regard. Finally, while comparative research on integration processes has been done in North America and Europe, most comparative research on integration policies has been limited to Europe (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx 2015, p. 27).

In the introductory chapter of the volume *Integration processes and policies in Europe*, Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas and Rinus Penninx (2015) suggest that the process of immigrants "becoming a part of society" is governed by a multitude of actors, located a multiple levels. To understand this governance of immigrant integration, one should look at policies frames (what should be done and for whom) as much as policy measures. This paper addresses the later: based on the analysis of policy measures taken by four municipalities in Israel, it examines the discretionary role of public service workers when implementing immigrant integration policies. In the European and American contexts, immigrant integration is still very much of a national matter. Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx argue that:

> In relation to the concept of integration, the major point of criticism is the fact that it continues to assume—as did the old conception of assimilation—that immigrants must conform to the norms and values of the dominant majority in order to be accepted. This assumption elevates a particular cultural model, in the USA that of middle-class, white Protestants of British ancestry, and in many European countries that of a collectively claimed national language, culture, and tradition; a model that expresses the normative standard towards which immigrants should aspire and by which their deservingness of membership should continuously be assessed (2015, p. 12).

Claims made by social theorists to go beyond methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) resonate strongly lately, and supranational and subnational levels are more and more taken into account (to name a few, Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Jørgensen, 2012; Penninx et al., 2004; Varsanyi, 2008; Walker & Leitner, 2011). But in the Israeli context, the ethno-national ideology underlying its immigration policy seems so inflexible that few have looked into other scales of policymaking and policy implementation (at the exception of: Auerbach, 2011; Tzfadia, 2005; Tzfadia & Yacobi, 2007). Nevertheless, and since the first years of statehood, Israel immigrant integration policy, called 'absorption', has been backed by a substantial number of street-level bureaucrats in various institutions, including city-level institutions. I suggest looking into their practices in order to grasp changes in how integration is conceived.

Secondly, immigrant integration policy has been very much of a majority matter. Immigrants, usually representing a small number, and occupying a relative disadvantageous position in most societies (demonstrated by oppression, social deprivation and discrimination), see the process of their integration decided upon by members of the dominant host society. This host/stranger set of relations has been an assumption in immigration policy studies (Alexander, 2003; Penninx et al., 2004). The Israeli case provides an ambiguous case. Effectively, there are (at least) three different types of majority/minority relations: Jewish Israeli vs. Palestinian; European Jew vs. Easterner Jew; and old-timer vs. newcomer. In that context, being a Russian Jewish immigrant or being an Ethiopian Jewish old-timer are both 'minority' identities. Nonetheless, within host/stranger relations, when it comes to implementation, one can see an increased participation of co-ethnics in public service. As Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx argue, "neither should we overlook how these policy measures are implemented in practice or to what extent and how street-level bureaucrats, practitioners, and professionals adapt them to their own goals and possibly limited resources" (2015, p. 22). In the case of Israel, many of these street-level bureaucrats, practitioners, and professionals occupying positions where they serve immigrants on a daily basis, are themselves established immigrants who act as mediators between the host society and their peers. During the several years of this research, I have met with many of them, and I argue that they cannot be ignored when studying the making of immigrant integration policies.

What is left to understand, is if they are mere agents of the State, reproducing the assimilationist policy formed at the central administration level, or on the contrary, do they introduce discretion that might bend policies? More precisely, does the participation of co-ethnics in policy implementation enable a more accommodating approach?

2. The case study: Israel development towns

2.1 1950s: the formation of Israel absorption policy

In the aftermath of the 1948 war, while more than 700,000 Palestinians take the roads of exile, the new State of Israel receives a similar amount of new Jewish immigrants. In 1960, more than a million and a half Jews of the Diaspora have

converged to Israel. With the double objective of hosting these new immigrants, while gaining sovereignty over the disputed land, the State quickly plans the establishment of thirty so-called development towns1 (or new towns) close to the borders. From the 1950s, a majority of Jews from North Africa, the Middle East and Asia are relocated to these development towns. The engineering of this socio-spatial segregation (Jamous, 1982; Khazzoom, 2005; Shama & Iris, 1977; Yiftachel, 2000; Yiftachel & Tzfadia, 2004) is still visible today, and current residents of development towns are primarily the offspring of these immigrants.

Their integration into the Israeli society is provided by a set of principles and activities under the concept of 'absorption'. The State's absorption policy was designed together with functionalist sociologist Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt. For Eisenstadt, established (Ashkenazi) immigrants from the second Aliyah (a Hebrew term meaning ascent and referring to Jewish immigration to Israel) and third Aliyah represent the core European Jewish culture. Immigrants from the Middle East, Africa or Asia are peripheral to this core culture, and must be assimilated in order to become modern Jews (Ram, 1995). This model therefore fits what van Amersfoort (1978, republished in 2010) will later call a minority/majority "continuation", where "the minority fulfils certain functions for the majority, as when the minority is exploited". State agents engage in a process of socialisation of new comers.

2.2 1970s: first rupture

Development towns, if they have provided a fast housing solution for the hundred thousands immigrants, quickly become not only geographical peripheries, but also socio-cultural, economic and political peripheries. Infrastructure is poor, access to the centre difficult, employment is scarce and mostly low-skilled, and education and health services neglected. However, the resentment of the peripheries is first heard in less remote cities. Impoverished neighbourhoods in Haifa (Wadi Salib's residents revolt in 1959), and later on in Jerusalem (Musrara's residents movements in 1971, organised by the Israeli "Black Panthers") are the voice of a new crystalizing Mizrahi (Hebrew term for Easterner) identity (Chetrit, 2000; Tzfadia, 2007). With the first wave of Soviet immigration in the 1970s, development towns' residents revolt too, and regularly

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[1] Development towns (*Ayarot Pituah* in Hebrew) were established following the Sharon Plan (1950). The terminology adopted was in line with modernization theory, which considered Jewish immigrants from African and Asian countries, the future residents of development towns, as "traditional". Nowadays, the lexicon has sometimes change, and shifted towards peripheral cities. However, I use the term 'development towns' to highlight the historical trajectory of these cities.

express their anger towards the establishment, the lack of distributive justice and the better conditions that Western immigrants get when arriving in the country (Tzfadia & Yiftachel, 2004).

The 1973 Kippur war, the economic crisis that hits the country in the 1980s and these social movements feed in the crisis of legitimacy experienced by the labour Mapai party. In 1977, after 29 years of labour dominance, right-wing Likud leader Menachem Begin is elected. Likud is influenced by Reaganean and Thatcherian politics. If the changes are not immediate, from 1985 on, Israel adopts a more neoliberal approach, characterised by a free-market economy, the withdrawal of the State and in general, the praise of private and individual interests at the expense of the collectivist planned economy of the 1950s and 1960s (Kay, 2012).

For development towns, these changes have several effects. With the fact that central administration looses grip, the election of local mayors (from 1978) enables a more fitting representation. New elected leaders belong to the communities they administer. However, these new leaders face a paradoxical issue. They are trapped between the withdrawing central administration and the reduction of public transfers, and an injunction to make local economic development policies without a proper productive base. Moreover, decentralisation is accompanied with sporadic recentralisation measures. One example is related to immigration. In fact, if Likud ideology leads to a shift towards a 'direct absorption', where new immigrants are given an allowance and are free to settle where they see fit, and responsible of their incorporation in the labour market, in times of large immigration, the State takes over once more.

2.3 1990s: second rupture

At the end of 1980s, the fall of the USSR results in one of the largest immigration to Israel: the incoming of 850,000 post-Soviet Jews from 1989 to 1995. Along those years, another group makes its way to Israel: Ethiopian Jews, whom, if they are much less in numbers, prompt a new racialised issue for the Israeli society (Anteby-Yemini, 2004; Elias & Kemp, 2010). Despite the adoption of a 'direct absorption' policy, the central administration formulates a new national plan to speed up building and industrial development. The 'population-dispersion' policy of the 1950s is abandoned, and a new paradigm – the metropolitan approach – sanctions development towns as public housing havens, while the four main cities (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa

and Beer Sheva) and their immediate suburbs rely on the private housing market (Gradus & Lipshitz, 1996). This housing policy largely influences the settlement of new comers. Although they enable a demographic burst in development towns suffering from out-migration (Berthomière, 2002), on the long-run, it accentuates the territorial inequalities of the country.

On the socio-cultural plan, the incoming of a million new immigrants in a more neoliberal context has a great impact. Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, through grassroots and national political actions, manage to weaken the assimilationist ideology and introduce a more pluralist approach (Yacobi & Tzfadia, 2009; Yonah, 2005). Social sciences take an interest in the cultural changes operated (Gershenson & Hudson, 2008; Golden, 2001; Lerner, 2015; Remennick, 2002). An interesting contribution is linked to the growing figure of the 'mediator' (Hertzog, 1999; Sharaby, 2013; Storper-Perez, 1998): established Russian-speaking or Amharic-speaking (among other languages) immigrants who intermediate between the host society and the new comers. This is precisely what interested this research: in a context of rescaling of power, and of transformations towards some form of pluralist approach to integration, what is the role and effect of these established immigrants?

2.4 2010s: new perspectives?

Nowadays, research on Israeli development towns and their immigration policies is much scarcer than after the mass immigration of former USSR immigrants. Yet, between 2001 and 2015, 27% of new immigrants still settle in development towns upon their arrival (CBS, 2016). Moreover, surveys show that an increasing number of them have established dedicated municipal units in charge of immigration and absorption, and hired municipal agents in charge of developing and implementing absorption programmes (see for instance the study ordered by Israel Union of Local Authorities: Yehuda Abramson, 2013).

3. In the offices of public service workers

Within the current context, I carried out an enquiry in so-called development towns. As a matter of fact, their historical significance in the development and enforcement of immigration settlement policies in Israel turns them, in my opinion, in paradigmatic cases. What is the actual framing of immigrant integration policies today? To which extent State ideology penetrates local administrations (in particular the

municipal units in charge of immigration that Yehuda Abramson has identified) and their public workers' discourses and practices? Does Eisenstadt's functionalist model persist today?

Four towns were selected to carry out the study: Acre, Arad, Kiryat Gat and Kiryat Shmona, located on the map below.

***Figure 1*. Map of the four cities under scrutiny**

Source: elaborated by the author

The selection of cases that I could compare followed a rather systematic method: Following several proposals by European scholars on the factors that often create

convergences of immigrant integration policies (Zincone et al., 2011), I have set that cities a) established or expanded under Sharon plan (1950) for the establishment of development towns (to settle new immigrants and secure the new borders), b) with a similar political orientation (right-wing), c) holding a similar position in the urban hierarchy (that is, serving a small centre for the surrounding hinterlands), d) with a large proportion of immigrants (including post-1990s immigrants from the Former Soviet Union), could be compared. I collected data on the 30 towns that were defined as development towns, through a phone survey with public workers dealing with immigration, the collection of data on the municipal website and other partners' website, and statistics on municipalities compiled by the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel (later CBS).

Although these towns have similar trajectories, political orientations, and stand in a similar urban hierarchy, they present variations in term of their demography, their industrial base and, more importantly, their response to immigration issues. The following facts and figures are drawn from interviews with actors conducting actions in the towns, the CBS Website (2016), as well as Orni & Efrat (1973).

Kiryat Shmona was established in 1949 on the ruins of the Palestinian village Al Khalisa, first as a rural settlement, then a transit camp and finally a town. As of today, the population is 23,000, including 16% FSU immigrants who settled after 1990. This Russian-speaking community is represented in the municipality until 2018 by two municipal councillors, one of them being deputy mayor.

Kiryat Gat was established in 1955 on the ruins of the Palestinian villages of Iraq-al-Manshiya and Al-Faluja, first as a transit camp and then a town. Contrarily to Kiryat Shmona, planners in Kiryat Gat were gearing their efforts towards sustaining a dynamic industrial base. Kiryat Gat was an industrial town for agro-industry, textile, and more recently, technology (even though the impact of these industries on the town were mitigated). Today, Kiryat Gat hosts 51,500 inhabitants, including 25% of new immigrants, mainly FSU immigrants who settled after 1990, but also Ethiopian immigrants. Two deputy mayors have themselves experienced migration. One was born in Ethiopia, and the second in Russia. The welfare department supervises two units dealing directly with immigration issues: the immigration unit, and the *moked klita* (which I could roughly translate as "absorption focal point"), the latter dealing primarily with Ethiopian immigrants.

Arad was established in 1962. This late foundation enabled planners to include new principles, such as the recruitment of immigrants with professional skills fitting the local industry, in their policies. Arad counts 24,000 inhabitants today, 40% of them being FSU immigrants who settled after 1990. One of the factors of the importance of the post-Soviet presence, is the early pro-active policy of reaching out, carried out by the mayor in the 1990s. During fieldwork, the mayor herself was a native of Moldova. The municipality counts a municipal department in charge of immigration and culture.

Acre stands out in this selection, since first human settlement is dated back to 2000BC. The Palestinian town and harbour were surrounded by the new Jewish town from the 1950s on. Today, among the 54,000 inhabitants, roughly a quarter are Palestinians and a quarter, FSU immigrants who settled after 1990. Therefore, the mayor is backed by two deputy mayors: one representing the Palestinian community, and the other, FSU immigrants. The municipality include a six-worker worth immigration department. The welfare department also supervised another centre for the integration of immigrants (called *Mishol*).

When it comes to immigration, Acre is characterised by the most pro-active policy, with a large municipal department in charge of outreaching to immigrants and of 'integration', whereas Kiryat Shmona does not have an independent department, and immigrants in the city rely on two local officials of Russian origin to defend their interests. Despite those differences, all four towns host State, municipal, non-profit and private actors dealing with immigration issues on a daily basis.

4. Assessing the participation of immigrant street-level bureaucrats in immigration policy implementation

A main assumption directing the project is the belief in the preponderance of the actors, their discourses, practices and their discretionary power, in policy implementation. Following this premise, I adopted a qualitative approach to the rescaling of immigrant integration policies in Israel. Analysis of interviews, and of textual discourses produced in local news, municipal reports, city museums and more, was the primary research method. For the purpose of this article, I draw on 34 in-depth encounters conducted with public service managers and workers in municipalities and in local offices of ministries and other public agencies in the four towns under scrutiny.

In what follows, I explain more in depth the role of street-level bureaucrats in immigration policies. I argue that encounters with street-level bureaucrats are in fact, encounters with the state on one hand; but the "state" is contested by bureaucrats' discretionary practices on the other hand. Secondly, I argue that there is a need to look at the discourses and practices of street-level bureaucrats who are also co-ethnics of the population they serve. As a matter of fact, in Israel and beyond, recruitment practices have promoted immigration experiences, language skills… when hiring public workers who are in contact with immigrants.

4.1 Street-level bureaucrats: the face of the State

In his seminal work *street-level bureaucracy,* Michael Lipsky (1980) introduces his argument saying:

> Public service workers currently occupy a critical position in American society. Although they are normally regarded as low-level employees, the actions of most public service workers actually constitute the services 'delivered' by government. Moreover, when taken together the individual decisions of these workers become, or add up to, agency policy (ibid, p. 1).

Later on, he adds: "Thus, in a sense street-level bureaucrats implicitly mediate aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state". In fact, in the period that follows their settlement, new immigrants in Israel are highly dependent on public services: to be granted the 'absorption basket' they are entitled for, to access language courses, public housing, education, retraining and so forth, they have little alternative but to face the local offices of the vast network of bureaucracies implementing Israel immigration policy at the street level. Through these multiple encounters, new comers daily meet with the State, and the control it exerts on their lives.

New comers' encounters with public workers will vary from one city to another – since different services will be available, and provided by different persons. For instance, in cities where particular 'ethnic' groups are better represented, availability of municipal services in one's mother tongue might exist, while not in other cities.

With such a centralised policy as the Law of Return, one might expect that eligibility to public services follow administrative criteria. But around the world, public service workers are granted a lot of discretion to distribute benefits and sanctions (ibid). Alexis Spire (2007) has produced an influential ethnography of French *prefectures*, the state agencies in charge of asylum demands in France. Spire shows the level of discretion enjoyed by agents in these institutions and the impacts of their practices on asylum demands' treatment. When it comes to immigration policy implementation,

Joanne van der Leun's study of the Dutch human service sector suggests that autonomous bureaucrats have discretion in implementing official policy goals (Lahav & Guiraudon, 2006). Maria Bruquetas-Callejo also accounts for discretionary practices of welfare workers and their weight on immigrants' access to welfare systems in Spain (Heelsum & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2013, p. 21-33). In particular, she highlights the problems arising from the devolution of these services to non-governmental bodies. Christine Lang, Sophie Hinger and Philip Schaefer have worked more particularly on public service workers dealing with asylum seekers in Germany (Lang, 2017; Hinger & Schaefer, 2019). Police and apprehension is also an important area of research for scholars interested in the State, its agents and immigration. In their research in the Netherlands, Arjeen Leerkes, Monica Varsanyi and Godfried Engbersen (2012) look into the role of the police in apprehending immigrants without the requested documentation. In the last years, considering the new influx of asylum seekers, with peaks in 2015 and 2016, new research works have focused on the role of street-level bureaucrats in reception centres and other housing arrangements in Europe (such as Darling, 2016).

In Israel, and since the 1950s, new immigrants therefore face a vast array of public service workers at all levels: how important are their discretionary power? Additionally, another important feature of these street-level bureaucrats should be noticed: a substantial amount of them has experienced migration themselves before they settled in Israel and started to work in administrations and other organisations dealing with immigration. To which extent these past experiences influence nowadays workers?

4.2 Established immigrants in public service

Immigrant 'absorption' in Israel combines service delivery from the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption (MOIA), the Ministry of Interior and the municipality, among others. Very often in history, the minister of Immigration and Absorption is an immigrant him/herself. Since 2009, Saint-Petersburg-born Sofa Landver occupies this position. She is also affiliated with *Israel Beitenu*, a Russian-immigrant party, which adopts a nationalistic stance. The prevalence of Russian-speakers in the Ministry and in municipalities (often through the local anchorage of *Israel Beitenu*) has been often brought forward by non-Russian participants to this research, who denounce the 'monopoly' of Former Soviet Union immigrants in immigration affairs.

Beyond this resentment, it is true that an overwhelming number of the public service workers I have met in the four cities under scrutiny are Russian-speaking immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. Until 2015, Kiryat Gat's director of the unit of absorption was born in Morocco, but during our encounter, he reports that during the annual conference where all municipal immigration and absorption directors meet, only him and a colleague are non-Russian speakers. He now retired and was replaced by a Former Soviet Union immigrant.

Evidently, Israel does not present a unique case. Maria Schiller (2016) depicts a similar employment policy in local governments' department of 'diversity' in Antwerp, Amsterdam and Leeds. Many of the workers in those departments achieve legitimacy because they are themselves immigrants. Nevertheless, in a 'nation of immigrants' such as Israel, this recruitment policy has been the rule.

Yet, so far, very few studies document the operation of immigration integration programmes in local governments in Israel. Among them, one can find works focusing on Tel Aviv non-Jewish immigrants' policy (Alexander, 2003; Raijman & Kemp, 2002). Additionally, several studies provide descriptions and analyses of the local governments' response to Jewish immigration (Auerbach, 2011; Aymard & Benko, 1998; Mesch 2002; Tzfadia, 2005; Tzfadia & Yacobi, 2007). But those have largely focused on immigration in the 1990s, and generally assessed the activities of the city council rather than public service workers. Among the few works that document Israel bureaucratic work, Esther Hertzog provided an ethnographic account of street-level bureaucrats in an absorption centre for Jewish Ethiopian immigrants in Israel in the 1980s (Hertzog, 1999). More recently, Julia Lerner (2015) looks into 'unclarified' immigrants[2] whose status is often conditioned by the practices of ministry of interior's workers. If both of them acknowledge the practices of street-level bureaucrats, they enquire offices at central administration level, rather than at the municipal level.

4.3 Policy measures and implementation

With this paper, I wish to offer a better understanding of the role of immigrant street-level bureaucrats in Israel when it comes to immigrant integration policymaking.

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[2] Around 30% of FSU immigrants who immigrated to Israel from the 1990s benefited from the Law of Return, although they were not *halach*ically Jewish. This leads to administrative imbroglios between the various authorities, some recognising their Jewishness, and some not.

Do they produce new outcomes? Do they induce changes in the way immigrant integration is conceived? Do they depart from the national 'absorption' policy?

The discretionary power of public service workers is the result of the tension between the policy their institution represent on one hand; and the habitual patterns they base their action on, the practical evaluation they conduct at the moment of taking decisions, the future projects they built on the other hand; in sum, their *intention*. Acknowledging that street-level bureaucrats have discretion and exert power, means that they can be active agents of making immigrant integration policies.

If the findings I present below clearly show the new force of gravitation of the municipality and its public service workers when it comes to immigration policy, their intention to inflect this policy towards a more accommodating and pluralist approach is questioned. In fact, social theorists working on issues of nationhood, identity and belonging in Israel have shown that new immigrants settling in peripheral areas tend to reach out to a mainstream identity rather than produce an alternative discourse of belonging (Tzfadia & Yacobi, 2007; Yiftachel & Tzfadia, 2004). These 'trapped communities', may they be the *Mizrahim* of the first immigrant waves, or more recent FSU immigrants, seek to be included in the dominant group (ibid). Assumption may therefore be that immigrant street-level bureaucrats will reproduce dominant discourses of integration.

5. Immigrant street-level bureaucrats largely reproduce Israel immigrant integration policy, while introducing some pluralism

5.1 The State is everywhere!

A first finding lies in the fragmented character of the immigrant integration policy field in Israel. Hence, 'absorption' is a domain shared by multiple actors located at multiple levels. If one looks at the four cities under scrutiny, agents in local offices of the central administration, municipal agents, and other para-public agents share or compete to serve new comers.

The Ministry of Immigration and Absorption (MOIA), represented by its local office, is the first bureaucracy visited by new immigrants. The MOIA gets a list of new comers ahead of time and can turn to immigrants upon their arrival, if they have not done so themselves. This office will unlock the various allocations and subsidies a new

Jewish immigrant in Israel is entitled to. The MOIA also has regional offices which deal with so-called community integration, and organise cultural, social and professional events at the district level. Finally, the last years, the MOIA, together with the Jewish Agency (JAFI) and municipalities have put together a new programme called Group Aliyah. The programme is funded by the MOIA, and a new position was created within municipalities: the *proyektor*.

The *proyektor* is conceived as a long-term interlocutor for the new immigrants, from the moment he decides to move to Israel to the years that follow its settlement in the city. He supports him in obtaining the various entitlements provided by the law, but he also provides him with tips regarding schooling, employment, housing, bank, phone services… etc. *Proyekorim* also organise socio-cultural activities and workshops at the city level. The *proyektor* is hired through the municipality, and belongs to the municipal department for immigration and absorption. Voluntarily set by the local governments, the establishment of these municipal departments or units (depending on their hierarchical location) is not provided by the municipal law. However, they have become well-spread in local governments in Israel (Yehuda Abramson, 2013). On top of these specific departments, municipalities have largely engaged in hiring an immigrant staff. The welfare department, and its community work unit, in each municipality does so, and has proved to have significant weight when it comes to immigrant settlement. Hence, the welfare department supervises a range of neighbourhood organisations which purpose is clearly identified with immigration. *Mishol* (the acronym *for Merkaz leIshtalvut leOlim*, Centre for the Integration of Immigrants) in Acre, the Centre for Mediation and Dialogue in the Community in Acre and Arad, or the Absorption Unit for Ethiopian immigrants, called *Mokad Klita*, in Kiryat Gat, are all supervised by welfare. Budget comes largely from the Ministry of Welfare, but workers are municipal agents.

Outside of the municipality, though often closely cooperating, the Youth Centre, supervised by the Ministry for the Development of the Galilee and Negev also hires an 'immigrant coordinator' (at least in Acre, Arad and Kiryat Gat) whose target audience is younger immigrants who need to join the military forces, the university or find a first job on the labour market. The network of *Matnass*, Centres for Cultural, Youth and Sport, supervised by the Ministry of Education, also engages in activities targeting immigrants (either because of the spoken language during activities, or the nature of the activities themselves).

Religious groups, particularly the *Garin Torani*[3] in Acre, and the one in Kiryat Shmona, have been key actors to the settlement of Indian Bnei Menashe[4] immigrants the last years, and cooperate with the NGO *Shave Israel*[5].

Finally, Kiryat Gat and Arad both host an 'absorption centre', supervised by the MOIA and the Jewish Agency, where new immigrants from Ethiopia settle for the first two years following their immigration. Kiryat Gat only provides long-term settlement solutions for residents of the absorption centre, whereas those in Arad usually move out of the city once their rights expire.

With such a diversity of actors, 'absorption' takes various meanings. From a bureaucratic point of view, adopted mostly by the MOIA, absorption policies mean distributing entitled rights to immigrants: the 'absorption basket', vouchers for retraining, and subsidies for Hebrew classes for instance. Municipalities emphasise more the need to support settlement, language acquisition and labour inclusion at an individual or familial level. Additionally, they cooperate with other actors to facilitate what I would call 'socio-religious assimilation': including a range of activities from conversion to Orthodox Judaism (targeting more specifically Indian or Ethiopian immigrants) to less coercive classes on Israeli culture. Paradoxically, the same actors may also put in place mechanisms in order to replicate one's cultural world. This is particularly true for Russian-speaking immigrants, where 'absorption' budget actually goes into cultural programmes in Russian, excluding Israeli residents. Finally, beyond absorption, several of those actors are involved in outreaching to potential candidates to immigration: they market the city so that Jews of the diaspora elect their place as first residency.

5.2 The State speaks mostly Russian

In the various offices I have visited during fieldwork, public service workers are, in their majority, Russian-speakers. Figures have a large role in this representation: Russian-speakers have formed a great part of the immigrant population of Israel, even

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[3] *Garin* is the Hebrew term for nucleus. It refers to religious communities such as the *Garin Torani*, which, subsequent to their mission to alleviate poverty and encourage community economic and social development in distressed towns, also engage in immigration issues.

[4] *Bnei Menashe* refers to a group who claims its practice of Judaism, mainly established in the Manipur and Mizoram states of northern India. However, in order to immigrate to Israel, they must undergo conversion to orthodox Judaism.

[5] Shavei Israel is a small organization working towards, according to their Website https://shavei.org/about-us/our-goals/, "actively reaching out to "lost Jews" in an effort to facilitate their return".

before statehood. As half a million immigrated in the 1970s, and almost a million between 1989 to 2000, Russian-speakers are wanted in public service. Moreover, if we look at more recent figures, they still form the biggest group of new immigrants today. Ukrainian Jews in particular, following the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and the annexing of Crimea by Russia, have come to Israel in larger numbers. In the four towns under scrutiny, Former Soviet Union immigrants who settled after 1996 form between 16 to 40% of the total city population.

The establishment of Russian-speakers in public service has translated into an even more important preponderance of their group. In fact, through their networks, they appeal mostly to Russian-speakers. They primarily outreach to Russian-speakers through the Jewish Agency, and once settled, Russian-speakers can interact in almost all public offices in Russian, benefit from political representation, find jobs within those networks… etc. Moreover, public funds feed into a Russian-speaking cultural world, with municipal departments' programmes or MOIA community integration programmes organising socio-cultural events and activities in Russian. In that sense, Russian-speaking street-level bureaucrats are the main organisers and gatekeepers of an emerging 'multicultural' policy –although limited to their (itself much more diverse than what the category 'Russian-speaking' might suggest) group.

Participants to this research have explained their active presence in public service through a sense of deprivation: their massive arrival in the 1990s was not accompanied with sufficient resources, and they had to quickly organise at local levels to ensure political representation, and to provide absorption activities through grassroots organisations. This quote, extracted from an encounter with two street-level bureaucrats in the city of Kiryat Gat, is enlightening:

> So we organized. We invited all the Russian speakers that lead at least 10 people behind them. And we said: guys, let's work together and we will all benefit from it. […] [The person in charge of immigration in the municipality] is not a new immigrant from Russia. The guy does not know our culture, except through us. Some people decide for us. Do like this like this like this. Until you understand this is not what corresponds to your population. Maybe it was my success in all the clubs I managed. I never did without asking. I always asked. Even for the group here, there are 200 people. […] They decide. There is a committee. One person manages the finance, the other organizes this. They are Russians, organized. […] Intelligent people that know how to work. In the past they were managers in big factories. For instance, Valodia that was here, he was the main architect of the city Donetsk. Donetsk is like Israel. You understand? And he was the city architect. So they have knowledge and capacity and the will, which is the best best best (Interview conducted in Kiryat Gat in 2014).

Especially in the city of Kiryat Gat, where the 'competing' immigrant group is composed of Ethiopian Jews, interviewees insist that they have the capacity to organise, whereas Ethiopian immigrants benefit from large transfer from the central administration. Paternalistic and assimilationist approaches towards Ethiopian immigration were common in that town.

Another important remark, linked to the overwhelming representation of Russian-speakers in public work, is their defensive attitude when it comes to religious integration. In fact, with a 30% of non-halachically Jews among them (Lustick, 1999), they have been often labelled as 'suspicious' immigrants (Lerner, 2015). Consequently, they are harshly defending their legitimacy. Interviews with Russian-speaking immigrants in public work usually start with stories which testify of their Jewishness and their belief in the Zionist ideology, as if to spare any doubts from the beginning of our discussion.

A final comment lies in the status of these street-level bureaucrats. One can assume that public service workers dedicated to immigration issues can draw their legitimacy – that is the acceptance from the authorities and from the public service clients themselves that they bear the ability to deliver integration services – from at least two sources: they were trained by recognised educational institutions to deliver these services and to 'intercultural skills'; or they learnt through their own immigration, therefore, they are themselves immigrants. Workers in the welfare department usually fall into the first category: they are social workers, community workers, psychologists and so on. They hold a relevant degree and are obliged to go through regular re-training. *Proyektorim* in turn, belongs to the second category. Among the 34 interviewees I mentioned in the methodology, an overwhelming majority has shared with me their immigration experience, and how it has affected their professional choice. This shows the centrality of the immigration experience, from which workers draw a set of hands-on, on-the-job skills. They justify their work in a sector that is not very well paid by a quest towards 'sense', and solidarity. Moreover, through their experience, they identify an ideal integration path, setting themselves as models (from 'illiterate' immigrants to public service workers).

5.3 The State, even for its ethnonational members, is not colour-blind

This is this last remark to leads me to this section: what are the consequences of a recruitment of primarily Russian-speaking Western (Ashkenazi) immigrants in public service? I have already mentioned that, if they encourage local multiculturalism, this is mostly for their peers. In fact, the type of accommodating attitude these public service workers may have towards other Russian-speakers – speaking in Russian during encounters, facilitating the organisation of socio-cultural activities in Russian, translating municipal services, and this even for immigrants who have been in Israel for the last three decades – is not as spread when it comes to immigrants from developing countries, such as India or Ethiopia.

For developing countries' immigrants (India and Ethiopia mostly), cases of religious re-conversion, socio-cultural assimilation and economical stereotyping are many. Regarding religion, Indian Bnei Menashe immigrants see their stay in Israel conditioned by re-conversion to Orthodox Judaism, whereas it is not the case for Western immigrants (even though they might later face issues regarding marriage and burial in Israel). In terms of socio-cultural assimilation, even if there are services in Amharic and in English available, and cultural activities in Amharic were common, street-level bureaucrats expect these new immigrants to be able to understand Hebrew within two years after their settlement. A MOIA officer therefore insisted that after two years, she refuses that a translator stays in the room (whereas this same officer speaks Russian and provides a lifetime service in Russian for her fellows).

Blatant paternalism can be seen in the integration activities defined for immigrants who come from India and Ethiopia. In Acre, families from the Bnei Menashe community in India have settled the past years. The coordinator of the religious group *Garin Torani* in charge of the project refers to himself as their 'father', since the immigrants can turn to him if they face a difficulty. Moreover, here is an extract of a conversation with a municipal agent:

> I helped them to bring a bed. A bed that he got as a donation. If I don't help to bring it, he needs to pay 300 NIS to a moving company. So I really helped them physically, to bring things to their home. If they are not helped the first year, it will be very hard for them. Especially in things they don't know like bureaucracy, agreements, documents. They come us and they ask us things that are now trivial for us. […] The same Bnei Menashe came from villages where they don't know what is local tax, gas, electricity, water, rent. They did not have that. They told me that in the middle of the village, there was a pole that the state put. An electrical pole. Each one would climb on the pole and connect his cable and get electricity for his home. It does not matter if you

don't pay the electricity. You need water? Go to the river. You need gas? You use coal or I don't know (Interview conducted in Acre in 2015).

Agents, based on rather stereotypical accounts of these 'village, simple people' with little knowledge of the administrative and professional norms in Israel, therefore spend time with the new immigrants, with the belief that through their work, they assist in their socialisation. This shows the extent to which 1950s Eisenshtadt's recommendation that "State agencies were thus advised to relate to 'absorption' as a process analogous to 'adult socialization' […]" and to create personal contacts to immigrants, in order to create identification and participation (Ram, 1995, p. 40) is still contemporary to immigrant integration in Israel.

The manifest difference of treatment between FSU immigrants and Ethiopian and Bnei Menashe immigrants, replicating the *Ashkenazi-Mizrahi* breach existing since the early years of the state of Israel, puzzled me: how come that residents of the same development towns where live segregated and stigmatised non-Western Jewish immigrants would repeat similar structures? Here, the concept of 'trapped communities' coined by Oren Yiftachel, Erez Tzadia and Chaim Yacobi explain a lot.

Within this strong ethno-national context, it goes without saying that they are no example of accommodating policies for non-Jews in the scrutinised towns. Arad hosts a small community of asylum-seekers from Eritrea and Sudan, nevertheless, at the exception of a needs' mapping initiative that started at the end of my fieldwork, there were no sign that a local policy targeting non-Jews will be formed.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Although Israel 'absorption' policy has been mostly depicted as a centralised policy – probably because of the very 'ethno-national' definition of citizenship –, displacing the frame of analysis to local public service has shown the considerable move from a centrally administered to a variegated mostly local policy field. Even though the State is present through these local actors, it shows the production and reproduction of immigrant integration policy from below. In particular, I argue that public service workers have had a positive role in positioning the municipality as a more active and central institution.

More specifically, with the establishment of municipal departments for immigration and absorption, and the recruitment of *proyekorim*, a new category of public service workers emerge, aside the workers of the MOIA, and the professionals in welfare and education departments. They compete to be legitimate agents, based on their share ethnicity, and their will to help. In that sense, solidarity and responsibility with peer immigrants replace the degrees that their fellow workers in welfare or education departments hold. The MOIA for instance, becomes more of a source of funding, and *proyektorim* benefit from a large margin of manoeuvre and little supervision in doing their jobs at the municipal level. With each municipality having more responsibility, dynamics change from one town to the other.

Israel immigration policy, and its shift towards a multi-actor and multiscalar policy domain, has favoured the participation of established immigrants in public service positions. Established immigrants re-conduct certain dimensions of the absorption policy as envisaged by the state as early as in the 1950s. The hospitality towards other Jews replicates certain aspects of the national absorption frame, such as personal accompaniment and the role of mediation – between the country immigrants left, and their new host society.

However, these public service workers have mostly enabled the forming of a local 'intercultural' or 'diversity' policy (rather than a multicultural policy). Indeed, it remains within a strong ethno-national ideology, that not only limits integration to Jews, but even more to Western Jews. Western Jews are perceived as economically performing, and part of the cultural core. At the moment, the quasi-monopoly of Russian-speakers in the administration limits these changes not only to Western immigrants, but to Russian-speaking immigrants in particular.

Although these findings are somehow mitigated, the presence of established immigrants in public service remains key to avoid a majority/minority dynamic when it comes to immigrant integration policymaking. The reasons why local policy measures and implementation in Israel towns are not necessarily more accommodating must be highlighted. Certainly, the lack of diversity among these immigrants is a first reason. Even among Russian-speaking immigrants, it is rare to see non-Jewish immigrants, or Russian-speakers coming from the Eastern part of the former USSR, such as Georgia, Azerbaijan or Uzbekistan (even though large groups are present in the cities I studied). But more importantly, the lack of collaboration and forums between the various actors show the extent to which Israeli local governments do not favour the formation of a

local democracy, where debate occurs (Ben-Elia, 2006). The recruitment of immigrants in public service could be only one of many mechanisms aiming at their participation in decision-making.

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