

## The Descendants of Time and the Lodgers of Space: The Life Stories of Teacher Trainees who Immigrated to Israel During the 1990s

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**Key words:** life stories, immigration, assimilation, student stories, teacher education college

**Abstract:** This paper attempts to characterize teacher trainees who immigrated to Israel during the 1990s. The life stories of six students who emigrated from the Ukraine, Russia, the Georgian Republic, Argentina, Chile, and Ethiopia are analyzed. The central finding suggests that their stories are devoid of the human, geographic, and cultural aspects of Israeli society. This finding is surprising because it differs from other studies. We used the Foucauldian concepts of the descendants of time and the lodgers of space for understanding the phenomenon.

### Table of Contents

#### [1. Introduction](#)

[1.1](#) About immigration and *aliya* and the difference between them

[1.2](#) The *olim* from the 1990s and the absorption policy

#### [2. Method](#)

#### [3. The Life Stories of \*Olim\* Students](#)

[3.1](#) Rakefet

[3.2](#) Rebeca

[3.3](#) Tarungo

[3.4](#) Misha

[3.5](#) Olga

[3.6](#) Ria

#### [4. Discussion](#)

[4.1](#) *Olim*—immigrants

[4.2](#) The new place—a society that is being privatized

[4.3](#) Group affiliation—private separateness

#### [References](#)

#### [Authors](#)

#### [Citation](#)

### 1. Introduction

This paper attempts to characterize teacher trainees who immigrated to Israel during the 1990s. The life stories of 6 students who emigrated from the Ukraine, Russia, the Georgian Republic, Argentina, Chile, and Ethiopia, are analyzed as we seek to discover how they, as future teachers, perceive their link to their new society. [1]

The introduction begins by differentiating between two concepts that are central to our topic: immigration and *aliya* [a Hebrew concept which refers to immigration to Israel; literally it means "an ascent" or "going up"]. We then introduce the

people who arrived in Israel during the 1990s, as well as the absorption policy that prevailed at that time, finally we relate briefly to the topic of life stories. [2]

### 1.1 About immigration and *aliya* and the difference between them

Immigration and *aliya* both refer to an identical process: people leaving their places of residence to settle in another country. The difference between immigration and *aliya* lies in the way that the process is perceived, and this difference affects the roles of the country and the immigrant in the process. Immigrants are perceived as aliens, and as such they seek a way to belong. *Olim* [immigrants to Israel, literally "people who ascend"], on the other hand, are perceived as people who have returned to their land. The fact of their belonging is supposed to be taken for granted by them and by society, and they seek ways to integrate and make a contribution to society. [3]

Immigration is a global phenomenon. Millions of people migrate from one country to another for political, national, or economic reasons (SEROW, NAM, SLY, & WELLER, 1990). Numerous researchers have investigated immigration and its attendant processes in recent years, for instance, GEVA-MAY (1998), JAMES (2002), KUNSTMAN (2003), ONISHI and MURPHY-SHIGEMATSU (2003), RAPPOPORT, LOMSKY-FEDER and HEIDER (2002), and SHUVAL (1998). Many of them examine the difficulties that this process poses for the immigrant—the necessity to build a new identity and find a group to which they feel they belong. RAPPOPORT, LOMSKY-FEDER and HEIDER (2002) describe the process in terms of a flexible "Memory Kit" with which the immigrants arrive. This kit creates a conflict with their perception of the society they have just entered and its culture and, in parallel, permits the creation of a new identity. ONISHI and MURPHY-SHIGEMATSU (2003) speak in terms of the "cognitive dissonance" that is produced by the clash between the two cultures. They claim that situations of cultural conflict, cultural remoteness, discrimination or rapid change are liable to pose a serious threat to immigrants' social identity making it difficult for them to maintain a coherent identity. According to ONISHI and MURPHY-SHIGEMATSU, immigrants cope with identity problems by means of four principal strategies, three of which are located on a continuum: *assimilation* into the absorbing culture, *separation* from it, or the creation of *integration* between the two cultures. The fourth strategy, which is not located on the continuum, is the *marginalization* strategy, in which the individual is situated in the margins of both cultures. The choice of strategies depends on the immigrant's resources and his or her social situation. [4]

In contrast to immigration, *aliya* is a unique term that describes the immigration of Jews in the 20th century from their countries of origin to Israel. It calls upon the Jewish people to leave their places of residence and "ascend" to Israel in a process that transforms Diaspora Jews, who are at the mercy of the nations of the world, into a nation that inhabits its own land and is responsible for its own fate. The Zionist ethos depicts the process as the rebirth of a nation. According to the Zionist ethos, *aliya* to Israel would create a safe place for the Jewish people to live and would also solve the problem of anti-Semitism. *Aliya* as a term that

describes the arrival in a sacred place also stems from the manner in which the Jewish religion perceives the place of Israel in relation to the entire world (COHEN, 1996; GUREVITCH, 1996; HOROWITZ, 1996; KEREN, 1997; LOMSKY-FEDER & RAPPOPORT, 2000). [5]

The perception of the process as an "ascent" affects both the absorption policy of the country and the strategies adopted by *olim* to integrate. The legal framework for immigrant absorption in Israel was the Law of Return, which dates from 1950 and grants every Jew the right to settle in Israel. As opposed to the strategies of belonging that are espoused in the case of immigration, *olim* adopt strategies of fitting in. LOMSKY-FEDER and RAPPOPORT (2000) found the *olim* to be active partners in the shaping of the absorption process, their affinity for society, and the way they shape it. The prominent strategy employed by the *olim* is participation in the cultural and social discourse as a process of integration. *Aliya* and immigration, then, are related terms: they both speak of people leaving their places of residence in order to settle in another country. The difference between them lies in the specific immigrant population, in the direction of the movement, and mainly in the perception of the process. Immigration is about foreigners who wish to belong to a new society and adopt strategies of belonging. *Aliya* is about Jews who migrate to Israel as a result of a value-based perception of a collective solution to the problem of their people. They are perceived as children who are coming home. They belong and they do not have to prove it. The strategies they adopt are integration strategies that center on participation in the social and cultural discourse. [6]

## 1.2 The *olim* from the 1990s and the absorption policy

The *olim* whose stories are presented here all immigrated to Israel during the wave of *aliya* that took place during the 1990s. This wave, which commenced at the end of 1989, brought 1,042,000 *olim* to Israel. Of these *olim*, 85% emigrated from the Soviet Union, 4.2% from Ethiopia, 2.2% from North America, 1.8% from Latin America, and approximately 7% from other places. (The Central Bureau of Statistics is source of these statistics up to 1998. The Ministry of Immigration and Absorption's Senior Department for Information Systems is the source from 1999.) [7]

Around 80% of the *olim* from the Soviet Union emigrated from the European republics and about 20% from the Asian republics. This immigrant population was remarkable for its high level of education relative to the absorbing society: 56% completed 13 or more years of schooling in contrast to 28% in the absorbing society. Moreover, there was a high percentage of professionals. This *aliya* did not have a single predominant motive (HOROWITZ, 1996). Most of the *olim* left the Soviet Union because of financial difficulties, the feeling that the social order was in crisis, and the lack of any evidence of a good future. Israel was a last resort, their affinity for the Jewish collective was tenuous, and from their point of view, being a Jew was principally an ethnic affiliation. From a cultural point of view, the *olim* are a group with a Western orientation whose economic outlook focuses on free enterprise. Their loyalty is to their family and to a few close

friends. Their attitude toward the collective reflects an instrumental orientation, pragmatism and rationalism (SIRKUN & LESHEM, 2004). With the exception of a relatively small group of *olim* from traditional communities in the eastern Soviet Union (the Georgian Republic, Kavkaz and Bukhara), most of the Jews from the Soviet Union perceive themselves as belonging to the Russian cultural space, and consider this space to be a part of their identity (KHEIMETS & EPSTEIN, 2001). This group also views itself as the elite or intelligentsia of the *aliya*. The extent of the integration of the *olim* from the Soviet Union as well as their absorption processes differed in accordance with their origins, family status, and age (SIRKUN & LESHEM, 2004). [8]

From 1989 to 1991, 36,500 Ethiopian *olim* arrived in Israel, and by 2000, their numbers had increased to 62,687. Some of them had been airlifted to Israel during the state's "Operation Moses" (8,000) and "Operation Solomon" (20,453), and the rest arrived independently. The chief rabbi at the time recognized their eligibility to immigrate in the framework of the Law of Return. At the same time, however, their Judaism was questioned and they were required to undergo symbolic processes of circumcision and ritual immersion in order to marry outside of their community. Most of the *olim* from Ethiopia came from poor rural villages. Eighty percent of them had eight years of schooling or less, and only 8% had 13 years of schooling. Many were schooled in traditional agricultural skills (DORON & KARGAR, 1993; LAZIN, 2002). [9]

We could not find studies investigated the small *aliya* from South America. Between 1998 and 2000, 12,154 Latin American Jews immigrated to Israel, constituting 1.8% of the wave of *aliya* that occurred in the 1990s. Little is known about the characteristics of this *aliya*. The Jewish community in Argentina, where most of the *olim* come from, is the largest in Latin America. Eighty percent of this community lives in Buenos Aires. The majority is secular with a powerful affinity for the Zionist movement and for Israel. [10]

In Israel, these groups of *olim*, who were heterogeneous from the point of view of quantity as well as educational, professional and cultural characteristics, encountered a society that was no less heterogeneous. This heterogeneity emerged from a lengthy process of transition from an ideologically motivated society to a multicultural society (SABAR, 2004). While a reduction in the status of the Zionist ethos as the hegemonic ethos occurred over the years, it was not replaced by any other ethos (COHEN, 1996). The ideological and cultural changes were accompanied by structural and economic ones. A transition from a central system of control to a decentralized system and from an economy with a high degree of federal involvement to free enterprise commenced (SIRKUN & LESHEM, 2004). [11]

The absorption policy in the 1990s was also influenced by a perception of free enterprise, meaning transferring the responsibility for absorption to the *olim* immigrants themselves. The state gave the *olim* a personal "absorption basket," namely, financial support that would help them take their first steps in Israel. Everything else depended on them. What actually happened was that in order to

prevent this direct absorption from running into difficulties, the central government intervened and gave incentives to builders and factory owners to provide *olim* with accommodations and workplaces that the open market could not supply (SIRKUN & LESHEM, 2004). [12]

Occasionally, a different absorption policy was applied to groups of *olim*, in accordance with how the state perceived the needs of the particular group. The *olim* from the European republics of the Soviet Union were absorbed by means of the direct absorption method, while the Ethiopians were absorbed by means of the old centralized method. The latter spent more time in absorption centers, their children were obliged to spend at least the first year in a religious school, and the majority of the 12- to 18-year-old youths were sent to boarding schools and youth *aliya* institutions (GINSBERG, 1999; GLINERT, 1995; LAZIN, 2002). [13]

The keywords that characterize the reality in Israel during the 1990s are heterogeneity and privatization. The groups of *olim* who are characterized by their heterogeneity in relation to their number, education, professional training, and cultural perceptions, confronted a country characterized by its economic, cultural, and social heterogeneity. The absorption processes proposed by the state were heterogeneous in relation to the various groups of *olim*, and lacked cultural and ideological direction. The state offered the *olim* assistance merely in their physical absorption—namely, finding accommodation and work. [14]

## 2. Method

The research is based on the life stories of 6 students in a college of education in southern Israel. The "life story" is a unique type of story that describes a sequence of events that the narrator views as the story of his or her life. Recently, the concept of using the story as a legitimate research domain has gained considerable momentum. Many researchers have accepted the idea that the story represents a type of knowledge that portrays the richness and nuances of the meaning of human events in a unique way. Research into stories facilitates a profound understanding of human phenomena. Moreover, one can understand both the individuals and the characteristics of their environment. (See, for example, ZABAR-BEN YEHOASHUA & DARGISH, 2001; KAINAN, 2002.) [15]

As a sub-category, there are studies of the personal histories of those involved in teaching. Some studies relate to the influence of personal histories on the teacher's point of view, on the decision to take up the teaching profession, and on the attitudes of new teachers toward teaching (CONNELLY & CLANDININ, 1990; KAGAN, 1992; KNOWLES & HOLT-REYNOLDS, 1994; ZEICHNER & GORE, 1990). In parallel, CARTER (1993) and JOSSELSOON (1993) discuss the importance of the narrative in educational research, and CARTER and DOYLE (1995) stress the importance of the story as a tool for research on teaching. CARTER (1995) addresses the notion of the story as a framework that helps teachers organize their personal understanding of their craft. This paper discusses life stories as cultural texts that reflect the reciprocal relations between the personal and social aspects that the narrator considers significant in her or

his life. The life story is not just an individual story; it also expresses a cultural context and is influenced by it, at the same time giving it form (LOMSKY-FEDER, 1998). Thus, the life story exhibits a combination of personal and social meanings (BILU, 1986), thereby facilitating the understanding of the culture in which it takes place (KAINAN, 2002; PASATA SHUBERT, 2000). When people recount their lives, they always organize and arrange their personal memories so as to anchor them in the communal memories of the group in which they live. According to BOURDIEU (1987) the hegemonic cultural world-view that exists in the narrators' environment comes to the fore via the presentation of their lives qua stories. While the narrators are unaware of this view, it encompasses their own views of reality and determines their basic assumptions. [16]

For our study, we conducted a stratified sampling in which one representative was chosen from each country of origin from among the groups of *olim* students who are studying at the college. After explaining our research to them they were invited to participate in the study. The researchers used ROSENTHAL's (1993) open interview method with those students who agreed to participate. The interviews took place at the college and were recorded. We categorized each narrative according to the themes that emerged in each story; for example: "life in the old country," and "a new beginning." We then identified the heroes in each of the stories: how they were described, their characteristics (for example: the father, his influence, what happened to him, the relations between him and the narrator) and for time references used by the narrators when describing themselves. In addition we analyzed the plot of each story: how and when the story begins and what happened subsequently (for example: The heroine went from her home to the big city to study. She meets a friend and has a party). The conflicts experienced were also analyzed: What was the conflict about and what ideas were connected to it? Thereafter, the stories were analyzed according to LEVI-STRAUSS' (1963) structuralistic method, seeking binary oppositions and the fields of content in which such oppositions exist. After the common analysis, a short description of each of the students was written by one of the researchers based on the findings. Finally, common themes were sought. The four researchers collaborated in the gathering and analysis of the data and the writing of the paper. [17]

Below, we present each student's life story, and then indicate the shared characteristics and offer explanations for our findings. [18]

### 3. The Life Stories of *Olim* Students

#### 3.1 Rakefet<sup>1</sup>

Rakefet begins her story with a description of her family, and only after a few sentences describing her family and the relations between her parents does she relate to herself, saying: "*Then they separated, my parents, and I decided to go with my father*" (who decided to immigrate to Israel). Her story is about a person with no connection to any larger group besides her own family. [19]

Thus, in Rakefet's case, the family is the significant factor. Her story is based on "here" and "there," with Rakefet describing "there" as a divided family in which the relations between the parents focused on the argument between "here" (Israel) and "there" (Chile). The central question was who would give in to whom. In the descriptions of "there," Rakefet practically does not exist. The main description is of the parents, the strife between them, and her father's sacrifice by remaining in a country he did not love for the sake of the family. In contrast, the focal point of the story "here" is Rakefet and what happened to her. Nevertheless, her family still plays an important role in the story. Rakefet lived with her father for a time, until she married and established her own family. She describes a process similar to what her parents went through from the point of view of the decision regarding where to live:

*"At that time, my husband was my boyfriend; we had a long-distance relationship. He was studying in Beersheba (In the south of the country). Then I applied to college of education in the north of the country... I wanted to study early childhood [education], but I got married and came to live here with my husband, and my father stayed by himself in north."* [20]

While "there" the question of where to live was a source of constant strife, "here" Rakefet continued to put other people's needs first, and she gave in, quit her studies, and joined her husband who was studying in Beersheba. For her, Beersheba and Tiberia are merely names of places where her father or her husband lived. Later on, she gave birth to a daughter and once more she put her family's needs before her own and stayed at home to take care of the infant. Only when the child was four years old did Rakefet wake up: "*And I said, that's it, she's big now ... She already understands what's going on, now it's time to start studying.*" [21]

Rakefet is aware of the fact that she puts other people's needs first and says: "... *I neglected myself a bit. I kept putting things off again and again, until I reached the point where I said that there's something I want to do.*" Putting other people in her family at the top of her list of priorities occurs both "here" and "there" with Rakefet. "There," it was her parents who were the important ones; "here," it was the family she established that was important. Priorities notwithstanding, a change took place in Rakefet herself. "There" she did not have any say, while

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1 To protect the students, names and some other details were changed.

"here" she certainly did. She voiced her opinions and thoughts, and even though she sacrificed things and put her family first, she eventually found an independent place for herself as well. [22]

Rakefet expresses the economic issue clearly in the "there's no work/there is work" dichotomy. A large part of the story about her father focuses on a description of his good job in Israel as opposed to the difficulties he experienced in finding employment in Chile. "There" he established a convenience store, went bankrupt, and then worked at a job "the family arranged for him"—serving as a translator in the air force. Rakefet describes her family in Israel as follows: "*There are five children working as employees or self-employed; they're all working people.*" In contrast to them, she was at a stage in her life where she "couldn't find work." Later on, when she decided to conduct her absorption in Israel in her own way, she tried to do so through work and found temporary jobs. After her marriage, she did not work for 5 years. The end of the story focuses on her decision regarding the kind of work she wanted and the studies she chose to this end. [23]

Rakefet comes from a migratory background. Her grandmother arrived in Chile from Germany and her grandfather came from Poland. Her mother was born in Chile and her father was born in Egypt and taken to Israel at a young age. He subsequently moved to Chile. A few years later, he returned to Israel for a trial period, but returned to Chile in the face of his wife's objections. In his old age, he came back to Israel once more. Even during his time in Israel, he roamed from the kibbutz to Tel Aviv, and from there to Tiberias. Rakefet's mother toured Europe and "popped into" Israel, when she was young. The family emigrated from Israel to Chile and on the way spent time in Europe and lived in Italy for a few months. Rakefet herself moved from Chile to Israel, and in Israel she started off at a kibbutz, moved to Tiberias, from there to Jerusalem, back to Tiberias, and finally to Beersheba. She does not describe any of these places geographically other than referring to Chile as a "very faraway country." Rakefet describes the reasons for her *aliya* and says:

*"Actually, I came because of that. I was always more attached to my father. I didn't come because of problems that immigrants from South America have I was attached to my father!!!"* [24]

She stressed the personal reason—taking her father's side in the quarrel between her divorcing parents—with the curiosity about the country of her father's stories. Rakefet does not describe her old country or any special connection to the geographical or social features there. Belonging to a nomad family, a place is introduced merely to state where her family is staying. [25]

Following the official absorption stages and the personal absorption process that she devised for herself, she joined a program organized by the Jewish Agency whereby she studied Hebrew at a kibbutz *ulpan* [Hebrew school for immigrants]. She quit the program feeling disappointed and exploited. She felt that she had been made to work very hard on the kibbutz without learning any Hebrew. She



says: "*I don't have anything good to say because we didn't learn anything ... For five months we didn't learn a word of Hebrew.*" She left the *ulpan* in the middle, and after spending some time with her family in Tiberias, attended an *ulpan* in Jerusalem. She quit that one, too, when she did not learn the language. Rakefet reached the conclusion that the formal absorption processes did not suit her, and she devised her own absorption program by going back to the small family circle of her father and living with him. [26]

Rakefet concludes her story with the social aspect of her life. Her life in Chile is presented as centering on her parents' processes of separating and reconnecting. Her first absorption processes in Israel, which were also attempts at separating and connecting, relate to her. At this point in her life, Rakefet has found connections. She has her own family and feels that she has "...*already adapted to society*" and can therefore go and study. This time, too, the studies are difficult, but while she quit her previous studies on the kibbutz and in Jerusalem in the middle because she did not feel connected to them, she says of her studies at the college: "*Every time I come here, I say that this is what I love, this is what I want.*" [27]

However apart from her studies Rakefet does not describe any other connection in her new country. There are no names or specific details about any person, and the people in her new country are always "they" without names and faces. [28]

### 3.2 Rebeca

Rebeca went through the process of moving from "there" to "here" twice. The first time was as a 2-year-old child, in accordance with her parents' decision. That time—the first time—she and her family lived here for 5 years, and then returned to Argentina. The second time, she underwent the transition from "there" to "here" as an adult, as someone who chose to come to Israel of her own free will. She followed in the footsteps of her sister, who had preceded her. This time, too, she immigrated in a group—a group she had joined and belonged to voluntarily: "*A group from the movement simply got organized and we all immigrated together.*" In Argentina, she had attended a Jewish elementary school and a Jewish secondary school and "*while I was there, I joined the movement.*" She began her professional training (as a kindergarten teacher and afterwards as a Hebrew teacher) in Argentina and completed it a few years later in Israel when the kibbutz where she lived sent her to study teaching. [29]

From her point of view, her *aliya* was actually a return—it seems "*kind of natural*" to her: "*I always knew I'd come back.*" The "there" and "here" in Rebeca's story are not described dichotomously. There is no rite of passage. Her first place in Israel is described by her as a "kind of summer camp." It appears that for Rebeca, the *olim's* direction, from "there" to "here," should be reversed: from "here" to "there" and back. [30]

She remembers her return to Argentina as a small child as traumatic: "*I was seven and I had already finished first grade here, and in Argentina I started first*

*grade all over again.*" To a certain extent, Rebeca was a "new immigrant" in Argentina. She remembers school as "same thing with much green." Israel—in her story has no landscape, no colors—just names of places between which she is moving. In the manner of "new immigrants," she made an effort to overcome the obstacles in order to be like everyone in the new country—Argentina. The kibbutz arouses pleasant feelings; e.g., "kind of nice," and "I feel very comfortable there" without any ideological comment. She was included in and associated with frameworks that distinguished and differentiated her from the surroundings in which she lived. She does not describe Argentina as her home, but rather as a "backdrop" for her life, which took place in distinctive territories: "Jewish secondary school," "movement," and "group." "Movement" and "group" were Israeli spaces, "different" from the social space in which she lived there. The kibbutz her parents left and to which she returned was a patently Israeli space. The "group" to which she belonged "there" and with which she moved "here" was a kind of movable space. "We were among ourselves." One could move in it and with it from one place to another while actually "remaining in the same city"—in the same ideological (Zionist), cultural (Jewish) and linguistic (Hebrew) space—in spite of the transition from country to country, from culture to culture, from language to language. Her parents who came to Israel are "joining their daughters"—also moving in space without any problem or hardship. [31]

### 3.3 Tarungo

Jerusalem of gold awaits them, somewhere far away, beyond the deserts of Sudan. That's what the village people believed. That is where they lifted their eyes every morning, and that is where the village youngsters fled to at night. The village where Tarungo lived was slowly losing its inhabitants. Her parents were comfortably well-off in the village. Her father went to the fields in the morning to ensure that his workers did their work faithfully, and her mother, who ran the household, sent food to her father and the field workers and kept an eye on the children. She did not want to lose them. She almost lost her eldest son, so she feels, when he departed one night with his cousins for Jerusalem via Sudan, but he reached Jerusalem. Her sister, who left with her children in the same way, lost both of them in the huge desert and reached Jerusalem alone. Jerusalem was waiting there, glowing and enticing. It was so tempting to leave here, this life among "them," the Christians, and rejoin the brothers in Jerusalem: brothers by blood and brothers by faith. [32]

In this tension that prevailed between the desire to immigrate to Israel and the desire to preserve the family, the parents decided to immigrate to Israel—legally, "in their turn." Turungo remembered the date "*I immigrated to Israel on January 1st, 1991.*" Turungo is the only one of our students who specifies an exact date. They sold their property and left for the big city of Addis Ababa, "the gate to legal immigration," where they entrusted their fate to the Israeli envoys who would ensure that they immigrated to Jerusalem in their turn. [33]

Turungo's parents lived in Addis Ababa for a year, and gradually "ate up" their assets. Tarungo went to school to learn Hebrew—"they taught her and she

learned"—until their turn came and they got on the plane with a little food and some family pictures. "They" [the envoys] discarded those bits of luggage, claiming that they made the plane heavy. Thus, they left everything behind them and arrived in the new land without belongings, without a language, without anyone they knew, but with great faith in their hearts that everything would work out there. [34]

Nothing worked out, however. They did not meet up with brothers in blood or in faith. They met war, both real and metaphorical, and they were not ready for either kind. They disembarked from the plane, got into taxis, and were dispersed to various absorption centers. Tarungo's uncle who spoke English, and on whom they depended for understanding and translating what people were saying, was placed in a different center. And so they were on their own. At night, they heard the air-raid sirens, instructing them all to put on gas masks and go into the bomb shelters. Those sounds did not mean anything to them, however. In the morning, the situation was explained to them, and they laughed at the fact that they had been in danger and had come out unscathed without even realizing it. [35]

The family's inability to comprehend, ignorance, and inability to communicate with their surroundings became permanent. Thirteen years have elapsed since their *aliya* and nothing has changed. The mother works as a charwoman and depends on her big children, Tarungo and her older brother who arrived in Israel alone, for assistance with anything connected to the outside world. They are the ones who read the correspondence and help take care of it. *"It'll soon be thirteen years in Israel and the situation is still the same. We're still in the situation that it's difficult to cope with the situation and with the language as well."* [36]

Tarungo's story began there as a little girl observing her surroundings and what was going on. She intuitively comprehended her parents' secrets, their respectable status, their fear of losing the family, her mother's pain when her son fled via Sudan, when the man in the plane threw out the food and the family pictures. She observed everything and asked: Did we learn or did they teach us? Using metaphors, she debated the question of being passive or active in the processes of immigration and absorption. *"There was also a school for learning Hebrew before the aliya to Israel. I learned the alphabet and all that stuff. They taught us and we learned."* [37]

In other words, the transition from "there" to "here" was a transition from being active to being passive. There, Tarungo's parents showed her the way. Once, on the way to school, when the Christian children taunted her about not eating the meat that was cooked at the school, her stepfather took her aside and explained how she should behave:

*"He took me off by myself, my father, and began to explain to me that I shouldn't be offended ... He explained to me in a very grown-up way ... Simply don't answer back ... Show them that you're cleverer ... Then I really did move ahead and everyone began to like me after the incident. That's the upbringing that I remember."* [38]

She internalized that upbringing: *"For me, my stepfather is like a father who knows what it means to educate. What it means to bring up children. To us, upbringing, education, is very important."* [39]

Of all the people she met, Turango remembers those who resembled her father—the instructors who explained things to them at the absorption center, the home-room teacher who would sit with the pupil at the boarding school she attended and talk to him or her, explaining things. Thus, unconsciously perhaps, she decided to be the "explainer" for youngsters from the Ethiopian community who were going astray in the system, dropping out, wandering around malls, and endangering their future. Tarungo's story is also shared by many of the Ethiopian community's youngsters who find themselves in the no-man's-land between their community and society. They understand that the task of arbitrating and ushering the young people of the community into the Promised Land has fallen to them. *"In spite of all the difficulties, I graduated and I have been accepted here to the second year of informal education at the college."* There is still a long way to go. [40]

### 3.4 Misha

Misha describes himself and his life in Russia almost only in terms of his affiliation with establishments—as a pupil at school, as a cadet in the Komsomol (Russian youth movement), and as an employee in a plant. His perception of himself as a part of various collectives is also reflected in his narrated contents, which deal with his activities that all took place in social frameworks, as well as in the first person plural form he employs. Misha stresses that his life was regulated by the government's organizing frameworks:

*"We were always organized along an orderly track. From first grade, there was a movement called 'October children', afterwards we were pioneers until eighth grade ... We would arrive with a red ribbon around our necks, and heaven help anyone who showed up without a ribbon."* [41]

During that period, he lived his life according to the numerous rules and regulations that existed in the preparations for festive events and rites of passage. These included performances, intellectual contests, and concerts, where the outstanding participants were awarded prizes and medals and those who failed were penalized. In the middle of all this, Misha also describes satirical reviews that made fun of the teachers who were representatives of the establishment. These took the form of skits in which the teachers were Mafiosi, in the style of American movies, and the pupils were the "good guys." These shows, held with the permission of the school and on school premises, served as a kind of safety valve that allowed controlled rebellious utterances. Misha enjoyed that social life, particularly "the rebellion within the order," and considered them to be "a good time of [his] life." However, as Misha continues describing himself from the standpoint of a mature person, the general order that depended on the stability of the central regime gradually disintegrated, and he discovered the hypocrisy and the lies that he had been told. For instance, he relates that a large campaign to expand crop production, dubbed "The Battle for Bread," turned out

to be nothing but propaganda, and in fact, most of the crops were to be imported from Canada and the United States. For Misha, during the period of the collapse of the Communist party in Russia, the "institutionalized rebellion" that was founded on belief in the ideology and rules of the establishment was replaced by suspicion and genuine rebellion against it. [42]

Alongside Misha's affiliation with the collective, there is a very evident practical aspect to his personality. Many portions of text deal with the practical considerations of choosing study tracks, attempts to get into university, overcoming obstacles of grades and final exams, and so on. All of these story parts are told in the first person, and Misha describes himself as coping alone without the backing or support of friends. Throughout the interview, Misha does not talk about individual figures of close friends, but rather just about the collective "we." In other words, he sees himself in two opposing contexts: either as one of "everyone" who belongs to the particular establishment and to the particular ideologies, or as a person struggling for survival alone, without ideological considerations or the support of personal friends. [43]

Only his family was involved in the fateful decision to immigrate to Israel:

*"This is a family decision. My parents and my brother, we all sat and the whole family decided to emigrate because the economic and political situation in the Soviet Union was becoming really uncertain. Israel was the only option. We have family in the U.S.A., but that could take many years."* [44]

His coming to Israel was not motivated by any idealistic drive. The whole family immigrated to Israel, and Misha decided to attend a kibbutz ulpan "*both in order to make things easier for the family and to learn Hebrew.*" At the ulpan, he resumed a similar pattern of life to the one he led when he was a pupil in Russia, and he describes that period, too, as one of the good ones in his life. He was part of an organized youth group that was run according to a fixed schedule of studies and work. He felt that the people responsible for immigrant absorption—the house mother and the kibbutz member responsible for them—treated him well and helped him. Nevertheless, his rebellious streak persisted. He describes several pranks carried out by the youth group—for instance, purchasing and drinking alcohol under the instructor's very nose. The instructor was an elderly kibbutz member who had been chosen for the job because he knew a little Russian. The patronizing attitude of the young kibbutz members who thought "*that we had fallen out of the tree and arrived in such a place, in paradise*" also constituted a topic of ironic criticism. When he talks about the time he spent in the kibbutz he uses the plural: They—for the old timers and us—for his group *olim*. [45]

Misha enlisted in the army, and here, too, the aspects that characterized him previously reemerge. He made a practical decision to work as an operator of heavy mechanical equipment so that he could utilize this profession in civilian life. Although he talks about the mild rebelliousness of the group that got organized and took "one more day of leave from the army," he is proud of the fact that he

was a good soldier. Even on days when it snowed heavily, he plowed a path to the outposts on the mountain. Although he was drafted into the army and was posted in Lebanon he does not mention the war during these years. No other event is mentioned as well: the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, the *Intifada*—or other dramatic events. When he recalls his youth in the former Soviet Union he mentions "the Red Army Day" and "Woman's International Day." When he was discharged from the army, he was no longer linked to any collective society, just to his family, especially to his parents, who had been absorbed successfully from the financial point of view. The entire direction of his thinking and way of life was dictated by financial survival. He worked in many different jobs and did not refuse any of them. The decision to study at the college was also taken as a result of practical considerations and not because it was something he had planned. "I was told the wages are high." He is not concerned with his abilities to be a teacher in an educational system different from one he knew as a child. He could work and study, and with his profession he could earn extra money from private lessons, and so on. The weight of these considerations increased as a result of his marriage—his wife is also a teacher—and the birth of his daughter. Now he is about to conclude his studies and works at two jobs. [46]

This part of his life occupies a limited place in Misha's story, apparently because he himself has changed during this period. All of the former complexity of his personality occurred between the poles and contrasts that existed within the circles of his social life both in Russia until his *aliya* and in Israel until his discharge from the army. Now, at the present point in time, everything revolves around existential needs and coping with the burden of supporting his young family. Misha does not yet have a story about his place and his feelings inside this family or about broader connections. [47]

### 3.5 Olga

Olga was born in the town of Yevstoria on the Crimean peninsula, and spent most of her life there. She describes the town and its sanatorium for children with bone diseases. The greater part of her story about this period is devoted to memories of the sick children. "*To this day I remember it. There isn't a war, there isn't anything, but there were children like that in wheelchairs.*" She talks about her regular visits to the children, and says that when she studied in the sports department, her coach organized several activities in the sanatorium of his own accord. These included contests in which athletes participated and the children were the spectators. [48]

After graduating from secondary school, Olga went to Khrakov in order to study at the sports university and become a professional coach. She relates that she was lonely there because she had a group of boys as friends, and while they behaved nicely to her, she did not have a female friend with whom she could talk about herself other than her mother, who was far away from her. There, too, Olga perceived herself as the savior and redeemer of the helpless. She tells of a chance meeting that occurred while she was walking her dog—a meeting with a girl younger than herself, very lonely, who was also walking her dog. During the

conversation, she discovered that the girl's family had nothing but contempt for her because rumor had it that she went out with boys and "*because she didn't have girl friends,*" and they did not even acknowledge her birthday. Olga relates how she organized a birthday party for the girl. "*I came with 'my' boys and she came with 'her' boys, and for the first time her father said that he no longer thought of her like he did before.*" This story contains an analogy between Olga's own loneliness and the loneliness of the girl, and, in fact, when Olga helps her, she is also helping herself. [49]

Olga describes herself not only as a savior but also as saved. She relates that she had a boyfriend who cheated on her. However, when she found out about her boyfriend's infidelity, she walked around aimlessly and suddenly found herself on her future husband's doorstep and he opened the door for her. [50]

The path of Olga's studies in Khrakov was strewn with difficulties. She failed the entrance exams and repeated them the following year. She had financial problems, but she paid for her studies by working as a sports coach in schools and factories. After her marriage, she describes in detail how the economic situation in the Soviet Union deteriorated: "*When I saw that my husband didn't bring money home, just a sack of sugar ... I said that we had to change something.*" They examined possibilities of immigrating to the United States or Germany because her husband did not want to immigrate to Israel—"He really didn't want to"—but the German consulate rejected them because they were not recognized as Jews. "*Then we went to the Jewish Agency.*" [51]

Olga's first stop along the path to absorption was in Russia, where she joined a group of volunteers who were organizing cultural and social activities for Jewish youngsters. They established a satirical club, which is very common in Russia. Here, again, Olga volunteers for other people's benefit. [52]

Olga, her husband and her son arrived in Israel and stayed in an absorption center because she was told that it was a good idea for her to live near the college. Afterwards, they moved to Ofakim (a small town in the south of Israel). Initially, the couple did not know how to make their way in Israel, but here, too, a savior came along: "*We came here to friends of my husband. He was a school friend, and he helped us a great deal during the first days.*" Their need for this assistance was great because their feeling of alienation as new *olim* was severe. Olga dwells on the fact that one of the main banks did not want to open an account for them; only one bank accepted them as clients. Olga and her husband studied Hebrew at an *ulpan* for three months, but their Hebrew was *ulpan* Hebrew that "sounded funny" when they went to the store. At that point, her husband was completely cut off from his surroundings and did not have the courage to speak. Olga, however, became his savior: "*It took my husband four, five months to open his mouth. I'm not afraid—I speak no matter what.*" She describes herself as an optimistic person, and here, too, as in Russia, alongside her perception of herself as a heroine in the melodrama of her life, it turned out that her practical nature and her industriousness helped her overcome difficulties. She decided to move to Ofakim because there were tax reductions and benefits for new *olim*, life was

cheaper there. In Ofakim, her husband found a job, and although it was not to his liking, there was nothing else for him. As opposed the large descriptions of her home town in Crimea, Ofakim is just a practical place. Olga, who had not completed her studies in Russia, had to begin again. She worked in odd jobs until the birth of her daughter. At this point, two people—the social worker and the coordinator of the Physical Education track at the college—came to Olga's aid. Thanks to them, she was accepted at the college, and is now about to complete her studies there. [53]

The dramatic structure is repeated twice in Olga's story: when she tells of her life in Russia and when she tells of her life in Israel. The story is laden with fateful meetings between the saviors, who themselves are alienated and lonely, and the saved, whose situation is similar but worse. The difference between her description of herself as the heroine of her life in Israel and in Russia lies in the fact that in Russia, the story deals with problems of the heart—compassion, loneliness, infidelity and friendship—on a stable and familiar background. In Israel, on the other hand, the ground itself is unstable from Olga's point of view, and the stories of salvation deal with survival in a foreign and unfamiliar reality. [54]

In Israel there are no friends and she is not volunteering any more, although there is a volunteering group in Ofakim. Here she is concentrated in her small family (a husband and two children) and the people she meets have no names, they have only titles. Also, in Russia there is a description of the general economic situation, while in Israel there is only the personal one. [55]

### 3.6 Ria

Ria immigrated to Israel with her nuclear family at age 12. Some time later, the other members of her family joined them: "*Now our whole family is in Israel as well.*" When she talks about the land of her birth, the Georgian Republic, she paints a picture of beauty ("*It's a stunning place, everything is green and trees*"), amazement ("*In the summer, it even rains*"), harmony, and values. The words that recur while she talks about "there" are "everything" and "it was different"—in a positive and superior way: "*Everything was greener*"; "*Everything was fine*"; "*Everything was more united*"; "*It was different*"; "*The buildings are different.*" No word is mentioned regarding the new country and its impression on her. The way she relates to the place she describes is full of emotion, passion, and nostalgia. In contrast to the harmony that prevailed between her and her home "there," her life in Israel is characterized by a dichotomy between cognition and resignation that stem from intellectual discipline on the one hand and emotion on the other. Emotions of nostalgia, love, and connection are directed toward "there," toward what was left behind. "I missed what was there terribly." She remembers vividly the earth quake she experienced: "I still remember it." Resignation—"I knew it was impossible to go back," "*In junior high school, it was OK*"—is directed toward "here." All of the "cornerstones" of her life as an adult—her self-identity as an outstanding pupil (in music and academics), her choice of professional identity ("*Ever since first grade, I wanted to be a teacher*"); her talent for languages—were laid in her country of origin. [56]



Her *aliya* was not a matter of choice. "I didn't want to be here." Nor did it engender any retroactive joy: "*When they told me, "I didn't know what it was"—* and her reaction to what she was told: "*I said OK.*" In contrast to her emotion-filled descriptions of Georgia, her description of the new place—both during her first encounter with it as a young girl or during the later years of her adult life—is completely devoid of expressions that relate to it. She speaks about the various stages along the absorption path in terms of information, almost as if she is reciting the list of "apartments" she passed through on the way to her present "apartment." She enumerates them in chronological order without assigning any special significance to any of them. Initially, Haifa-*ulpan*, then, "*we were with friends,*" and then Beersheba. The various stages were classified according to "*I felt good*" or "*I didn't feel good*"—and those judgments were made according to her social acclimatization. All the people participating in her absorption to the new country are friends or family from "there." In Israel, the feeling of connection and belonging that characterized her life in Georgia disintegrated: There, "*everyone's together, "everything's together, "I loved going to school.*" Here, "*I suffered in junior high school, "until I made friends, "Here, everything's groups and dividing up into groups.*" [57]

From the financial and cultural points of view, her parents' situation here is the opposite of what it was there. "*Whatever they have—degrees, status, respect—comes from there.*" Here, neither of them is working in their profession: "*To hold an important position in a company and here it's suddenly cleaning floors.*" She speaks about her mother and expresses the feeling of going down in the world and even humiliation that occurred in their status after *aliya*. Ria's time is the time she spent "there," even though she lives here. [58]

Eight years after immigrating to Israel, she registered at Kaye College of Education in order to realize her desire to become a teacher—a desire that had been conceived when she was still in the old country. Ria notes the time and distinguishes that special day from all the other days. She was thrilled to discover that "*it was exactly March 8th—International Women's Day*"—a kind of sign sent to her from her life there, telling her that she belonged, that she was included in some sort of harmonious timetable, as she once had been. Israeli time—memorial days, the Rabin assassination, and the terror attacks in the last years—disappeared completely from her speech, as did Jewish time—holidays and festivals. She also mentioned her "National Service" as an indication of a stage she passed through—the same as "elementary school" or "junior high school." [59]

Ria speaks in the language and terms of the new place—the place where she lives. Through her use of the language, she expresses the "horizons" of her world in the present: "*first grade*" (and not the first class), "*elementary school,*" "*junior high school,*" "*the Bagruyiot* [matriculation exams]"—an Israeli term she uses when talking about herself in the present to indicate the graduation, and "*the most popular* ["accepted" in Hebrew] *little girl*"—using the language of "here" to refer to her life "there." The "place" in which emotion and cognition coincide in her world is the classroom, where she loves and is loved. [60]

She describes her work as a second-grade novice teacher emotionally and lavishly—in the same way as she relates to "there": "*the most delightful class in the world,*" "*the children are very special,*" "*the highest achievements,*" "*there isn't a class like it in the country,*" "*you won't find a class like this.*" [61]

She can taste something of the flavor of the lost country of the feeling of togetherness and belonging, in the children and in the loving relationship between them and her. Saying goodbye to them makes her cry, both as a lament and in resignation: "*I understood that the time had come for me to leave them, and I cried.*" Thanks to the "inimitable" class, her emotion, which finally found an outlet, and her understanding came together within her. [62]

#### 4. Discussion

Reading the life stories of the *olim* students reveals several common characteristics: The stories are stories of immigration. Their journey is a journey in space from place to place, from home to home. Among most of them, the home "there" was flawed by an economic, social or political defect. All of the students arrived in Israel during the mass immigration waves of the 1990s from such regions. [63]

The country to which they moved—Israel—is depicted as consisting of a series of residences or stages that they encountered at the beginning of their life in Israel: "absorption center," "kibbutz," "kibbutz *ulpan*," "school." Our story-tellers describe the new place mainly through the prism of "making it" financially and learning the language. The people who populate the new space—"the Israelis"—do not have faces in the stories. They are mentioned as functionaries who belong to the particular "stage" where the immigrants happen to be. "The new place"—the country as a physical and real place that has its own unique "surface features"—is not mentioned by the interviewees. The Zionist ethos of Israel as a place of vision and a national destiny is completely absent. "Israeli society" and "the Israeli story" scarcely come up in their descriptions. [64]

Even more striking is the fact that none of the life stories reports a clash between cultural worlds or difficulty in understanding the cultural codes of the "new place." Moreover, nothing is said directly about their attitude toward the cultural and social structures of their new or renewed home. [65]

The stories of the "new *olim*" introduce us to their view from their place in the fabric of life in Israel. The stories were revealed to us by people who are weighed down by existential problems, and who, like all young people, are involved in professional training, in establishing families, and in earning a living. Since most of them (four out of six) arrived in Israel as adults, their age places obligations and responsibilities on their shoulders. [66]

Thus, according to the differentiation between *olim* and immigrants we presented in the Introduction, our *olim* are actually immigrants in Israeli space. In keeping

with immigrants all over the world, their attention is mainly if not totally focused on themselves and the way they are coping. [67]

The arrival of our story-tellers in Israel is not marked in their stories by a symbolic rite of passage. Their *aliya* contains no traces of the drama of a new beginning, much less a "rebirth." They settle in the space, indifferent to the unique physical, social, or cultural features of the new place. They are sent to set up homes of their own—personal, individual, family. The reckoning presented in their stories focuses on their process of settling down and getting organized. [68]

The index for checking the success of the move is the person's own feeling and his or her success in coping with practical and emotional difficulties. Our participants report that they are coping within the frameworks of family, employment, and studies. In each of these frameworks, the focus is on personal and private aspects: they have/do not have a command of the language; they are/are not working; they are/are not satisfied. [69]

Their words barely touch upon the collective portrait of the new place. They make very few generalized distinctions with regard to the new society's properties or qualities: neither stereotypical distinctions nor distinctions of personal discovery and insight. The country's landscapes, climate, problems, and people elicit very little emotion or interest. [70]

Tarungo—the student from Ethiopia is the only one for whom Jerusalem was a dream to be fulfilled. She is the only one who expresses disappointment with the Israeli reality. In Ethiopia she experienced her distinction as a Jew vis-à-vis the Christian children. In Israel she confronts the alienation of her family and her tribe from the "Israelis." She thinks in *collective* terms "there" and "here" and prepares herself to fulfill a calling for her fellow *olim* from Ethiopia, to be a connection between them and the Israeli society. [71]

The two immigrants from South America are related by former ties to Israel. Rakefet's father is an Israeli, living in Israel. Her stories about Chile as well as about Israel are focused on family problems. This is what has to be settled by coming to Israel. She is joining him and his fellow-Israelis. She attends an *ulpan* in a Kibbutz: she is not satisfied there and chooses not to accommodate herself as an *ola* (new-comer). She is confident she can lead a normal life and can be part of "regular society," (her words) and not be part of a distinguished group—the *olim*. [72]

Rebecca's *alya* is a return, a home coming. She is a part of a group and she is bringing with her language, friends, and culture: "sliding easily," as she says, into the new country, Israel. [73]

Misha, from the former Soviet Union arrives in Israel by default: it was easier to get a visa to Israel than Germany or the United States. His attitude is pragmatic: he faces his military service, which is a unique Israeli experience, neither critically nor enthusiastically. Only while staying at a Kibbutz when he belongs to a

distinctive group of *olim* do we meet some generalizing comments about the *vatikim* (the old founders). He is reproaching them for treating the *olim* "as apes that have just descended from the trees." [74]

Olga knows that things in a new country are strange as they are meant to be for a stranger. The unpleasant response she gets at the bank from one of the clerks or the warm welcome from a college teacher are interpreted by her as personal manifestations, like the ones she experienced in her homeland. [75]

Ria, who came like Tarungo as a child, attends Israeli schools and serves in a paramilitary formation. She who praises enthusiastically the landscape and climate in Georgia does not comment about the Israeli scenery at all. The grievances of her parents are not explained or refuted in terms related to the economical system of Israel. Her point of view is personal: a loving daughter expressing empathy to her parents. Eight years after she arrived in Israel, while enrolling in college she is thrilled to notice that the day was 8 March-(Woman's Day) a date with no significance in Israel. [76]

How can the lack of both interest in and emotional reaction to the new place—Israel—in our participants' stories be explained? In general, explanations regarding immigrants concentrate on three principal directions: the immigrant her or himself, the absorbing country, and the connection between the immigrant and the group. [77]

First, we discuss explanations that relate to immigrants and the processes they undergo. While many studies have focused on this topic, we will present only few bibliographical items, each from a different region of the world. Canada provides us with an example of the life story of a black immigrant who became a teacher and his explanation of the process of his involvement in society (JAMES, 2002). OUIHI and MURPHY-SHIGEMATSU (2003) describe how Muslim immigrants in Japan construct their social identity there. In Israel, FREILICH, NEWMAN, SHOHAM and HADAD (2002) present the personal processes undergone by immigrant youngsters and their parents. [78]

Second, we present explanations that focus on the policy of the absorbing country vis-à-vis the people arriving in it. Here, too, we offer only a few examples. SEROW, NAM, SLY and WELLER (1990) examine the influences of immigration on the receiving country and the sending country. BAUBOCK (2001) compares the immigration policies of the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Israel, and shows that to a great extent, policy determines the immigrants' conduct. REITZ-JEFFREY (2002) compares several aspects of the characteristics of societies that absorb immigrants: ethnic and racial relations, the job market and institutions linked to it, government policy, and immigration programs. GLINERT (1995) attributes the changes in Israel's policy regarding *olim* to the decrease in Zionist ideology. [79]

Third, we present explanations relating to the link between the immigrants on the one hand and the group on the other. For instance, PORTES, HALLER, WILLIAM

and GUARNIZO LUIS (2002) show how minorities rely on social connections in order to advance in their new countries. [80]

We have also chosen to utilize these three directions in order to explain our *olim*'s attitude toward the new place in their stories. [81]

#### **4.1 *Olim*—immigrants**

Our participants did not perceive themselves as *olim* in the ideological sense of the term. They used the term "new *oleh*"—an identifying and affiliating label that is given to them by the society to which they have come. They adopt the term as a "family name" and use it as a transit card, an identity tag. This status renders them eligible for government care, financial benefits, and various exemptions and discounts. In their subjective worlds, however—when they are not subject to society's scrutiny and social practices—they perceive themselves more as immigrants who have found accommodation or shelter here for lack of any other available accommodation (Misha and Olga); as people who came here to live near their family (Rakefet); as people who returned to their previous accommodation with their parents (Rakefet and Rebeca); as people who were brought to Israel as a result of a decision that was not theirs and learned to live with it (Ria). Only Tarungo identifies with the essentiality and the exclusivity of the place—Israel. Her perception and her rhetoric are romantic rather than Zionist or political. All the others are conscious of a possibility of choice or lack of choice, and of a possibility of exchange and trading. For two of our participants, this is an exchange that is taking place for the second time. For two of them, coming to Israel was a last resort. [82]

This consciousness of impermanence, attachment and detachment, intransigence and choice, partially explains the minimal interest and emotion that the new place elicits from them. [83]

#### **4.2 The new place—a society that is being privatized**

The privatized face that Israel displayed to the *olim* during the 1990s also played a part in their lack of emotional reaction toward and interest in the country. [84]

Each one of them (except Tarungo) experienced a personal and private absorption: They were helped by friends (Olga and Ria); they were responsible for their own absorption (Rakefet and Misha). In the absorption process, there are collective absorption stages: Misha stays at the kibbutz *ulpan* for a few months; Rakefet goes to a kibbutz; Ria attends elementary school. Tarungo and her family are transferred to an absorption center and afterwards Tarungo spends several years in a boarding school. [85]

The kibbutz absorption routes were also chosen personally from among possible tracks. They were chosen by our story-tellers according to their personal needs and considerations and served specific *ad hoc* purposes: mainly for learning the language or easing the economic burden. The kibbutz absorption routes were not

imposed on them by the absorbing establishment. There are no hints of social or cultural absorption in the things our participants said. None of them reports being distinctly and consciously initiated into the new society by its representatives or agents. The representatives of the establishment do not function as agents of society but rather as officials who are in charge of orderly operative tasks. The variety of absorption methods and horizons, the disintegration of the cultural and social hegemony that should be instilled in the people who are just now becoming a part of society, the absence of a consciousness of mission on the part of the representatives of Israeli society who come into contact with the "new *olim*"—all these, too, undoubtedly contributed to their concentration on the personal and private and to their almost total lack of interest in the *res publica* [public affairs]. The *res publica* does not appear to the new *olim* powerfully or in a manner that demands their attention. The privatized nature of the absorption processed blurred the encounter between absorbers and absorbees. The term *absorption* ("absorption basket," absorption center, Absorption Ministry) is still used when talking about the new *olim*—but it has become devoid of meaning and awareness for them. [86]

Although all of our participants (except Olga) pass through the patently Israeli stages by means of which Israeli society molds individuals to its ideology (army, National Service, kibbutz, *ulpan*/kibbutz, absorption center, boarding school, school), the ideological or emotional traces left by these stages are barely apparent in their stories. [87]

The fact that the new society arouses very little emotion or interest in them—dissimilarity in our participants' origins and differences between them notwithstanding—is also a reflection of society's lack of interest in and emotion connected to them. They are treated in a cold bureaucratic fashion. The representatives and agents of Israeli society fulfill their obligations toward them in a "down-to-earth" manner, without giving the *olim* the feeling that they are important, that they have done something worthwhile. Neither they nor the society they represent display an embracing, welcoming, emotional attitude toward the *olim*. Beyond the "treatment" and the benefits for which they are eligible, the bureaucrats leave them entirely to their own devices. [88]

The picture that emerges from the stories of the "new *olim*" is one of existence in an Israeli space in which they work, educate themselves, raise children—and participate minimally in the *res publica*. It is a portrait of society no less than it is a portrait of the "new *olim*." [89]

#### **4.3 Group affiliation—private separateness**

Another possible explanation lies in the link between the individual and the group. When one of our participants describes the period of time he or she spent with a group of *olim* at the kibbutz *ulpan*, he or she attributes the reasons for the positive or negative events that occurred to the accepted behavioral standards and norms in Israeli society. In contrast, when the story-teller describes herself or himself as an individual who is waging an individual struggle against the

vicissitudes of *aliya*, their difficulties and their solutions are perceived as stemming from private causes rather than from the nature of the encounter between themselves and the collective Israeli system. It seems that this principle is also applicable with regard to the participants' perceptions of their lives in their country of origin. In other words, the more the story-teller identifies with an affiliated group, the more he or she acknowledges and expresses a general understanding of the society. [90]

FOUCAULT's (1984) distinction between "the descendants of time" and "the lodgers of space" may provide us with a conceptual map whereby we can interpret the stories of the *olim* in our study. [91]

"The descendants of time" are the ones who are heirs, the ones who necessarily have "parents," the ones who continue a fateful, necessary chain that is "written" in their blood and cannot be exchanged or selected. Descent in time exists on the vertical time axis. In contrast, "the lodgers of space" exist on the horizontal space axis, which signals changing localizations, dynamism, mobility, choice, attachment and detachment, and exchanges (AZOULAI, 2003). [92]

It seems that the term *descendants-lodgers*, which is based on FOUCAULT's idea of a dichotomous society, may suit our participants very well. They all came to Israel as descendants of the Jewish people and this fateful or accidental fact granted them the right to move here. They were granted it by dint of birth and imposed blood ties. The move to Israel, as it is described in their stories, does not appear as a necessary or fateful deed. The options to leave Israel, to choose another place instead, or not to go there are possibilities that they can think about and even act upon. Rebeca and Rakefet really do migrate; Misha and Olga came here against their will; Ria misses "there." Only in Tarungo's case, as mentioned previously, is Israel the only place that perpetuates a chain of essentiality that has no substitute—not even in thought. The command of the "fathers" and her duty to them are incontrovertible. As far as our other participants are concerned, things like society, language, home, and country can be obtained, exchanged, compared, chosen, or abandoned. [93]

Our story-tellers participate in the patently ideological practices of Israeli society (the army, National Service, kibbutz) without expressing their attitudes or their feelings toward them. They are being trained to teach—a role that unquestionably belongs to socialization agents and people who initiate others into the secrets of the culture. This aspect of their chosen profession is neither related to nor examined in what they say. The reasons for their choice of the teaching profession vary: an expression of the emotional needs they brought with them from "there"; a way of integrating economically and socially into the new space; practical considerations of availability and accessibility. Their decision is dictated by private individuality. The only one who takes the group into consideration is Tarungo, who sees teaching as a mission—a mission for her tribe. The *olim* students are not perturbed by the social or political significance of teaching; in any event, they are not qualified for that role. [94]

This position enables the "lodgers of space" to take an active part without participating emotionally or conceptually. Israeli society, too, relates to them more as lodgers. It does not demand social and ideological identification from those who enter its gates, nor does it take the trouble to engender a change of heart in them. It puts up with their presence and their participation. The privatized society—Israeli society in the last few decades—permits every individual to adhere to his or her identity. The quantitative conquest of the individuals who join the society suffices. They are enumerated among the members of Jewish society as opposed to non-Jewish society. After enumerating them, society is indifferent to them. From the point of view of Israeli society, the names, beliefs, customs, conceptual identities, and attitudes of the new *olim* toward Israel are their own private business. For Israeli society, the ability and the willingness of the new *olim* to serve as its teachers or cultural and social agents do not pose a question or a problem. [95]

The country to which the "new *olim*" immigrate opens its gates to the new arrivals in their capacity as "descendants of time" and enables them to set up their lodgings in its space. Again, it does not have the old integrative "melting pot" ideology that it wishes to impose on the new participants, nor does it have a cultural or social canon by means of which it links the new people to the chain of generations that have built their joint home here. It is enough for society that the descendants of time—the Jews—convert their various spaces into the space of the country and become lodgers in it. [96]

Every lodger sets up her home as she wishes and according to her ability within the country's space. In an "apartment building," it is possible to pull one's weight in various ways and to various extents. Those dynamic "contracts" between the lodgers themselves and the lodgers and their neighbors emerge and change. The state interferes very little in the contents of these contracts. It acquiesces in the basic contract that promises people who will increase its strength, enhance its *raison d'être*, and fulfill their obligations toward it. The people who come to its gates are assured of a place that is ready and willing to accommodate them. [97]

Is this the story of the new normality of a society of immigrants who are "lodgers in space" here as they are everywhere else in the world? Is it the emptying of the founding ethos and the vestiges of concepts and terms even after they have been voided of their human content? For some of us, the stories of the *olim* caused us to face our own histories. As people who were molded by the hegemonic Zionist ethos, we expected *aliya* stories that contained an exaltation of life and worth upon their arrival in Israel. We had a hard time sloughing off our preconceptions that were shaken to the core by the stories told by the *olim*. Perhaps they taught us that there is more than one way to participate and belong. We could only learn this lesson through listening to their many stories instead of to the one story we told ourselves. Perhaps this lesson will open our hearts to them as people—people who came to Israel and live here—rather than as "new *olim*." The latter term has become devoid of content in more ways than one since it keeps people at arm's length and classifies them rigidly rather than coming to them and greeting them with open arms. [98]



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