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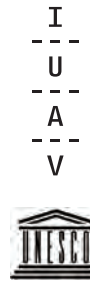
FOREIGN WORKERS IN TEL AVIV AND POLITICAL INNOVATION: THE REDEFINITION OF CITIZENSHIP IN ISRAEL

Caroline Rozenholc



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Israel, Tel Aviv and the neighbourhood of Florentin: the scales of the study

This article is based on material I collected between 2005 and 2010 for my doctoral research in Geography. This work explores the questions of identity, territory, and mobility in Israel and more generally the impact of globalisation on place and sense of place in urban settings (Rozenholc, 2010). For this research, I chose Israel and South Tel Aviv became my "research laboratory" and observation site. Tel Aviv is the economic and cultural capital of Israel, which animates a metropolitan area of more than 3 million individuals. The diversity of its population in terms of geographical origins mirrors that of a country largely built by international migration. Indeed, since its independence in 1948, Israel has faced and relied on constant and diverse influx of immigrants: between 1948 and 2012, a total of 3,108,760 individuals from about a hundred of different countries settled in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). But the diversity and heterogeneity of the country is also due to the presence of non-Jews; a majority of non-Jews being what the State defines as "Arab Israelis".¹ Arab Israelis (Muslims and Christians) constitute 20% of the total population of Israel² and most of them live either in localities where they constitute a majority or in "mixed cities" where Arabs constitute a "numerous minority".³ Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem and Acre are all examples of mixed cities. But co-presence results from different processes and has different meanings.⁴ Variations in the co-presence of Jewish and Arab citizens also reflects regional politics as well as, I suggest, the evolution of the housing market.

The state of the housing market is a fundamental parameter for understanding population distribution, concentration and dispersion, at all scales – from the national to the infra-urban level. Although this article does not allow for a comprehensive account, we shall see that the housing market also explains patterns of migrant workers concentration in the southern neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv, such as Florentin. Florentin was once the border between Tel Aviv and Jaffa. Even if today Tel Aviv and Jaffa form a single municipality,⁵ Florentin remains one of Tel Aviv's crucial historical neighbourhoods. It is an ancient Jewish neighbourhood of the Arab city of Jaffa built in the 1920s by immigrants from Thessaloniki. Today, young bohemian Israelis live there alongside international work



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1. Although it is crucial, the discussion on the use of the terms "Palestinian" or "Arab Israeli" is beyond the scope of this article.

2. According to the censuses of 1995 and 2008, the percentage of Arabs in the Israeli population grew from 17,88% to 20,2%, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2012*, Central Bureau of Statistics.

3. According to the definition of "mixed cities" given by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

4. O. Yiftachel et H. Yacobi (2002) define three types of mixed cities in Israel: first type is Haifa where cohabitation between Jews and Arabs under a unique jurisdiction is previous too 1948; second type is Jaffa where cohabitation was created by the "judaisation" of the city before 1948; third type is made of recent mixed cities such as Nazareth Illit or Carmiel in the Galilee.

5. Pre-State Tel Aviv was a neighbourhood that grew into an independent township within the municipality of Jaffa before becoming a municipality by itself.

6. In Israel, North African and Middle Eastern Jews – in particular Israelis from Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, Iran and Iraq – are referred to as "Oriental", *Mizrahim* in Hebrew (from *mizrah*, the East), as opposed to *Ashkenazim* from Europe and North America. The term *mizrahi* was forged in the 1970s when specific communitarian claims started being expressed by this specific population. *Mizrahi* is considered more political than the term *Sephardi* it replaced because it points at the minority status of individuals who constitute today the majority of the Jewish population in Israel (Chetrit, 2000).

7. For a full development of this question see Rozenholc 2008 and Rozenholc 2010.

8. At a time the city's urbanism and architecture focused international attention and Tel Aviv was nominated to the Unesco World Heritage in 2003 for its architecture and urbanism.

migrants, Arab residents (Israelis and non-Israelis) and working-class North African and Middle Eastern Jews.⁶ Because it has repeatedly welcome new migrants, Florentin can be used to illustrate the many ways in which issues of identity, diversity and globalisation are rooted in the geo-history of a neighbourhood.⁷ Because this diversity has influenced my vision of the contemporary transformations of Israeli society, Florentin – the neighbourhood, its streets and population – is here used as a prism through which recent evolutions in citizenship may be observed.

The research methodology and context

Trying to understand how this diversity was built within a central, though extremely neglected neighbourhood of Tel Aviv,⁸ I studied different aspects of Florentin relying on: repeated street observation between 2005 and 2008, an analysis of the renovations, constructions, destructions of buildings in the neighbourhood during this period, the photographic recording of an intense production of graffiti and other mural productions, active participation in local NGOs (such as after-school children day-care and migrant workers' information and support) and in-depth interviews with inhabitants, social workers and urban planners (80 interviews between 2005 and 2008). The research also draws from documents collected in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipal archives where maps, urban plans, projects, press releases, etc. in English and in Hebrew.⁹

My ambition here is to decipher the coexistence of local and global scales within urban places and to discuss whether globalisation and diversity really annihilate the sense of place and place-related identities. The general argument is based on the attempt to explain how some neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv have succeeded in accommodating up to 70% of non-Jewish non-Palestinian migrants in the 2000s,¹⁰ while Israel maintained the distinction between Jews and non-Jews as the main lever of immigration. The mere mention of this figure illustrates the gap separating the narrative of Israel as a country of unlimited but exclusively Jewish immigration, and its socio-economic reality. Nonetheless, this striking disjunction is far from unique: gaps between political discourses and migratory realities have been observed in many countries such as Switzerland that does not view itself as a country of immigration even as over 30% of the population was born abroad, or born to foreign parents (Piguet, 2004). Thus, this research aligns itself with the definition sociologist Michel Marié (1996) who shed light on the gap between the inertia of discourse and social dynamics. The disjunction between the policies and practices of the national government and the innovative decisions the municipality of Tel Aviv and its inhabitants promoted will be examined here. This article will also address the new requirements for acquiring Israeli citizenship that were largely implemented due to the presence of foreign workers in Israel over the past twenty years.

Globalisation in Israel: international migrant workers in an immigrant's country

In Israel the unlimited settlement of (Jewish) migrants constitutes a societal goal: the State views the "blending of exiles"¹¹ and the absorption of immigrants from all over the world as a national mission. The Law of Return under which several millions have migrated to Israel is one of the "fundamental laws" of Israel. It was adopted by the Parliament in 1950,¹² and allows all individuals who are considered Jewish by the rabbinical authorities to obtain Israeli citizenship. Yet, those arriving in Israel under the "right of return" are not automatically registered as Jewish. The Ministry of Interior is in charge of registering new arrivals according to their ethno-religious group membership. The right wing Ultra-Orthodox who have repeatedly received this portfolio are often reluctant to accept those whose Jewishness is not sufficiently proven in their eyes (Shafir and Peled, 2002: 315).¹³ The Law of return has also been amended several times since 1950 and now covers the spouse, children and grandchildren of those registered as Jewish. Under the Law, about 700,000 Jews¹⁴ – partly from Europe and partly from neighbouring countries like Yemen and Iraq – rushed to Israel in the years that followed Independence, rapidly doubling the Jewish population of Israel. Later on, the same law saw hundreds of thousands of migrants from Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, driven out of their country's decolonisation in the 1960s, settle in Israel. After the 1960s, Israel faced one more major and ample influx of a million of migrants who arrived in the 1990s from the former USSR. These migrants joined a population of less than 5.5 millions (it is estimated today at 7,956,000). This last, massive wave explains why, in 1995, 40% of the Jewish population had still been born outside the country and 25% had parents of foreign origin (Yishai, 1999). Although the population has now stabilised, first-generation migrants are even more numerous today because about 665,000 new migrants have nevertheless settled in the country in the mean time.

That most migrants of these different waves have all settled in cities is quite specific to this Jewish immigration to Israel; migrants settle either in cities such as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem or Haifa, for example, or in "development towns" built by the government. In the 1960s, the trend was actually organised by the State that built 28 cities in order to cope with the North African migration wave. They were scattered across the country, away from the main agglomerations: "development towns" were seen as the right answer to the new migrants' needs in terms of employment and housing. Development towns were also considered an efficient tool to secure and occupy the entire expanse of national territory. But by relocating new immigrants in the peripheries (mostly in the Negev desert and in the Galilee region) outside the main cities, the government created the long-standing conditions of a limited access to

9. The use of Hebrew or English depends on if the documents had been produced during or after the British Mandate on Palestine which ended in 1947.

10. "[I]n other places, you had up to 60-70% of the population that was of illegal immigrants and foreign workers. So in Florentin, 18% [in 2000] it was not that much" Talia Margalit (01/12/2005).

11. In Hebrew, this ingathering is called *kibboutz galouiot*; *galouiot* (the plural of *galout*) meaning the biblical exiles of Jews out of the land of Israel.

12. As one of the fundamental laws of Israel, the Law of return endorses a constitutional nature in a country that does not possess a Constitution *per se*.

13. We shall go back to this point later on because nationality and citizenship are two different matters in Israel.

14. 687,624, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics 2013.

15. The circulation of European citizens was eased within the Schengen space while entering European borders became more difficult for foreigners, particularly those from Africa and above all the Maghreb.

economic and territorial resources for Oriental Jews. Today, this segment of the population remains both socially and economically deprived. While it is often depicted as homogeneous regarding the "Arab Other" (Semyonov et Lewin-Epstein, 2004), patterns of stratification within the Jewish population in Israel can thus be read in the urban and social fabric of the country. "Orientals" and "Occidentals", religious and seculars, new and veteran migrants are often spatially segmented.

In Tel Aviv, this intrinsic diversity was reinforced in the 1990s by the influx of non-Jewish / non-Arab migrant workers from Asia, Europe and Africa, when these workers found unexpected employment opportunities in Israel. For Israel, the 1990s were a crucial period of transition: the Oslo agreements had just been signed between Israel, the United States and the newly created Palestinian Authority (1993), spreading a profound optimism in the entire region that was brutally interrupted by the shooting and death of Prime Minister I. Rabin (1995) later replaced by B. Netanyahu and his coalition of right wing parties. In this period, Israel also started closing its borders to Palestinian workers from the Israeli-occupied Palestinian-territories (Gaza and the West Bank at the time, until Israel officially withdrew from the Gaza strip in 2005). For Europe, the 1990s constituted an important momentum as well in terms of regional structuration when France, Germany, Belgium, and later on Italy and Spain, reinforced their external borders and border controls. The creation of the Schengen space¹⁵ diverted flows away from European traditional receiving countries and indirectly participated to the integration of Israel into the Mediterranean migratory system (Berthomière, 2007). Thus, if the presence of foreign workers in Israel crystallises specific local dynamics, it also highlights the integration of Israel into a system of global circulation that also works according to specific opportunities. This conjunction of international (closure of Europe to work migrants from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe) and local politics (closure of Israel to Palestinian workers) created in Israel a vacuum and numerous opportunities for work migrants. Today, twenty years later, this "foreign" population and the question of whether can and should socially integrate in Israel constitute hot topics among Israeli media, society and politicians. Therefore, South Tel Aviv and Florentin neighbourhood are ideal places where to grasp the social and economical issues its presence raises in the field of Israeli citizenship.

But before moving any further, I shall mention that if the presence and number of migrant workers in Israel surely integrates the country in the Mediterranean region, its management by the State also situates Israel in the Middle Eastern migratory system. Israel manages international work immigration by the same *kafala* system (where migrants need a citizen-sponsor in the country) found in countries like Jordan, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the Qatar, the Emirates and Oman. We will return to this point later on but first, let us mention that work migration

has become a central element of social transformations in Israel. We may observe in Israel the same trends described by sociologist Ray Jureidini (2003) for Lebanon where a long-lasting internal conflict has made the employment of foreign workforce a satisfactory solution. In Lebanon, maids are called "Sri Lankans" regardless of their actual nationality. In Israel, migrant workers are defined according to their sector of employment: Israelis looking for a domestic help to take care of an elderly parent, will often talk of "taking a Filipina".

"Foreign workers": a homogeneous category?

Migrant workers constitute a relatively new and unexpected population in Israel and reflecting on the categories and labels used to name them is very instructive. Migrant workers are commonly called "foreign workers", *ovdim zarim* in Hebrew. This is a slightly pejorative term since *avoda zara* ("foreign work" in Hebrew) carries a negative connotation of idolatry inherited from biblical Hebrew. It also underlines the fact that these workers are not Jewish and not Arab and their "foreign" status is defined by this double negation – nor Jewish, nor Arab – rather than a geographical reference. Nonetheless geographic origin is important among a population that comes from about a hundred of different Asian, African or European countries. The figures, however, vary rapidly from year to year, both in volume and in the distribution by country of origin. At the end of the 1990s, Europe – not Asia – was the largest labour exporter with Romanian workers representing up to 40% of the legal entries in 1997. Today, the Central bureau of statistics indicates that Asian workers constitute the largest share of labour migration to Israel since 2001¹⁶ and within Asia the top sending countries are Thailand, the Philippines, India, China and Nepal. On the contrary, African workers present extremely low numbers. Ever since 1996, when the State started collecting data on migrant workers, African workers never accounted for more than 1.55% of the foreign population on a work visa. But Djibril, a Senegalese journalist who arrived in Israel at the end of the 1990s on a work visa and then married an Israeli woman, reported in an interview I conducted with him in October 2005, that not only all African nations were found in South Tel Aviv – mostly Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone or South Africa but also Congo and Ivory Cost nationals – but so were all African ethnic groups. This shows how ethnographical data can shed light on situations that data do not reveal, especially when talking about migration issues. Moreover, migrant themselves perceive their immediate surrounding differently than State and government do. Here, the discrepancy between the low governmental figures and the perception we get from the street of Tel Aviv can be explain either by the fact that African workers has arrived *en masse* prior to the collection of data or by the fact that many of African workers settled in Israel and in Tel Aviv without work visa.

16. In 2008, they accounted for almost 70% of workers entering Israel under a work visa.

17. In the last years, workers from the former Soviet Union account for a large share of all European workers in Israel: 3,500 in 2005, they were 5,700 in 2010 (Press release, July 31, 2011, Central Bureau of Statistics).

18. *Oleh* comes from *alyah* – as a Jew migrating to Israel is making an *alyah*, a “rise” to the land of Israel – and *hadash* means “new”.

Table 1. Work Visas Entries in Israel.

Absolute numbers and percentage of the total by continent and country of origin (1996-2011)

	1996	2002	2009	2010
Asia %	40.52	68.97	71.80	74
Thailand	14,900	12,100	5,600	7,600
Turkey	9,000	600	1,000	800
China	3,600	1,800	1,100	1,600
Philippines	3,200	7,400	5,100	5,800
India	400	500	2,100	3,000
Nepal	-	-	2,700	1,500
Europe ¹⁷ %	54.84	28.31	25.56	24
Romania	37,900	4,500	900	200
Africa %	0.44	0.90	0.37	0.37
Total	90,800	33,200	26,600	32,000

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstracts of Israel* (1996-2011)

The fact that a single denomination (“foreign worker” in English – *ovdim zarim* in Hebrew) covers a diverse population in terms of geographical origins gives an indication of how these individuals are perceived: as a highly employable homogeneous population. This drives to the question of why are they not viewed as migrants – as they would be in Europe for example – and why are they confined to their extraneous foreign worker status? Firstly, because Israel is a country of immigration where the figure of the migrant is well accepted and valued, but is only used to refer to Jewish migrants who have chosen to settle in the country. Being a Jewish immigrant (an *oleh hadash*¹⁸) is a status that will be used for many years after the arrival in Israel for several. It gives access to citizenship, free intensive daily Hebrew classes, housing subsidies and preferential loan opportunities (Alexander, 1999). Importantly, non-Jewish migrants are not considered as migrants and they are not untitled or expected to settle in Israel in the long run. Moreover, foreign immigration is often perceived as a threat to the Jewish identity of the State, as repeatedly expressed in statements by government and Parliament members. At the same time, the State views Jewish migration as a prime necessity: it “embodies all the historical needs of the State” (Berthomière, 2000). In this respect, Jewish immigration and non-Jewish immigration represent two fundamentally different aspects of migration to Israel. For this reason, I suggest not considering them as a continuum, at least from an economic and legal point of view.

If the migrant workers status differs radically from Jewish migrants status, the insistence on the fact that migrant workers are foreigners who do not belong raises important questions. What is the exact meaning of “foreign”? Part of the answer lies in the fact that foreign workers have come to Israel

to replace Palestinian workers who commuted daily between the Palestinian Territories and Israel: the “workers from the Territories” (*ovdim me ha’shtahim* in Hebrew) were expected to leave Israel at the end of their workday and return to the Palestinian Territories. The two categories – “foreign workers” and “workers from the territories” – do not refer to the workers themselves but to their geographic “origin”: vague for the first group, highly specific and evocative for the second group. The territorial control over the West Bank and Gaza that began with the end of the Six-Day War opened the Israeli work market to the Palestinian population administered by Israel. The military occupation of the territories and their close relationship with Israel transformed this “other” reality into a rather familiar one: Palestinians workers were not considered to be “foreign”. Today, Israel is more dependent on “foreign” labour and less dependent on Palestinian workers, although dependence on the Palestinian labour force is still the norm on many industrial plants built on the Israeli side of the border with Gaza. Even after the closure of the Gaza strip and tighter security at Israel’s borders, Israelis continue to employ Palestinian workers because this population is both productive and cheap: a combination Israeli employers and economy have heavily relied on to for the last forty years.

As a consequence, migrant workers are simultaneously widely recognized as a component of Israeli society (Berthomière, 2005) and a prominent feature of Israeli society (Kemp et al., 2000) and expected to remain in the country temporarily. The insistence on this temporary aspect raises the question of how Israel found itself hosting approximately 250,000 non-Jewish transnational migrant workers in the early 2000s (Willen, 2003). The question is certainly relevant regarding the Israeli context and the fact that “Hebrew labour” (*avoda ivrit* in Hebrew) is one of the pillars on which the country was built: exclusively employing Jews has long been regarded as a national mission, as an act of patriotism when the “mysticism of work” predominated in the Zionist movement (Schlör, 1999: 120). Beyond the obvious economic reasons, employing Jews was related to the wish to revive the Jewish man by freeing him of the restrictions life imposed on certain careers in the Diaspora. “Hebrew work” (*avoda ivrit* in Hebrew) was highly valued while conversely “Arab work” (*avoda aravit*) was completely discredited, to the point of equating “Arab work” with a poorly done job. Israeli researcher Ella Shohat (2006) also underlines the fact that the preference for Jewish employment in companies held by Jews in Palestine until 1948 profoundly influenced the positive image that the Hebrew pioneers forged of themselves. It helped, she said, shape the image of a people who, by avoiding the use and exploitation of “local people”, did not engage in a colonial action. Nonetheless, while the willingness to rely exclusively on Jewish workers has often been seen as a means for absorbing Jewish immigration to Israel, especially in the construction sector at the beginning of the 20th century, the emergence of “Hebrew work” as a positive value also indicates an ethnic preference.

19. See M. Semyonov and N. Lewin-Epstein (2004) on the question of the segmentation of the Israeli population.

20. From 1,400 in 1984 to 3,000 in 1987.

The political and economic causes behind economic migration to Israel

How did a country that made "Hebrew work" both a national value and a pillar of its social construction switch to employing a large foreign workforce from the mid-1990s? The presence of work migrants rapidly raised issues of citizenship in a region where citizenship, as well as identity and territory, is a complex and intricate matter. Migration processes shed light on the social and political functioning of the country where it stake place. Since work migration in Israel takes place in a country built on migration yet it cannot be analysed with the same analytical framework used for studying Jewish migrations. The surprising appearance of migrant workers on the Israeli work market can only be explained by combining structural factors and political considerations. Sociologist David Bartram (1998) suggests approaching work migration as a response to both a specific socio-political context and complex intercultural relations. According to this author, Israel was "predisposed" to import a foreign workforce to cater for its needs, which explains the presence in South Tel Aviv, from the mid-1990s onwards, of numerous workers from Latin America, Africa and Asia. By predispositions, one should understand the ethnic segmentation built through successive waves of migration, with migrants from the Muslim and Mediterranean countries – the aforementioned "Oriental" population – often having lower socio-economic positions than Ashkenazi Israelis.¹⁹ This segmentation was reinforced with the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip at the end of the Six-Day War (1967) that opened access to significant cheap Palestinian labour. Palestinian workers suddenly entered the Israeli work market at the very bottom of the wage scale (Ben-Porat, 2004). In the mid-1980s, about 110,000 Palestinian workers were employed in Israel, mainly in the agriculture and construction sectors. More than half of them were employed without permit and neither the authorities nor their employers saw this as a threat.

Only with the first Intifada did this system slowly come to an end. Data shows that the outbreak of the first Palestinian uprising against Israel in 1987 did not bring an immediate change in practices that had been entrenched for twenty years. The number of permits issued to foreign workers doubled before 1987²⁰ and by then the proportion of foreign (less than 0.5% of the labour force of the country) and Palestinian workers (about 7%) had become stable. The government was afraid of making the identity issue more complex than it already was (among Orientals, Westerners, religious and secular Jews and between Jews and non-Jews) by importing workers from "abroad" in a country built on the distinction between Jews and non-Jews (Willen, 2003). Nonetheless, governmental resistance was overcome in 1990 with the arrival of almost 200,000 immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union and their urgent need for housing. The task of responding to such immigration, increased with the arrival of 800,000 additional migrants in the decade.²¹ The task grew even more daunting in 1993 when Israel closed the occupied territories in response to

the increase in terror attacks. At this point, the government decided to strongly limit the presence of Palestinian workers in Israel. As D. Bartram (1998: 310) puts it: "Replacing Palestinians [workers] with Russian Jews thus became something of a national mission" and it was thought that the massive influx of immigrants would provide the workforce needed to respond to their own need of housing. But the highly educated Russian migrants were conscious of their skills and of the stigma attached to "Arab jobs" in the construction sector, and they saw no reason to comply with this mission. As a result, the lack of workers became so acute that it prompted Israeli employers to challenge the government and appeal to the Supreme Court in the hope of opening the Israeli labour market to foreigners. While this had been unthinkable until then, resorting to foreign workers suddenly seemed the perfect answer to the challenges Israel was facing. From then on, visa attribution followed a repetitive pattern where each Palestinian attack led the government to close the Territories and respond to the need of Israeli employers by delivering 20,000 new work permits for migrants (Bartram, 1998: 314). Identity preoccupations were thus momentarily set aside as work migrants - a cheap labour force - allowed the government to solve both housing problems (being able to build accommodation for the massive amount of new migrants) and security problems by replacing, and thus reducing, the presence of Palestinian workers in the country. From that point of view, recourse to international work migration became a systematic solution to the need for a labour force in Israel. At a political level, it should be noted that the presence of work migrants in Israel also contributed to the separation of the Israeli and Palestinian economies while simultaneously promoting the idea of a two-States solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Bartram, 1998).

However, the moment foreign workers were called to take the job vacancies created by the tense political situation, they became a target for the government which started deporting them. In 1996, obviously fearing that foreigners could/would settle in Israel, the Ministry of Interior asserted that 100,000 workers had remained in Israel after expiration of their work visa and that they had to leave the country or be deported. Even before the establishment of a full-fledge immigration police and policy, visa duration was actually already central in the management of work migration. A deportation campaign, endorsed by an interdepartmental committee in August 1996, announced a goal of deporting 1,000 illegal workers per month; the aim being to absorb half of the illegal workers in the country over five years (Bartram, 1998: 317).²² These few points are important to keep in mind since the 1990s are often perceived as prosperous years for the work migrants' community thanks to a relative governmental *laissez-faire*. If ever the case, this age came to an end in 2002, when then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided a policy under which no new permit could be delivered in certain sectors of activity as long as the number of requested workers had been attained. This policy – the *Closed Skies Policy* – clearly aimed at

21. 956,319 migrants arrived from the former Soviet Union between 1990 and 1999 with 199,516 arrivals in 1990 and 176,100 in 1991, Central Bureau of Statistics, "Immigrants, by period of immigration (1948-2012)".

22. The collection of data by the Central Bureau of Statistics on work migrants' entries and visas starts in 1996.

23. Many asylum seekers find themselves imprisoned, sometimes for several months, in facilities situated in the south of the country.

workers from Asia and Africa coming by plane. The idea was that Israel would no longer import new workers and had to fully employ those already present and reduce unemployment among the Israeli population. Yet, the relation between the reduction of Israeli unemployment and the vacation of work migrants' jobs was purely rhetorical. Migrant workers jobs were unlikely to fit Israelis, as explained by Djibril who knows the problem well as he entered to Israel with a work visa before obtaining a residence status:

"People know they are here to do the work that nobody else wants to do. And if Israelis do this job, they are ashamed. People know that if they employ Israelis, they will have problems. They will have to pay taxes and insurances. And the workers will want holidays and then too, they'll be jealous. But if you take a foreign worker, he does what you want and then gets out of your head. He doesn't give you any trouble".

In 2002, the Closed Sky Policy was published together with the introduction of a foreign immigration police; its first goal being to reduce the number of "illegal" work migrants in Israel. Apart from workers who smuggled through the Egyptian border – the issue became very hot lately with asylum seekers entering in Israel after crossing the Egyptian border²³ – we shall later see that illegality refers to different people and situations. More recently, new proposals recall the French attempt to manage migration flows at the end of the 1970s when the French government was offering 10,000 francs bonuses (the "million Stoléru" as it was named after its initiator) to each migrant worker who was willing to return to his country of origin. Like France at the time, the Israeli government is now considering financial incentives as a way to initiate return migration: a "reward" of \$500 was evoked in 2008 for each voluntary departure. At first abandoned, the idea was raised again to allocate \$3,000 to all foreign families who would consider leaving the country voluntarily (Haaretz, 11/11/2009).

A procedure was set up to force employers to seek among workers present in Israel for at least a month before calling on workers from abroad, which means among workers who are in Israel without a valid visa. But as the Ministry of Interior is the only authority entitled to change the assignment of a visa (and allocate an employee from one employer to another), employers are therefore expected to recruit workers waiting in prisons for deportation. Yet, the government refuses to automatically grant work permits to imprisoned workers and the employers' requests can succeed only if they match several conditions: workers must have entered the country legally; they should also have spent no more than 4 years and 3 months in Israel; they should be able to present their passport to the authorities within a week; they should be enrolled in the same sector of activities for which they initially obtained their visa; their sector of employment should be one of the (temporarily) saturated sectors. In 2005, for example, the procedure only applied to workers in agriculture and construction; industry and care were not included in the Closed Sky Policy.

Becoming illegal in Israel

The general policy of deporting "illegal" workers while, at the same time, giving work visas to new migrants candidates²⁴ shows how the government is trying to keep work migration temporary, while using it simultaneously as a long-term economic solution. This system of short-term visas that cannot turn into long term permits signals that successive governments of Israel are not willing to allow the country to become a host country for non-Jews. But the system also pushes many workers to exceed the duration of their visa and remain in Israel illegally. Therefore, many "illegal" work-migrants are migrants who remained in the country beyond the date set by the visa, whether it is a tourist visa obtained when entering the country or a work visa obtained prior to arrival in Israel through an employer or an employment agency. But apart from illegally entering in the country by the Israeli-Egyptian border, there are several ways for work-migrants to fall from legality to illegality. Switching from a legal status to an illegal one may actually happen by changing job sector or by leaving an employer for another employer in the same sector. Work permits in Israel, like in the entire Middle East, are issued to employers, not to employees, and both the job for which the worker is hired and the name of the employer are specified on the visa (and written in the employee's passport). This *kafala* system, based on the sponsoring of employees by their employers (de Bel Air, 2006), is the means by which Israel, like other countries of the region such as the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Oman, deals with work migration. This dependence of the employee on the employer leads to many abuses notably regarding wages and work hours (often reported by the media and NGOs) and shifts the balance of power in favour of employers, with work migrants getting less and working more hours than the Palestinian workers before them (Alexander, 1999). In fact, because of these work conditions, it is common for work migrants to leave their legal employer at risk of losing their visa and to choose illegality over such restrictive, though legal, conditions.

We shall also mention that becoming illegal can also happen to women workers who got pregnant: until now a woman who got pregnant had leave the country with her child within 14 weeks²⁵ but the Supreme Court is now reviewing this legislation that has led women to voluntarily terminate their pregnancy or send their new-borns back home. In spite of this legislation, many women still regard birth-giving as a strategy to secure their future in Israel and migrant worker population's birth rates actually peaked in 2005 when hundreds of children born in Israel, as we shall see later, were granted papers and a legal status in Israel. This peak took place when difficulties increased for migrant workers to remain in Israel: once the decision to grant papers to some foreign children had been taken, the government seemed more eager to prevent "foreign" families from developing roots in the country. This started a policy of systematic deportation of fathers/head of families whose visa had

24. This system recalls the way work migration was envisioned in France in the 1980s, when the government and entrepreneurs thought they could draw from a workforce reservoir constantly replenished.

25. www.gov.il/FirstGov/TopNav/Eng/EngSituations/ESMigrantWorkersGuide/ESMWGMaternity

expired; the idea being that deporting fathers would convince entire families to leave the country.

The Israeli government policy in recent years is twofold. Its stated purpose is to reduce the number of undocumented workers in the country. But it seems destined to fight the emergence of a generation of children born to foreign parents in Israel, and sustainable settlement of non-Jewish families in the country. If these measures are actually deeply disrupting existing social networks by dismantling families, they also produced, against all odds, the above-mentioned peak of births. This baby boom followed the government decision, when women who previously avoided pregnancy for fear of losing their visas adopted a new strategy after several hundred children born in Israel in 2005 secured citizenship. Hoping to see them obtaining a resident status beyond the duration of their work visa status, many women have indeed tried to get pregnant. If pregnancy could be the cause of the loss of work permit in the past, today it appears as one of the alleged means to secure a future in Israel. The equation is obviously not so simple but the hope was raised when the Israeli Parliament passed the summer of 2005 a measure that can be described as historic.

South Tel Aviv: where from political mobilisation spreads

These national policies have local implications at the city scale of Tel Aviv's southern neighbourhoods – Neve Sha'anani, Florentin, Shapira, Shrunat Ha'tikva – where work migrants and their children actually reside. There, migrant presence is apparent on the streets, in specific shops (such as pork butcheries, phone centres, money transfers signs) and more subtly in the network of NGOs fighting for their interests. This is why I suggest that socio-political innovations, that are not always easy to grasp at a wider level, can be best understood through the geography of these neighbourhoods. First, part of the globalisation of Israel - its economy and socio-urban landscape - is happening there. Second, these residents' struggle for their right to live and work in Israel was supported and still is promoted by local associations and the municipality of Tel Aviv. This struggle also contributes to rebalancing the internal geo-strategy of the country. The municipal decisions taken to meet the reality of Tel Aviv's metropolitan population commits the country as a whole and gives more weight to the city, over Jerusalem, the capital town and the siege of the Parliament. However, these neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv - poor, and scantily endowed in infrastructures (being cultural infrastructures, schools, infant care or green spaces) - are far from being a centrality for all. Few residents of central or northern neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv actually know or have the need to visit these neighbourhoods even when they meet migrant workers in their daily lives. Even when they employ migrant workers (as caretakers or cleaners) and welcome them in their houses or families, most of Tel Aviv inhabitants do not know what these neighbourhoods look like. Forming the bottom of the socio-spatial scale of a very stratified society,

the southern neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv have nonetheless become the place where the revaluation of the content and the access to citizenship in Israel first started. These southern districts have effectively become centres for the foreign population who has invested these heavily degraded areas and settled in the dwellings left vacant by economically mobile segments of the population who moved to higher-value areas like the northern suburbs of Tel Aviv, for the better off, and the southern suburbs for the less wealthy. However, and although migrants have a predilection for areas of greater mobility – migrant workers have mostly settled around the Central bus and railway stations – the "foreign" is not only "the figure and the analyser of urban mobility." It also indicates, by its sheer presence, an environment that creates "otherness and interference" (Grafmeyer and Joseph, 2004: 11-12). These southern neighbourhoods are places of accumulation (of traces left by different migration waves) and change, where new social tendencies of the Israeli society are expressed. The conjunction of work migrants in Israel will therefore be related to other social questions which become manifest in Florentin and adjacent neighbourhoods.

Historically, until 1998, former mayor of Tel Aviv Roni Milo deliberately avoided the question of work migrants and set the municipal policy in line with the national policy. He considered work migrants to be the entire responsibility of their employers and of the agencies that brought them into the country.²⁶ But by largely transferring the management of migrant workers to citizens, the authorities (State, municipality) rarely managed the problems created by the asymmetric power relations although, as put by M. Alexander (1999: 9), this "bonding of foreign workers to a specific employer, who can make them illegal simply by dismissing them, encourages massive exploitation". Such system and the growing number of migrant workers in Tel Aviv at the end of the 1990s prompted several Israeli NGOs with head offices in Tel Aviv to extend their mission to work migrants. The promotion of work migrants' interests thus started among Israeli activists when some NGOs initiating political action and lobbying in their favour. Such was the case with *Physicians for Human Rights*, founded in 1988 during the first Intifada to broaden access to healthcare in both Israel and the occupied territories. Similarly, *Kav la'Oved* (*kav* "line" and *oved* "worker" in Hebrew), a hotline for workers regardless of their origin and status that was established in 1993 now protects the rights of all vulnerable workers employed in Israel and in the occupied territories. *The Hotline for Migrant Workers*, an NGO established in 1998 to promote the civic and political rights of "illegal" work migrants and asylum-seekers,²⁷ now works on promoting the recognition and integration of work migrants in Israel.

During fieldwork in Florentin, I volunteered to help children after school at another organisation, *Kadima Youth Centre* (referred to as KYC from now on). KYC is of particular interest for our present reflection because this

26. According to *Kav La'Oved* (Newsletter May 2013) care givers pay astronomical brokerage fees to obtain a work visa in Israel: an average of \$8,400 for female workers and of \$10,400 for men as the demand for men in this field is lower. Over the 830 caregivers they interviewed in 2013, about half of them reported having paid approximately 75% of the brokerage fees in Israel, in contradiction with the law and without reporting.

27. www.hotline.org.il/english/index.htm.

28. The United States are an important contributor from abroad.

29. Israel has signed agreements on schooling children regardless of their status.

30. At the time KYC was situated in the Bialik-Rugosin school, the three convicts it employed before for cleaning and cooking were not allowed to enter the school.

non-profit organisation is dedicated to assist and help children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods and families. And as we shall see, changed in citizenship occurred through and for these children. KYC is a branch of a wider social organisation (*Lasova*) established in the mid-1980s by two Israeli lawyers, S. and G. Harish. It functions thanks to voluntary work and private donations.²⁸ In 2005, KYC had 15 youth clubs across the country (19 in 2010) among which one in Tel Aviv exclusively addressed the issue of work migrants and asylum seekers' children. Because these children, who lack legal status in Israel, are not referred to this "club" (*moadonit* in Hebrew) through local Welfare Services or the Education Department, KYC must send representatives to schools, to inform children, parents and teachers about the activities they carry out to reach these children. This reversed approach is actually eased by the fact that these children are schooled in public institutions,²⁹ most of them attending the same school in the south of Tel Aviv. This school (Bialik-Rugosin) has been an important place for advancing the rights of foreign workers' children. And this can be seen by the fact that the school hosted the *moadonit* for a while, before it moved again to a private building (on Matalon street, between Florentin and Neve Sha'anán neighbourhoods). By offering free, though temporary, access to a public building to the *moadonit*, the municipality recognised the needs of these children and the work carried on by KYC.

In fact, this centre represents a considerable asset for foreign workers, since their children are welcomed after school on each school day, allowing parents to complete or extend their workday as much as they need or want. In addition to being cared for, the children are welcomed with a meal and receive tutoring at KYC. The six instructors of the *moadonit*, led by a manager, were young girls on Civil Service: young religious girls who did not serve in the army and performed a year of compensatory social work service (*shnat sherout*, literally: "service year") receiving their wages both from the Civil Service and from KYC. To complete the picture, some volunteers from abroad (like me at the time of my research), punctual volunteers from Israel, new immigrants who benefited from State subsidies for their academic studies, as well as people whom minor sentences to jail were commuted into social work, worked there too: 30 people altogether in 2005-2006.³⁰ The supervised preparation of homework on school days is accompanied by lectures about "Judaism, life in Israel, history and tradition [...] all in the spirit of the Israeli consensus". The strong emphasis on Israeli and Jewish mainstream values in KYC takes a particular resonance, for migrant workers' children who are not Jewish but take part into a society widely dominated by the cultural values and spatial practices of Judaism. Why then separate these children from their Israeli peers, especially when they share the same socio-economical difficulties? Galit (15/11/2005), the manager of the centre, explained how separation actually answers the wish of the local

Jewish population in south Tel Aviv. Therefore, she insists on these children's integration in Israel being also a question of overcoming the ethnic lines they face among their communities (e.g. Latin American, African, Asian) and within the centre:

"They [the Jewish children] have plenty of other centres and in Shapira, it was mixed and the Jewish families didn't want to send their children anymore (...) But yes KYC is a good way to integrate them. First they study more, Hebrew and things on Israel. They also have the same activities that the Israeli children have in the other moadoniot [clubs]³¹: which means eight hundred children in fifteen moadoniot. But it is also a good way for them to integrate among themselves because you know, they are called "foreign workers", but each one is in its own community. It's different communities and Africans and Filipinos: they don't mingle. But they are in the same situation so it's important for them to be together. You know, I hear them sometimes speaking among themselves, they say "blacks", "Filipinos" and one of the mothers complained lately that I treat some of the children better than others".

Tel Aviv and the municipal responses to a national issue: Mesila and Rugosin-Bialik

As the municipality of Tel Aviv is directly concerned by the issue of migrant workers and their children, it started working in close coordination with these NGOs and non-profit organisations. Moreover, it became a main player in the foreign workers' recognition at the national scale. In 1998, Ron Huldaï, now mayor of Tel Aviv, was campaigning for this office, and addressing the very controversial issue of the recognition of these workers as full-fledged actors of the city and the society as a whole. By doing so, he was pushing forward an agenda that was only starting to emerge in Israel, arguing for the opening of the political and social arenas to claims and practices that differ from the hegemonic Zionist identity. Once elected as mayor, Huldaï created *Mesila*, the "Centre of Information and Help for the Foreign Community".³² The goal of *Mesila*, at the time of its creation, was to facilitate access to legal and social services for the foreign population and to let them know about the work of different NGOs. The advent of *Mesila* on the political scene is significant in many respects. First of all, it signalled the recognition of a new population of Tel Aviv (about 80,000 individuals at the time). Second, it established this foreign population who worked and lived in Tel Aviv as fully belonging to the life of the city, to its urban fabric and to its social environment and to the revitalisation of durably abandoned neighbourhoods.

The audacious recognition from the municipality, regarding governmental policies, of equal rights for foreigners and citizen-residents corresponds to a pragmatic management of a productive population that has regenerated the economically and socially decaying neighbourhoods of south Tel Aviv.

31. Kadima has set up more than fifteen "youth clubs" all over the country. Three of them are in Tel Aviv, one is in Jaffa and dedicated to Arab children and one is in Rehovot for Israeli Jewish children of Ethiopian background. Other centres are located in Azur, Yavne, Kiriat Gat, Bat Yam, Petah Tikva, Kfar Saba, Kiriat Shmone, Or Yehuda and Ramle.

32. *Mesila* is the acronym for *merkaz sioua ou meida la kehila hazara* also means "rail" or "path" in Hebrew.

33. On the issue of young Israelis travelling to India after their compulsory military service, see Rozenholc 2002.

34. Thus, between 2002 and 2004, Mesila received ten times more requests concerning unemployed people (from 2% to 27% of all registered requests). Taking into account that these figures relate only to applications filled to the municipality, the actual proportion of unemployment among the foreign population must be much higher.

It is organised through *Mesila*, which heavily relies on voluntary work. Its permanent staff is small – seven social workers working part time – but supported by an average of 70 volunteers per year, coming from different socio-economical backgrounds. The fact that *Mesila* is increasingly attracting younger volunteers points to the re-politicisation of Tel Aviv's population beyond issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to a growing interest for the "Other" stimulated by the long journeys to Asia, Africa or Latin America undertaken after military service.³³ Dividing their activities between individual help, the reinforcement of community networks and awareness of the public opinion, each of the seven employees is in charge of one specific sector. One is in charge of managing and coordinating the volunteers together with other organisations (such as KYC, for example); two are in charge of the young children's program (*Mesila* manages a kindergarten and organises parental guidance classes) and one follows up with the foreign workers' private kindergartens. According to *Mesila*, 400 children from 0 to 3 attended 24 unofficial kindergartens in 2005-2006.

Today, with the accelerating pace of illegal workers' deportations, the work of *Mesila* has changed dramatically to reflect the needs of a rapidly evolving population. Much time is spent on counselling the workers about police-custody, non-payment of their wages, solving conflict relationships with the employer or how to gather money for return flight tickets. More means are spent to address the most urgent situations, including by distributing food. The "foreign community" that had flourished between 1990-2000 - establishing shops, churches and a dense and effective social network - is now very weak. Media campaigns started informing Israelis about penalties for employing irregular migrants, which resulted in significant job losses for the migrants: according to the municipality of Tel Aviv, the number of unemployed migrants increased tenfold between 2002 and 2004. And as mentioned earlier, the 2002 migration policy set targeted male heads of families staying in Israel without a valid visa, with the idea that deporting the fathers would result in the departure of entire families. In fact, its main effect was to separate families and increase the proportion of single women staying in Israel with, in most cases, one or more dependent children. More broadly, this policy has disrupted the community of migrant workers. In its 2004 annual report, *Mesila* estimated at 90% the number of women in the foreign community who raise their children alone or with the help of a family member. Children have also often been divided between parents, between the one who had to leave and the one who stayed back, to ease the family burden on the family remaining in Israel.

The municipality has taken into consideration the fact that work migrants become parents while in Israel and that asylum seekers also have homes and families. The municipality of Tel Aviv thus invested important resources in schooling and education. Israeli sociologists Adriana Kemp

and Rebecca Raijman (2004) speak about 700 children registered in public schools, all of them located in the South of Tel Aviv, most of them at a single institution: the Bialik-Rugosin school. Actually, Bialik-Rugosin is the fusion of the two Rugosin and Bialik schools. When Bialik closed in 2005, all its teachers and pupils – among whom one third of foreign workers' and asylum seekers' children – were incorporated to Rugosin. The only school of Florentin, built at the end of the 1960s at the corner of Ha'alyah and Salame streets, now welcomes the majority of these foreign children schooled in Tel Aviv. Their arrival in the school had unexpected effects on the trajectory of the Israeli children of the neighbourhood. Many Israeli families decided to take their children out of this public school. Several parents interviewed in 2008 asserted that the number of foreign children in Rugosin-Bialik (work migrants and asylum seekers' children) who were only starting to learn Hebrew, combined with the structure of the school itself that gathers children from primary to high school, contributed to the decline of teaching. For these parents who do not have the financial means to put their children in private schools, religious schools appeared as the most appropriate solution, reinforced by the fact that religious schools pick up and drive children back home. As for work migrants, schedule is an important issue for modest households whose work schedules are long and often inflexible. By changing to religious schools, their children remain in the public scholar system³⁵ but enter institutions conducted by nationalist right-wing religious party's ideology (mainly Shas). Natali, who coordinates the community centre in Florentin explains this process in an interview I conducted with her in 2008:

"It's very interesting because what happened in Rugosin is that Florentin kids they are the miout [minority] there. A lot of immigration...it's affect on the bagrout [baccalaureate] and you know, it's very effective (...) if you are in the kita vav – 12 or 11 or 10 years old and most of the...class...just started to talk Hebrew, it effects...so like...they learn in a private...but...religious school! They learn in a private but because they...they understand that...it's a good...good education and they don't...pay the price of a private school. Because the religious...they have interest to have a lot of children".

Through Natali and the community center where I volunteered, I met Neema who has been living in Florentin since 2000, when she became a mother. She explains how migrant workers' children have indirectly diverted the neighbourhood children out of the secular public schools and therefore reinforced the religious imprint in Florentin and other southern neighbourhoods. Talking about her 8 years old daughter, she explains a phenomenon that needs to be investigated in details to understand its importance and expansion (08/09/2008):

"She doesn't go to school in the neighbourhood anymore...but her school is not far away, it's near Geula street and she's got transportation from home to there...in fact, the municipality doesn't

35. In Israel, it is possible to choose between public secular schools, public religious schools and a whole network of ultra-orthodox institutions independent but State-subsidised (Klein 1999).

36. The African Workers Union was the first association of foreign workers to be registered in Israel.

37. The term "Jewishness" is more appropriate here than "Judaism" which concerns the religious practice.

38. *Haggadot* is the plural of *Haggada* "tale" or "narrative" in Hebrew.

39. *Seder* (literally "order") designates the meal of the first night of the Passover.

leave the parents any choice. The neighbourhood school [Bialik-Rugosin] is a school from kindergarten to youd-bet class [final year]. It's not possible, how can a child from youd-bet class sit next to a first grade child. It's not possible! And I don't even want to see the way girls dress up, and how boys speak! Plus you have the children from Neve Sha'anana, the migrant workers...them, they don't even know the language so how can you put in the same class room a child who knows the language and its spelling and a child who doesn't speak Hebrew. It's not...you cant move on with the material they have to learn with such level discrepancies. So it wasn't working out. And she went to another school to which most of her friends started to attend. So she joined most of her primary school friends".

Work migrants' civic mobilisation: the national scale

Beyond the work done by several NGOs and the municipal office, progress in the inclusion of work migrants and their children into the socio-political landscape of Israel also results from the work migrants' own political activism. Through recognised and registered associations,³⁶ Africans, Asians and Latin Americans have learnt how to sensitise political authorities which were, at first, reluctant to acknowledge their presence. These associations are political platforms that have helped establish migrant workers as political players in Israel. Through them, it is the belonging to and participation in the host society which are being negotiated (Kemp and alii, 2000). Their success, favoured by the use of a global discourse on human rights, was made possible by a disjunction between Jewishness³⁷ and citizenship. This disjunction started with the welcoming of Vietnamese *boat people* in the 1970s and was strongly reinforced in the 1990s by the integration of former-Soviet Union migrant's non-Jewish spouses, whom a third, although recognised as non-Jewish, were given access to Israeli citizenship (Berthomière, 2005). Work migrants have thus based their claim to a universal right to citizenship on a globalized discourse on the "citizens-of-the-world". They have also tapped into the local Jewish ethos, trying to reach out to a population who experienced the suffering involved in exile and diaspora. Work migrants and asylum-seekers organised for example Passover ceremonies where they read alternative *Haggadot*³⁸ such as the one entitled "From Slavery to Freedom. The Common *Seder*³⁹ for Israelis and African Refugees in Israel" published in 2010 by the African Refugee Development Centre. These texts are read during the Jewish Passover to celebrate the constitution of the Jewish people, freed from Egyptian slavery by crossing the Egyptian desert. In their revised versions, parallels were set between this constitutive experience and that of migrant workers and asylum-seekers streaming into Israel from Eritrea and Sudan through Egypt.

The parallels between the work migrants and asylum-seekers' experiences

and the Jewish exile through their respective crossing of the Egyptian desert also find an echo in the Israeli press as it is the case for the *Haaretz* newspaper. *Haaretz* is one of the main Israeli newspapers who often publishes articles on the issue and among them "As we recall our Passover exodus, think of the flight of African refugees" (March 24, 2010) and President Shimon Peres' letter to his Ministry of Interior entitled "Who, if not a people who suffered embitterment in the lands of exile, should be sensitive to their fellow man living amongst them?" (July 31, 2009). In this letter, President Peres, after a visit to Bialik-Rugosin school asks his Ministry of Interior to consider the situation of work migrant's children in these terms: "I felt they had an appreciation for Israel, where they were born (...) I heard Hebrew ring naturally from their mouths. I felt their connection and their love for Israel and their desire to live in it, to serve in its army and to help to strengthen it". The use and recognition of the recurrent themes of Israeli identity – Hebrew language, love and commitment to the country, military duty – functions here as the call, and means, to include these children.

But Hebrew skills or the desire of foreign workers' children to join the Israel Defence Force also simply express the fact that some of my interviewees have spent more than 20 years in Tel Aviv. And during fieldwork, I met several parents who were wielding their children's wish to serve in the army several times as an ultimate manifestation of patriotism and sense of belonging to the country. Let me add that it also shows a good understanding of a social system in which not performing military duties (3 years of compulsory service for Israeli men and 2 for Israeli women) still invalidates a career and social inclusion and recognition. The acculturation of these families is most probably reinforced by the fact that traveling to their country of origin is rare. The often-illegal residence in Israel is a strong impediment to their international mobility, as is their economic situation and that of the country of origin in terms of political instability. So while most of the time gaining recognition happens by establishing one's own identity parameters (Silberstein, 1994), on the contrary, work migrants manage to secure their position in Israel by promoting the Jewish majority's values.

These values are also illustrated by stickers on their doors and walls of Florentin, recalling the verse of the Deuteronomy "Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (10: 19). Here, the reference to the Bible is highly cultural and less religious – it is the experience of the exile more than religious practices that operates the link between foreigners and Israeli Jews – but work migrants and asylum-seekers' religiosity still should be considered to understand their sense of belonging to this country and to this land. Their very presence in Israel-the Holy Land often seems to invigorate their religiosity and therefore their claims to have rights to Israel as Christians and believers. Even the "pre-knowledge" of Israel before hand, through the reading of the Bible or the

Quran, should be taken in consideration for understanding such positioning. Kimia (10/09/2008), whom I met in Florentin neighbourhood, came from the Democratic Republic of Congo, to work in Israel with her husband and two children. Her husband is now a pastor in Tel Aviv and she explains:

"We read Israel in the Bible. But by coming here, we live in Israel. This is very important. Mostly for Christians! Mostly for Christians. We read about Jerusalem, we read that David was here, we read about Peter, Jesus walked on the water, and this and that. Jesus multiplied the breads, but where did Jesus multiply the breads? Here! Than you need to go see it! And once you've seen, with your one eyes...it's something else. I could go somewhere else, but I like this country. It's the country of the Gods. When someone asks you where you are and you tell this person that you are in Israel...in Israel? How? And they ask: "Have you been to Jerusalem?" Yes! "So Jerusalem is on earth? Yes! We think that Jerusalem is in the sky".

Pierre-Henri (12/10/ 2008), also a Democratic Republic of Congo national, reveals a similar perception of Israel but through a very different personal development and more complex path from his country to Israel. Pierre-Henri left his country twenty years ago to complete his studies in the former-Soviet Union and holds a PhD in engineering. At the end of his studies, he became involved in a religious association who gathered funds to "bring the Jewish people from the former Soviet Union back to Israel". The goal was even more precise as it is specifically by boat that they wanted to bring Jewish candidates to immigration to Israel. They did and organised several of these boat journeys between the former-Soviet Union and Israel, between March and December 1996. In December 1996, he himself decided to settle in Israel. Once in Israel, he first worked as a pastor in Jerusalem. But after few years of living off his congregation, he decided to leave Jerusalem and have a life of his own in Tel Aviv and settled in the southern part of the city. Now, his status and stay in the country are at risk, as long as he doesn't get a visa or a resident permit. He says about his approach and connection to Israel when I interviewed him:

"Yes, as a Christian... we believe in certain prophecies of the Bible...who say that the Jewish people must return to the land God gave their fathers (...) And what I did, it was like assisting the Israeli State indirectly because the State did not even have to spend money: we organised and paid for everything and it was us too who now had to...convince people to make alyah. Israel also needed alyah to secure the occupied territories because that's where they injected new immigrants".

For Boubacar (20/09/2008), 23, who arrived in Tel Aviv after a six-year journey that started in Ivory Coast in 2002, his motivations to settle in Israel are different but they are also expressed through a religious book: the Quran. A transnational journey through Mali, Ghana, Senegal, Libya and

Egypt, led Boubacar to Egypt where, from Cairo, he finally crossed the desert and the Israeli border. After having waited several weeks at the border, he was finally taken by Israeli soldiers to the city of Be'er Sheva, in the Negev desert, where from he managed to reach Tel Aviv. In Tel Aviv, he found his way following the instructions of friends who had already settled in Israel. About his journey and longing for Israel, He says:

"In the Quran, it is written to follow your father's steps, to follow your mother's step. If you walk in their steps, you are supposed to be ok. But my father is dead and my mother is in a refugee camp, so what to do? So I've decided to follow the Quran, to do as the Quran says. And I asked myself, this country, Israel, where is it in the world? I wanted to see Israel, to live in Israel and then...see if the conditions get better in my country and go back".

Moussa, 32, a career soldier from Guinea Conakry, who now works in a restaurant in Florentin neighbourhood adds to his friend's speech (20/09/2008): "[I]n the Quran, God made it clear that the land of Israel, they are rich. It is written in the Quran that they are the most powerful men in the world". Asked about whether his experience fits in with such statement, he confirms, expressing another aspect of what Israel represent for these young men dwelling in the poor working class southern neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv. But each personal story is different and Moussa left his country in 2007, when he received the order, as a soldier, to disperse the large demonstrations against the rise of food prices by shooting at the people. He refused to obey and chose to desert his country and illegally cross the border between Guinea Conakry and Liberia. From Liberia, he first flew to Morocco and, from Morocco, to Egypt. In Egypt, he continued his way on foot, for several weeks through the Sinai desert, until reaching the Israeli border. At the border, he too managed to reach Be'er Sheva from where he took a taxi with other fellow adventurers, heading for South Tel Aviv, "where the Africans are" as he put it. There, he spent few weeks in a workers' hostel, until a country-fellowman informed him that a room was vacated in a building of Florentin. He moved to this building in the centre of the neighbourhood, mostly occupied by foreign workers and asylum seekers and now shares his rent and space with two other persons.

Getting a status: obtaining birth-right for migrant workers' children

These young men, and before them entire work migrant families, trying to find and secure their place in Israel, have actually breached and unexpectedly participated to the redefinition of access to citizenship. Before proceeding further, it is important to note that the reorientation of core values that underpin citizenship, and therefore identity, took place relatively rapidly in regard to the novelty of the question raised by their presence, and despite the systematic political refusal to consider durable integration of non-Jewish populations into the body of citizens.⁴⁰ The point is the following: in 2005, the *Knesset*, the Israeli Parliament,

40. Israeli Arabs (whether Muslim or Christians) constitute a notable exception to this point as noted before they amount 20% of the population of the country.

allowed hundreds of children and their families to finally sort out their status with the authorities. It is important to stress that this parliamentary decision was meant to meet specific humanitarian needs and was not foreseen as a law *per se*. Strict criteria were thus set and only 600 children met them and obtained the right to remain in the country and benefit from all social and civic rights of Israeli citizenship. These figures are derisory nationwide but in the wake of these children, their 300 siblings and parents were also granted papers. The parents of these nine hundred children obtained, by the regularisation of one or more of their children's status, a permit (A5) that gives them equal civil rights to citizens except voting rights. This permit must be renewed annually and shall be granted until the 21st year of their child, according to principles set forth today. Once their children aged 21, parents who be considered to have completed their educational work, will indeed be called to leave the country. The Israeli case is thus a peculiar one, with a downward way to sort out ones status with the authorities since parents can obtain long-term resident status thanks to their children.

The criteria were the following: to be aged six years or older at the time of the decree in July 2005, to be born in Israel from foreign parents legally entered in the country (with a tourist or a work visa), to go to school and to speak Hebrew. The age was actually the most restrictive of all requirements as the mastery of Hebrew is generally not a problem. As mentioned before, Israel has signed the international treaties that allow all children present on the national territory, regardless of their parents' legal status, to be enrolled in the public school system (Alexander, 1999). So initially intended for children aged from 10 years and above, the lobbying of Tel Aviv municipality, through the employees of Mesila, and of non-governmental organisations succeeded in lowering the threshold to six years old. Reflecting on the independence of Tel Aviv *vis-à-vis* the government, on issues related to the management of international migration, it should be noted that it is Tel Aviv municipality and not the Ministry of Education that covers expenses incurred by the education of foreign children.

Nonetheless, these figures do not cover the entire population of children born to foreign parents in Israel and many appeals were made. According to Mesila, most appeals were dismissed after 2005 and the same happened in 2010 when the authorities decided of a second "one-time" regularisation campaign. This shows that the inflection from right to citizenship by virtue of kinship (*jus sanguinis*) to right of citizenship by virtue of birth in Israel (*jus solii*) is obviously limited but noteworthy in a country where access to citizenship is a determining issue in the overall social functioning. It should also be paid attention to in the future, as this regulation will also be accompanied, ultimately, by the creation of a new administrative category of citizens. Israel being, according to political scientist Alain Dieckhoff (1999), a democracy "where political sovereignty belongs to all citizens, but where the State is institutionally linked to the

Jewish nation" has many expressions, amongst which the fact that nationality and citizenship represent two different level of inclusion. These different memberships are designated by different terms: *ezrah*, in Hebrew, for "citizen" and *leom* for "nation", but also *edah* (plur. *edot*), which refers to the idea of cultural ethnicity.⁴¹ Israeli citizens belong to different nations and nationalities – Jewish, Druze, Circassian or Arab –, but all included in the definition of Israeli citizenship. Therefore, each citizen is registered to the authorities with its nationality (which until recently appeared on identity documents). In the case of foreign workers' children who fall in none of these categories, we might then wonder how they will be considered in the future in this classification system knowing that this categorisation by nationalities emphasises ethnic affiliation, real or perceived, rather than belonging to the state defined by citizenship.

If these two decrees (2005 and 2010) show the opening of Israel to right of citizenship by virtue of birth in the country, driven by the globalisation of its population and the appearance of a foreign generation born in Israel, the government nevertheless tries to keep control of the non-Jewish population. Government guidelines and their implementation by the immigration police in recurrent deportation campaigns force any observer to moderate the projections that this event could have raised. In addition, the opening of the citizenship issue also carries the spectre in the eyes of the State of the reunification of Palestinian families separated by successive wars since 1948 and the creation of the State. This became obvious in 2005 when some of the work migrant's children, whom one of the parents had been deported, got their residence permit. If the parent who had been deported from Israel actually then had the right to resettle in Israel and benefit from an A5 permit, a clause was added to condition their return and avoid use of this law by Palestinians: expelled parents can only return to Israel and receive their new status after their children have completed one year of military service. As Israeli Arabs cannot take part in military activities, this legal point is directly designed for them.

However, even if with these numerous restrictions, the recognition of virtue of birth in a country where citizenship is obtained by filiation is a profound change, that all impacts are not predictable. This is especially true if we consider the results of a survey conducted in 2009 that reaffirms the importance of birth in Israel in the definition of Israeli identity. Showing that "half of Israelis believe that those born abroad can not be real Israelis" (Haaretz, edition of 03/08/2009), this survey illustrates, once more, the ambivalence of the country to respond to non-Jewish children actually born and grown up in Israel. It also underlines the willingness of a part of the population, up to the highest political level as E. Olmert's wife personal engagement in this fight showed – to integrate. But in a socio-political system that treats individuals and social groups according to their contribution to the common well defined by the Zionist optic (Shafir and Peled, 2002: 19), those children born to foreign parents in

41. Political ethnographer Dvora Yanow (1999) underlines that if Oriental Jews are often referred to as *edot ha'mizrah*, in Hebrew, the "Oriental ethnic groups", the term *edot ha'maarav* for "Western ethnic groups" is never employed.

42. « We need to see our city as the locus of citizenship, and to recognize multiple levels of citizenship as well as multiple levels of common destiny, from the city to the nation to trans-national citizenship possibilities ».

Israel still claim the values of a system they want to integrate but at the same time undermine. Eager to assimilate the cardinal Israeli values and remain in the country or, to put it more sharply, often patriots and nationalists, they defend institutions that, for a large part, do not represent them and are based on an exclusionary system between Jews and non-Jews. In this sense, while other studies emphasise the transformations and the lives of this population within Israeli society, I have chosen here to focus on the impact this foreign population has on the "receiving" population, in a country that did not resolve the dilemma of being both a Jewish state and a Western democracy (Shafir and Peled, 2002).

Globalisation and new urban hierarchy: the emergence of Tel Aviv

Based on what the preceding pages have shown, I shall focus in this last section how my paper on how Tel Aviv appeared in a decade as "a major political player in migration policies" (Kemp and Rajjman, 2004: 27) through its southern neighbourhoods. Combining a large population of foreign workers, pragmatic management and commitment by local authorities to a population on the left of the Israeli political spectrum, Tel Aviv has become a new arena for the re-evaluation of citizenship and identity in Israel. "From the city to the nation", the city incorporates a *bottom-up* process that might anticipate on future "trans-national citizenship possibilities" (Fenster and Yacobi, 2005: 191).⁴² Thus, the population and the municipality of Tel Aviv's preoccupations to manage the city to its best are often contradictory *vis-à-vis* the State and the governmental practices (Kemp et alii, 2000). Several readings of this relative independence of Tel Aviv, as a cultural and economical capital, are possible. First, the city is prosperous and receives, contradictory to Jerusalem which economy largely functions thanks to State aid, very little support from governmental public funds. This economic independence thus helps independence of political action too. Second, if we dig a little bit into history, this relative independence appears to date back already to the British Mandate times when the local leaders of Tel Aviv voluntarily maintained an inclusive management of all municipal issues (Alfasi and Fenster, 2005: 351). This was reinforced by the fact that Tel Aviv also had a special status in British mandatory Palestine, as it obtained its independence even before the creation of the State of Israel. The city was recognised as an autonomous entity in the 1930s, before the State or Jerusalem were.

The city independence is worth pointing at in a reflection on globalisation. If we refer to Saskia Sassen's work (1996, 2006, 2007), global cities are described as both "independent" from the national context and places were the mechanisms of globalisation settle "from below". Centres of economic controls and migrant polarisation, these global cities are the link between the national and the global economies circuits. However, they develop their own cultural, economic, and political concerns that are, in

some ways, distinct from the national economy. Thus, in the same way that Paris is not France, or New York the United States, Tel Aviv is not Israel. It would however be hard to say that it is not very representative of it. In Israeli narratives and perceptions, Tel Aviv somehow summarises the structures, lifestyles and ideologies that accompany the transformation of the country into a post-industrial society. As it kept on hosting work migrants, Tel Aviv is the place of the cosmopolitisation of Israel (Kemp and Rajjman, 2004). It is thus maybe because Tel Aviv, like other big cities, gathers and dissolves particularities that it is both the source of a national identity and the apex of a globalised life-style. Big, global, world cities, play a capital role in the decentering of national identity and in the rescaling of national sovereignty distributions (Kemp et Rajjman, 2004). As such, Tel Aviv has become the place for alternative definitions of identity and belonging. This is why issues linked to globalisation, citizenship, migration and urban policies meet in Tel Aviv and draw new proposals aimed at migrants who, elsewhere in the country, have no status or civic rights recognition (Kemp and Rajjman, 2004: 30). Tel Aviv municipality promotes practices that flirt with a city-citizen-identity open to all its residents as promoted in a post-Zionist discourse and identity that is not only affiliated to and defined by the State.

Conclusion

The presence of migrant workers in the southern neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv shows a new face of Israel built on an increased heterogeneity of its population. The foreign population in fact raises, in Israel, as it is often the case, issues that affect the very foundation of the society, as well as the State and its organisation. The children of migrant workers born in Israel have indeed paved the way for the construction of a right of citizenship by virtue of birth in Israel: to recognize a right of residence and establishment to children born to foreign parents in Israel with no affiliation to Judaism, marks a turning point in the definition of citizenship. This can be seen as a political innovation that also reflects the mobilisation of the civil society for these children as when, in August 2009, a demonstration bringing together citizens and migrant workers on the streets of southern neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv has momentarily stopped the eviction of families planned by the government. Each time these kind of decisions and deadlines are postponed thanks to popular demonstrations, it expresses the progressive incorporation of the concept of Israeliness extended to individuals born in Israel because of the unpredictable opportunities of international work migration and not by choice or affiliation.

Place and sense of place then appear with much strength in a globalised economy that organises a constant diversification of co-presences. It is the people they meet on the streets of their neighbourhood day-by-day, and for which they are mobilised through various associations, that some Israeli citizens defend against State immigration policy. In this context,

migrant workers present a real opportunity for reflecting on the globalisation of the country and the role of Tel Aviv on the national political scene. I suggest that the re-territorialisation which brought Tel Aviv on the front of the national political scene is anchored in Florentin and other southern neighbourhoods of the city where new figures dwell. Although, it was not fully developed in this article, these neighbourhoods are arenas of a shared day-to-day life between citizens and non-citizens which allow us to reflect on the future development of citizenship in Israel. In a future research, more investigations and research should be done on and in the Rugosin-Bialik school which is one place for learning common values and socialisation that also became, at a certain point, a political ground invested by migrant workers. The attention to the issue raised by work migrants goes through the attention to the southern neighbourhoods of the city and to their children in particular. The incorporation of migrant workers' children in the Israeli regime also indicates the effectiveness of migrants' participatory practices. Migrant workers expanded the Israeli public sphere through a global humanitarian discourse (Kemp et al., 2000). But at the same time, the difficulty to incorporate foreign migrants in the Israeli political and social system also reflects a strong resistance to new members and draws the limits of the Israeli cosmopolitanism (Berthomière, 2005). Nonetheless, the inclusion of foreign migrants, which started with the closing of borders to Palestinian workers, thus oscillates between extensions and closures, according to the needs of different sectors of production and to government decisions and political uncertainties.

The analysis of the foreign presence in Israel in the long run shows how labour migration affects not only the issue of national identity, but how it connects social cohesion, internal security of massive immigration and the need to wave a cheap labour market. Placed in its context, this labour migration has also shown how it appeared, at one point, as the most appropriate response for the successful absorption of hundreds of thousands of migrants. In this sense, migrant workers constitute the last bit migration wave in Israel. Their presence has increased the heterogeneity of the population, reinforced the local resident activism and influenced government policies. Migrant workers have given rise to central issues in the Israeli society and State. Giving children born in Israel and their non-Jewish parents the right to settle and live in the country was a decisive milestone in re-defining citizenship. The outcome of the debate is still undecided, with government ruling on both the unsolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the definition of Israel as a Jewish State. Government response to popular support of foreign residents is always dependent on the status of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, and the preferences of the powerful religious and nationalist political parties. But popular mobilisation for more inclusive forms of identity that acknowledge children's birth rights gives Tel Aviv new leverage in the

management of national identities. The Florentin case study opens opportunities to read from the street up to the most crucial and complex issues of how the Israeli State functions. It shows how work migration not only touches questions of national identity but also issues of social cohesion, interior security, mass migration and the need for a cheap, flexible labour force. The incorporation of the work migrants' children in Israel and their parents indicates how foreign migration has opened a new path, between extension and closure, balancing popular demands against the needs of the different sectors of production. In the Israeli context, work migrants precipitated a reflection on globalisation and constitute an innovative entry to analyse and grasp the emergence of Tel Aviv in the national political landscape.

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