# The current article was submitted several times to journals and was not accepted. It was originally concerned with categorization and labeling. I want to adapt it to the concept of **limited hybridity**. The idea to refer to the concept of limited hybridity also comes from the article on religion (which you edited).

# I have left old and new parts and I would be happy if you could help me create an adaptation to the concept of limited hybridity .

# The current text will be submitted for comments (not judgment) and I shoud send til 4,000 words and therefore does not need to be finished.

# In the current global reality, it is important to me that the State of Israel does not come out "wrong" but to describe a situation where, on the one hand, there are clear definitions for immigrants suspended from policy and at the same time, due to immigration processes that have been going on for years, many transitions both within countries and between immigrants lead to changing lifestyles, whether those that are adapted to the categories or those that are adapted to the countries. The limited hybridity mainly refers to the definitions of the countries that allow them to immigrate or not.

# The article is submitted to a journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.

# I am also attaching the call for the special issue you will have.

# I believe we may need at least two rounds.

# https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?show=instructions&journalCode=cjms20

**Guideline / basic assumptions for the article (my thoughts)**

States define categories of immigrants based on which rights and/or citizenship can be obtained

The categories define for immigrants what is permissible and acceptable to do and what is not.

Throughout the migration process, immigrants create hybrid spaces that allow them diverse actions that are not directly related to the geographic space where they stay.

As the immigration process continues, the borders expand and shrink

Hybridity is limited by categories of country migration. The intention is: the spaces of limited hybridity are on the one hand global - referring to their desire or to be international immigrants and on the other hand are diluted due to the country's definitions. In the current case between an internal, international, immigrant and refugee.

. In the present article I will present the transit camp where people wait for immigration to Ethiopia and the stay in the destination country for up to seven years to show how a limited hybridity was created in everyday life.

I'm writing a thought here that I'm not sure I'm right and I'm writing to think with you. During the article I will present the categories and how they affect dayily life during migration. At the same time, I will present examples of hybrid spaces that are created. At the end of the artical I will argue that all hybrid fighters were limited by the definitions of the immigrants. Now after reas it few times I'm confused, maybe it is better to explain the limited hybrid at the beginning of the article and then explain…

For long term I think to write 3 articals about limited hybride (this will be the second) So in future it will be a concept that will be identified with me

**What I sent as an initial abstract was accepted**

This paper investigates the challenges posed by the interaction between bureaucratic migration categorizations and the lived experiences of migrants in the global context. Focusing on the case of Zera Beita Israel (ZBI), descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity in the nineteenth century and returned to Judaism in the 20th century. The study analyzes their immigration journey to Israel, encompassing various stages from their villages, transit camps in Ethiopia (where they have been waiting for more than a decade), absorption centers, to their eventual permanent dwelling in Israel. The categorization of migrants into distinct groups during the migration process, including informal categories within the compound such as citizens or those awaiting immigration from Ethiopia, and formal categories like olim (Jewish immigrants), mehagrim (non-Jewish migrants), and refugees, is influenced by Israel’s Law of Return and immigration laws. Nevertheless, the unique background of the ZBI community presents a significant challenge to these rigid legal distinctions, underscoring the complexities of migration categorization in the context of their everyday lives and adaptation.

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted throughout various stages of the ZBI migration journey, including their villages, transit camps in Ethiopia, and absorption centers, and permanent dwelling in Israel, this study explores their daily lives, creative expressions, and interactions with the imposed categories. The ZBI individuals encountered diverse environments and societal perceptions, resulting in continually evolving definitions and categorizations.

The concept of ‘limited hybridity’ is introduced as a tool to comprehend the tensions and connections between state-imposed categories and the present-day experiences of immigrants. This limited hybridity enables the ZBI community to navigate their lives in the contemporary global era while remaining aware of the influence of state-defined categories on their existence.

And now the article 😊

**The Dynamics of ‘Limited Hybridity’ in Migration: The Case of Zera Beita Israel from Ethiopia**

Dr. Ravit Talmi-Cohn

1. **Introduction**

One of the key challenges posed by global migration today is the tension created by the categories and labels nation states use to define who will and who will not belong as legitimate future citizens in the face of the lived experiences of migrants. Such categories and labels represent an attempt to create order, as migration policies reflect a struggle with the lines of demarcation between groups of migrants: those who have come to settle permanently, labor migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and those who come as professionals, students, and temporary migrants. Thus, through legislation and policies, states intervene in global migration flows by deciding who is an immigrant, a refugee or an illegal migrant (Sahin-Mencütek 2012).

Despite its ostensible logic, Moncrieffe & Eyben (2007) have argued that categorization aims to transform dynamic cultural processes into defined constructs. Earlier, Zetter (1991) maintained that labeling turns humans into objects with material and political meaning, enabling the translation of identity for bureaucratic purposes. Regardless, it is clear that, by their very nature, these policy mechanisms are dynamic and particular (Appelqvist 1999; McAdam 2005), with different countries imposing different definitions of identity, resulting in diverse rights and obligations (Adelman 1988) as well as a labeling that creates conditioning by means of differentiation, inclusion and exclusion, stereotypes, and control mechanisms—a process wherebymigratory paths and flows are constructed and shaped by the “interaction between the policies governing migration, the capabilities of migrants and their aspirations” (Dimitriadi 2015: 5; c.f. Mingot and de Arimatéia da Cruz 2013; Düvell 2012).

to justify“”“”“”“”“”

“”(“”) While the bureaucratic and political systems that label and categorize people and communities are inflexible, the everyday activities and lives of flesh-and-blood migrants as they navigate and negotiate the rigid categorizations imposed by nation-states are characterized by a complex interplay of anthropological and sociological blurring.

This chapter argues that as migrants navigate the tension between the categories imposed on them by the sovereign state and their own lived experiences across multiple spaces, they experience a limited hybridity that creates combinations – of old and new, past and present – that enable them to exist and to achieve a sense of belonging. This hybridity is particularly relevant given the reality of contemporary migration processes, which can last years and often involve temporary or circular movements, multi-country journeys, and diverse diaspora connections bridging origin and destination (Düvell 2008; Fargues 2009; Hugo et al. 2014; Mingot and de Arimatéia da Cruz 2013; Tudoroiu 2017). which migrants inhabit , ing

(Harrell-Bond 1986; Jenkins 1994; Mazu 1986; Peterson 1958; Robertson, 2015; Zetter 1991).

Literature on cultural hybridity emerged in postcolonial studies in the 1980s. Bhahba initially conceived of it as a third “in-between” space in the postcolonial context, in that it dislodges hegemonic colonialist paradigms and contests such discrimination (Bhabha 1994). Hall linked it to identity in diaspora, migration or (multi) cultural studies, arguing that identity is lived through difference via hybridity (Hall 1990).

The concept of cultural hybridity helps highlight the multiple societal boundaries that individuals encounter (Pieterse 2001). It incorporates the reflexive emphasis on identity, in that it encompasses the autonomous selection of systems of belief, regardless of nation or community, and avoids defining a “stranger” (Werbner 1997). Critiques of cultural hybridity assert that the definition of hybridity itself is based in static and bounded categories which serve as the norm to which hybridity is the exception (Palmié 2013). As we use the term here, however, hybridity is not meant to presuppose essentialist notions, but rather is based in theory that argues for a continual, historical process of hybridities (Pieterse 2001). Such a conception aligns with the notion that hybridity occupies a ‘third space’ – in which “even the same signs can be appropriated, re-historicized and read anew” (Bhabha 2012). Hybridity allows us to see beyond binaries, bringing into focus the other, as dynamic, open, and creative. In this sense, hybridity is a lens through which to scrutinize the in-betweenness of binaries such as modem/traditional, secular/religious in contemporary societies (Talmi-Cohn 2023).

Focusing on the experience of the Zera Beita Israel (ZBI) of Ethiopia— descendents of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity in the 19th century—this article explores how the various categories and labels appended to this group and its members during the process of migration from Ethiopia to Israel created tensions and conflicts in their everyday lives along the way. Their journey to permanent residence in Israel—setting out from their villages, spending lengthy time spent in transit camps in Ethiopia, moving to absorption centers in Israel before settling permanently in Israel—takes them through various environments where they are viewed and labeled differently. A close examination of the ZBI will illuminate some of the urgent issues raised by global migration and will cast light on the complex relationship between categorization and state policy, and the hybridity which characterizes the way ZBI migrants respond, react and employ their limited agency to negotiate the meaning of labels and categories applied to them.

1. **Methodology**

This article is part of a larger ethnographic study of migration conducted in various time periods between 2005 and 2012 and 2017-2023—lengthy periods over which to examine migration. The study included in-depth fieldwork at each of the four stations of the ZBI journey: their villages of origin in northern Ethiopia, transit camps in Ethiopia, absorption centers in Israel, and permanent dwellings in Israel. The larger project is thus a multi-sited ethnography of movement, using the countries of origin and destinations not as the alpha and omega of immigration. In this chapter, the focus is on how hybridity changed between two of these reference points—the transit camps and permanent settlement in Israel—in a journey shaped by changing labels and categorizations, as well as multiple competing practices of place making and perceptions of time.

Travelling with the ZBI, living with them in each of the places they lived, and participating in their experiences of waiting and moving,[[1]](#footnote-1) and applying Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 2009) methodology allowed the main topics of inquiry to evolve and emerge during and after the field research. At each transit station, qualitative methods included participant observations and in-depth and open-ended interviews with 106 people. The interviews, guided by an ethnographic interview guide (Spradley 1979), followed a chronological axis personalized for each interviewee at each migration station, were especially valuable, and confirmed the presumption that interviews help people express their perceptions, thoughts, and hidden attitudes (Arksey and Knight 1999).

These qualitative methods were supplemented with 40 questionnaires administered in Gondar, Ethiopia and 30 administered in 2010 and 2011 at an absorption center in Israel. Additionally, texts drawn from the wider political and public discourse, including government resolutions and items from the press, provided societal context. Together, these methods enabled a close understanding of daily experiences, social encounters, conversations, prayer, and especially the ZBI’s experiences of waiting and moving. The central role of labeling and categorizing played in the lives of the ZBI emerged frp, tjese interviews.. Below we describe Israeli immigration policies and practices and how they interacted with the unique characteristics of the ZBI. We explore how these contradictions and challenges were experienced by Zera Beita Israel as they attempted to immigrate to Israel, resulting in limited hybridity.

***Israeli Immigration Law***

Like other countries, Israel uses legislation and policies that label and categorize migrants to control which migrants will ultimately become legal citizens. However, while Israel is not the only country where immigration and citizenship laws limit migration based on ethnicity or various other categories, it is one of the few applying ethno-religious distinctions. Although a liberal democratic state, Israel encourages only one specific form of migration: Jewish migration, on the premise, following the Holocaust, that Israel would be the homeland for all Jews around the world, no matter their country of birth, race or ethnicity—a value that is enshrined in the state’s Basic Laws, Israel’s quasi-constitution.

The right to citizenship is granted legislatively through the 1950 Law of Return, and almost exclusively through the process known in Hebrew as *aliyah*,and only for Jews, known in Hebrew as *olim* (or *oleh* in the singular). By contrast, Israeli laws and regulations do not allow non-Jewish foreigners to freely come and settle in Israel. In 1970 the law extended the right to immigrate to people with just one Jewish grandparent and to those married to them,countering strict Orthodox interpretations of Jewish religious law that defines as Jewish only someone with a Jewish mother. As a result of this law, at present, about 73% of the Jewish Israeli population are immigrants or are the children or grandchildren of immigrants from around the world. Thus, in most senses, Israel is a multi-cultural immigration society.

***The Zera Beita Israel***

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the ZBI, known as Feres Mura (Seeman 2009) were part of the larger Ethiopian Jewish community, known as Beita Israel. By the end of the 19th century, some Beita Israel members had converted to Christianity, some out of choice, others by force. Although these converts lived as Christians, they were not accepted as such by their Christian neighbors. Consequently, they lived a religiously liminal life, self-categorized as Christians, but categorized by the dominant Christian community as Jews (Talmi-Cohn 2011; Ehrlich, Salamon & Kaplan 2003; Messing 1982; Salamon 1993; Seeman 2009 Shabtai 2006; Waldman 1995, 2004, 2015, 2016).

In 1991, the State of Israel conducted *Operation Solomon*, transporting more than 14,000 *olim* from Ethiopia to Israel, most of whom were Beita Israel—Ethiopian Jews who had maintained their religious identity. Following[[2]](#footnote-2) this first mass migration, about 3,000 members of the ZBI, intending to make *aliyah*, arrived from their villages to Addis Ababa and Gondar, where transit camps had been created for those seeking to migrate to Israel. Their motives for immigrating were varied: Some wished to reunite with their families that had already immigrated as Jews, while others had problems with their neighbors because of their historical status as Jews. For yet others, economic motivations were key.

Although having relatives in Israel, this group of ZBI did not meet the criteria for Jewishness of the Law of Return and Israeli immigration policies and were thus not granted *oleh* status (Rubinstein Committee 1991, Clause A; Waldman and Kimchi 1992). Because the Law of Return distinguishes between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants and refugees, as non-Jewish descendants of Jews, the ZBI *a priori* presented a challenge to this legal distinction. Thus, initial applications to migrate to Israel were rejected, and they found themselves stranded in the camps, unwilling to return to their villages but unable to continue to their intended destination.

The ensuing controversy led then-prime minister Yitzhak Shamir to establish the Rubinstein Committee in 1991 to examine the ZBI’s entitlement to make *aliyah*. The Committee’s discussions mark the beginning of the processes of labeling and categorization with regard to the ZBI, beginning with its reference in committee minutes to “the *Falashmura* problem.” So defined, it was indicative of the establishment’s approach to the ZBI community as a ‘problem’ and one essentially related to classification. The question was how (or if) the ZBI should be classified so as to confer upon them *oleh* status?

The Israeli establishment, and Israeli society in general, have held ambivalent positions regarding the ZBI, evident from the very first discussions of their case at the Rubinstein Commission hearings. Some argued the ZBI were motivated to make *aliyah* for purely economic reasons. Israel’s ambassador to Ethiopia in 1995, for example, described them as “residents of destitute Ethiopia in search of a better place in the wider world.” Others, including members of Israel’s Beita Israel Ethiopian community, labeled them as “gentiles” (Sharvit 2004). In 1995, one activist, in a letter sent to the head of the conversion administration complained that, “The state is bringing in gentiles of our color, from the same country we came from” (Brendstain 2008). At the same time, others described these same ZBI as “Jews who go lost on the way,” or as “full-fledged Jews" (State Comptroller 2008). Such conflicting views, expressed across decades of government debates and resolutions, also resonate in the daily life of the ZBI, in the way they view themselves, and in they way they are viewed by those around them.

A a major complication to the ZBI’s right to migrate to Israel was posed by the mass migration to Israel from the Former Soviet Union (FSU)—that also began in the early 1990s and among whom some did not have migration rights under the Law of Return. Both groups posed unique challenges to Israel’s existing migration laws by highlighting the tension between the reigning Halachic Judaism and enshrined in Israeli state laws, and alternative streams and perceptions of being Jewish. Adding to the ambiguity of the whole situation, the different solutions for each group were not necessarily consistent with one another (Harel 2015; Kemp & Reichman 2003; Yaron 2015), and challenged the definition of the State of Israel as exclusively a state of Jewish migration (Kemp 2008).

Questions Israeli policy makers entertained about the authenticity of the ZBI’s Jewishness led to long periods of waiting and uncertainty, a situation that has not yet changed significantly since 1991. Between 1991 and 2018, around 48,000 ZBI were eventually granted the right to migrate to Israel. Their lives in Israel began with another prolonged stay in absorption centers for around two years, and only then did they move into permanent dwellings. Others ZBI, however, are still waiting to be granted the right to migrate to Israel; some have been waiting for more than 20 years.

***The politics of labeling and creating hybridity***

 and XXX

The ideological, religious, political, economic, and racial context in which the ZBI live has meant that struggling for acceptance is their daily reality. Despite their attempts to belong to a defined and stable category as *olim,* and thus as part of the Jewish mainstream of Israel, they are confronted daily with issues of labeling. Multiple actors and forces, from state bureaucracies to NGOs, play a role in this complex reality and affect the ZBI both directly and indirectly. Moreover, the state’s arbitrary and ambiguous procedures and the resulting frequent policy changes have created a sense of insecurity and the need for vigilance among the ZBI. For example, the community has experienced a years-long chronicle of changing government decisions regarding their right to enter Israel as *olim*, endless debates about their Jewishness and the resources directed toward them, and a long history of government functionaries evading the questions about the immigration status of those who waiting to immigrate (Author, 2006).

The very name *Falasmura* (or Falashmura, as it came to be used in public Israeli discourse) demonstrates the inclination towards labeling and exclusion directed toward the ZBI. It is not the name the community uses for itself, but rather a mispronunciation of a label that Ethiopians have used to describe—and exclude— Beita Israel, the Jews of Ethiopia, even after they converted to Christianity. Eshkoli (1943) understood the root F-L-S as derived from the Ge’ez (biblical and classic Ethiopian) for “immigrant” or “exile”; Leslau (1976, 244), a linguist, claimed that the word means to “lose roots, wander, immigrate.”[[3]](#footnote-3) This understanding is consistent with the fact that Ethiopian Christians perceived Beita Israel, as well as those among the community who had converted to Christianity, as rootless and detached. In interviews, members of the Christian convert community noted that, although they lived as Christians, the Christians called them *Falashmura* as a term of abuse.

The use of the names Falasha and Falashmura thus contributed to social exclusion in both Ethiopia and Israel (Wethrell & Potter 1992). According to one interviewee, “When they wanted to tease me in Ethiopia, they called me Falasha, and in Israel the state and the people call me Falashmura. There they tell me that I don’t belong, and the same here. So, where’s my home? Where do I belong?” (Yosef, Israel, 2010).

Decades after the Rubinstein Committee meetings and long after many of the ZBI made *aliyah* to Israel, the question of ZBI entitlement and belonging remains a subject of debate.[[4]](#footnote-4) The use of seemingly permanent labels creates gaps between the perceptions of policymakers and parts of the Israeli public regarding Ethiopian Jews, and the self-perceptions of Ethiopian Jews themselves. These gaps stem from the differences between the static and predefined notions held by policymakers and the dynamic and complex reality of the lives of Ethiopian Jews. The identity of the ZBI has been questioned throughout their entire migration process and this doubt is embedded in the very terminology used by different forces. The name ZBI, used throughout this chapter, specifically avoids this history as it has not yet acquired an explicit political significance. Nonetheless, the range of names and labels applied to them clearly reflects their complex position in both Ethiopian and Israeli societies.

The criteria defining who could make *aliyah* have shifted and changed during the decades of immigration from Ethiopia, but the process of application has remained the same. Usually, relatives in Israel must apply to the Ministry of Interior and request reunification with their relatives. They are required to provide a detailed geneology on a form that is first examined by representatives of the Ministry and then by the Israeli Consulate in Ethiopia, which summons the prospective immigrants for an investigation. Details of the investigation are then sent back to the Ministry of the Interior where the case is evaluated and permission granted or denied. As expected, this process can take many years. Until 2011, candidates were typically not informed of the decision and many continued to wait in vain for a response from the Israeli government.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In sum, Israel’s treatment of ZBI is different from its treatment of all other *olim*, as reflected in the drawn out immigration process, the unique testing of their Jewishness, and in the control it then exerted over their options and opportunities once they arrive (for example, in education, employment and reproduction).

**3. Findings**

Below we compare changes in limited hybridity using field work and interview data at two points along the ZBI’s transit points: the transit camps in Ethiopia with the goal of migrating to Israel (between 2005 and 2011) and permanent settlement in Israel a decade later (between 2022 and 2023).

**Limited Hybridity in the Transit Camp**

I was born in a village near Shaura, and I was a kid like everyone else. I played and I helped around the house. When friends were angry with me or wanted to make fun of me, they called me Falasha, and then I understood that Ethiopia isn’t really my home. One day, when I was nine years old, my parents said, “Come, we’re leaving the village and going to Jerusalem.” The next day we were gone. Two days later I was in Gondar. I tried to find friends and family but didn’t find many. All of a sudden, we had no land and no agriculture; I couldn’t just run around like I used to. I saw other people and they all told me I’m Beita Israel. In the beginning, I didn’t understand what that meant. Then my father told me that we were making *aliyah* to Israel and will be with the family, and we’ll be Beita Israel. Then we stayed in Gondar for many years, we waited there for nine years. Meanwhile, I grew up and started going to school like everyone, then I switched to a Beita Israel school, and we also had a synagogue and a library where I learned Hebrew. I waited many years to make *aliyah* to Israel, and when we did I was really happy. I thought it would be great fun here [that] I’ll be like everyone. I’ll have a family, I’m coming to the country that my father and grandfather dreamed about all their lives, that I dreamed about so much. And then they told me that I have to study Judaism and take tests to show them that I’m a Jew… (Elpha, 2011, absorption center).

In the interview, Elpha described his transition from life in the village as a Christian Ethiopian citizen to the transit camp in Gondar, as well as the transition from being an Ethiopian citizen who migrated to the city to becoming a candidate for *aliyah*. At the transit camp he was exposed to the concept of *oleh,* and changed his lifestyle accordingly, trying to adapt to the category so as to be able to immigrate to Israel. When describing being unable to go about freely and of his feelings of alienation and not belonging, Elpha highlights the tension between wanting to be an *oleh* and his experience of rootlessness and being a refugee in his own country. His views were expressed by other newcomers to the transit camp where they felt like migrants or temporary visitors who did not belong, while experiencing the loss of home, compounded by poverty and hunger (Talmi-Cohn 2018).

The transit camp was also where people first encountered Israeli demands, laws, and expectations regarding who qualified for *oleh* status. It was at this point that clear and open categorization took place: a person became a migrant, an *oleh*, or a refugee. To ensure their status as potential *olim* during this waiting stage, members of the ZBI community began to participate in Jewish ritual activities and modify their behavior to match state expectations. Essentially, they exercised agency in specific ways in order to conform to the immigration category to which they aspired to belong.

The establishment of the camps as transit points significantly challenged existing categories of citizenship and migration in both Ethiopia and Israel, and encouraged those waiting to fit into the categories that came into being during that time; categories that were shaped collaboratively by the actions of those waiting, the various organizations tending to them, and the nation-states involved.

Below I describe the contradictory dynamics of categorizing the ZBI in further detail and analyze the formation of categories in these stations.

Although the Israeli government did not maintain a direct presence in the transit camp, there were frequent visits by government officials and the ongoing presence of aid NGOs (Seeman 2009; Talmi-Cohn 2014), the most prominent of which were the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOJ) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. These agencies provided subsistence aid, primarily food and medication, as well as spiritual help through the provision of a synagogue, library, and *mikveh* (ritual purification bath), as well as tutoring assistance to help the children with their studies. Other organizations provided spiritual aid focused on the return of the ZBI to active Jewish practice.

The aid provided by those various organizations helped create a community whose members were unified by their desire to obtain *oleh* status and make *aliyah*. These characteristics clearly distinguished them from the locals, a situation different from what they experienced in their villages, where even if a person dreamed of going to Israel, there was nothing concrete or tangible to differentiate them from the wider environment.

In return for the aid—and ultimately as a condition for making *aliyah—*members of the ZBI community were sometimes obliged to demonstrate the type of behavior deemed appropriate for returning to Judaism. They had to shed all characteristics relating to their Christian life and to work toward being classified as Jews. For some, the return was swift. As they saw it, once they stopped eating meat like the Christians, continued to avoid intermarriage with Christians, and stopped wearing a cross, they had converted and were once again Beita Israel. Many started attending synagogue, where some of the children learned that they were descendants of Beita Israel, and adults began to acquire a deeper understanding of religious faith and practice:

When we got to [the transit camp in] Gondar we went to synagogue and stopped eating meat. We had a ceremony there, and took off the necklaces with the crosses we’d been wearing. After this, we became Beita Israel. Now, we go to synagogue every morning, and we celebrate the Jewish holidays. We stopped being like everyone else, the way we had been in the village. We returned to Grandma and Grandpa’s culture (Mersha, Gondar transit camp, 2005).

Although Mersha felt that changing some habits and espousing others was sufficient for her to regain the label “Jew,” Taganu described his return to Judaism as a complicated process that required constant engagement with the choice between Judaism and Christianity:

When we got to [the transit camp in] Gondar, I knew that I was Beita Israel. I tried to follow the Beita Israel culture, but it wasn’t easy in the beginning. You see, when it was [the Christian holiday of] Timkat or Aba Gabriel, I couldn’t stop celebrating, so I went with them. I’d be with Beita Israel all the time, but sometimes it was like before (2009, Israel).

The prolonged waiting was understood at times as a message from a government bureaucracy that doubted their Judaism. This indirect perceived message was also conveyed through arbitrary and inexplicable acts like changes in immigration quotas, or the intermittent withholding and reissuing of permits . The vague and shifting policies regarding the status of the ZBI preserved the power relations between the would-be migrants and the state, which was heedless of the distress caused by the long wait for the classification that would entitle them to move to Israel These actions created constant reminders about the limits of movement.

The ZBI’s return to Judaism also created tensions between those waiting for *aliyah* in their villages and their Christian neighbors. When I first visited with Nazirat in Gondar in 2005, we entered a yard shared by a few small houses, and while Nazirat busied herself preparing coffee, the neighbors gathered and started to chat. When I asked Nazirat which of her relatives were in Israel, she just gave me a strange look and did not answer. I was silent. I did not understand what had happened, but realized that I had done something wrong. At the end of our meeting, I asked her what had happened and she explained: “We’re new here. The landlady doesn’t know for sure if we’re Beita Israel, so we don’t talk about this. I'm actually studying for a B.A at the university and I’m not completely with those who are waiting. We don’t want any problems. Even now, she asks us once in a while why we don’t come to church.”

Two years later, when I visited Nazirat again, she had moved with her family to a house that shared a common yard with the houses of other people waiting to make *aliyah*. When I asked Nazirat why they had moved, she explained: “When the neighbors realized that we were Beita Israel, they started giving us weird looks, and we didn’t feel comfortable. We wanted to go to synagogue and be with everyone, and that’s when they heard about it. They didn’t say a thing, but their behavior toward us changed. They understood that we were Beita Israel, and then the landlady decided to raise our rent. No other neighbor had their rent increased, only us. When Mother asked her why, she said, “You’re Beita Israel; you get help and money from Israel.”

Indeed, the conflict between those waiting in the transit camps and their Christian neighbors was intensified by the fact that they received money from their families in Israel, and especially because of the ongoing assistance from the aid organizations, who helped only those defined as “waiting to make *aliyah*.” This distinction also caused problems vis-à-vis the local authorities, who viewed these organizations as exclusionary and discriminatory and called for them to give equal access to all the people in the area, prospective migrants or not.

In the transit camps, the mere belonging to a certain religious group createds a constant reference to the immigration limits and the role they are supposed to perform. Over the years, locations in a big city, along with the continuity of the gift, meetings with immigrants and/or relatives allowed them to think globally and produce globality.

The desire to belong to the immigrant community along with the long wait, the move from a village to the city, and a move of residences within the city, the fact that over the years some have moved residences and are in other neighborhoods created unique combinations of those waiting between being Ethiopian citizens, waiting for *aliya*, internal immigrants who dream of being immigrants in Israel.

 This unique combination is reflected for example in the names members of the community chose for their babies: “I chose to name my daughter Ziona, because Israel is Zion and I am waiting to immigrate to Israel with her” (Habtam to 2021). Similarly, Mentagbush relates that, “In the village the names were not the same, some were called Yohannes or Jeremiah. Here sometimes they call a baby by a biblical Jewish name like Yosef or David or by other non-religious Ethiopian names. There are those who call their child a name related to the one they have been waiting for many years such as Tesfahon which is hope or because of something that happened to them in the transit camp” (2011).

The Amharic language also changed in the transit camp, “it’s not the same language anymore, in the village they speak a different Amharic, if you go there you won’t understand. It doesn’t sound the same. They also speak more in stories, but here in Gondar it’s the Amharic of the city, and because we’re also waiting to immigrate to Israel, we use the words in Hebrew such as ‘prayer’ or ‘synagogue.’ …Those who live in Gondar understand us and those who live in the village are not the same. There are also those who use words in English” (Degarga 2010)

The desire to do everything for *aliya,* alongside the long wait, created different patterns of hybridity. Some were overwhelmed with the long preparations for Israel alongside everyday life; some decided to live as Ethiopians with little reference to the wait for the *aliya*. Between these poles, a movement was created, a dynamism of hybrid spaces affected by the timing of *aliyah.*

There are things that separate us from the others in Gondar, but it's not like it used to be. Once, for example, everyone went with the Magen David [worn outside on a chain, but] not always... Once you came to visit us and we were in high school, then we were really, really one group. Today we've grown up and we're adults; we dream of *aliyah* and we are very, very [much] waiting. We have friends and family in Israel; we talk to them and they come to visit, but we also have friends from Gonder, who, when we were little, tried to separate us so that we would only be with Beita Israel but who grew up and already went to study with others so some became friends. …. There are [also] those who really connected with the Christians and then they go to hang out with them and … there are those who continue to be friends of the community (Semaniw 2023).

Everyone knows everyone in the neighborhood, and also in the other neighborhood, but there are those who have moved to other neighborhoods, to the market, to a hospital, to all kinds of neighborhoods further away because it costs a lot of money here. Everyone thinks that the family sends us money from Israel, although it is not true, but it is expensive here. For example, I live with my mother nearby, my wife and her children live with her mother in the city. I go to them but also [go] with my mother because all my siblings are in Israel and there is no one to be with her. She doesn’t want to move far from the community because here she knows everyone. My children don’t attend a community school. They do sometimes come to the synagogue, on holidays, or sometimes on Shabbat. Those who live nearby are very strong in the community. There is a Bnei Akiva [youth movement] [and] there are Jewish studies. There is a synagogue, there is a lot of the community and we continue to be strong, but there are all kinds of [challenges]... For example, someone can go to drink coffee with Christians and not be told anything [negative], or even get married [to a Christian] (xxxx).

Although those waiting for *aliyah* were doing so in their own country, their life differed from the one that they had lived in their villages or towns. They could not return to their homes, and they could not go to Israel. Their life in the transit camps was temporary, their self-definition differentiated them from the local population, and their status and everyday livese were shaped by definitions and frameworks that had been created by Israeli and U. S.-based bureaucracies and organizations. These unique circumstances turned them into a new class of refugees—those waiting to immigrate (Talmi-Cohn 2006). Berhanu described the experience in 2010:

I have no place to return to. We’re here in Gondar, that’s what we were told to do. We got an announcement from the Israeli government to get here so we could make *aliyah* to Israel. […] They told us to come, and I thought that we’d be here for a little while. We rushed out and left everything in the village. Then we got here, and we’re waiting. We’re just waiting. We have nothing. Whatever we have is what people send us or the help we get from NACOEJ. We have no land, we have no food. For seven years, I thought, maybe we’ll go to Israel, but no…. It’s not good to live this way in Gondar. I have nothing here, no family and no work. Everyone makes fun of me that I’m Beita Israel. They steal our money and do bad things.

Bound by their detached and difficult situation, the ZBI had no choice but to do what they were told, especially as they hoped that compliance would lead to confirmation of their *oleh* status and an *aliyah* permit. The situation drove many to poverty and a sense of alienation and detachment from the place where they now found themselves. Although ostensibly they were in their own country and amidst neighbors, they were actually homeless and unemployed and lacked a sense of belonging to the place where they were.

The ZBI migration process is inseparable from other similar processes in Ethiopia (Tadele, Pankjurst, Bevan, and Lavers 2006), especially in Gondar, a large city where different groups have indicated the desire to leave Ethiopia. There are many reasons for wanting to leave Ethiopia, including seeking a wider range of income opportunities (Alula 1989; Kothari 2003; McDowell and de Hann 1997; Stark 1991; Worku 1995), reasons related to women’s status in society (Gurmu 2005), and educational, religious, and medical motives.

In the transit camps in Gondar and elsewhere, people remain Ethiopian citizens. In their own minds, however, they live with the status of transit migrants from the moment that they left their villages and arrived at the transit camps where they wait to migrate to Israel, existing in a local discourse of migration. From the perspective of the Israeli government, however, this group of people does not fit any category and, consequently, they are simply under investigation. The space in which they reside is, therefore, marked by hybridity.

**7. Next Step Israel**  (I will continue and show how limited hybridity is reflected in life in Israel after Aliyah)

1. **Conclusions**

Every country has its own means of determining who can be allowed into its territory on the basis of classifications as a citizen, migrant, or refugee. This is the principal instrument by which a state can control its national ‘character’ and social order. The experiences of people in their everyday life, however, do not necessarily conform to these definitions, thus , thus leading to the creation limited hybridec – daily life that combine in diffrent ways law, place, globalization and the migration proceses.

This article presents the tensions between the various definitions and the process of categorization that immigrants are forced to carry out if they want to immigrate alongside the human creativity that enables movement and a variety of direct and indirect ways for the continuity and adaptation of life patterns

The ZBI, a group whose definition is as unclear in its country of origin as it is in its country of destination, is a specific case of the confluence of categories in one group. However, they are not unique; The encounter with various categories developed along the journey of immigration is an experience shared by all people moving from place to place, with each place stamping them not only with cultural values but with bureaucratic labels. This is a global issue of increasing relevance, when people seek refuge regardless of whether they have been recognized as refugees. Indeed, it is this tension between human needs and desires and bureaucratic definitions that lies at the heart of the immigration experience.

The Israeli state’s treatment of ZBI immigrants is a combination of acceptance and embrace on the one hand, and rejection and alienation on the other. Paradoxically, the journey they embarked upon motivated by doubts about their belonging to religious and social categories in Ethiopian society leads to new doubts, this time about belonging to the dominant socio-religious category in Israel. Doubts about identity and the subsequent processes have made the immigration and absorption process of this community unique in the history of Israeli immigration.Despite the considerable resources and efforts invested by the State of Israel and the aid agencies in bringing the ZBI to Israel and integrating them into society, the state’s insistence on strict categories makes the ZBI a community in perpetual waiting, which must fight for its place in Israel.

This study focuses on …..

The process of migration, beyond the physical movement from place to place, is a dialogue with stronger forces that shape migrants’ own perceptions of citizenship and belonging. They are actively engaged in an ongoing dialogue with labels and categories applied to them as migrants and others: (1) the questions of status and possibility of citizenship hang over them constantly (2) it is states that define the migrants’ status, and definitions of citizenship vary depending on the immigrants country of origin. In other words, definitions are not applied uniformly to all migrants. (3) The range of interactions at each stage along the migration route further challenge the very categories applied to the migrants, generating new labels and provoking novel responses to those labels. (4) migrants act in response to the categories imposed upon them, but they exercise their agency in some circumstances by choosing the categories to which they adapt themselves , for example by beginning to practice Halachic Judaism, so as to qualify for the category of *Olim*.

Finally, categories and labels do not merely define a migrant’s status, but have a powerful affect on that migrant’s daily life and being. This categorization does not simply affect the migrants, but also defines the state's own social boundaries and hierarchies and thus, profoundly shapes the state and society at large.

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1. I have reflected elsewhere on how my identity as a woman, an Israeli, white, and Jewish shaped my relationships with my subjects, the questions I asked, the responses I received and my interpretation of the social reality within which I existed (Talmi-Cohn 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. At the end of 2022, the population of Ethiopian origin in Israel numbered 168.8 thousand residents, 92.1 thousand born in Ethiopia and 76.8 thousand born in Israel whose father was born in Ethiopia. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. One explanation of the word *Falashmura* is that the Amharic word “mora” was added following the conversion to Christianity and that the word means “converted foreigners.” (Corinaldi 1998, 121; Elizur 1998; Salamon 1999, 67-69). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Talmi-Cohn (2006) for an in-depth review of the position of State of Israel toward the ZBI from 1991 to 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)