# **הקדמה**

הדיון האחרון במושג האזרחות מצביע על שחיקה וטרנספורמציה במובנים המסורתיים של אזרחות ככלי להקצאה של משאבים, זכויות וכניסה לקהילה הפוליטית. מגמות גלובליות כמו גידול באי-שוויון והגירת עבודה שמשנים את פניה של הקהילה הפוליטית, מייצרות צורות חדשות של אזרחות, טראנס-לאומיות וקוסמופוליטיות, לצד הפיכתה של האזרחות לפעולה מוסדית שנשענת על היגיון ניאו-ליברלי. כפועל יוצא, נוצר מודל חדש של אזרחות ניאו-ליברלית (Joppke 2021) או Ordinal Citizenship (Fourcade 2021) המתאפיינת במדידה דקדקנית של כושר היצרנות של פרטים. לצד זאת, חוקרים אחרים מצביעים על כך שההיגיון הניאו-ליברלי שמעצב מחדש את מושג האזרחות איננו כבול רק לערכים של השוק החופשי, אלא, הוא פועל לצד היגיון לאומי שתובע היטמעות תרבותית והפנמה של ערכי הקהילה המקבלת. מודל זה נקרא אזרחות ניאו-ליברלית קהילתנית (Neo-Liberal Communitarian Citizenship) והוא מדגים את השינויים שחלו בקריטריונים להכלה של מהגרים בעלי כישורים-גבוהים בארצות מערביות (Schinkel and Van Houdt 2010).

המחקר שלנו יראה כיצד מודלים אלו של אזרחות אינם תקפים רק לתהליכים של הכלה והדרה במדינות מפותחות שמתמודדות עם הגירת עבודה, ואינם קשורים רק בשינויים בתפקוד ובמבנה המוסדי המדינתי. אנחנו, לעומת זאת, מבקשים להראות שאזרחות היא קודם כול מכלול של שיחים בעלי מטען משמעות שנתון להקשרים של לזמן ולמקום. באמצעות ראיונות עומק שהתקיימו עם חברים בולטים בקהילת הסיינטולוגיה בישראל, נראה כיצד דתות חדשות משתמשות במאפיינים התאגידיים שלהן כדי לרתום שיחי אזרחות מקומיים ובכך להיות מוכלים בקהילה הפוליטית. לאורך המחקר נצביע על כך שאזרחות כשיח איננה רק פעולה מדינתית, אלא היא גם בגדר אסטרטגיה של מיעוטים להשתלב בקהילה הפוליטית. הטענה המרכזית שלנו היא שאסטרטגיית הלגיטימציה של המרכז לסיינטולוגיה בישראל רותמת בהצלחה את מודל האזרחות הניאו-ליברלית קהילתנית באמצעות עיצוב של שני מסלולי השתלבות: בעוד האחד מדגיש את הכישורים שחברות בדת תאגידית מפתחת ואת ההצלחה בשוק החופשי; המסלול השני מראה את ההשתלבות התרבותית וההזדהות עם הערכים המקומיים, שבמובן זה נוגעים לשייכות ליהדות ולתרומה לקהילה. בכך מצליחה אסטרטגיית ההשתלבות לשלב בין היגיון אתנו-לאומי יהודי להיגיון של השוק החופשי, ובכוחם של אלו להסביר את ההצלחה והקבלה היחסית שלה זוכה המרכז לסיינטולוגיה בישראל.

דרך מקרה הבוחן של המרכז לסיינטולוגיה בישראל, שחבריו פועלים במרחב פלורליסטי מוגבל, נראה כיצד משמשים שיחי אזרחות כאסטרטגיה לקבלת לגיטימציה של מיעוט דתי, שמבקש לייצר מרחב אמוני אלטרנטיבי, במדינה שבה הלאומיות והאזרחות ממוסגרות תחת היגיון אתנו-לאומי, דתי-יהודי. במדינת ישראל השייכות האתנו-לאומית ליהדות היא תנאי הכרחי לקבלת זכויות ופריווילגיות, וחברי המרכז לסיינטולוגיה בישראל, משתמשים בזהות היהודית שלהם בדיוק לשם כך – באמצעות רתימת שיח אזרחות אתנו-לאומי יהודי, הם מבקשים לקבל מרחב פעולה ולגיטימציה לפעילות דתית שאיננה מזוהה, ואף עלולה להיתפס כמאתגרת, לזהות האתנו-לאומית הדומיננטית.

# **NRM as a Corporate Religions**

Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, NRM (new religious movements) developed around the globe, borrowing neo-liberal ideas which place the individual to live the lifestyle as he seems fit. The need for individuals to form an individualized framework of belief and identity has led to the fast spread of religion entrepreneurs, most of them NRM. Peter Berger (2003) points to the formation of a global culture in which there is renewed interest in adopting religious identities, traditional and new ones, while weaving together various and often hybrid and eclectic elements of belief. Therefore, various researchers conceptualize the renewal and growth of NRM in macroeconomic terms, thriving within a spiritual marketplace (Beckford 2007; Berger 2003; Chestnut 2003; Lambert 1999; Orgad 2015; Roof 2001). The erosion of traditional religious institutions amidst the growth of NRMs and has changed the economic structure of religion from a monopolistic market to a dynamic, pluralistic arena, while successful players must adapt their global faith system to local markets of faith (Berger 2003; Chestnut 2003).

 Some features have come to characterize NRMs: new doctrines and practices that differ significantly from those of mainstream society, an authoritative leader\s, and driving missionary zeal. Many NRM integrate modern therapy techniques and healing practices within their teachings and activities, and operate much like global economic enterprises. Although some of these groups originated from Christian denominations, others originated in non-western, particularly Asian settings, and many of them have become global movements (Arweck, 2002; Beckford 2004; Bromley, 2007; Clarke 2006).

Most NRMs encounter opposition, and are compelled to develop strategies to overcome the negative reaction of established religions and majority culture (Arweck 2007; Lewis 2003). Consequently NRMs may not only face a reality, in which old religions remain significant and actively struggle to maintain their authority, but also confront social and political structures. The strategies developed to address opposition, by mobilizing citizenship logic local discourses, are the focus of this paper, in which we analyze these issues through a case study examining the Scientology Center in Israel.

the Church of Scientology is the most consistently controversial (Lewis & Hellesøy, 2016). Urban (2011) views the Church of Scientology as one of the strongest and wealthiest religious organizations in the world. There are currently 11,000 branches in 167 countries which are identified as local missions and affiliates of the world-organization[[1]](#footnote-1). Until two decades ago, the Church of Scientology would react vehemently to any criticism raised against it, and it would frequently use legal means against any denouncers (Lewis & Hellesøy 2016). The Church of Scientology was officially established in 1954 by L. Ron Hubbard, a prolific and successful science fiction writer. Hubbard became famous following the publication of his book, Dianetics in 1950, copies of which are still sold by the millions each year (Frisk 2006). He then began to promote, as in other publications, the ideas which have since become the guiding tenets of Scientology even today: These include a belief in man as a basically good spiritual being, which following the accumulation of "engrams" – memories of painful or post-traumatic events – has difficulty in making the right decisions for living a good healthy life. Hubbard laid the foundations for Scientology's critique of the mental health system and particularly the use of psychiatric drugs in his books (Melton 2000; Whrite 2013; Wilson 2004). As is the case for other NRMs, Scientology proposes to combine religion with therapy for the empowerment of an individual's personal potential and as an alternative to psychiatry.

Like other NRMs, Scientology demands a radical change of the social order through the transformation of each and every individual. This new social order depends on the individual's emancipation, following the completion of paid workshops and training sessions which advance him on the 'Bridge to Total Freedom'. The state of Clear is the province of a man who has overcome the "reactive mind", meaning a new spiritual consciousness which is beneficial for the individual and his surrounding (Bromley, 2009).

The personal advancement of the individual testifies to the influence of neo-liberal ideas regarding the theological perceptions of Scientology, which formed in capitalistic corporate America. Bromley claims that Scientology successfully merging religion with capitalism. Even though registered as a not-for-profit organization, the it operates as a corporation religion providing spiritual advancement through the acquisition of products and therapy: "**Business and religion are unified, creating a *corporate religion* where the spirit of capitalism and spiritual salvation are harmonized, where spiritual salvation can be earned and purchased**" (Bromley, 2009, 100).

This merger between economics and religion, and the linkage between religion, business and therapy – marks the Church of Scientology as a popular *corporate religion*. Its corporate behavior is expressed in numerous ways: a) Scientology protects its logo, technology and Hubbard's writings through trademarks and copyrights; b) each one of its "missions" operates as a local franchise; c) A certain share of the revenues derived from training and other courses are transferred to the central headquarters, while the local franchises receive remuneration for recruiting new members; providing personal coaching services allegedly based on scientific and principles aimed at unveiling and maximizing a person's potential (Horonborg, 2013; Lockwood 2016)

The neo-liberal motif of individual success, personal advancement and self-fulfillment as a result of the spiritual process is a recurrent theme in Scientology, as evidenced in our interviews as well as the research of others (Wallis 1984; Urban 2011). Rather than sanctifying divinity, the Church of Scientology sanctify the Authentic Self, "thetan", which is buried and hidden behind past traumas and modern processes of socialization. The process of uncovering the Authentic Self is spiritual, and is undertaken through "technological", rational and scientific means. This discovery leads to the fulfillment of each individual's ultimate potential, and finds expression on different levels, especially the enhancement of creativity and wealth accumulation. The proficiency in the technology can be acquired by purchasing workshops and courses (Lewis 2009; Lockwood 2016:178; Wallis 1984:34).

Moreover, like other corporate religions, Scientology views the advancement of the individual as an important step towards the big societal change it seeks to generate under its theological vision. The redemption of society is intimately linked to the personal redemption of each individual. Accordingly, as a corporate religion, Scientology developed therapeutic and rehabilitative programs worldwide, which are designed to appeal to marginal populations, such as prisoners, drug addicts, welfare recipients and school children (Flinn 2009; Melton 2000). On the one hand, these programs cast Scientology's social role as beneficial, philanthropic and contributing. On the other hand, the programs designed to promote a broader theological vision, *the redemption of all humankind*, in the sense that they facilitate Scientology's ability to reach target audiences, which to its thinking, are in special need of the services that the Church provides. Individual therapy is in essence the incremental therapy of society at large, in which the advancement of each individual ultimately sparks the creation of a new society liberated from old emotional habits (Lockwood 2016).

# **Citizenship as integration strategy**

Despite its successful expansion, the Church of Scientology, as well as other NRM, are perceived as a cult, and considered an entity which endangers individuals and society at large (Barker 2014; Olson 2006). The case of Israel, a country which does not separate church from state, is even more acute (Zaidman-Dvir and Sharot, 1992). For this reason, NRMs endeavor to find ways to climatize themselves and integrate in the host society. Therefore, they must formulate strategies to assist them in adapting contemporaneously to local reality. Just as Bromley binds NRMs to corporate behavior in a global market of religions, Beckford and Levasseur (1986) point to the possibility of self-healing and *individual improvement* as one of the defining characteristics of NRMs. In this case, however, the individual and societal improvement techniques are not just part of either the theological vision of corporate behavior, but rather part of *the integration strategy* used to obtain legitimacy in the host society.

We wish to add another observation to these insights and point to an additional dimension, which is the *enlistment of the citizenship discourse* and status of NRM members. It is rather impossible to grasp the scope of citizenship study, as it seems utterly challenging to explore the ongoing theoretical novelties in the field. Citizenship is a part of a process of inclusion, which not only confers social status and rights, but access to participation in decision-making as well (Ben-Porat & Turner 2011). Completing multiple roles and varied functioning, citizenship marks the boundaries of communitarian affiliation as well as political and social rights (Turner 1986); as it enables the inclusion of individuals according to different criteria (Shafir and Peled 2002). As Bosniak (2000) articulates, citizenship refers to different modes of civic participation and governance, rights and duties, identities and commitments, and statutes (p. 450).

Though globalized trends exponentially spreading, reshaping and generating citizenship erosion (transnational, cosmopolitan etc.) (Turner 2001), scholars still see citizenship as the primary practice, process, and instrument of marginalization vs. inclusion in any national state (Bosniak 2000). Following globalization processes and the erosion of the liberal nature of citizenship (Turner 2001), new form of citizenship emerged while scholars debate about new practices of rights allocation and inclusion\exclusion. In that respect, Marion Fourcade's (2021) novelty of "Ordinal Citizenship" model reveal the new functioning of contemporary national state as the "*Data State*", in which citizens, especially "good citizens", are financially measured according to a socio-technical systems, under a general global process of extreme datafication. In response to the "*Ordinal Citizenship*" model, Joppke (2021) situated Fourcade's observation as a part of wider transformation in citizenship generated by global capitalism and market logic. According to Joppke, the obsessive nature of contemporary national states for ranking and digitalizing personal data of individuals is a part of a larger change of citizenship, *from liberal to neoliberal*.

Ordinal citizenship is a novel manifestation of market values affecting not only state services, but *the very possibility for gaining citizenship*, or, as Joppke articulate if, "the access to citizenship itself." Meaning, market criteria of personal economic performance are at large a means of inclusion, a gateway for one to be affiliated in the political community. The new form of ordinal citizenship re-commodifies the individual, measuring its contribution to the local market as to its ability to increase economic achievements. Ordinality goes together with meritocracy, which focusing on behavior, judges and sorts people by *what they do* rather than what they are: "In the neoliberal era, new citizens are expected not to be 'average' but 'ideal' or 'super-citizens' (Joppke, 2021: 186). According to Badenhoop (2017), rich-western countries apply ordinal citizenship as an inclusion process through prioritizes high-skilled immigrants. Though Joppke and Fourcade analyzing Ordinal citizenship as a new form of institution, we will address novel modes of citizenship as a discourse and as a integration strategy of marginal groups.

However, other processes affect contemporary citizenship rather than market values. Increasing immigration and economic turmoil seems to enforce national adherence, leading national state to embrace restrictive and deterrent citizenship policies. According to Van Houdt, Suvarierol and Schinkel (2011), these processes lead to (re)formulations of social contracts between (potential) citizens, civil society, the state and the markets; a *renewed sacralization* of the nation; and the need *to earn* one’s citizenship. Through examination of population management, researches indicate a new governmentality strategy of *Neo-Liberal Communitarian*, which emphasis not only individual market performance, but the importance of cultural assimilation into national community (Schinkel and Van Houdt 2010). Reattaching the discussion to a "good" or "ideal" citizen, *Neo-liberal Communitarian* is a form of citizenship and governmentality indicating that market performance and values are as good as long its bound to a cultural-national context; thus, emphasizing the importance of primordial imaginary characteristic to the national community and the need for one to implement local values and costumes.

Indeed, good or ideal citizenship signifies that citizenship status is a hierarchy, as individuals and groups obtain the prior values and contributing to the common good acquire legitimacy and status. At the same time, citizenship discourses indicate that numerous paths to integration and to the bestowal of rights outside the governmental framework exist (Shafir & Peled 2002). In the case of Israel, the enlistment of various citizenship discourses helps NRM members pinpoint their religion's contribution to society, and in this manner, creates a track to legitimacy and freedom of action.

The discussion of the concept of citizenship distinguishes between three citizenship discourses: republican citizenship, ethno-national citizenship and liberal citizenship (Peled & Shafir 2002). While the republican discourse emphasizes an individual's contribution to the common good through volunteering for national goals as the key to special rights and recognition, the ethno-national discourse imparts special rights and status solely on the basis of an individual's primordial origins as member of the majority group. In contrast, the liberal citizenship discourse views the bestowal of rights based on ethnic identity as a prerequisite. At the same time, in accordance with adaptation to the prevailing neo-liberal model, attainment of an individual's legitimacy, inclusion and civil status is also possible as recognition of his talent and economic performance (Joppke 2021).

From the establishment of the state, the structure of Israel's citizenship regime rests on three citizenship discourses. Peled and Shafir (2002) not only pointed to the parallel existence of each one of the three discourses, but also to competitive dynamics between them, such that at any given point of time, one becomes dominant relative to the others. The initial decades of the State of Israel's existence are significantly dominated by the republican citizenship discourse, which sought to allocate additional rights to those who contribute and sacrifice themselves for the common good. Good citizenship was measured in the contribution to the mission of nation-building, which included settling in the frontier, and of course, serving in the army, especially combat units (Peled and Shafir 2002; Lomsky-Feder and Sasson-Levy 2015).

Starting in the 1980s, however, changes in the competitive dynamics between citizenship discourses began to unfold, and while the collectivist-republican ethos faded, the ethos of individualism, competitiveness and productiveness associated with the neo-liberal citizenship discourse increasingly took hold. It is important to emphasize that during this time, national sentiment did not wane, but rather was woven into the liberal ethos of productivity designed to stimulate Israel's economic growth. However, Kemp (2007) and Reichman (2010) note that ethno-nationalist citizenship discourse, which seeks to preserve the country's Jewish character, is becoming more dominant in the sense that in many cases, such as the Israeli immigration policy, it dictates government policy. Moreover, Peled (2008) reviews his former theoretical work, suggesting that the liberalization of the Israeli economy has weakened the republican discourse, causing the liberal and ethno-nationalist ones to confront each other directly (p. 335). In his latest work, Peled (2019) provided numerous examples amplifies the ongoing religionization of Israel, indicating how the ethno-national citizenship discourses increasingly gaining priority over the others (Peled and Peled 2019).

The changes to the citizenship discourse in Israel are reflected in our Scientology Center case study as well. The members of the center identify themselves as good citizens appropriately to the neo-liberal communitarian model, while their integration strategy lies upon neo-liberal and ethno-national citizenship discourses: On the one hand, they emphasize their ethno-national Jewish identity, Israeli symbols and values; On the other hand, they enlist the neo-liberal citizenship discourse and the characteristics of Scientology as a corporate religion, and point to the latter's ability to help people optimize their individual abilities, rendering their lives productive, functional and worthwhile. All these serve the Scientology Center to create an integration strategy of good citizenship, which aims at attaining legitimacy and the freedom to recruit new members.

# Scientology and NRM in Israel

In Israel, Orthodox Judaism is a state-sponsored monopoly. However, while the *status quo* and the arrangements between state and church have remained unchanged since the 1950s, in practice the public realm has been undergoing processes of secularization and religious pluralism(Ben-Porat 2017). At the same time, however, the religious establishment in Israel struggle to preserve their standing, as is the struggle to maintain control in areas already within their purview, such as marriage, burial, conversion to Judaism and the supervision of *kashrut* (Jewish dietary law) (Ben-Porat 2016).

In Israel, not unlike other countries, the growth of NRMs and mysticism groups in the seventies and eighties provoked public panic and a strong backlash. Especially evident is the fact that NMRs and mysticism groups in Israel were monolithically and stereotypically assigned the vague and highly evocative title of cults. The Israeli anti-NRM coalition rests on: Orthodox elements, particularly ultra-Orthodox civil society groups; policy makers, most of which are notably conservative; and secular mass media, which reject religious beliefs and practices in general as dark and irrational (Sharir 2019; Beit-Hallahmi 1992; Ruah-Midbar & Klim-Oron 2013).

All the parties described above, therefore, served as key players and cooperated with the various public committees that were formed to discuss NRM. Between the years 1982-2011, four committees were convened by the government with the aim of studying and handling the problem of cults in Israel. To date, clear and concrete guidelines have not yet been set, in either primary or secondary legislation. However, a bill which seeks to narrow the range of activity undertaken by NRMs is pending deliberation (Beit-Hallahmi 1992; Cavaglion 2008; Ruah-Midbar & Klim-Oron 2013; Zaidman-Dvir & Sharot 1992). The bill is still pending final deliberation in the Knesset Plenum, and its ratification could halt the process of religious pluralization and secularization in Israel, not to mention, the freedom of faith.

Scientology activity in Israel was launched in 1972 by individual entrepreneurs, who set up small independent centers in Beer-Sheva and Tel-Aviv. The community was miniscule, but already at this nascent stage, it became the focal point for sharp opposition as a "mystic cult" in Israel (Beit Hallahmi 1992; Cavaglion 2008; Ruah-Midbar & Klin-Oron 2013; Zidman-Dvir & Sharot 1992). Other than the media negative coverage given to all mysticism groups and NRMs during those years (Sharir 2019), the activity against the Scientology organization was manifested in field work undertaken by *Yad L'Achim[[2]](#footnote-2)* activists, who waited outside the centers, harassing workers and passersby. Veteran activists recall that this threatening activity significantly endangered the development of the community, and its impact is still notable today.

We were reduced from a group of around 40 people working for the organization to 11 […] under the pretext that we are a cult, that we are some kind of religion that pulls people out of Judaism. They simply did such a good job of destroying, that until this day, actually even today, we have to… I don't know how to say it, rehabilitate our reputation[[3]](#footnote-3).

Some very good people study Scientology, practice Scientology, but they are scared. They are scared because, *Yad L'Achim*, means campaigns, and years-long war. There were years in which the government engaged in a real fight against Scientology, and that affects people… it's hard […] because the moment a person is afraid to say that he's a Scientologist […] You know, this makes expansion very difficult, and the government has an opinion. There are laws… now there is some law, some law that is stuck, but there is some law […] It doesn't directly target Scientology, but it will hurt Scientology and other religions[[4]](#footnote-4).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the hostile environment created in the 1980s does not necessarily reflect current reality. On the one hand, at least part of the community members interviewed claim that a feeling of defensiveness does remain, given the controversial reputation of Scientology worldwide, and the lingering hostility on the part of the anti-cult coalition. On the other hand, acknowledgement of a general trend towards religious pluralism, albeit limited, is palpable, and a certain space, which allows for a broader scope of activities and community membership does exist.

In 2012, the Scientology Center opened its doors on Jerusalem Blvd. in Jaffa and was inaugurated with a festive public event. The Center operates out of the Alhambra Theater – a multi-story historical building, originally built in 1937 as cultural center – which was renovated by the organization. Overall, the Center's activities are conducted unimpeded, and according to the senior managers, the number of participants in courses and volunteer activities grows each year.

Despite the resistance encountered by the Center's staff from time to time, at the end of the day, there is a consensus that the community and its members no longer have to contend with significant opposition, at least not in their daily life routine. Practically all interviewees believe that the community will grow – that the society at large is tolerant, attentive and even curious, and that the local expansion of Scientology in Israel is just a matter of time.

**The current situation for Scientology today in my opinion is that it is flourishing** […] I compare this to the situation in the past…Today I have clients who come to me just because I am a Scientologist […] Compare that with the situation 25, 20 and 15 years ago […] Today we are a full community. I look at how people react to me when I tell them that I am a Scientologist and that it is totally different than what it used to be. Back in the day, when I would say that I am a Scientologist, 11 people would get in my face […] **Today society accepts us, in my opinion, with open arms; even if the government less so** […][[5]](#footnote-5).

The reason for this is apparently stems from the changes that have occurred in Israeli society, but most importantly, because of the successful implementation of integration strategy, which facilitates its ability to adapt itself to the Israeli context. In this manner, the Center succeeds in expanding its activities, recruiting new members, and most important – acceptance in community and municipal frameworks, even if the same is not true regarding the government. This integration strategy that we describe below, rests on the characteristics of corporate religion, as it harnesses scientific-therapeutic discourse and the emphasis on the personal self-fulfillment of individuals. This integration strategy comprises **two** **separate** but complementary **tracks** – the first lies on the **neo-liberal** citizenship discourse, which evaluate individuals' productivity and skills performance; while the second is based on the **ethno-national** citizenship discourse, which focuses on Jewish identification and affiliation. Altogether, utilizing those two citizenship discourses marks the Scientology member as **ideal citizens** according to the **neo-liberal communitarian model**, thus pave the road toward inclusion and acceptance.

## **Corporate Religion and Neo-Liberal Citizenship Track**

*"We render our assistance in this country with great pride […] Our assistance is meant for you[[6]](#footnote-6)"*

One of the things really defining us is aid. Aid, but it is… sometimes it is boundless. There were days, when the coronavirus first hit, over 12 hours, to go to families at 12 midnight sometimes and they have no food for the Sabbath and to gather and bring […] suddenly it comes to you, it can be on Friday evening, and then you jump. There were people who gave their cars, gave money, I among others[[7]](#footnote-7).

The motif of rendering assistance to the community is a recurrent theme in many of the materials distributed by the international Church of Scientology and the Israeli center. Assistance is often rendered in emergencies and crises, in addition to the ongoing volunteer assistance requested by the various municipalities. In some cases, there is a network of volunteers affiliated with the municipal welfare departments, particularly those of Tel Aviv-Yafo and its surroundings. For example, in the early days of the covid crisis, the Center served as a key organizers of volunteer manpower, particularly for distributing food, tablets to senior citizens and various equipment to those in need[[8]](#footnote-8).

In other cases, and in keeping with the international activity conducted by the international church, the Israeli Center activates various non-profit organizations to work in many areas, starting with welfare, education and prisoner rehabilitation. Volunteers on behalf of the Center feel that the non-profit activity undertaken in the Center's name renders added value to society and the community:

Last Wednesday, I stopped at two restaurants, took food, filled the car and went to some organization in Ramat Gan that organizes food distribution to the needy on Fridays. I did this with my son. I took him to distribute to the needy here in Tel Aviv, and then we went to city hall, collected food and together went door to door to distribute it. Listen, first, in my opinion, it is important that he sees that I contribute, as an educational thing. I cannot explain to you how important it is. **I contribute**, he knows I contribute and he comes along with me. In my opinion, it's the best education. Second, I also involve him: you also contribute. You are doing something[[9]](#footnote-9).

The link to the municipalities is particularly important to understanding the perceptions of Scientology members as ideal citizens, and the recurring motif of Scientology Center volunteers providing vital services to the community.

There were 250 Holocaust survivors that needed to receive food packages, no one could. Because of covid everyone disappeared. The Tel Aviv Municipality immediately called and told us to come. Let's go, if you need us, we are here to help[[10]](#footnote-10).

We really enjoy that we can be beneficial. We are currently involved in a welfare project, to call 70,000 old people throughout Tel Aviv to check if they are alright. […] It's really fun. But here, the necessity, the need, makes it so - okay, let's go, who can do it? We are highly organized, we have lots of well-meaning people, so it is easy for us to respond to the need[[11]](#footnote-11).

The municipal activity is indeed cooperative and reciprocal, however, activity undertaken with institutions under government jurisdiction, such as schools and prisons, has not grown and usually occurs on a one-off basis at a specific institution. The Center's activity is still limited even when the projects rack up success.

There is an organization called Criminon, I was part of it for three years. I was a supervisor […] We were having a good time after the five-year checkup, 95% success. That means that five years after people were released from prison, 95% did not go back […] No rehabilitation program gets such good results. So, inside it was really fun with prisoners, it was crazy fun. But, inside prison there is… it's a system […] **if we had government recognition, they would demand to let us in even further[[12]](#footnote-12).**

A world without drugs, for human rights…**it would be nicer if we had access**… these activities are strictly secular, there is nothing Scientologist about them, **we are very aware of the sensitivity of this subject** […] From our standpoint, **these activities are really a desire to help generate change in Israel[[13]](#footnote-13).**

All these strengthen the insight that the international Church of Scientology, and particularly its Israeli branch, functions as a corporate religion. On the one hand, like any other corporate religion, it aspires to create a new society according to its broad theological vision. On the other hand, in addition to the aspiration to bring about personal and collective redemption to create a new society, the contribution to the community is also part of the ability of corporate religions to adapt themselves to various target audiences, and particularly to marginal segments of the population. In our view, these actions not only advance the organization's theological vision, but are part and parcel of its integration strategy, which seeks to distinguish the Scientology Center as a benefactor to the community and its members as ideal citizens.

At the same time, the integration strategy that aims at distinguishing the Scientology Center as socially beneficial is not limited to philanthropic, educational and rehabilitation activities alone. The vision of a corporate religion and particularly Scientology, sees the quest for general redemption as a process which first addresses the personal development and redemption of each individual. In this respect, Scientology member are ideal citizens not only because of their aids and contributes to the society; but rather because they are beneficial to the *empowerment of individuals*, helping them realize their potential through methods acquired in various workshops and courses.

In this manner, the Scientology Center enlists the neo-liberal citizenship discourse, and endeavors to justify integration through its contribution to individuals and their personal and professional development. Like other corporate religions, which rely on a rationalist-scientific discourse, many members of the Jaffa Scientology Center describe their personal success following course study, and how their success contributes to their environment. The personal success of each individual is described as a key objective they seek to disseminate and promote, whether this success be in terms of personal relationships or in terms of personal welfare, but above all – in terms of improved productiveness, ambition, and wealth accumulation. As they have learned how to realize their personal potential, they now endeavor to promote other individuals, while creating a logical, neo-liberal integration strategy that sanctifies personal success.

Within the framework of scientific-therapeutic services, Scientology refers to the tools for self- improvement as **"technology"**, whether this pertains to tools to advance learning skills or self-treatment regarding relationships, behavior, personal ethics, etc. Either way, this technology is designed to improve a person's overall feeling, to liberate him from past pathological patterns of consciousness created from past trauma, and ultimately to advance the personal and professional success:

I also passed those courses. I studied all that technology and I know from personal experience that it changed many aspects of my life tremendously, particularly at work. When you study this technology and you start to apply techniques to overcome any barrier, it is crazy, because your concentration increases, the mass and volume and speed at which you absorb things rises in a way, I was in shock [...] and you learn what it means to be whole[[14]](#footnote-14).

You acquire an amazing power. Listen, I can do things that I never believed that I could do […] I will tell you things that maybe sound a little like fantasy, but from the place I am at, I do not have to struggle for anything. Anything I want, happens, when my whole life I had to really struggle. What do I mean struggle? I spit blood, sweat and fought - a business woman, divorced… I don't have to struggle anymore. I have a different power. I know it and I don't have to struggle. What I want, happens. It's as simple as that[[15]](#footnote-15).

It is important to note, that the attempt to distinguish between the contribution to the community and the contribution to individuals and their welfare creates an artificial division, which transgresses Scientology's theological outlook. *The two are intertwined*, since every individual who advances towards the Bridge and a 'Clear' status, is yet another milestone towards creating a better and healthier society. Whether in the discussions with auditors, who deal directly with healing people, or in conversations with Center members who have chosen a personal path of crossing the Bridge – the motif of correcting society through individual correction was a recurring theme:

**This is a treatment of the human race. It is a project of global assistance to the entire human race; but the real work is individuals, individuals, individuals. Before we are a general public, we are a collection of individuals. The minute one individual is crushed, the general public is injured[[16]](#footnote-16).**

As a Scientologist, I really want not only to do well for you, because what happens is that it's clear that **all the circles around you have an impact** at the end of the day. Whether it's your society and then your country or whether it's more general, like the Middle East, Europe or even the planet earth, whatever happens on it. So, as a Scientologist, I want to improve and help as much as possible in any region in which I am found, […] **Scientologists are good for society because they are very positive, they really want to help**, very ethical, **law-abiding.** So, generally speaking they help, okay? This activity of volunteering is amazing, but I think that it is more than this. I think that it is each one of us, just like you through a stone in the water and it shifts the water around-around-around and so on, in circles[[17]](#footnote-17).

It is also clear from the official website of the Scientology Center that the service provided by the organization to the community does not distinguish between activities for advancing the individual and aid to the needy. The guide towards "The Way to Happiness" and the improvement of personal educational technologies, is presented as a single entity next to prisoner rehabilitation, treating drug addiction and volunteer community projects. As aforementioned, this is because, the outlook of Scientology is that **there really is no distinction between a contribution to the community and contribution to the individual.** In effect, it's precisely the personal progress of each individual that will ultimately advance wellness of the human race.

Think what would happen if in school, children would really adopt the technology and would be able to learn. No need for Ritalin, no dropping out, violence goes down to zero, solely because people suddenly are able to learn. No violence. The next generation which we are raising, of leaders, you can really rely on them. It is not a confused generation, full of self-denigration, that feels unsuccessful […] **If you look at the redemption of the world from a Scientologist's point of view, world redemption is achieved by the fact that you take individual people** and raise them to levels of consciousness and responsibility through auditing, through this process. And this is work that will actually lead to long-term change […] Any project fighting drug abuse, for human rights and so on, is like a torniquet, it quiets things down and helps immediately. **But the long term, if you really want to create a sane society, you need as many people as possible to be Clear, whose reactive mind has been treated[[18]](#footnote-18).**

### **Corporate Religion and the Ethno-National Track**

*"We are the only organization in the world with mezuzas"*

The second integration strategy which we wish to describe rely on the local ethno-national context, which stems from the official Jewish identity of the State of Israel. The congealment of this integration strategy is made possible by and is rooted in the processes we described above pertaining to cultural globalization and changes in religious belief systems. The renewed flourishing of religions and NRM worldwide is part of the global phenomenon of emerging hybrid identities and believes (Berger 2003). To these, one can add local processes of secularization which are taking place in Israel (Ben-Porat 2016). These not only facilitate the ability of non-Jewish players to operate in the local faith market, but also lead to the realization of Jewish identity in tandem with the adoption of other identity and faith components.

Members of the Scientology Center emphasized time and again that their belief in Scientology does not contradict Jewish belief. As is the case with other corporate religions, and as a part of the integration strategy, the members of the Scientology Center in Israel seek to brand themselves as not competing or threatening other religions[[19]](#footnote-19), in this case, Judaism.

And since Scientology is in all honesty, I will send you quotes from Ron Hubbard, but he says: don't convert anyone, period. He says this as a command […] We do not change anyone's religion; we do not have any desire to cause a person to leave his previous faith[[20]](#footnote-20).

This integration track rests on the ethno-national citizenship discourse, which includes understating any sign – physical, symbolic or semantic – which could be interpreted as having Christian undertones. The public realm in Israel is particularly sensitive to any Christian connotations. Consequently, the Jewish component is accentuated, while Christian elements are muted and the Israeli Scientology Center rejects the usage of the global, widespread, and original title – the Church of Scientology. Scientology was originally born as a "church" as part of Hubbard's aspiration to establish the movement as a religious organization[[21]](#footnote-21). The worldwide identification of Scientology as a church, in the Israeli local context, might sticks in the throat of Israeli adherents. Scientology members are extremely careful not to use the word "church" or "mission", as they are acutely aware that these words have Christian, and particularly missionary, connotations. For example, the word "church" does not appear even once on the organization's Hebrew website, replaced by the word "center".

I explain to them that a 'church' is place for religious, not necessarily Christian, gatherings. But, many people in Israel who study Scientology would not say church, or least prefer not to. They will say "organization", 'center'. In English, 'church' is very open to ownership by different religions. The word church in Hebrew is much more closely tied to Christianity than it is in English. So, here there is a phonetic, linguistic problem[[22]](#footnote-22)

Because you are Jewish. Because in Scientology you can believe what you want. It's true. From their standpoint it is either/or. Now this is not true. You do not have to believe in God to be a Scientologist. I can either believe or not believe. I can believe in Jesus… because Scientology does not pertain to the divine, on this topic. It pertains to you personally […] If we open, let's say, a church, yes, we still call it Church, then this will create antagonism; it will stir opposition[[23]](#footnote-23).

Moreover, the Scientology symbol, which represents the "eight dynamics", a central tenet of the Scientology theology – and a prominent symbol at the entrance to any other local center – is missing from the Israeli public space. It appears from the interviews that many Israeli scientologist are well aware of the sensitivity attached to this logo, and some emphasized several times during their interview that the symbol[[24]](#footnote-24) is divorced from any Christian connotation.

Do you recognize the Scientology symbol now? It's a cross with eight sideburns. The meaning… well it's a terribly old symbol which is not related to Christianity at all, the symbol of the cross is Egyptian after all, ancient. It symbolizes what looks like the eight dynamics of life, the eight areas of life. This is what it symbolizes. In Israel, we don't use it, why? This is apropos the adaptation of Scientology to Israel […] because it pushes a button! People will yell, 'Christianity!!' […][[25]](#footnote-25).

As mentioned above, by utilizing the ethno-national citizenship discourse Scientology members emphasizes their hybrid identity as Jewish and Scientologist. In addition to the removal of any Christian motif, Scientology members insisted that Scientology does not contradict Judaism, meaning, that Scientology does not demand Jews to forgo their original tradition or affiliation.

I grew up in a Jewish Orthodox school, I adhere to religious traditions and I define myself as a Jew. **Scientology is not a religion which tries to change your religion** […] I think that it is simply tools for dealing with life. I view my religion as tradition, and there is wisdom in it, and that's it. It's not as if it comes instead of it[[26]](#footnote-26).

My mom is glad that I have a senior position in Scientology, and my mom is ultra-Orthodox […] This does not collide with anything because **we don't deal with God.** Ron Hubbard says – each person has his own god. It doesn't matter if you decide that this glass is your god. However, it does do the job and gives you hope and gives you… you know, it takes you out of the material world, that's what matters […][[27]](#footnote-27).

The hybrid religious identity of Scientology members often expresses by emphasizing not only the Jewish affiliation, but other indicators of culture assimilation, such as Zionist, Israeli, and offspring of holocaust survivors.

**We are the only organization in the world that has *mezuzas*** […] One of the unique attributes, I think, of Israel is that **Israeli Scientologist insist that they are Jewish Scientologists.** Listen, we come after 2000 years of living in the Diaspora, and 90%, 95% of the Scientologists in Israel are Jews. While it's true that there are some Christians too, but the majority are Jewish. And one of the things is that **actually most are the offspring of Holocaust survivors,** and so on and so forth, and **they will not give up their Jewishness. So, the fact is that it is very important for them to keep their Jewish identity […]** So, we have ultra-Orthodox Jews studying with us […] In this respect, **I am very pleased that I can adopt both the Jewish identity and Scientologist identity.** In principle one could say that **I am a Jewish Israeli Scientologist[[28]](#footnote-28).**

**I am a Zionist** […] **We are Israelis**; we are a different nation, no? And despite that fact that we use the same sources of knowledge we operate differently […] Israelis are a people with over-the-top enterprise and over-the-top determination, as Israelis, right? And things happen here sometimes that don't happen anywhere else in the world […] While I don't believe in God so much, even though there are Scientologists who believe in our religion and that God created us, I still believe that we are a very special people, very smart. So, I believe that Scientology seems different here[[29]](#footnote-29).

Within the framework of Scientology's adaptation and assimilation in Israel ethno-national culture and identity, one can point to two key components: the first is the deliberate understating of Christian elements, whether in the use of the term, church or the Scientology symbol; while the second is the emphasis on the compatibility between Judaism and Scientology, leading to the formation of a dual identity, in which Judaism and Scientology, are compatible with each other. The members of the organization enlist the ethno-national citizenship discourse and accentuate the role Judaism plays in the Center's activities and their own personal lives as indicator for their assimilation with the national culture and values. In addition, some highlight their identification with the national goals, in the sense that they are Zionists and the offspring of Holocaust survivors. Consequently, one can detect that either than high-skills and economic potential, cultural assimilation is as important for marginal groups who sicks to be legitimize and included.

# **Conclusion**

המחקר מראה כיצד התגבשותן של צורות חדשות של אזרחות אינן מאפיינות רק את מוסדות המדינה ותפקודה, אלא, אלו משמשות קבוצות שוליים לייצר אסטרטגיית השתלבות ולגיטימציה. כמו כן, קבוצות שוליים יכולות להשתמש במאפיינים הפרטיקולריים שלהן, ולהתאים את עצמן להקשרים ולשיחים המקומיים שמבנים את ההיגיון האזרחי, ובכך לעצב אסטרטגיית השתלבות שתאפשר להן חופש פעולה וקבלה בחברה נתונה.

הסיינטולוגיה היא דת תאגידית, במובן שחבריה מתעקשים שהיא איננה סותרת דתות ואמונות אחרות; מפני שהיא מבקשת לספק טיפול אינדיבידואלי באמצעות רכישה של קורסים והכשרות; ומשום החזון התיאולוגי שלה למלא תפקיד חברתי, לתרום לטוב המשותף, ולטפל באנושות כולה באמצעות סיוע לפרטים. גם במקרה חריג של חברה שבה קיים מונופול לדת אחת דומיננטית בהגדרת הלאום והשייכות, מצליחים חברי המרכז לסיינטולוגיה לגייס את מאפייני הדת התאגידית הסיינטולוגית לכדי יצירה של אסטרטגיית השתלבות שנשענת על שלושה שיחים מסורתיים: רפובליקני, ניאו-ליברלי ואתנו-לאומי. שלושת שיחי האזרחות הללו מתלכדים לכדי מודל חדש של אזרחות שאותו חוקרים כבר זיהו במדינות מפותחות אחרות, והוא מודל **האזרחות הקהילתנית הניאו-ליברלית** – שמעצב מחדש את דמותה של **האזרחות הטובה**. מודל האזרחות הקהילתנית הניאו-ליברלית, מדגיש לא רק את כוחו היצרני של הפרט כתנאי להשתלבות וקבלת זכויות, אלא, גם את שייכותו האתנו-לאומית והיטמעותו בחברה הכללית.

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1. From the official Scientology website, March 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Yad L'Achim organization and the offshoot organization, Lev L'Achim, are ultra-Orthadox organizations that explicitly declare that they are fighting against missions (of non-Jewish religions in Israel) and against interfaith marriages between Jews and non-Jews. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Interview 8/4/2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Interview 15/3/2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Interview 3.5.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. From the home page of the Scientology Center in Israel [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Interview 7.3.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This is gleaned from the interviews of activists who volunteered during the coronavirus crisis, and from the organization's website "Scientology's Volunteer Advisors". [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Interview 3.5.2001 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Interview 14.5.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Interview 9.2.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Interview 3.5.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Interview 27.6.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Interview 11.3.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Interview 15.3.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Interview 11.3.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Interview 8.4.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Interview 9.2.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. [A]and so we should be perfectly willing to include in our ranks a Moslem, or a Taoist, as well as any Protestant or Catholic." Ron Hubbard, Article in Ability Magazine, March 1955. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Interview 9.2.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Some argue that the rationale behind this designation was economic, the desire to obtain tax-exempt status under federal tax law. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Interview 9.2.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Interview 3.5.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The other symbol, of two triangles and a S, is presented at the side of the center building, and some of the interviewees who are veteran members in the organization, wear it as a charm on a gold bracelet. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Interview 11.3.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Interview 7.3.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Interview 14.5.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Interview 9.2.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Interview 8.4.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)