

THE IMMIGRANT ETHIOPIAN CHILD IN CHILDREN LITERATURE IN ISRAEL AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE IMMIGRANT

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***Abstract:** As a branch of literature, children's literature has developed as a tool to guide the young generation and enable socialization. Initially it was just educational, and later also independent and artistic. The Hebrew children's literature development accelerated with the development of Zionism and the revival of the Hebrew language, reinforcing some of the core values of Zionism, such as the melting pot, the belittling of the foreign Jew, the settlement of Israel and the myth of Sabra. To assimilate into the local community, the immigrants' traits had to change so the immigrant resembles the local children, by appearance, speech, and feelings. This paper will research whether there were books which facilitated the exposure to the subject, or if their absence or presence was intentional, in alignment with the adults' agenda.*

***Keywords:** Children literature, Immigrant child, Sabra, Israel, Ethiopia*

Children's literature

Children's literature has developed as a distinct literary branch. Adults and different regimes have used it as a tool to guide youths and children. Moreover, it serves as a means for controlling their development into adulthood and citizenship as well as enabling them to adopt and internalize the underlying ideas of the respective regime (i.e. – socialization). This genre has been harnessed from its beginning for influencing children's beliefs, morals, and behavior. Children's literature was initially just educational, but over time changed from being dependent to being independent, distinctly expressing the authors' point of view and becoming more artistic. The literary pieces expressed the authors' point of view, and responses to the regime's ideology and social guidelines, praising the regime for how it defines and governs interactions.

Hebrew children's literature developed in parallel with worldwide children's literature. Its development accelerated following the development of Zionism as well as the revival of the Hebrew language. Children's Literature started reinforcing some of the core values of Zionism, such as the melting pot, the myth of Sabra and the settlement in the land of Israel. In addition, it reinforced the belittling of the foreign Jew, ignoring subjects which are not connected to Zionism. Children's literature disvalued the individual while praising patriotic acts of self-sacrifice. Contempt was woven into in the texts as an attitude towards characters who tried to

refute society's norms These characters were displayed as pale and unhealthy unlike the Sabra. Typically, in each story there were other characters that made the life of the outsider more difficult. In addition, there was a helper, a character whose role was to assist the outsider. These helpers served as educational figures for the different, deviating characters. Children's literature made use of the positive characters, the adults and of the painful assimilation of the outsider to manifest society's need to incorporate the outsider. Therefore, the character has immersed into the local community, consequently the characters' traits changed and were portrayed in a more positive manner. At the end of many such books the immigrant, the outsider, resembles the local children, by appearance, speech, and feelings.

Children's literature is a field guided by adults looking to control a child's socialization process. It focuses on the development of a child. From an early age onwards, it exposes children to themes which are seemingly not an integral part of their daily life experience or helps them while tackling challenges and problems indirectly. Literature is a source of enrichment, reinforcement of values, development of imagination and a broad set of experiences, that accompany the local daily life.

Since the impact of literature is stronger in young ages, (Baruch, 1991), it is interesting to learn how literature treats the topic of immigrants to Israel and find out what its role has been in reinforcing social and national norms in Israel throughout the years. This paper will research whether there were books which facilitated the exposure to the subject, or if their absence or presence was intentional in alignment with the adults' agenda. It will also study whether this instrumental role, as well as the differences, expand to other fields in children's literature .

The Sabra (Tzabar)

Sabra – 1. The English name of the cactus plant is “a prickly pear”. This fruit grows on a thorny desert plant, with a thick skin that conceals a sweet, softer interior. The cactus is usually grown as hedges of a natural fence. 2. A Sabra, (tzabar) is a Jew born in Israel. The Israeli-born Jews, who are supposedly prickly on the outside, but soft and sweet on the inside is compared to the fruit of the cactus (Even-Shoshan, 1991). On one hand, typical "Sabra" behavior may be sarcastic, and even rude. On the other hand, it will be courageous and fiercely loyal.

At the background of the idealistic Sabra, stood the image of the Diaspora Jew as a shadow. The first was more attractive than the submissive and servile latter, whose existence contributed much to the creation of the Sabra. The vision of the hero was embodied in the pioneer, farmer, fighter, showing strength, vigor, action, and independence (Shalit, 1995). The Diaspora Jew stood for what everyone wanted to forget and erase, the antithesis of the Sabra.

The name of the Sabra had a profound meaning for an Israeli Jew. It was not a biblical – religious name or one stemming from other cultures and countries. The name change was part of the transition from a diaspora Jew into a Sabra. The transformation was possible only by rebelling against the forefather's religion and by turning myth into reality .

Zionism in the beginning of the 20th century envisioned a new Jew and an end to the Nomad Jew by creating a permanent homeland. In the first stages of the change, a new man had to appear, free from fears and complexes, independent, combining spiritual values with material ones. The image of a man who is a part of his homeland. The young pioneer rebelled against his father, abandoned traditions, and challenged the old practices. His whole purpose of being is to serve the old homeland, breathe life into it and redeem it. "The difference between Jewish fathers worldwide and the Israeli sons, is greater than the expected generation gap. It is a mutation. A different lifestyle, nutrition, climate, political reality, and social environment had to form the native as different as can be from his Ghetto-born father (Avneri, 1968) .

In Israel, since its' establishment the relations between the private and the public are intensive, unique, there is a sheer sense of belonging and sharing the same fate. Israeli society evolved in the shadow of the holocaust, and the reciprocity between the individual and historical events is therefore inevitable. The individual's identification with this common ideal is at the core of Israeli society, that could manifest itself only through individuals who were and are ready to be one with the Zionist ideal and help realize it (Shalit, 1995) .

A new nation formed a new identity, totally different from that of the diaspora Jew. A major role in the formation of native mythology and the consolidation of the term "Sabra" was taken by the post-war memorialization culture. The heavy death toll of the war infused the older generation with a sentiment of guilt, mixed with deep gratitude to the young generation. This was expressed in the press, the arts and the especially prolific memorialization literature that was published after the war. The adjective "Sabra" was repeated in the memorialization of the fallen 1948 warriors, in official anthologies, and publications by the Ministry of Defense, becoming a national linguistic code, expressing the love of the people for their devoted youth (Almog, 2001). The Sabra became a cultural hero, with stories highlighting the stereotypical aspects of his image. "Post-war albums emphasized photos of handsome Sabra images, and these became the young state national symbols and reflected the mythic-symbolical parallel between the splendor of the nascent state and the beauty of its Sabra youth" (Almog, 2004).

The era of the Ethiopian immigration

At the beginning of Israel's fifth decade, it seemed that Israel had achieved the main goal of Zionism, creating a haven for the Jewish nation in the historical Land of Israel .

The 1990's were characterized by a massive immigration wave from the former USSR and Ethiopia. The political change of 1992, the negotiations with the PLO (Palestine liberation organization) and the peace treaty with Jordan, were a source of optimism regarding the future of the region. That sentiment collapsed after PM Rabin's assassination.

The Ethiopian immigration started at the beginning of the

In the early 1980s, many Ethiopian Jews began to leave their villages as they made their way to South Sudan, from where they hoped to reach Israel. By the end of 1981, 1400 people had arrived in Israel. By 1983, the number had doubled, and in the middle of 1984, about 7,000 people of the Ethiopian community were already living in Israel.

In the middle of 1984, a mass rescue operation was launched, known as "Operation Moses". For several months, 8000 people were flown to Israel. In January 1985, the president of Sudan, forbade the continuation of the operation and only after negotiations, six American "Hercules" planes were allowed to rescue the last Ethiopian Jews who were in Sudan and they arrived in Israel. In total, about 16 thousand immigrants from Ethiopia arrived in the 1980s.

In December 1989, a connection was established between Ethiopians in Israel and the families who remained there and by the end of 1990 most of the Jews had arrived in Addis Ababa.

In May 1991, after Ethiopia's ruler, Mengistu, fled, the new administration agreed, in exchange for a \$40 million ransom, for Israel to operate an aerial train. On May 24, 1991, on the holiday of Shavuot, 14,000 people flown to Israel. The operation, known as "Operation Shlomo", lasted less than 48 hours. After "Operation Solomon" about 6000 people immigrated to Israel. In total, over 35,000 Jews from Ethiopia immigrated to Israel.

The absorption of Ethiopian Jews, who differ so much in their appearance and way of life, posed huge challenge, special absorption programs were implemented.

In the second wave of immigration (1991) most of the immigrants arrived in a period of less than 48 years and during the peak of the immigration of the Jews of the former Soviet Union. In 1992, due to the lack of apartments, "Operation Solomon" immigrants were moved to live in caravan sites throughout the country. Special enrichment programs for students of Ethiopian origin were launched in the schools, and preparatory courses were opened in higher education institutions. The IDF also got involved in the task of absorbing the immigrants and initiated a series of special education programs.

In the process of assimilation of Ethiopian Jews, several problems arose: the transition from the traditional life framework in rural Ethiopia to the modern and industrialized society in Israel was extremely complicated and painful. It was easier for young people to absorb in

modern society and thus a growing gap was created between young people and their parents. The transition process also resulted in a leadership crisis. The elders of the community, who were its leaders in the Ethiopian villages, found it difficult to fulfill this role in Israel.

Although the Russian immigration was described by many mainstream authors, the Ethiopian immigration was not dealt with and no books on this group could be found from this particular period. It took over 10 years for the first book by a mainstream author to appear.

The book "Grasshopper Day and Other Days" written by Dorit Orgad (2001), is the first one to describe this immigration and it is told from the view point of an immigrant child, Asmerch or Osnat, according to the Israeli name given to her at the absorption center, unlike the Russian immigration at the time who does miss the old country, the Ethiopian immigration is divided between the young generation who tries to forget the past and the old generation who thinks it is important to remember. Here we can see the change from past years as the author stresses the need to remember and appreciate the history of the immigrant "In the first days I thought only about our village and what happened in Ethiopia, but the thoughts saddened me and who needed a bad mood. So we're done with it." (Orgad, 2001, p.8). While Asmerch tries to forget the memory of Ethiopia, her mother, a first-generation immigrant, argues that it is important to remember as life is a journey where one must remember everything and learn the necessary lessons.

Unlike the Russian immigration at the time who kept their Russian names and identity, the Ethiopian immigration like in former immigrations in the past undergone name change. The speaker refers to the issue of name change. It is present among her friends and is evident from the story that not only do the characters not mind the name change, but they adopt it, some even in their immediate home environment (Orgad, 2001, pp. 11-12; 106-108).

In the story, there are many references to the norms and values practiced in Ethiopia and the tension around them. The writer is not trying to embellish reality; therefore, not all the experiences and characters are positive.

The move affected the family and the author describes how the parents argue frequently, and the tension created by immigration leaves its mark on the family unit. The Ethiopian originated families of the main character and the supporting characters emphasize the importance of studies and education as a critical component for social mobility.

As the familial unit goes through changes, it is the first time we can see the price the immigrant pay for the move and how it affected their lives and even family structure as the father returns to Ethiopia, In this story, one can find references to the experience of emigration,

the journey, and the severe losses along the way. The journey, which includes a challenging walk and violent bandits of robbers, is being told concerning several characters of the family and the father's sister. Asmerch mother tells her, after receiving the news that her father's sister had died, "Don't you know that every family that came from Ethiopia paid a heavy price for the right to immigrate to Israel" (Orgad, 2001, p. 116). Unlike its predecessors, the story "The Last Day of Purim by Vasa & Vasa Y (2015) which was written almost 15 years after the first book by an Ethiopian writer describes the journey to Israel in more detail. The speaker notes the hardships that the family members went through and the impressive manner in which the father behaved. He notes the length of walking and staying in the refugee camp and the mixed reactions to the plane. He noted the losses they suffered along the way, the loss of his grandmother on the journey to a disease. In this book there is a detailed reference to events that took place in Ethiopia, such as the recruitment of the boys to the army and hiding his brother, in the fields to evade them. This book describes and gives the viewpoint of the immigrant society and emphasizes the hardships and the sacrifices.

The story incorporates characters who help the family both from the Ethiopian and local communities. Which again is very much the difference between the Ethiopian immigration that "needed help" and Russian immigration who were supposed to assimilate on their own.

In the second book, unlike its predecessors, many characters kept their original names, such as Nano and Dassa. The family moved from Ethiopia to an urban settlement whose name is not specified. This book shows the differences and tension between the new norms, values, and practices of the old society and the new one.

The food is very present and serves as a means to illustrate the family's social integration. The speaker notes that his sandwiches for school would contain chocolate, or an Ethiopian spicy spread called Chaw. When one day he exchanges sandwiches with his friend, Ofer, he discovers the possibility of putting baloney in a sandwich. The sandwich exchange didn't go well, and the boy's mother, who had difficulty withstanding the heat, comes to the school and scolds Yossi (Vasa, 2015, pp. 37-38)

The economic theme is present in this book as well. The family mainly relies on social security benefits.

The narrator mentions other customs prevalent in Ethiopia longingly, in contrast to the traditions of the new society, such as sleeping in a shared bed until a teenager is old enough. Due to his age, the speaker moves to live with his grandmother, who lives nearby.

This book also addresses the subject of new language knowledge. Due to the difficulty in mastering the language, the father avoids interaction with others. The mother in the story

needs her children's assistance communicating with the environment. Another important topic presented in the book is the use of language. This is the first book in which we have encountered the use of the word "fringe" (whites). Ethiopians usually use this term to describe the local community. We can only assume that the writer used this term and nickname due to his origin.

Conclusions

This study sought to examine image of the Ethiopian immigrants while examining books written about the experience of Ethiopian immigrants by Ethiopian writers and local popular leading writers.

According to the research literature, a difference was observed between parents and children. The findings of the various studies indicate that Ethiopian immigrants to Israel faced identity problems, and that the parents formed an Israeli identity for themselves, while the children experience identity conflict due to the internalization of negative messages and the difficulty in coping with stereotypes. The children form hyphenated identities as well as a general black identity and do not share the sabra identity. An examination of the books shows that the authors' emphasis was placed on the children, their integration and interaction with both members of their ethnic group and the local population.

In the books the fathers are described as characters living in an undefined zone of neither being in Israel nor Ethiopia, having a temporary and volatile sense of belonging. They are unable or incapable of forming a sense of self, based on rigid categories such as ethnicity, religion, and nationality. The characters transcend physical boundaries and cultural boundaries. It seems as if the multicultural nature of Israeli society also influenced the experiences of the various characters.

An intergenerational gap was observed as disagreements and conflicts were discovered between parents and their children. Parents who practiced and valued their origin country's values and norms, found it difficult in light of the new value system in Israel. The children opposed and disliked this set of values and their cultural heritage. Girls who learn new knowledge based on the values of Israeli culture embrace this knowledge. As a result, the status of mothers as the sole authority on imparting values is damaged (Shabtai, 1996; Kassen & Shabtai, 2005). The children assimilate into society but they are not fully sabra and the family structure is damaged, unlike former immigrations who kept the family structure, and became whole after being assimilated.

There are very few books even today on the Ethiopian immigration, even over 30 years after unlike other groups, niche groups who started writing books in order to tell their story, the

Ethiopian immigration is still struggling with their absorption and identity which leads the youngster to look outside for the feeling of belonging.

In conclusion, there is a need for an in-depth understanding of the processes of identity of Ethiopian immigrants, considering that each person is in a different place in the identity construction process and on a different identification continuum.. Moreover, the importance of niche writers (Ethiopian) writing literature for youth is evident. In books written by Ethiopian writers, the descriptions were very detailed and authentic, as was the exposure and use of language jargon, mentioning customs and experiences extensively and leaving the reader with a good sense of both the culture and the experience of immigrants' integration.

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