Between a Western Career and Traditional Community Belonging: Narratives of

Successful Ethiopian Immigrant Women

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Abstract

The study's objective was to examine the relations between successful Ethiopian immigrant women in Israel and their traditional community, as well as the strategies they adopt to contend with its expectations. Based on a qualitative life and work history methodology, the data were collected from 34 successful women who emigrated from Ethiopia to Israel. Results show three dialectical axes scrutinizing the interrelations of the participants with their community (found both between different participants and within the same woman): (a) trenchant criticism of the community coupled with praise and pride; (b) community as a support base or as hindering personal development; and (c) a desire for separation/detachment from community coupled with a desire to support the community. The findings demonstrate how the Ethiopian women contend with the normative demands of two different, clashing systems: the Ethiopian community-family system and Israel's neoliberal labor market.

Keywords: success, intersectionality, career, black women, immigrant women

Between a Western Career and Traditional Community: Narratives of Successful

Ethiopian Immigrant Women

Immigration of Jews from Ethiopia to Israel began in the 1980s, and despite the

investment of substantial government resources aimed at assisting their integration into

Israeli society (Shapira, 2013; Swirski & Kafalea, 2005), it was accompanied by many

assimilation challenges (Shabtay, 1999; Walsh & Tuval-Mashiach, 2012). The case of

Ethiopian women is particularly interesting, since the modern Western Israeli lifestyle

exposed them to a relatively gender-equal regime, which eventually led to their occupational

integration, to a change in their families, and to opportunities for higher education (Shabtay

& Kacen, 2005). Although their current position in the Israeli labor market is far from

satisfactory—as many of them are employed in menial work and report feelings of alienation,

low self-esteem, and no social involvement (Itzhaky, 2003)—a growing number of them have

managed to break through the gender, status, ethnic, and racial glass ceiling, and become the

only, or one of few, women of color in their occupational field (Kanter, 1977). However, as

Kanter indicated, this success comes with a heavy personal price: loneliness, high visibility

that brings pressure to perform, an inability to be part of a supportive professional network,

social isolation, and stereotypes. While Kanter's theory was extensively implemented in

various contexts, the interactions between women of color and their community were mostly

overlooked. This article presents the success stories of immigrant women from Ethiopia who

became pioneers in their occupational field. It examines their relationship with their

community and the ways in which they cope with its expectations, yet are still able to breach

the boundaries of triple discrimination (woman, black, and immigrant).

The study seeks to contribute to the existing research in several respects. First, on the

empirical level, the interaction between successful women and their community of origin has

not been thoroughly studied (Wach, Stephan, & Gorgievski, 2016). Since many successful

Ethiopian women are employed in projects specifically designed for their community, and since their occupation is not a stepping stone to increased involvement in Israeli society or advancing their own careers (Offer, 2004, 2007; Swirski & Kafalea, 2005), examining their interactions with their community of origin is of great importance. Second, on the theoretical level, the study is based on the literature of intersectionality that has flourished in recent years and that emphasizes the triple connection between gender, race, and status (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and seeks to contribute to the growing knowledge of the interactions between these three positions of social exclusion, focusing both on giving voice to silenced groups and on the mutually transformative processes that change institutions such as the labor market and the Ethiopian community. The present study seeks to add narratives of success to this equation in order to examine how women break out of this threefold barrier and formulate effective coping strategies. We also reveal how these women perceive their community simultaneously as another repressive mechanism that restricts their career path and as a community in which they take pride. Finally, on the methodological level, the methodology of success stories is not often used, despite its advantages in offering role models and empowerment tools to assist excluded communities. Despite the growing interest in subjective perceptions and definitions of occupational success (see a review in Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), few studies have delved into the many aspects and indicators of subjective success, especially in regard to women of various cultural origins. Overall, the role of community in women's success has been mostly overlooked, although belonging to a community plays a significant role in cultural traditional minorities (see Wach et al., 2016). Given the growing number of immigrants and refugees from traditional societies and their integration into the Western labor market, this study offers a unique glimpse into the subjective perception of successful women of a traditional community and highlights how they assess their success, inter alia, through their ability to help their community.

Theoretical Background

"Women, Immigrants, and Black as Well": Theory of Intersectionality

The last decade has witnessed an increasing interest in intersectionality studies, which pertain to the interrelations between different spheres of identity (especially gender, race, and class) and how they are interdependent (Brah & Phoenix, 2013; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016; Holvino, 2010; McCall, 2005). Defined as the interplay between person and social location, with particular emphasis on power relations among various social locations, these studies focus on the multilayered oppression and exclusion of women of weakened social groups, especially in the labor market and in organizations (Styhre & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008). Most of these studies, especially in the United States, have focused on gender and race discrimination, but not much attention has been paid to the success of black immigrant women in the labor market (Blake-Beard, 1999; Egan, 1994; Fulbright, 1985; Spaights & Whitaker, 1995). For instance, Crawford and Smith (2005) and Hite (2006) show that successful black women earn less and advance more slowly than black men or white women in the same occupation. Spaights and Whitaker (1995) point to the role of socioeconomic status and education in success, yet they show that even those who begin from a more advantageous starting point do not manage to advance to senior positions. Other studies of professional black women have found that they describe themselves as having to contend with a white male labor market that discriminates against them because they are black women. One of the barriers is the paucity of mentors in general and of black women mentors in particular (Blake-Beard, 1999; Crawford & Smith, 2005).

Ethiopian Immigrant Women in Israel

Like black women in the United States and the United Kingdom, women who have emigrated from Ethiopia to Israel must contend with exclusion and dual discrimination, racial and gendered. But they also experience alienation, since they are immigrants from a culture

with different mores and customs (Walsh & Abuzan-Yonas, 2012) and from a predominantly non-industrialized, agricultural society (Ben-Ezer, 2007). Thus, their path to integration into the Israeli labor market is paved with numerous obstacles with respect to unemployment rates, salary level, types of occupation, and promotion options. Despite the extensive resources invested in this group and despite the high visibility of their belonging to the Jewish community (most of them are religious), social "blackening" processes can easily be discerned, as well as the importation of a global racist discourse (mainly from the United States) that labels Ethiopian immigrants as "blacks" and, consequently, as culturally inferior "others" (Ben-David & Ben-Ari, 1997; Ben Eliezer, 2008; Mizrachi & Herzog, 2012). This tension has often been exacerbated by patronizing absorption policies and mismanagement of cultural differences (Noam, 1994; Offer, 2004), especially regarding Ethiopian women in Israel. Herzog (1998), for example, describes the patronizing attitude of welfare workers toward Ethiopian women in their efforts to reeducate them for motherhood and housekeeping in accordance with an ostensibly Western model, and the perpetuation of their economic dependence on men. Itzhaky (2003) exposes the paucity of community intervention programs, whose efficacy in empowering women and aiding their integration into society was shown in previous studies. Swirski and Kafalea (2005) show that young Ethiopian women share the aspirations of other Israeli women but are blocked by racial stereotyping and a lack of training in creating social networks in the employment market.

While these findings may characterize many other immigrant groups around the world, the Ethiopian immigrant women in Israel are a particularly interesting case, since their social position changed enormously after their immigration, and it was they who supported their families. They were quicker than men to learn the language and gradually began demanding an equal say in family decisions (Shabtay & Kacen, 2005). The change in the family's traditional hierarchical structure, the transition from a patriarchal society to a more

egalitarian and liberal one, and their adaptation to patterns of occupational behavior are some of the significant challenges facing immigrant women in general and women from non-Western cultures in particular (Walsh, Shulman, Bar-On, & Antal, 2006; Weil, 2004).

Studies conducted in Israel indicate that Ethiopians cope with these challenges by acquiring the relevant higher/vocational education for the labor market (Offer, 2004) or by denying the racist discourse regarding their color (Mizrachi & Herzog, 2012). In other cultural contexts, it was found (Healy, Bradley, & Forson, 2011; Zimmer, 1988) that successful people from minority groups (who are physically conspicuous) tend to employ three main coping strategies: (a) creating a delicate balance that enables them to function well under constant social scrutiny without arousing enmity in their colleagues; (b) accentuating their difference by turning it into an advantage; and (c) limiting their visibility. However, none of these studies specify the nature of the women's interactions with their community of origin as part of their coping strategy. A recent study by Wach et al. (2016) pointed to the importance of community impact in self-definitions of success as one of five determinants of subjective success. However, since their study refers to a completely different context—that of German entrepreneurs and their business success in their community—their definition of community impact ignores gender differences and refers to firm reputation and firm continuity rather than the complex relations between individuals and their communities.

Method

For many years, life and work histories have been used in the social sciences in furtherance of an approach that examines the interrelationships of an individual's life and work, as well as its overlaps with others (Ladkin, 2002). This methodology is often used for exploratory purposes and has been employed extensively in race-related research (Dex, 1987). Due to its in-depth examination of the different aspects that influence people's lifelong

careers, this life-and-work-history methodology has important practical applications (Heslin, 2005).

Participants

We focused on 34 Israeli women born in Ethiopia who pursued a range of occupations and hailed from a variety of educational and family backgrounds. All of the participants in this study emigrated to Israel as young children. Most of them came from small agricultural villages. The women who participated varied greatly in terms of demographics. Their age range was 25–60, and their educational level varied: 7 of them did not finish high school, 11 were high school graduates, 8 had a bachelor's degree, 6 had M.A. degrees, and 2 held Ph.D. degrees. Their marital status varied: 5 were single, 8 were divorced, and 21 were married. As for occupation, the group included scientists, artists, politicians, lawyers, journalists, entrepreneurs, and NGO managers. They varied in their positions as well: some were business entrepreneurs, others parliament members, partners in law firms, NGO managers, and so forth (see Appendix A: Interviewees' Profile). Despite these differences, they were all pioneers in their fields in the sense that they were women who managed to break through the gender, status, ethnic, and racial glass ceiling and become symbols of success in their occupational field (Zimmer, 1988). All interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

The conceptual framework that identified the participants as "successful in the labor market" was mutually negotiated with each one of them. We purposely refrained from using only definitions of objective success (such as high-salary and high-status occupations; Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Heslin, 2005), and we did not merely follow the subjective definitions of success such as self-realization and self-gratification (Essers, Doorwaard, & Benschop, 2013). As a result, some of the women we approached said they did not consider themselves to be "successful" and declined to participate. Because the participants in this

study have careers that reflect totally different sectors in the labor market (public and private, NGO, performing arts, as well as local and national politics, media, and communication, etc.), we adopted Wach et al.'s (2016) broad definition of success: "The individual understanding and assessment of the achievement of criteria that are personally important to the entrepreneur" (p. 1099). Other researchers in the field (Heslin, 2005; Ladkin, 1999; Sullivan, 1999) remark that the nature of such criteria remains underexplored.

Procedure

This study is a qualitative life and work history study (Dex, 1987; Ladkin, 2002; Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008) that is based on questions that led the research process and focused on the interviewees' occupational stories. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting between 40 minutes and two hours were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The questions focused on the interviewees' past employment, their perception of success in the labor market, the obstacles they encountered and the coping strategies they employed to overcome them, and the part that the community played in this process.

The interviews were conducted by the lead researchers (two Caucasian women) and their research assistants (two women of Ethiopian origin who were trained for this purpose). We formed this collaboration in order to minimize our (the senior researchers') possible bias, as we are not only Caucasians but also Israeli-born. Issues of values, norms of behavior, and culture were openly and extensively discussed among our research team to help us have a "reflexive conscious positioning" of ourselves, our preconceptions, and our values regarding the study participants (Galdas, 2017). For instance, to break the power distance between us and the two assistants (we are elderly, established academics, while they are young graduate students), we discussed together relevant definitions of career success to better reflect their experience as black women in a white society rather than imposing our own terminology.

However, some preconceptions and biases were occasionally evidenced. For example, we were very surprised to find so many women who define themselves as successful regardless of neoliberal standards (such as a high salary). As white feminist scholars, we were also surprised to realize that many of these successful women define themselves as traditional in their lifestyle and worldview. However, the collaboration with the research assistants, along with some of the participants' feedback on our initial analysis, helped us to amplify the participants' voices and minimize misinterpretations that might derive from possible biases.

Analysis

In the analysis of the material obtained, we used the categorical approach (Zilber et al., 2008), which is suitable for a study focusing on a question or phenomenon common to a number of individuals. Categories were derived inductively and independently by the authors and by the research assistants. The content categorization procedure was based on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparison method. First, the researchers compared initial themes, using constant comparison and analytic induction (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to support or modify the emerging themes. Second, the research team discussed and modified the themes and performed a final distillation of them. In the third stage, the initial findings were sent to a number of participants who had agreed in advance to provide comments and feedback on the initial analysis, thus ensuring validity and trustworthiness.

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Results

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An analysis of the interviews revealed that the relationship between successful pioneer women and their community of origin is complex and multidimensional. This section is therefore organized according to three dialectical axes that were constructed from the data: (a) women's trenchant criticism of their community, coupled with praise of and pride in it; (b) their attitude toward the community as a base of support, coupled with their perception of it as a hindrance to their personal development; and (c) a desire to separate and detach

themselves from the community while simultaneously wishing to return to the community

fold and support it. These three axes reside not only among the different participants; they

also reflect internal conflicts within some of the women, as expressed clearly by Malka: "At

different periods in my life I still feel these two voices tearing up my integrity." We now

present representative quotes along with some theoretical discussion regarding them.

Cultural Attitudes Toward Success: Criticism of the Community or Pride and Praise?

One of the most noteworthy findings to emerge from the interviews is the

internalization of the measures of what is considered occupational success in accordance with

Western society, without an attempt to challenge these definitions of success and without

questioning the importance of the drive to succeed as a central motivator for success.

Consequently, some of the interviewees expressed sharp criticism of the community,

attributing to its members stereotypical characteristics such as passivity, acceptance of fate,

self-silencing, and a lack of intrinsic motivation. This is exemplified in the following stance:

> Do you know what it does to a child when his parents come home from work and sit
>
> around at home all day and moan that they haven't got things? […] Enough of being
>
> poor unfortunates! We must remember our children take everything in. Even if they
>
> don't say so, they sit and take it in. Parents, take responsibility! Be active! [Hanit]

The above quote indicates that some of the women place considerable responsibility

at the feet of members of the Ethiopian community, blaming them not only for their poor

occupational situation but also for damaging the intrinsic motivation of the next generation,

the children. Critical voices were heard in other accusations, such as "they have become

lazy," "they would rather live on welfare than work," "they don't fight; they accept the

situation as their fate," and "they lack the desire to improve the quality of their employment,

housing, and education." Further, some interviewees voiced doubts concerning the

effectiveness of the substantial government resources invested in the community, and even

viewed them as an inter-generational perpetuation of the community's dependency and passivity, resulting in people "who will never succeed." The next two quotes reflect this criticism:

> You can't just give [to] us all the time. Enough! I'm not in favor of giving anything for free. Something you pay money for, you give [back]. It has a value. You come on time, you're not late, you don't pull no-shows, you come because you're paid, and it doesn't matter how much you're paid. The Ethiopians have this attitude of "I should be given, I'm entitled." I was never in that place of "I'm entitled." Never. [Ravit]

> We need the aid, but it's also a trap for degeneration. When I was told "no" for a grant, I managed [on my own] for two years… and that taught me to start standing on my own two feet. [Malka]

The above quotes indicate that the successful women identify with the stereotypical view of their community and believe that the government aid received over the years by the Ethiopian population is "a waste of public money" and a means of perpetuating the community's passivity. Many claimed that not accepting financial aid is what drove them to success and to developing stronger intrinsic motivation. According to their testimonies, government aid breeds a culture of dependency on external institutions and discourages the community from tapping into its own sources of strength.

In contrast to this critical attitude, some viewed the community's struggle and the difficult circumstances of its immigration to Israel as one of its strengths. Specifically, some of the interviewees drew strength from "connecting with their roots" and viewed their parents' struggle as a shining example, a mark of success and of personal and community resilience. For some, their Ethiopian heritage served as a basis for shaping a unique identity that constitutes a source of personal strength. In an interview published in *Haaretz* (Saar, 2015), Kassa Getoo, one of the leaders of the recent Ethiopian protest, explained:

Israeli society doesn't see the Ethiopians as heroes. The narrative is that "the country rescued us." It's a victimization story. But people *chose* to immigrate; they made a choice to fulfill a dream. And along the way people were murdered, raped, suffered atrocities…. This story should become part of Israeli identity, part of the Jewish narrative. Not only mine as an Ethiopian. We're marching now and people are impressed by it. But what's that compared with what they did? In one moment they gave up everything, all they knew was that they were going to Jerusalem….

A similar view emerged from other interviewees:

I'm proud of this community that immigrated 30 years ago and reduced vast gaps. Look at the number of educated people, of groundbreakers. The community has amazed me with its tremendous endeavor, with its desire to be absorbed into the State of Israel, to contribute to it. I believe that twenty years from now we'll be in a different place because people are brave. "As a child you came to Israel on foot," I tell myself, so what can stop you here? Nobody can stop you, only your will. [Nurit]

In contrast to the first quotes, the latter attest to a perspective that does not espouse the view of linear career success and does not accept the position of cultural and social inferiority as a barrier to occupational success. The women's connection to their roots and preservation of their tradition and culture, which they translate into a contemporary context, provide a basis for forming an integrative identity combining their Ethiopian and Israeli selves. Interestingly, many of these excerpts are taken from older interviewees (ages 40+), some of whom even claimed that, when they were younger, they had to be critical about the community because the denial of their cultural origins helped them to break through the cultural and gender ceilings of the Western neoliberal labor market. Moreover, as mentioned above, this view of the community and its heritage is more complex and sets different standards with regard to success and its measures. For instance, success is calculated in terms

of the ability to surmount cultural differences and to integrate into Israeli society, despite all the difficulties entailed.

Cultural Differences Regarding Gender Equality: The Community as a Support Base or as a Hindering Factor in Women's Development

Our analysis of the interviews revealed a second dialectical axis in the women's attitude toward their community: the perception of it as either a hindering or a driving factor in advancing their careers. In the interviews, some women noted a wide range of factors in their environment that held them back, or attempted to hold them back, as they took their first steps in their careers (such as parents, spouses, and other community members), but they often mentioned these same factors as a source of support later on in their careers. The following quote exemplifies the role of parents and the community in occupational choices:

> My parents were opposed when I entered politics. [They asked] "What do you need it
>
> for, the headaches…. Isn't it enough that three times [a week] you come home at ten
>
> in the evening? Why are you even thinking about it? You know there are conflicts,
>
> that people make all kind of comments." In politics… you don't always come out
>
> clean even when things aren't true…. They didn't like me standing for [election to]
>
> the council…. It was actually from the Ethiopian side that I saw it [a critical attitude].
>
> [They asked] if my husband agrees [to you working like this]? "How is that possible?
>
> You'll be staying here every evening now? What do you need it for? Your
>
> photograph will be plastered everywhere. Why do you need it?" If I were a man it
>
> wouldn't be like that. There was even one man who said, "Why would I want my
>
> wife's photograph on the street corner? I wouldn't agree to something like that at
>
> all." [Rachel, deputy mayor]

As is evident in this quote and in other interviews, when pioneering women become the focus of public attention, their visibility is the object of criticism by a traditional,

conservative patriarchal society that takes a jaundiced view of their occupational success, especially in regard to their visibility in the public space.

In an attempt to overcome the dual discrimination that they face both as women and as immigrants from Ethiopia, some of the women developed a sisterhood with white career women. For example, one of the interviewees [Zahavit] recounted that when she was promoted, she received a telephone call from her female managing director, who told her: "I want to support you and I'm here at your side because it's not easy in this men's world." This call, she says, is etched in her memory as a significant event authenticating a sisterhood with other women that she joined when she became part of senior management.

As seen in these quotes, the community was not often perceived as a source of support. Some of the interviewees even preferred to divorce and "create a new destiny for themselves" as part of their coping strategy. Freedom from the influence of men in their families was found in many interviews to have a profound impact on occupational decisions and the tendency to pursue higher education. Further, some of the women interviewed reported that they had to divorce their Ethiopian husbands, an act that is out of step with the cultural values of their highly traditional community. They perceived this act as a testimonial to their success, as demonstrated in the following statements:

> I was married to someone [Ethiopian] who wasn't good for me…. He held me back… the divorce was difficult, but now I can do what I want…. It was hard for my parents, but I managed to come through it. It's good for me… It's a relief. [Sarit]

And:

> An Ethiopian husband will never support a real career for his woman. They are too scared of it! I had to divorce my husband in order to go forwards… and my second husband, he is not from there. [Vorkee]

In contrast to these women, the community and the family were perceived as a source of support among some of our interviewees, particularly in cases of educated families from Addis Ababa or families that had enjoyed high social status in Ethiopia:

> My mother's father was very wealthy in Ethiopia and she was a spoiled child…. In my extended family, education was always [at the top] of the list of priorities…. When we came to Israel my mother really made decisions [on] some very extraordinary schooling frameworks…. My sisters attended private schools… it cost a fortune, but my mother always managed somehow…. [She said] "You'll go to good schools"…. [They always said] "Be good and be good students." [Ilana, academia]

> Similar quotes were voiced mostly by the older women in the study. Some of them also described ambivalence in their parents' attitudes toward their careers. On the one hand, "they encouraged me to 'make it outside the community'"; on the other, "they were too poor and uneducated to understand what it takes and to allow me to make my own decisions."

"Alone at the Top": The Desire for Separation from the Community Coupled with a Desire to Return to the Community and Support It

A third axis that emerged from our analysis of the findings, and which to a great extent constitutes a fusion of the previous two, is many of the interviewees' description of a course of life that begins with separation and a need for detachment from the Ethiopian community, and a return to it at a later stage. Many interviewees described their refusal to be representatives of the community and their wanting to be judged on their own merits, without any connection to their Ethiopian origins, as exemplified in this quote:

> I've got lots of social criticism of the society and lots of criticism of the community…. When I was in the army I told myself, "I can do it differently." I mean, I've got the tools to do it differently…. We worked a lot with the Ethiopian

community that was living in deprivation, [although] in many cases in a feeling of

deprivation, not necessarily deprivation, so we tried to bring them face to face with

black figures with an Afro-American background that suffered lots of difficulties [in

order] to show them that despite everything it's possible…. When I started to be

successful I was often asked if I represent something and if I have some kind of

agenda, some kind of statement, and I was always terribly taken aback…. I don't

want to represent anybody. It's too heavy for me. It's hard. No. [I thought I was]

representing myself, and what I understood was that willingly or not, whether I

wanted to or not, I do represent. At first I really denied it…. I don't want to be

remembered as an Ethiopian, I want to be remembered as me. [Ronit]

Not only did many of the interviewees note that in the initial stages of their

occupational lives they did not wish to be representatives of the community, but, as

mentioned earlier, some even expressed more extreme viewpoints and voiced anger with the

community and a need to detach themselves from it as a vital step in their personal

development. However, once their success is assured, numerous pressures are exerted on

them to return to the community and to support it. An analysis of the interviews shows that

these pressures come from a trio of sources: from Israeli white society, from the immigrants'

families and their community, and, equally, from an inner sense of commitment on the part of

the women themselves. The next three quotes exemplify the various pressures exerted on

educated Ethiopian women to work with and to help the community. The first refers to the

stigmatization by the general, white society:

I've been a senior journalist for a number of years now. However, to this day my

journalism colleagues approach me on topics connected with the [Ethiopian]

community. They won't approach me on general subjects. I've been here for enough

years, even more than most of my colleagues, and I'm better educated than them…

>but no, [for them] automatically I'm an Ethiopian. Regrettably we haven't yet
>
>managed to break through the glass ceiling and shatter it. [Tzilla, journalist]

The second quote describes the pressures from family, especially the need to help provide for

the family that is still suffering from the hardships of immigration:

>I've taken a year out now because it was hard for me with the tuition fees…. You
>
>know, commitment to home, so I said I'd take a break for a year [from her doctoral
>
>studies], and continue next year…. At the same time, I'm in this job today… and I've
>
>got family in Ethiopia that I must help…. I feel there's a sort of family burden on
>
>me… lots of times I felt I was turning my back on the family…. I've got to work.
>
>Bring home money to help. How can I suddenly neglect everyone I've got behind
>
>me? And it also paralyzed me… I couldn't really be inside this thing [her
>
>profession]… I always felt that I was standing at the side and considering the
>
>profession, yearning…. [Alma, social agency]

And the third refers to the sense of commitment and responsibility that successful women

develop, according to which they have to help by giving back to the community and the

family:

>I think that not only I [but all] the educated Ethiopians who succeed take
>
>responsibility to help others. I tell them all "Well done!" They can get somebody else
>
>out [of the cycle of poverty], and build a chain of people who can help others. It's a
>
>community with a close social network… We have responsibility. Nobody gave me
>
>responsibility… I took this responsibility myself to initiate, to do, to set up, to help,
>
>to bring in people. [Mira, manager of an aid organization]

Although returning to the Ethiopian community might be perceived as an

occupational setback, a considerable number of the women defined their success by the

extent of their ability to help their community. The following are among the interviewees'

responses to the question, What is success from your point of view? "Success for me is the ability to really touch, to get to the sensitive points of the community" [Rachel]; "I see my success in my contribution [to the community]. It's not only my personal success" [Fantay]; "The community is at the top of my priorities.... The Ethiopians are a disadvantaged group and we've got to invest in them" [Amalmal]; and Pnina describes success as "The way to influence reality and bring about change… it will have to pass through academe or something like this…[to] move things, make right what is wrong."

These quotes indicate that, for the interviewees, success is not measured in terms of objective status achievements such as salary, prestige, and power, but in terms of their ability to provide support and aid to their community. This perception can also explain the fact that many of them neither seek nor occupy positions that come with a high salary, prestige, or power. Many of them remain focused on occupations that provide aid and support to the Ethiopian community, and they experience themselves as occupationally successful women because they are leaders bringing about change in their community:

> Yes, I could have earned more outside the community, but what do people want money for? Power? To influence the world? To change what they see as broken? So for me if, thanks to my studies and my power I manage to change my community and show [the white] Israelis that we have a rich culture, that we're worth no less than you, that the hardships my parents went through are Zionism no less than the establishment of the state—then for me I'm a successful woman. [Tamar]

In summary, our data show that when successful women return to their community, they act as role models for other female members of the community as well as for their female family members. As is evident from our interviews, this is a unique model that comprises a mix of personal-subjective definitions of success, Ethiopian cultural definitions emphasizing a belonging to community and family, and Western market-oriented definitions

connected to education, hierarchy, professional status, and so forth. This model combines resistance to and breaking through the boundaries of the Ethiopian community's culture and, at the same time, respect for and acceptance of its roots and boundaries.

Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate that the women who participated in it contend with two systems of identity regulation: the community-family system, with its norms of "being a good (and supportive) Ethiopian woman," and the Israeli labor system, which is individualistic, neoliberal, and male in its values and identity (Blustein, 2001; Sullivan, 1999). The analysis presented above demonstrates how the participants in the study contend with clashing normative demands and how they employ a cultural repertoire to broaden and render these norms more flexible so that they can succeed in the labor market.

The first contribution of the study's findings pertains to the struggle with intersectionality. Like other minority communities (Mizrachi & Herzog, 2012; Mushaben, 2009), the Ethiopian community is to a great extent characterized by a culture that promotes a high degree of involvement and loyalty, coupled with traditionalism and patriarchy, for all its members, especially women. Within this meeting of cultures, the question arises as to how these women manage to progress and fulfill themselves in the labor market, and how they construct their identity while constantly navigating between the various (and at times competing) normative demands placed on them by their different membership groups. The findings show that this is a complex process of acceptance and rejection, and of constructing a flexible and changing identity in the stages of personal and professional development (Cole, 2009). The main contribution of the present study is its attempt to provide greater insight into the complex process of carving out a path in the Western labor market. Following Brown and Lewis (2011), who emphasize the complexity and ambiguity of processes connected to occupational identities, our findings show that the processes undergone by the Ethiopian

women in making their occupational way take place with reference to complex personal identities (gender, color, immigration) identified with discrimination and exclusion. These simultaneously intersect with the traditional culture, on the one hand, and with the Western labor market on the other, thereby creating what Choo and Ferree (2010) have termed "institutional interpenetration" (p. 135), in which no process is assigned hierarchical primacy.

Social identity theories and various theories of socialization often engage with processes of rebuilding, normalization, and internalization of cultural and social norms of individuals who relocate to a new culture (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). Moreover, labor market researchers contend that the prevailing norms and rules in organizations influence (and indeed govern) the identity of the people working in them, who are required to adapt and conform in order to succeed (Hochschild, 1983). The findings of the present study show that internalization of some of the outlooks of the hegemonic society regarding "the character of the traditional society" in general, and the labor market in particular, take over and act as socialization agents that influence the interviewees' identity perception. It seems, however, that this is not solely a process of internalizing the expectations and norms of the hegemonic society. In addition, these women's culture also provides them with a repertoire of meanings from which they derive their choices, modes of action, and—no less important—their power. This phenomenon has been manifested in other studies of successful women immigrants in Western labor markets (e.g., Essers & Benschop, 2009; Mushaben, 2009; Spaights & Whitaker, 1995), pointing to the importance and complexity of such integration.

A second contribution of this study concerns success in a diverse cultural context and how it affects the successful woman's relationship with her community of origin. Whereas most studies on career success have tended to offer measurable universal criteria such as salary, promotion, and status (Heslin, 2005), in recent years these have been joined by subjective aspects (such as meaning and satisfaction, a sense of progress, etc.) that are

defined by the individual him/herself and that change during the course of one's life (Hall, 2002; Wach et al., 2016). Taking into consideration the interrelations of immigrant women with their cultural community when crafting subjective definitions of success is of critical significance in the context of traditional, weakened communities. In other words, the success of people in different groups can be measured on the basis of their ability to advance their community and to contribute to its well-being (Arthur et al., 2005; Juntunen et al., 2001).

These findings reveal that the hegemonic models of success not only ignore the fact that different groups define and measure success in different terms (Blustein, 2001; Sullivan, 1999), but that they hinder the viewpoints of other groups such as immigrants, women, and blacks, and do not allow the dominant discourse to be challenged. Therefore, we must study when self and others' criteria of success are likely to be most salient (Arthur et al., 2005; Heslin, 2005; Wach et al., 2016). This study therefore joins a growing corpus of knowledge that attempts to question the validity of career success's basic definitions.

A third contribution of the study concerns attempts at gender identity control and regulation in a specific cultural context. The literature addressing gendering in the workplace is extensive and longstanding (Acker, 1990; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004) and touches upon the stereotypes and barriers faced both by women from hegemonic social groups and women from minority groups. However, in the case of women who belong to a traditional culture such as Jewish-Ethiopian society, it is clear that they face additional difficulties. The study's findings show that the normative framework of welfare workers, community, and family, which pushes the women to be mothers and devoted family women, clashes not only with the norms of the modern labor market, which dictate male conventions of ambition, competitiveness, and utmost commitment to the workplace (Heslin, 2005). In addition, there is an expectation that the women maintain their loyalty to the community and help its members. When it comes to women from a disadvantaged group, especially one that is

traditional and collective in its nature, it seems that a successful career must be negotiated in constant dialogue with their community. In fact, the interviewees in this study describe a situation in which they must constantly juggle the private and public domains. This occurs when, on many occasions, the private domain is no longer clearly defined as a result of the changes that have taken place in the structure of the traditional family and society post-immigration, and the members of the community are insufficiently conversant in the public domain because of a shortage of women mentors from the community, on the one hand, and an unfamiliarity with the Israeli labor market, on the other. However, these successful women are reshaping both the job market norms and their families' and communities' norms and structures, and in that respect they are paving the way to and becoming leaders of deeper social changes (Choo & Ferree, 2010).

Our work has several limitations, the first of which relates to our sample. Despite the seeming homogeneity of the participants in this study (all are women immigrants from Ethiopia, all are Jewish, and all are dark-skinned), they actually differ in almost every other aspect of their lives and career histories. The circumstance of their often having been the first in their fields of work has made each of their stories unique.

We hope that future studies can substantiate further the criteria for subjective definitions of career success of minority groups in general, and of immigrant women from traditional communities in particular. Future research should explore role models, educational levels, and community values as potential assets or deterrents to successful careers of immigrant women. Regarding women who encounter many exclusionary boundaries in the Western labor market, this kind of research represents a call for greater social justice in such markets, which today are absorbing thousands of refugees and immigrants.

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Appendix A should be here