

**IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION
AMONG ISRAELI MIGRANTS IN CANADA**

by

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Abstract

Scholarship on migration has flourished in recent decades along with increasing interest in how migrants both experience and negotiate life abroad. Here I present a case study of the Israeli community in Vancouver as a way of engaging with these issues. The study is based on research that I conducted in 2008-09, involving nine months of participant observation in the community and 34 in-depth interviews. This research explores the process of identity formation among Israeli migrants in Canada and is framed by prevailing theories of identity, ethnicity, migration and transnationalism. On the whole, the Israelis I interviewed have maintained a strong sense of Israeli identity. While the majority are content with life in Canada, few consider themselves Canadian. Meanwhile, many have developed a stronger Jewish identity in Canada where, unlike in Israel, Jews constitute a minority. This phenomenon closely follows Fredrik Barth's theory concerning the link between identity formation and the maintenance of group boundaries. However, many of my informants have encountered social barriers in their interactions with Canadians, including Canadian Jews. These social barriers can hinder Israelis' involvement in the Canadian Jewish community. Thus, many of my informants forge strong social networks with one another and their participation in the Canadian Jewish community varies. By comparing these findings to research conducted in the Israeli community in Toronto, I conclude that Israeli patterns of identity and social network formation differ little between large and small communities. This study further sheds light on some of the problems faced by new immigrants in Canada and the extent to which local ethnic communities may aid in their process of integration.

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Introduction

In July 2008, while traveling in the United States, I met a young Israeli backpacker around my age. Being a Canadian Jew, who speaks Hebrew and has spent much time in Israel, I felt a strong personal connection to Israelis. Moreover, I was conducting my master's research on the experiences of Israeli migrants in Canada. I soon invited him to visit Vancouver and a few days later, we sat talking in my apartment when the backpacker made a comment that I found offensive. I quickly grew angry, to which he jokingly responded with similar comments, and an argument ensued. "Calm down, man," the backpacker said, "look at how worked up you've gotten yourself." As I realized that he had been joking, my anger subsided but his now increased. "Why does everyone take everything so seriously here?" he complained. In Israel you can joke about anything, he said, but North Americans are so uptight, so politically correct, and it drives him nuts. North Americans don't know how to relax, he told me.

As I listened to these words, it dawned on me that I had heard them all before. Many of the Israeli migrants I had interviewed as part of my research had told me how difficult it was to relate to Canadians, even in terms of humour. Furthermore, many of my informants had spoken about Canadian Jews in the same regard—that regardless of the commonalities they may share with Israelis, Canadian Jews are still Canadians, are socialized as Canadians, and can be just as hard for Israelis to relate to as non-Jews. Here I had misread the backpacker's signs and rather than take his comments in jest, I had taken them so seriously as to grow angry—all despite the fact that I was a fellow Jew, that I knew Israel well, and that I was intensively *studying* elements of this very topic. This sort of cultural miscommunication would rarely occur between me and a Canadian non-Jew, but it did occur between me and a fellow Jew from Israel. If the backpacker had experienced this conflict in only a few weeks in North America, one can only imagine how it takes place in the lives of Israelis who live there.

This thesis examines the experiences of Israeli migrants in Canada and their relationship to the Canadian Jewish community. The work is based on participant observation and in-depth interviews that I conducted in the Israeli community of Vancouver. Identity, and the way that identity is shaped by the migration process, is the central issue that permeates this discussion. The findings of the project show that, among my informants, most came to Canada for reasons of travel or adventure rather than a strong desire to leave Israel itself. Although largely pleased with life in Canada, most envisioned this move as temporary rather than permanent (thus I speak of them as “migrants” rather than “immigrants”). As a result, most have maintained a strong Israeli identity in Canada and few self-identify as Canadians. Meanwhile, their Jewish identity often becomes more salient in Canada where, unlike in Israel, Jews constitute a minority group.

As Israeli migrants negotiate their multiple and changing identities, how does this affect their relationship with the Canadian Jewish community? Since many Israelis become more aware of their Jewish identity in Canada, one might expect them to participate in the Jewish community and forge ties with Canadian Jews. However, relations between Israelis and Canadian Jews vary widely. Some Israelis in Vancouver frequently participate in Jewish community programming while others avoid it. In order to explain this, we must first understand how Israelis view Canadians in general. Of my informants, most find Canadians on the whole to be friendly and polite. However, many find them less warm and more difficult to connect to than fellow Israelis; as a result, a number of my informants have had difficulty forging close relationships with Canadians. Canadian Jews, meanwhile, are seen in much the same way. Although many Israelis feel some sort of connection to them as fellow Jews, Israelis often feel that ultimately these Jews act much the same as other Canadians. Consequently, Israelis encounter many of

the same impediments to social interaction with Jews that they come across with non-Jews.

Some years ago, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992:17) wrote: “A certain unity of place and people has been long assumed in the anthropological concept of culture.” This, they argued, has never really been true and is particularly untrue in today’s world. We wrongly equate country, people, and culture—Israel being where Israelis live and Israeli culture resides, Canada being where Canadians live and a Canadian culture resides (9, 12, 19). The individuals we encounter in this study show that none of these propositions are entirely true. On the most obvious level, not all Israelis live in Israel—migrants clearly conflate this. From there we must accept that elements of Israeli culture may thrive outside of Israel among this migrant population. Our understanding of these phenomena has increased through the framework of transnationalism, which Linda Basch et al. (1994:7) define as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”¹ Meanwhile, Israelis in Canada—even those with Canadian citizenship—may not feel strongly Canadian. As the above authors explain, there is no longer a “conflation of geographic space and social identity” (8).

At the same time, Ronald Niezen (2004:40) argues that the experience of deterritorialization is met with a desire to “‘relocalize’ identities.” According to Niezen: “Globalization entails not only diasporas and combinations, but an opposite tendency toward the erection of cultural boundaries, to the reclamation and protection of distinct territories and ways of life . . .” As migrants seek out a balance between these processes, they actively negotiate feelings of belonging and a sense of self. Identities are always

¹ Theories of transnationalism are relatively new and have become extremely influential in scholarship on migration. However, Alejandro Portes (2003:874) adds an important caution: “Transnationalism represents a novel perspective, not a novel phenomenon.” As Ewa Morawska (2003:621) explains, historians have responded to the spread of these theories not by disproving transnationalism but by documenting its existence throughout history. Still, Portes acknowledges that the heightened technology of our time has allowed for transnational activity to a much greater extent (875).

evolving, never fixed (Hall 1990:225), and this is all the more true for migrants. What we must keep in mind is that identities are not “either/or” categories—“Israeli” and “Canadian” are not mutually exclusive. In the same way, they do not run on a spectrum with clearly defined gradations, wherein a migrant travels a linear path between allegiance to home country and allegiance to host country (Basch et al. 1996:4). Culture and identity are far too complex, and in the transformation between Israeli and Canadian life, Israeli migrants must also come to terms with what feeling (if any) they have as Jews.

This thesis serves three aims. The first is to contribute to the small body of research on Israeli migrants in Canada and address certain gaps in the literature. Many of my findings confirm those of previous studies, both in Canada and elsewhere, particularly the comprehensive and invaluable work of Steven J. Gold (2002). However, very little research has been conducted in Canada during the past ten to fifteen years, a period in which Israeli migration has markedly increased (Statistics Canada 2007c, Lustick 2004, Gold in press). Thus, the existing scholarship offers a picture of Israeli migrants that is in need of updating. Meanwhile, most studies have been based in Toronto, Canada’s largest Israeli community. My research serves to shed light on how Israelis negotiate life in small communities such as that of Vancouver.

The second aim of the thesis is to offer Canadian Jewry a better understanding of Israeli migrants, who constitute a growing segment of their community. If population estimates are correct (see under “Israeli Migration” below), Israelis comprise roughly 14 percent of the Jewish population in Canada (Statistics Canada 2001). In Vancouver, the figure is only around 8 percent but Israelis are one of the largest groups of Jewish newcomers to the city. Shalom BC, an information and welcome service for these newcomers, receives more inquiries from Israelis than any other group. Indeed, between 2001 and 2007 (the years for which records are available), a full 54 percent of Shalom

BC inquiries have come from Israelis, whether born in Israel or originating from other countries (mainly the former Soviet Union). In addition to this group are a small but growing number of Israelis who have relocated to Vancouver from elsewhere in Canada, mainly Toronto.² Thus, the Jewish community stands to gain from a deeper understanding of Israeli migrants in order to create programs and services that meet their needs.

The final aim of the thesis is to provide a case study for understanding the process of identity formation and integration among migrants more broadly. Migration is among the most important dynamics at play in our world today. There were 175 million international migrants in 2000, equating to just 3 percent of the world's population but more than double the number of international migrants 20 years before. Of these, 40.8 million (or 22.3 percent) resided in North America, accounting for 12.9 percent of the North American population (GCIM 2005:1, 5, 83-84). Migration is of particular concern in Canada, where immigrants number more than 6 million and account for nearly 20 percent of the national population (Statistics Canada 2007a, 2007c). Moreover, they are disproportionately responsible for 50 percent of Canada's population growth as well as 70 percent of Canada's labour force growth (Ley 2005:13), both of which are expected to rise to 100 percent by about 2020 (Hiebert 2006:192). Understanding who these migrants are, how they identify themselves and how they experience life in a new society is therefore of central importance. Throughout the thesis, discussion will be framed by prevailing theories of identity, ethnicity, migration and transnationalism.

Israeli Migration

Last year, Israel celebrated its sixtieth anniversary. The creation of the Jewish state in 1948 marked the culmination of Zionism, a nationalist movement that emerged in

² I am indebted to Yael Levy, Executive Director of Shalom BC, for providing me with this information.

Europe during the late nineteenth century. Zionists sought the return of world Jewry to the Land of Israel, which Jews had claimed as their homeland for centuries—indeed, for millennia—without ever before working toward the creation of their own state. Since 1948, more than three million Jews from around the world have resettled in Israel (Cohen 2005:136). Yet nearly as soon as there were immigrants to Israel, there were emigrants from there as well. This reverse pattern of migration has been much smaller but is significant nonetheless. Rina Cohen estimated in 2005 that approximately 9 percent of the Israeli population lived outside of Israel (136), corresponding to over 620,000 people. In 2007, the Israeli Foreign Ministry estimated that there were 750,000 Israelis living abroad (for two years or more) (Eichner 2007), corresponding to nearly 10.5 percent of the Israeli population. These are high percentages, particularly when Israel is typically viewed as a receiving rather than source country of migration. Indeed, these percentages are not much lower than those of such well-known source countries as the Philippines, whose emigrant population is estimated at 11 million or just under 14 percent of the national population (Collymore 2003).

The largest destination for Israeli migrants is the United States, where Cohen (2005:137) estimates that approximately 400,000 have settled. Canada, however, is the second largest destination with an Israeli population of approximately 45,000. Exact numbers are hard to come by, partly due to the inadequacy of indicators employed in government records. For example, neither country of birth nor mother tongue are adequate categories for ascertaining the Israeli population abroad since Israel itself is an immigrant country and therefore many Israelis may not have been born in Israel or speak Hebrew as their mother tongue. Nevertheless, this information can help us to gain a general idea of the size of the community. According to the 2006 Canadian census, there were 23,265 immigrants, permanent residents and work- or study-permit holders in Canada who were born in Israel (comprising 3.6 percent of Canada's total immigrant

population) (Statistics Canada 2007c). In the same census, 10,755 people living in Canada listed their ethnic origin as Israeli (either as a single response or in tandem with other responses) (Statistics Canada 2007a). Meanwhile, 11,355 listed Hebrew as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada 2007g) and 8,650 listed Hebrew as the language spoken most often at home (Statistics Canada 2007e).

Toronto is by far the largest Israeli community in Canada, with a population of between 20,000 and 35,000 Israelis—more than the rest of Canada combined (Cohen 1999:128, Cohen 2001:221). It is not surprising, therefore, that most studies of Israelis in Canada have been based in Toronto.³ The first was published just seven years after Israel's independence by the Canadian Jewish Congress (Savan 1955) and was followed by a master's thesis a number of years later (Greenberg 1971). Gerald Gold, an anthropologist, and Rina Cohen, a sociologist, have since published several articles on the Israeli community in the city (Gold 1992, Cohen & Gold 1997, Cohen 1999, Cohen 2001). These studies found that, despite the existence of a highly organized Jewish community, Israelis tend not integrate to the same extent as other Jewish immigrants. According to Cohen (1999:121), one finds in Toronto “the existence of a distinctive ethnic community of Israelis on the margins of, but at the same time distinct from, the more established Jewish community.” While Jewish communities in Canada are often based around synagogues, which may double as Jewish community centres, Israelis are largely secular and may feel uncomfortable in such settings. Thus, Cohen (1999:126) found that fewer than 20% of her informants were synagogue members and no more than 26% participated in Jewish activities. Meanwhile, many Israelis only forge friendships with other Israelis, even after living in Canada for decades (Cohen 1999:127).

³ In the United States, the literature on Israeli migrants has had a similar bias toward large communities such as New York (e.g. Korazim 1985, Ritterband 1986, Shokeid 1988, Rosenthal & Auerbach 1992) and Los Angeles (e.g. Gold 1994, Gold 1995, Sabar 2000).

The Vancouver Israeli population, meanwhile, is much smaller. The 2006 Canadian census shows that 1,925 immigrants, permanent residents and work- or study-permit holders residing in Vancouver were born in Israel (Statistics Canada 2007d), while 760 Vancouverites listed Israeli as their ethnic origin (Statistics Canada 2007b). In terms of language, 955 Vancouverites listed Hebrew as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada 2007h) and 790 listed it as the language spoken most often at home (Statistics Canada 2007f). By investigating the Israeli community of Vancouver, we may put previous studies in context. Are Israelis prone to forge strong social networks with other Israelis or do they simply do so when living in large communities amongst thousands of others? The same questions may be asked of Israelis' sense of identity.

Thus far only one study, a doctoral dissertation, has been completed on the Israeli community in Vancouver and it did not investigate issues of identity or Israelis' relationship with Canadian Jews (Mastai 1980). A small number of other studies have engaged with some of these issues in Montreal (Gutstadt 1996) and Western Canada (Linn & Barkan-Ascher 1996), including Edmonton (Magat 1999) and Calgary (Fogell 2006). This study adds to our understanding of the Israeli migrant experience in small communities and how they negotiate identity and integration when there are relatively few Israelis around.

Methodology

My fieldwork lasted for nine months during 2008-09. I conducted participant observation in both informal Israeli gatherings and more organized community programs. Of the former category, I participated in *shabbat* (Sabbath) and holiday celebrations with Israeli families, took part in poker games with Israelis, and spent time in local Israeli restaurants. Of the latter category, I participated in numerous activities and events at a variety of sites. I attended *shabbat* and holiday services in two local synagogues that are

frequented by Israelis. I attended a welcome brunch for Israeli newcomers, an Israeli family picnic, as well as a Hebrew book and music exchange, all held annually. I participated in Hebrew-language sing-alongs (*shira b'tzibur*), literature meetings and a musical performance held at the Jewish Community Centre. I also participated in Israeli dancing (*rikudey am*) at the Jewish Community Centre and attended English-language lectures on Israel-related themes.

Meanwhile, Hadassah-WIZO (a Jewish women's charitable organization) has a local chapter for Hebrew speakers, entitled *Tzabar* (meaning "sabrah," or native-born Israeli), and I attended their monthly meetings. I also participated in programs organized by Hillel (the Jewish student group) at the University of British Columbia, as well as two affiliated groups, the Israel Awareness Club and Young Jewish Urbanites. I attended Israeli film screenings at various locations around the city as well as a pub night and barbeques organized by one of the aforementioned synagogues. Finally, I attended a *Yom Hazikaron* (Israeli Remembrance Day) ceremony, a *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Israeli Independence Day) concert, a memorial for former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, an Israel solidarity gathering (during the January 2009 war in Gaza), and a panel discussion of Jews against the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian Territories.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 31 Israelis in Vancouver, as well as an additional three Israelis who work or are active in the community. For the first group, my questions surrounded their personal migration story and their experiences living in Canada (see Appendix A); for the second, I focused on their professional knowledge of the community and its development (see Appendix B). I began with a few contacts in the community and then recruited my informants through snowball sampling. I also recruited many informants through Facebook, an online social networking site, by contacting the members of groups that have been formed by Israelis in Vancouver. Through further snowball sampling, these

contacts led me to others. Interviews were held either in informants' homes or in public meeting spots, mainly cafés, according to the informants' preference. When informants consented, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed; for those who preferred not to be recorded (a minority), notes were taken instead. The average interview lasted around one-and-a-half hours, although interviews ranged from under one hour to over two. All names of informants in the pages that follow are pseudonyms.

Two key variables of my study were that my participants be born in Israel and that they be relatively recent newcomers to Canada.⁴ Of my 31 primary informants, 16 were women and 15 were men. All had come to Canada between 1990 and 2007, though most had arrived since 2000. All were born in Israel (known as *sabras*, or *tzabarim*) and most were second-generation Israelis (born to sabra parents and immigrant grandparents). Nineteen were Ashkenazi, eight were Mizrahi and four were of mixed background.⁵ One was religious and a few were traditional but the large majority were secular. My informants ranged in age from 19 to 57, though most were under 40. This spread came about partly because of my research design (since more recent newcomers tend to be in young adulthood or early middle age), partly because of the character of the Israeli community (in which there are very few senior citizens),⁶ and partly because of my methods of recruitment (in which Facebook, which caters to young people, was an important tool). My informants were a highly educated group, in which all but two had completed some sort of post-secondary education and the large majority had one or more university degrees. It appears that these educational levels are in line with the characteristics of the Israeli community in general, although no quantitative information is available to confirm this. On the whole, my informants also had excellent English.

⁴ I also interviewed two Israelis who fell outside these variables. They were not included in my analysis but were valuable to my research nonetheless.

⁵ Ashkenazi Jews originate from Central and Eastern Europe, while Mizrahi Jews originate from parts of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

⁶ Indeed, according to the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, 70 percent of Israelis abroad are between the ages of 20 and 44 (Eglish 2007).

While my interaction with Israelis in everyday life occurred in a mix of Hebrew and English, all interviews but one were conducted in English.

Although my informants do not constitute a representational sample, by utilizing multiple entry points into the Israeli community I acquired a group of informants that is indeed representative of the range of experiences found in that community. I wish to stress, however, that Israeli migrants are a highly heterogeneous group like any other. I am of course unable to represent the full range of these experiences here. Rather, in the pages that follow, I have tried to highlight the most significant trends without obscuring their great diversity.

Making the Move

The reasons for my informants' move to Canada were varied. Some came to pursue their education while others came for a particular job, either for themselves or their spouse. Some came to join a partner who lived in Canada or moved to Canada with a Canadian spouse they had married abroad. Others, however, came mostly out of an interest in travel, adventure, the chance to experience a different culture or a change of pace. Indeed, this was a motivating factor for most of my informants. Of those who came to Canada seeking a particular job or school, most had similar opportunities in Israel and it was in fact an underlying interest in travel or new experiences that drew them abroad. Meanwhile, six of my informants, who had come to Canada between the ages of 12 and 22, followed their parents there and were not the primary decision-makers in the move.

For many Israelis that I encountered, their choice of destination was well planned.⁷ As all Israelis learn English in school, they usually select English-speaking countries when they move abroad. Some of my Israelis listed the destinations that they had considered before moving and these were nearly always confined to the English-speaking world—United States, Canada, Australia and England—as well as occasionally continental Europe. Canada stood out for the relative ease of its visa and permanent residency requirements for Israelis. Ron, for example, came to Canada in his early twenties and did not apply for permanent residency before leaving Israel (unlike many of my other informants). He chose Canada “because it was the easiest country to get into. No visa.” As he relates: “Just land, don’t need to do anything, just buy a plane ticket. Australia you need a visa, the States you need a visa. In order to get those visas, most times you get rejected when you’ve just come out of the military⁸ ’cause they know you’re gonna go and work [illegally], that’s why. So Canada, they’re nice. They don’t ask questions.” For those coming to study, Canada also offered less expensive tuition. This was the case for Keren, who explains, “Europe was too complicated because of the second language, and the United States was too expensive, so Canada seems to be the right fit...”

As for Vancouver itself, Israelis often choose the city because of its warm weather (relative to the rest of Canada), its beauty (as a number of them had visited Vancouver prior to their move), and its high standard of living which is internationally recognized. Some, meanwhile, come primarily because a particular job, school or social network (whether family or friends) is located there. In particular, Vancouver has seen a number of Israeli families settle in the city in recent years because of job transfers through one of three companies. Creo, co-founded in 1983 by an Israeli who immigrated to Canada ten

⁷ Though most of my informants moved directly from Israel to Vancouver, some had arrived after living elsewhere in Canada (or in a few cases, the United States or Australia) for a few years. After living in Vancouver for a few years, some also moved away and have since returned to the city.

⁸ Military service (three years for men and two years for women) is mandatory for most Israelis.

years before, is a software and graphic arts company based in the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby. In 2000, Creo took over one of its leading Israeli competitors, Scitex Corporation, resulting in the relocation of a number of Scitex employees from Israel to Vancouver.⁹ Telrad Networks is an Israeli telecommunications company and Amdocs is a service and software provider for telecommunications companies which was founded in Israel and is now based in the United States. They, too, have operations in Vancouver which have brought a number of employees over from Israel.

Though each of my informants had his or her own reasons for moving, many are not what I would call “purposeful migrants.” A number presented the story of their move in a narrative of serendipity, as if their migration—far from planned—had come about through a series of particular circumstances and was almost unexpected or accidental. Irit, who came to Canada in her early fifties at an older age than most, is a prime example. “I never thought of leaving Israel,” she tells me. “I didn’t think that I would live in *chutz la’aretz* [outside of Israel, literally ‘outside of the land’]...” However, she met an Israeli man living in Canada and moved abroad to join him. Her move, as she narrates, was therefore “*b’mikre...mamash b’mikre*” [by accident...really by accident]. Moran, a woman in her mid-thirties, is another example. When asked about her journey to Canada, she laughs and says, “Actually it’s my brother’s fault.” Moran’s brother had wanted to study in Canada but did not have the qualifications for a visa so he asked her, who had already completed a bachelor’s degree, to apply first and increase his chances of acquiring a visa in the future. According to Moran:

I actually did it without thinking too much, I was doing it just to see if I could and for my brother. And then after two years of forgetting about it, I got the visa. And I was just in the middle of working really hard in a big company and I needed a break from there...Perfect, I said. Perfect time to go study and take the dust off my brain, experience something more relaxed.

⁹ Creo was later taken over by Kodak in 2005 and operations in Burnaby continue under the company’s new direction.

Moran then moved to Canada in 2004.

Irit and Moran are far from the kind of immigrants that we often imagine, who dream for years of making a new life for themselves in a country like Canada. They are also far from alone. Kochi, a woman in her late forties, has a similar story. Kochi had always loved to travel and wanted to experience living abroad as well as expose her children “to the broader world.” As a result, she considered moving to Canada and completed her visa application but then largely forgot about it. Family life continued and in the summer of 2005, Kochi traveled with her husband and children through the West Coast of North America. “We kept on with regular life,” she relates, “and suddenly it came,” a visa awaiting them in the mail upon their return from the trip. They would not have taken the trip to North America, she says, had they known that they might soon be moving there. Eight months later, they left Israel for Vancouver. Ro’i, meanwhile, came to Canada because he wanted a new experience, to “add a bit of a dimension to our lives,” and so he enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Vancouver. Before the move, however, he and his wife had both been doing well in their respective jobs and studies in Israel. “I think that in fact if I look back at it, it didn’t make sense to go abroad,” Ro’i says. As he recalls, “it almost felt that I was kind of persistently pursuing something that I should drop. And it was close to that, in fact, we almost dropped the whole idea...” Ultimately, Ro’i and his wife did make the move but as he relates, “in a funny way, in the end we decided to move just because we had started the process of thinking about it and we didn’t want to dump it. We thought, ‘Well, we might as well do it.’”

Many of my informants, when they first came to Canada, also envisioned their migration as a sojourn rather than permanent resettlement abroad. Ro’i, for one, recalled how he and his wife had planned on only a short-term move to Canada as they had no interest in leaving Israel forever. “I mean the thing was that we really said we’re going to study for a Ph.D. So there was never a feeling that we’re leaving Israel for good—we

loved Israel, there was no issue of ‘Oh, we hate this country.’” However, after completing his Ph.D. in Vancouver, Ro’i moved to the United States to take up a post-doctorate position and then returned to Vancouver for a faculty position. Keren, who is now in her mid-thirties, also came to Canada to pursue a graduate degree. She arrived in 1999 and planned to return to Israel after her studies, but during that time she met a Canadian Jew whom she would marry shortly after. Izhar, in his mid-forties, moved to Vancouver for a job in 2002 together with his family. Although he and his wife had intended to stay for only a few years, Izhar wished to acquire Canadian citizenship for the family and this process extended their stay. Meanwhile, Izhar’s family went through hard times in Canada as his wife suffered from several bouts of depression (a condition that began after their migration). “With all that we went through,” Izhar explains, “I wanted to get to stay enough to kind of compensate for having hard times here—to also have good times.”

Thus, for a number of reasons, Israelis often end up staying longer in Canada than they anticipate. Just as so many describe their path to Canada as serendipitous, prolonging their stay in Canada also develops from a series of unanticipated circumstances. This has led Moshe Shokeid (1988) to call Israeli migrants “children of circumstances.”

On Being Israeli

As previously mentioned, most of my informants left Israel more from an interest in experiencing life abroad than from dissatisfaction with life in Israel. Furthermore, most did not intend to leave Israel forever. It is perhaps not surprising then that most of the Israelis I met profess a strong feeling of Israeli identity and have maintained this feeling in Canada. Assaf, a man in his early forties, is one example. He affirms that his Israeli identity has always been very strong and remains so after six years in Canada. “I

read daily the newspapers from Israel,” he tells me. “As much as I’m so many years away from there, it’s still a very strong part of my life.” In fact, Assaf feels that his connection to Israel is too strong. “I don’t think it should be this deep,” he says. When I ask him how he reconciles this strong identification with the fact that he lives in Canada, he tells me that he does not—it simply doesn’t bother him much. “I must say this is not hard for me, so I don’t know exactly the reason but it’s not something that is hard for me to live here and have half of my heart somewhere else.” Kobi, who came to Canada in 2000 and is now in his early thirties, speaks in similarly evocative terms about his connection to Israel. According to Kobi: “...if you ask me where my home is, my home is Israel—like let’s say I care about Israeli politics way more than I care about Canadian politics...even though today it affect me personally more than affect me the Israeli politics, ’cause I’m not there. But I care about Israeli politics a thousand times more. Why? Because that’s my heart, that’s my essence.”

Meanwhile, a strong sense of Israeli identity may coincide with other equally strong affiliations. This is particularly true since the Jewish population of Israel is itself quite diverse and has been formed by immigrants from all corners of the world. Thus Liora, whose grandparents immigrated from Yemen, strongly identifies as both an Israeli and a Yemeni or Arabic Jew. Ella Shohat reminds us not to ignore these internal differences and presuppose “Israeli” as a unitary character. Shohat, who was born in Israel to immigrants from Iraq, is herself now a migrant living in the United States. In her essay, ““Coming to America”” (2000:289), she describes how she is often reduced to simply being “Israeli” because the complexities of her Iraqi-Israeli identity fail to resonate with Americans.

When speaking of their Israeli identity, it is interesting to note that both Assaf and Kobi mention their connection to Israeli news and politics. Indeed, keeping up to date with current events in Israel is extremely common in the Israeli community abroad.

Although Israelis may engage in a number of transnational activities to varying degrees, reading news from home is the most prevalent activity. Most of my informants read Israeli news websites regularly, and many do so once a day or more. Israelis frequently set their homepages to Israeli news websites and even when their English is outstanding, Israelis tend to always read Israeli news in Hebrew; Ynet, the online version of *Yedioth Ahronoth*, is one particularly popular site. Reading the news is also an activity that seems to transcend age, equally popular among young and middle-aged adults. When I ask Omer, in his early thirties, whether he follows Israeli news, he laughs and says, “Yeah, every hour.” When I ask the same question of Or, who is in his early twenties, his simple response is: “All the time.” Or reads the news, he explains, “just to see that everything is alright, you know, everything is not breaking down because I still worry about my family and my friends.” This high rate of news consumption among Israeli migrants is only an extension of the same pattern in Israel. Yoram Peri (2004:3) likens the need for news in Israel to a need for water in the desert; he suggests that this is partly a result of the long-term conflict in which Israel is embroiled and partly a result of “Israeli national characteristics such as dynamism, energy, agitation, and overactivism.” Whatever the reason, some 60 percent of television viewers in Israel watch the evening news while some 80 percent of adults in Israel read a daily newspaper on a regular basis.¹⁰ What is noteworthy is that the rate at which Israelis keep up with Israeli news does not greatly lessen—and in some cases even increases—when they move abroad. According to Ro’i, who left Israel in 1994, “I used to know everything that was going on. Now you can catch me not knowing that something has happened.” Still, Ro’i tells me that he reads the Israeli news about every three days; in other words, even after 14 years living away from Israel, he still remains very well in tune with what goes on there.

¹⁰ Canadians, it appears, are not far behind with 75 percent of adults reading a daily newspaper in a given week (CNA 2008).

Some Israelis also engage in other, less common forms of transnational activity. Thanks to the internet, it is possible to listen to Israeli radio right from your home in Vancouver. As a result, stations such as *Galei Tzahal* and *Galgalatz* provide the background music to Israeli family gatherings or poker games. Liron, speaking of herself and her partner, tells me: “We listen to Israeli radio more than Canadian radio.” Keren, whose three children keep her busy at home, has less time for music. “But on *Yom Hazikaron* [Israeli Remembrance Day] for example,” she explains,

that’s a time when I’m really, really willing to pay a million dollars to be in Israel. Because there’s no way of feeling it here, there’s no—you can attend the ceremony [at the Jewish Community Centre] but it’s not the right way to feel it. So *then* I put the radio on. So during holidays, especially during holidays, the radio would be on.

Meanwhile for some, particularly among the women I spoke to, trips back to Israel are a chance to stock up on much missed Hebrew books that simply cannot be bought in Vancouver. Ilana, who is in her early forties and has lived in Canada since 2003, laughs when she tells me how many books she buys when she visits home. At other times of the year, she gets by with books that her mother and friends in Israel send to her. Liron’s family in Israel also sends her books. “We got two packages last year,” she tells me. For Liora, who reads mostly in English, she notes that an Israeli friend in Vancouver is currently home for a visit. When she returns, Liora tells me, “she’s gonna bring some Hebrew books and I’m gonna devour them.” Then there is a Hebrew book exchange that the Jewish Community Centre hosts once a year; this event, where people trade in their used books for one another’s, attracts large crowds.

The greatest link to Israel, of course, is through family and friendship ties. For the large majority of my informants, all parents and siblings remain in Israel. A number of the Israelis I spoke with also maintain close friendships in Israel. These connections, together with a longing for life in Israel more generally, mean that many of my informants try to visit Israel once a year—or, when their finances hinder them from doing

so, wish that they could. Few mentioned any feeling of not wanting to make such visits. For Inbal, who first moved to Canada in 1996, going back to Israel “is getting a fix, it’s like a drug”—you need it every three months and then you feel better, but three months after you return you need another fix. For Ro’i, visits back to Israel are an important way of cementing his children’s Israeli identity. At the same time, these visits carry what Ro’i calls “an absolutely enormous burden financially.” In addition, it prohibits them from being able to enjoy the luxury of other types of travel. As Ro’i explains, “all vacation is always go to Israel.”

In the interim between visits, however, the telephone must act as replacement and many speak with their family once a week or more. Meanwhile, internet communication has allowed for a whole new way of collapsing the great distance that separates Israeli migrants from their families. According to Pnina, who is in her late thirties and in Canada since 2001, she speaks with her family over Skype (a computer program that places telephone calls through an internet connection) on a daily basis. “My mom actually read a story to my son yesterday,” she tells me. When I tell her that I find that amazing, she replies: “She did it, he fell asleep.” This, in the words of David Harvey (1989), is a true example of “time-space compression.” At the same time, there is a certain sadness in the situation. Israeli migration is not a chain migration—friends may follow friends or cousins follow cousins, but rarely are Israeli migrants followed abroad by their close relatives. Therefore, unless they arrived as children, young adults in Vancouver find themselves far from parents and siblings. Young parents, meanwhile, must raise their children in Vancouver without the support of nearby grandparents. There is no doubt that the technologies of time-space compression have made this distance from kin more bearable. Yet the types of mediated interactions that these technologies allow, such as bedtime stories through Skype, are likely no substitute for the real-life contact with loved ones that many migrants miss so much.

On Being Jewish

For many of my informants, their sense of being Jewish is more difficult to articulate than their sense of being Israeli. Although all recognize that they are Jews, the large majority are secular¹¹ and many see being Jewish as a part of being Israeli rather than distinct from it. It may seem ironic that Israelis, who live in the Jewish homeland and the only country in the world where Jews constitute a majority, should have a relatively weak Jewish identity. However, it is precisely *because* of this situation that they feel this way. In order to understand this phenomenon we must turn to the foundational work of Fredrik Barth (1969), whose theories of ethnicity remain highly influential to this day. According to Barth, ethnic membership is subjective and based on group ascriptions of who does and does not belong. In other words, ethnic identity is defined more by the maintenance of group boundaries than the cultural features that group members share; after all, these cultural features are malleable and subject to change over time. Moreover, ethnic groups do not maintain strong boundaries through isolation. In fact, boundary maintenance occurs precisely as a result of close contact with other groups. In other words, there is no “self” without an “other.” In Israel, non-Jews (mostly Arabs) constitute a significant minority at nearly 25 percent of the population (Bassok 2008). However, most Jews have little to no contact with Arabs in their daily lives. Added to this is the role of the state in creating a distinctly Jewish character for Israeli society. As Charles Liebman and Yaacov Yadgar (2004:175) write:

The symbols of the state are Jewish, it is the Jewish holidays that are celebrated as national holidays, it is Jewish history and not the history of Palestine that youngsters learn as their history, and it is the Holocaust that continues to serve as the central myth of Israeli society and that forms the prism through which the present is understood.¹²

¹¹ This is generally reflective of the situation in Israel where, according to a study conducted in 2008, 51% of Jews are secular, 30% are traditional and 19% are Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox (Nahshoni 2008).

¹² On the place of collective memory in Israeli society and Zionism, cf. Zerubavel 1995.

Consequently, there is a pervasive feeling that in Israel “everyone is Jewish.” When everyone around them is Jewish, and particularly when they are secular, it can be difficult for Israelis to forge a strong sense of what it means to be Jewish.

In Canada, however, everyone is not Jewish. Vancouver, in particular, is home to some 26,000-27,000 Jews (Kuropatwa 2007) who constitute just over 1 percent of the metropolitan population (Statistics Canada 2007b). Although the city’s Jewish community is the third largest in Canada, it is a distant third behind the much larger communities of Toronto and Montreal. Thus it is often in Canada, with few Jews around them, that Israelis’ Jewish identity becomes salient. Although a number of my informants had felt no Jewish identity or a weak Jewish identity when they lived in Israel, many of them have felt this identity strengthen since moving to Canada. Saar, a young man who arrived in 2005, tells me that his Jewish identity is stronger since leaving Israel. As Saar relates, “now that you’re among *goys* [Gentiles], you’re much more aware of your Jewish identity kind of, like who you are to them and who they are to you.” Moran elaborates this point. When I ask her to describe her Jewish identity in Israel, she replies: “Very much *chiloni* [secular]. Very much going to the beach with my friends and going to a good university, spending quality time with my family.” It is interesting to note what reference points are called upon when Moran speaks of herself as a Jew. Going to the beach, for example, is not an activity that a Canadian Jew would ever associate with being Jewish. Meanwhile, in Israel (or at least in coastal cities like Tel Aviv), going to the beach is something that marks secular Jews from the religious, who frequent gender-segregated beaches and do not go to the beach on *shabbat*. I then ask Moran if, while living in Israel, she had a sense of herself as a Jew.

Moran: As a Jew? No—no, no. I didn’t know what’s a Jew before I left Israel. I didn’t understand so much about religion. However now from the outside I understand why people keep it, why people follow all the *mitzvot* [commandments]—I understand.

Author: Even religion aside, did you have a sense that culturally you were Jewish or not really?

M: It's a good question because when you're there, you really don't think about it. You think: I live in Israel, I'm *chiloni* [secular], I live here, I do that. When you travel then in Paris you say oh, I'm Israeli, you're Israeli, oh maybe you're Jewish, then you start to discover your friends are Jewish, right? You will help—I mean you will help anyone, but you know that a Jewish person will help you first, because—I don't know why...

Although Jewish identity often becomes more salient once Israelis move abroad, for only a few of my informants has their sense of being Jewish ever surpassed their sense of being Israeli. In fact, I heard several Israelis explicitly prioritize their multiple identities and the phrase “I'm Israeli first, Jewish second” was repeated to me by a surprising number of people. One example is Liron, for whom the change in her Jewish identity (or lack thereof) has been more subtle.

Author: Did you have a Jewish identity in Israel?

Liron: Oh, that's so difficult, living in Israel, when you're secular. First of all because the religious institutions can be really obnoxious, okay, so I, coming from a *kibbutz* and my parents, living in Jerusalem,¹³ when I was a girl my father would go to demonstration against the Orthodox Jews because they wanted to close down the cinemas Friday evening. So, my whole experience was always kind of anti-religion and “they're trying to force their own beliefs on us,” and for me really to say that I'm Jewish, I don't really know what it means. Yeah I'm Jewish, but I don't observe any, uh, Jewish law, I'm not religious in any way, I don't believe in God as such, so for me it's another difficult part in my identity.

A: Does “Jewish” to you mean exclusively the religious aspect?

L: No. I guess not, but then I'm Israeli so why do I need the Jewish part?—you know, it's...I would say that first of all I'm Israeli, that's my identity. I connect to that much better.

As for her feelings now, after having lived in Canada for just under one year, Liron tells me:

L: I would say that I'm still more Israeli, and the Jewish aspect is not stronger but it's part of the Israeli identity. It's more part of it—in Israel, it's like the anti. And here I don't feel any antagonism to it, so that's what changed.

¹³ *Kibbutzim* (socialist agricultural communities) tend to be very secular, while Jerusalem has a much higher proportion of religious Jews.

A: So in Israel you see the Jewish and the Israeli as separate, is that what you're saying?—No, because you said before that you couldn't separate them...

L: I don't see it as separate because everybody's Jewish, so it's just nothing that you even have to consider. The separate is between the religious and the secular, right-wing religious and left-wing secularists—these are like distinctly different cultures, political stance—but here I don't have to build my identity against those groups, so the Jewish and the Israeli just combine somehow.

Here again we come face to face with Barth's theories of identity and boundary maintenance. On the one hand, the ethnic and cultural ties that Liron shared with the majority of fellow Israelis meant that being Jewish was of little relevance to her while living in Israel. On the other hand, Liron's involvement in the secular opposition to Orthodox Judaism led her to distance herself from a Jewish identity on religious terms. In Canada, however, this opposition is more marginal when Jews as a whole constitute a small minority in the Canadian population at large.

Meanwhile, one need not be religious to appreciate the family celebrations and traditions that are so often associated with religion (as many secular North Americans who celebrate Christmas know well). Consequently, practically all my informants—including the most secular—had celebrated a number of Jewish holidays while living in Israel. Most men celebrated a *bar mitzvah* (coming of age ceremony) and some families observed a *shabbat* meal or attended occasional synagogue services. More importantly, many spoke of the special feeling that exists in Israel during *shabbat* or holidays, when businesses close and public transportation shuts down. On *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), in particular, there is no driving whatsoever and everyone pours into the streets, strolling down the middle of the road with children bicycling at their side. Whether they engaged in some form of religious observance or whether they simply spent these days with family, many of my informants note that there is something in the air in

Israel during these times. When they move to Canada, they are suddenly confronted with the loss of this feeling.

What we find, then, are many Israelis who work to create this feeling which they had never had to work at before. As Ro'i explains, Israelis in Israel can be completely secular but still feel Jewish because the Jewishness surrounds them; Jewish holidays, for instance, are national holidays. "There was something very easy about being Jewish in Israel which you don't have here," he says. "Here you really have to make an effort..." Often, this involves adopting "traditions" that Israelis never observed in Israel. For Pnina, the week has a different feel to it in Canada because there is no *shabbat* to punctuate it. In Israel, *shabbat* was a day off and a time to relax with family; in Canada, however, Pnina began going to synagogue—which she had not done in Israel—in order to "create the *shabbat*." Similarly, Liron has begun observing a Friday night meal, together with the blessings, since moving to Vancouver. Although she does not do so for religious reasons, she explains that it helps to fill a certain void. According to Liron, "in Israel it's just so obvious—Friday evening or Friday afternoon, everything calms down and you feel that the weekend starts. It's a very special feeling that you don't get in other places in the world, so I feel that here we need that kind of small ceremony to get that feeling which *is* important to us." She also notes that, while she has always celebrated the Passover *seder* (ritual meal), she sometimes thought of it as a hassle. Now that she is away from family, she does not have the same obligation to celebrate; however, rather than embrace this freedom, she feels that celebrating the *seder* is more important than ever.

Ro'i repeated the exact same sentiment, telling me that he has a newfound appreciation for such rituals, "for maintaining some kind of an identity, why are we different than others." Working at the feeling of being Jewish often becomes more important when Israelis have children and raise them abroad. In the case of Ro'i, he feels

that as an Israeli he can remain completely secular and maintain a Jewish identity. “But my children, it’s different for them,” he says. “If they behave exactly like me, they will not maintain the same identity that I do...so we as a family need to work on it a little bit.” Although he still does not enjoy going to synagogue, he is happy for his children to attend and will join them if need be. As Ro’i relates, “I used to be very anti-religious when I was in Israel, and this doesn’t make sense anymore for me.”

Meanwhile, there is another big change that Israelis experience at holiday times which has nothing to do with becoming a minority. This is the absence of those who would normally be found around the holiday table—that is, family. As previously mentioned, very few Israelis living in Vancouver have close relatives in the city and many have no relatives there at all. Thus Inbal tells me that Israelis are like “orphans” when they get together for holidays abroad. Like the feeling in the air that exists during holiday times in Israel, family is another great—indeed, perhaps a greater—void that Israelis struggle to fill. Keren, for example, compensates through synagogue. Although raised in a traditional family, she rarely went to synagogue on holidays because the women of her family would congregate at her grandmother’s house and sit around together. “*That* would be the synagogue,” she says. When she arrived in Canada, however, these relatives were absent. “Here in *yom tov* [High Holiday], who will I sit down with?...the only option is to go to synagogue.” In the same way, I bumped into Shay while attending Yom Kippur services myself. Shay, who is in his late twenties, told me that he had never attended these services before and had never been in synagogue for more than a few hours. However, he was now planning to spend the whole day there because if he stayed at home he would be alone.

Not everyone acts this way. According to Moran, “I don’t feel that I need to be doing something here that I wouldn’t be doing in Israel.” In addition, Moran now celebrates fewer holidays than she used to because she has fewer friends with whom to

celebrate them. Maya also observes fewer holidays than she did in Israel because she only celebrates them when invited by friends. Neither of them, however, have reduced their observances because they value them less. Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004:1010-1011) provide two related concepts, “ways of being” and “ways of belonging,” which are useful in understanding this. According to Levitt and Glick Schiller, ways of being refer to individuals’ actions or social interactions with fellow group members that do not necessarily imply any strong identification on their part; ways of belonging, meanwhile, are those actions that do. In other words, the extent to which Israelis observe Jewish traditions does not necessarily signify the level of importance they hold for them. Thus Shachar, who is in his mid-twenties, accompanies his Canadian relatives to synagogue on the High Holidays but would rather not go at all. Moran, meanwhile, tells me that she would love to celebrate more of the holidays and would be happier if she did. For Shachar, going to synagogue is a way of being, an action that he performs out of duty but which holds no meaning for him; for Moran, celebrating the holidays—even if she does so less frequently—is a meaningful way of belonging.

What this section has sought to elucidate, then, is how Israeli migrants negotiate their evolving sense of Jewish identity and what ways of belonging they maintain, adopt or discard in the process. In some cases, actions that Israelis deemed perfunctory in Israel (such as attending a Passover *seder*) gain new meaning in Canada as their Jewish identity strengthens. At times, Israelis may even begin to partake in rituals that they never had before in an effort to maintain a feeling of Jewishness outside the Jewish State.

On Canada and Canadians

At first glance, it may appear that there would be many incentives for Israelis to forge ties with the Canadian Jewish community—that is, to forge friendships with

Canadian Jews and participate in Jewish community activities. As discussed above, Israelis often become more aware of their Jewish identity when they arrive in Canada. Moreover, some feel a greater need to observe Jewish rituals in order to actively create the feeling of Jewishness that surrounded them in Israel. However, this does not necessarily lead Israelis in Canada to participate in the Jewish community. In order to understand why, we must first understand how Israelis view Canadians more generally.

Most of the Israelis I have met speak positively about Canada as a place to live. Although nearly all complain about the weather in Vancouver (rainy and cold by Israeli standards), many also comment on the beauty of the location. A number of Israelis speak appreciatively of the many opportunities they find in Canada. Moreover, the large majority of Israelis see Canada as a very easy, comfortable place to live in contrast to the stressful pace of life in Israel. This stress is partly a product of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the feeling of existential threat that it engenders among Israelis—a feeling that strengthens or weakens according to current events but that never entirely vanishes from the national consciousness. More than this, however, is the daily manner of interaction between people in Israel that can often be perceived as gruff or aggressive. Gal, who is in her late teens and arrived in Canada in 2007, tells me that people in Israel are “*atzbani'im*” [irritable]—“with each other, in the workplace, on the roads, in schools, to their teachers.” As another Israeli related to me, when people in Israel need to renew their driver’s license, they wake up in the morning knowing that they are in for a fight at the licensing office. Meanwhile, the employees that issue the driver’s licenses wake up in the morning knowing that they are in for a fight with the patrons—everything is a struggle. “Personally, I’m a calm person,” Gal tells me. “I don’t like conflict, I love the quiet and serenity...” Canada provides that quiet and serenity for many Israeli migrants.

Assaf is one such migrant. As we conducted our interview in a café, he told me: “When I left Israel, sitting in a coffee place like that, I all the time watched that no crazy

guy carrying a bomb will just enter the door and we will go up in smoke. Seriously.” In Canada, he can escape much of the stress of life in Israel. Still, he feels ambivalent about the laid-back atmosphere that he finds in Canada. At times, Assaf sees a certain emptiness in it. On the other hand, Assaf explains:

It has also its beauty. It’s nice to be in a place that is kind of virtual, I don’t know, another planet, no worries, you know, “everything will be fine,” “can we get our latte?” So, the huge worry, I mean, “is the latte here as good as it’s there?” Okay, “foam,” “too much foam”—uh, great. That’s maybe my huge appeal here, that I can think about foam.

Meanwhile, Canadian society offers an entirely different form of social interaction. In contrast to the pushiness of people in Israel, Israelis note time and time again that Canadians are exceedingly polite. There is a pervasive feeling that daily interaction is pleasant in Canada, where people are politically correct, say “please” and “thank you,” wait in lines and drive courteously in ways unknown in Israel. For many, this is a welcome change yet it does not come without its drawbacks. Israelis are often frustrated by the marked contrast between the Canadian style of interaction and the Israeli style of direct, straightforward speech (cf. Katriel 1986). According to Maya, who moved to Canada in 2006, Israelis “say it as it is” whereas the Canadian way is to “wrap it up.” “You have to be careful,” she says, “I burned a lot of bridges here just because of the way I speak.” Sometimes, she explains, “there’s just no nice way to say it.” For Inbal, the hardest thing is that she feels she cannot be honest with people. She too offended many people by her direct manner when she first arrived. “You start closing yourself in,” she says. “You learn to shut up. I think that’s a worse thing.” When Israelis have transgressed this new code of conduct, Canadians may respond with passive aggressiveness or, in Inbal’s experience, they “just send you bad vibes” instead of explaining what is wrong or why they have been offended. Israelis may also have difficulty reading between the lines when Canadians communicate, which can make work situations and social relationships difficult to navigate.

Furthermore, Canadian politeness can often be interpreted by Israelis as disingenuous. For this reason, Ronit, who is in her mid-forties, is sometimes uncomfortable with the Canadian style of communication. “I’m not always sure about what they are thinking,” she explains. “They can be very nice to you but they can think a very different thing about you.” In the same way, Israelis often find Canadians to be very nice but not, in the end, particularly warm. While Israelis are used to dropping in on their friends unannounced, they note that Canadians are more concerned with their privacy and require plans in advance. “There’s a nice way to put it,” Ziv says, while discussing Canadians. “Everybody will open their hands to you and give you a hug, but they will never close them. So...they’re very warm but to a point and it’s harder to get closer to people.” These twin impressions of Canadians as polite but fake and nice but not warm are in fact two sides of the same coin; both are products of the same difference in interaction style between Canadian and Israeli societies. As Ronit explains: “In Israel, whether you like it or not, people are very direct. If they don’t like you, they show you that they don’t like you. If they like you, they show you that they like you.” In other words, what the Israeli directness may lose at times in pleasantries it gains at other times in warmth. For all these reasons, many Israelis speak of Canadians as having a very different “mentality.”

Ron, who has lived in Canada since 2002, has a very positive outlook on the Canadian mentality while recognizing its differences from the dominant one in Israel. “I guess, I’m like a chameleon,” he says. “I don’t feel like you guys need to change for me, I feel like I need to change for you ’cause after all, we’re in *your* country.” Indeed, some Israelis are embarrassed by others who do not adjust their style in Canada. During a panel discussion organized by the Jewish community, which was attended primarily by Canadian Jews, one Israeli repeatedly tried to interject by speaking out of turn during the question period. When the man was finally given the floor, he acted very directly by

taking the microphone, addressing the crowd from the front of the room and making curt demands (in heavily accented English) to one of the organizers. In reaction to this display, an Israeli woman across the room responded by calling out “Please!”, admonishing him to be polite. When his behaviour continued, she smiled at her friend and said, adopting a thick Israeli accent, “What a rrrreal Isrrraeli.” This comment revealed as much if not more about how she viewed herself as her thoughts on the other man. By mimicking him, the woman disassociated herself along with her friend from the image of the stereotypical Israeli that the man presented.

On the other hand, of all my informants, Inbal speaks the most negatively of the Canadian mentality. “I value the things that are better about our culture,” she says. As she repeatedly told me, “I think of Canadians and Israelis like water and oil.” When considering Israelis’ impressions of Canadians, such as a perceived lack of warmth, it is important to note that for most of my informants, their acquaintance with Canadians is largely limited to Vancouverites. However, the responses of my informants speak less to the particular character of Vancouverites and more to the general pattern of interactions that occur between Israelis and non-Israelis.¹⁴ Cohen and Gold (1997:385) find that Israelis in Toronto express similar perceptions of Canadians as less than warm. Moreover, these same criticisms are found among Israelis living in other countries. In New York, Shokeid (1988:49) found that nearly every Israeli he spoke with considered Americans to be colder and less hospitable than Israelis. Even in Cape Town, Israelis migrants report that they find the local population to be nice and polite but also cold and insincere (Frankental 1999:171-172).

¹⁴ Indeed, research currently being conducted on a different migrant group in Vancouver, the Japanese, finds that Vancouverites can sometimes be considered *rude* by Japanese standards—a far cry from Israeli perceptions of them as overly polite (Eisuke Shimo, personal communication, May 30, 2009). This shows that what is at issue are not the inherent qualities or sensibilities of the local population but the meeting of these with those of the immigrant population.

What is noteworthy is that Israelis, both in my own study and those mentioned above, tend to perceive the local Jewish population in much the same way. Most of the Israelis I have spoken with do recognize some sort of feeling of connection to Canadian Jews. Having been educated on the hardships of Jewish history and the triumph of establishing a Jewish state, most Israelis regard themselves as part of the Jewish People, an international community. However, once they migrate and become acquainted with Jewish communities abroad, they often become more aware of the differences between Jewish communities than of their commonalities. Ultimately, many Israelis find Canadian Jews to be decidedly *Canadian* in their mentality. Thus, they often find that all the various impediments to social interaction that they face with Canadians—their lack of directness, their lack of warmth—are replicated in interactions with Canadian Jews. As Inbal sees it, the mentality of local Jews is “first of all Canadian, second of all Jewish—even if they don’t think so.” Or agrees. “Canadian Jews,” he tells me, “I don’t see a difference between Canadian Jews and Canadians. Basically, it’s just the same thing for me.” Liron helps to elaborate on this perspective. Even though Jewish identity becomes more salient for many Israelis once they move abroad, it typically remains secondary to a much stronger sense of themselves as Israelis. Moreover, Liron feels that Canadian Jews express their Jewish identity in a very different way. “For me, only the title is the same,” she tells me, “but underneath it’s a very different feeling.”

The irony is that Canadian Jews may feel a strong affinity with Israelis. For some Canadian Jews, Israel holds a special place in their hearts as the Jewish homeland and this feeling of fondness is extended to Israelis. Indeed, it is not unknown for a Canadian Jew to excitedly approach strangers upon hearing them speak Hebrew or learning that they are from Israel. Benedict Anderson (1983:6) theorized that nations are “imagined communities,” in which co-nationals imagine that they share a commonality despite the fact that most of them have never met. As Anderson explains, the nation “is *imagined*

because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Perhaps such encounters between Israelis and Canadian Jews are evidence that the imagined community of Canadian Jews includes Israelis but the same is not true in reverse. For although Jews around the world share certain cultural and historical features, they also carry a range of divergent experiences that are specific to the societies in which they live; Israeli and Canadian Jews are no different. For example, most Canadian Jews have not had the first-hand experience of living through the Arab-Israeli conflict, serving in the army, or being part of a majority Jewish population. In addition, most Canadian Jews do not have a strong knowledge of the Hebrew language.

One thing that both groups do share are their religious traditions, which may differ in certain aspects but are largely quite similar between Canadian Jewish communities and Israel (and which, I would argue, do not vary on the scale seen in other religions such as Christianity). Yet this commonality often has only limited appeal for the large proportion of Israelis who are secular. As Inbal explains, she feels that she has nothing in common with Canadian Jews apart from the fact that they celebrate the same holidays. From Or’s perspective, this is not a strong enough bond in and of itself. As Or tells me: “I mean, if the only thing that connects me to those people [is] that we’re Jewish but [not] the things we do and common interest, it’s not that appealing to me, that’s all.” Not everyone feels the same. Izhar is one of my few informants to have always felt a stronger Jewish than Israeli identity. As he explains, “I see Israelis living in Israel as Jewish people living in Israel. I see the Jewish People as the first thing, not Israelis.” Izhar affirms that he feels a connection when he meets a fellow Jew in Canada, that “there’s something in the back of your mind about it.” Ron feels similarly. He believes that Jews help one another and senses a strong feeling of “togetherness” in the Jewish community. Still, for most Israelis it comes down to what place this Jewish commonality

holds for them in their lives. As Omer explains, he does feel that he relates to Canadian Jews differently than to non-Jews. However, as an unobservant Jew himself, this does not mean that he feels inclined to spend more time with Canadian Jews than with any other group.

For all these reasons, Israeli social networks¹⁵ remain extremely important for many of my informants. That is not to say that all their friends are Israeli, though such is the case for a few of my informants in their forties and fifties. Younger Israelis tend to have wider social circles (as previously noted by Cohen 1999:131), yet even among my informants in their late teens, twenties and thirties, Israelis often have a significant presence in their social circles. In other cases, some of my informants count few Israelis among their friends but these friends are sometimes among their closest. Meanwhile, only a few of my informants are friends primarily with Canadian Jews. This is all the more significant because before they left Israel, nearly none had had any particular expectations of what types of people—whether Israeli or non-Israeli, Jewish or non-Jewish—they wished to meet and befriend in Canada. Many had simply never given the issue any thought and those who had were mostly open to meeting new kinds of people. This is further reflected in the fact that nearly none of my informants selected their neighbourhood of residence based on proximity to other Israelis or Jews. However, once they moved to Canada, many had difficulties making friends—another issue that most had never anticipated. A few women commented that they had always been quite sociable in Israel and had had no reason to think this would ever change. Once in Canada, some of my informants found that they could connect to other migrants better

¹⁵ The field of social network analysis emerged from the work of Barnes (1954), who first applied the term “network” to the social ties he observed during fieldwork in a small Norwegian community. Social network analysis was advanced by theorists such as Granovetter (1973), who examined the density of social networks and distinguished “weak ties” from strong. Although my work does not measure social networks in this analytical tradition, a review of this field may be found in Mitchell (1974).

than Canadians and, not surprisingly, most found that they could connect better to fellow Israelis.¹⁶

A number of my informants tell me that what is important in forming friendships is personality, not cultural background. Maya, for example, expresses no stronger feeling of connection to one group over another, Israelis included, and tells me: “Being with Israelis doesn’t mean anything. Honestly, it doesn’t mean anything.” Yet despite this, after living in Canada for two and a half years, most of her friends are Israeli. Although she claims not to relate to them better, she finds them more open and easier to befriend. “Canadians don’t make friends,” she explains, because many already have an established social network that they are not looking to expand. Consequently, Maya has had great difficulty forging her own social network in Canada—“I was alone for two years,” she tells me—and still has not found a friendship that parallels the closeness of her friendships back in Israel. This is a common sentiment, and Israelis report varied levels of satisfaction with their social networks in Vancouver. As many note, friendships take time; added to this are the differences in experience and interaction style that separate Canadians, both Jewish and non-Jewish, from Israelis. This situation is likely familiar to a wide range of migrants more generally—indeed, perhaps to most migrants around the world.

Considering these social barriers, combined with the fact that most Israelis maintain a strong Israeli identity, it is perhaps not surprising that few identify as Canadian themselves. Benny is a rare case of one who does. He moved to Canada in 1999, at the age of 20, and today socializes almost entirely with non-Israelis. “I think I’m lucky in that respect,” Benny tells me, “because I can identify as Canadian, Israeli, whatever I want, I can blend in very well.” For him, it seems obvious that one would

¹⁶ Beyond this general connection among Israelis, social networks are further patterned by divisions internal to the community. For example, there are two Israeli men’s soccer groups that exist in Vancouver and they are divided along class lines.

develop a Canadian identity after living in the country for nearly ten years. Otherwise, he asks laughingly, “what have you been doing for the past ten years?” Yet as clear as this may seem to Benny, it does not ring true for most Israelis. Very few of my informants express any feeling of themselves as Canadian—and their duration in Canada appears to have little to do with it. Inbal, the most dramatic case, states: “I haven’t felt at home in 11 years.” When I asked whether she feels Canadian, she paused for a few seconds then burst out laughing. “After everything I said,” she told me, “do you need to ask?”

Meanwhile, many of my informants simply did not know how to answer the question. A number of the Israelis I spoke with were not only unsure as to what it would mean to feel Canadian but asked me, as a Canadian, to explain it to them. The following interaction with Moran, who has lived in Canada for four years, is emblematic:

Author: Do you feel Canadian?

Moran: Ooh, that’s a good question. Ah, “what’s Canadian?”...no—I don’t know—umm, I feel a Vancouverite right now...I enjoy what B.C. has to offer. Canadian? I don’t know what that is. I tried to discover that—I was interested, I was curious...But, I’m like what is Canadian? It’s so huge and everybody’s so different, and they’re all coming from different countries. So if being Canadian is like just being, you know—what is it? I’m asking you, I don’t know.

A: Umm...

M: I believe in the beaver? The maple? The hockey? C’mon. What’s the bond, like based on what?

This says much about the nebulous character of Canadian identity, which Canadians themselves spend much energy debating. On the other hand, two of my informants who had previously lived in the United States had a much clearer sense of what it would mean to feel American (despite the fact that one felt quite positive about his years spent there and the other felt quite negative about hers). The same was true for an informant who had previously lived in Australia. More importantly, no Israeli has ever asked me to define what I mean by “Israeli identity”—this is sufficiently clear to all of them.

Conclusion

In her groundbreaking work, *Flexible Citizenship* (1999), Aihwa Ong draws our attention to the new ways that people now move around the world. She critiques Arjun Appadurai's (1996) theorization of "scapes" and "cultural flows," processes of globalization which are seemingly open to all people equally. As Ong astutely notes, mobility is in fact tied to class and is a strategy that relatively few in this world have the resources to employ (11). Like the globe-trotting business class that Ong examines, Israelis are by and large a very privileged group (as evidenced by the high levels of education and English proficiency found among my informants). As they resettle abroad in communities like Vancouver, Israelis are a prime example of "flexible citizens" and push us to expand the term beyond its strict association with economic migration. For Ong, flexible citizenship is intimately connected with global capitalism and the accumulation of wealth (19). Among my informants, economic concerns were rarely the primary motivation for their move. In addition, many present the story of their move in a narrative of serendipity that ill resembles the intense strategizing of Chinese families, Ong's primary case study, whose "astronaut" parents and "parachute kids" migrate around the Pacific for business and educational opportunities. This difference, however, only further reflects my informants' extreme flexibility. In this way they have followed an interest in experiencing life abroad and resettled themselves, for a matter of years or perhaps for good, in a Canadian city halfway around the world—all the while, for the most part, maintaining a strong Israeli identity. Moreover, Ong's central claim—that "[f]lexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability" (19)—applies as much to Israeli migrants as any other. Ong's statement is particularly relevant when one considers the long history of Jewish migration, in which today's Israeli migrants are a relatively rare case of Jews moving by will and not by force or persecution.

This study of Israeli migrants in Vancouver, based on participant observation and in-depth interviews, is thus a useful contribution to the study of migration more generally. In addition, the study serves to illuminate the unique challenges faced by Israelis living in Canada as well as the ways that they experience life in a relatively small community such as that in Vancouver. Of course, there is no single Israeli experience of migration and the Israeli community is as heterogeneous as any other. Still, certain trends emerge. As they move from a majority status in Israel to a minority status in Canada, many Israelis become more aware of their Jewish identity and some make efforts to recreate a Jewish atmosphere for themselves. This phenomenon closely follows Barth's theory that identity formation and maintenance of group boundaries are intimately linked. However, Israelis' involvement in the Jewish community can be hindered by the social barriers that many encounter in their interactions with Canadians, Canadian Jews included.

This study is also an exploration of the intricate process of identity formation. On the surface, it may appear that Israelis prioritize their national (Israeli) identity over their religious (Jewish) one. This view, however, does not take into account the full complexity of these two forms of identification. On the one hand, Jewishness is as much a cultural entity as a religious one. This is evidenced by the many secular Jews in Canada who have little involvement in Judaism as a religion but nonetheless maintain a strong sense of themselves as Jews. On the other hand, Israeliness has grown to represent more than national affiliation. This is made abundantly clear when Israelis migrate to Canada and often find that what separates them from Canadian Jews is more than the passports they carry. Thus, more than choosing national identity over religious identity, Israelis prioritize one cultural identity over another. When Israeli migrants express a feeling of distance from Canadian Jews, it is not simply an issue of nationality or religion but a sense that the two groups—despite the ties that do bind them together—have more cultural differences than similarities.

A number of my findings support those of previous studies in Toronto, drawing the important conclusion that Israeli experiences of life in Canada differ little between large and small communities. Previous studies show that Israelis in Toronto, even after living there for decades, often forge friendships predominantly with other Israelis (Gold 1992:240, Cohen 1999:130). They often do not socialize in the same circles as Canadian Jews and remark upon the different styles of interaction that separate them (Gold 1992:247). Younger Israelis, meanwhile, are more likely to socialize with Israelis and non-Israelis alike (Cohen 1999:131). Despite the fact that Israelis in Vancouver do not congregate geographically as they do in Toronto (Gold 1992:238), their patterns of social network formation are strikingly similar. Thus, even in a city with a relatively small Israeli population, Israeli social ties remain quite strong.

Consequently, there is a strong need for community programming that meets Israelis' unique needs. In Vancouver, the Jewish Community Centre has made this a priority by appointing an Israel Affairs Liaison in charge of outreach to local Israelis (JCC Association n.d.). This initiative has been quite successful in creating programming for the middle-aged population. Israeli dancing, sing-alongs, lectures and classes—including a seminar on orienting new Israelis to life in Canada and another for Israelis contemplating their return to Israel—are part of an ever-expanding list of activities on offer, many of which are held in Hebrew and generate an enthusiastic following. These combine with outside initiatives such as men's soccer clubs, a women's charity organization, an annual family picnic as well as celebrations and memorials to build a sense of community among Israelis in the city.¹⁷ Indeed, the *Yom Hazikaron* (Israeli Remembrance Day) ceremony, although a solemn event, is the one time of year that sees many hundreds of Israelis congregate as a community in one place.

¹⁷ Many of these events are advertised through a weekly e-mail newsletter that is sent out by a local Israeli to over four thousand recipients. The newsletter, which also advertises local businesses, serves to further connect members of the community.

However, more is needed for younger adults. Few of the programs currently on offer appeal to Israelis in their late teens, twenties and thirties. “Nothing brings us out to meet each other,” Inbal comments. Of course, this does not mean that there is no Jewish community programming geared at this age group—far from it. One local synagogue holds popular social events such as pub nights and barbeques while Hillel is active on university campuses. Still, there is very little that is specifically designed for Israelis in the way that exists for the older age group. Although it is true that younger Israelis tend to have more varied social circles, and therefore may not have the same desire for exclusively Israeli activities, many have difficulty forging these social circles in their first few years in Canada. Such activities would likely help those newly arrived by connecting them with other Israelis in similar situations.

Thus, this thesis begins to explore the extent to which ethnic or religious communities in the host country, such as the Jewish community in Canada, may aid in migrants’ process of integration. More importantly, it examines the ways that migrants themselves grapple with issues of identity and belonging as they move around the world. In the end, many Israelis do come to feel increasingly attached to their new lives in Canada while maintaining a strong emotional connection to Israel. For some, this process leads to uncomfortable feelings of liminality, of inhabiting an in-between place, a sense of belonging to both Israel and Canada along with the joint sense of belonging to neither. “You’re somewhere in the air,” Lilach explains to me, “and it’s not a fun place to be.” Since our interview, Lilach has returned to Israel. For many of my informants, however, their stories in Canada will continue.¹⁸ As they do, so too will they continue to negotiate their unique experience as Israelis, as Canadians and as Jews.

¹⁸ For my findings on the question of return among Israeli migrants in Vancouver, see Harris 2009.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions for Israeli Migrants

Although my interviews were semi-structured, most of the following questions were asked of each informant:

- When did you leave Israel and how old were you when you left?
- Did you leave Israel alone or with family? Which relatives accompanied you?
- How do you feel about Israel? What were your motivations for leaving Israel?
- How do you feel about Canada and Vancouver? What were your motivations for coming to Canada and Vancouver?
- When you left Israel, did you come directly to Canada? Was Vancouver the first city you settled in?
- Did you have friends or relatives in Canada or Vancouver?
- Was it important to you to settle in a city or neighbourhood where other Israelis lived? Or, more generally, where other Jews lived?
- How many Israeli friends do you socialize with in Vancouver? How many Jews more generally?
- How do you feel about fellow Israelis? About fellow Israelis abroad? About fellow Jews?
- Do you socialize with Israelis who emigrated during an earlier/later era (e.g. during the 1970s versus 1990s)?
- How did you meet other Israelis?
- Did you gain employment through Israelis that you knew? Did you further meet Israelis through your employment?
- Are you satisfied with your social network?
- For unmarried individuals: If you currently have a partner, is s/he Israeli? Is s/he Jewish? Is it important to you to date or marry an Israeli? A Jew?
- For married individuals: Is your spouse Israeli? Is s/he Jewish? Is it important to you that your children date or marry an Israeli? A Jew?
- To what extent are you involved in the Vancouver Jewish community?
- Are you satisfied with your relationship to the Vancouver Jewish community?

- Do you think there is a Vancouver Israeli community, and if so, to what extent are you involved in it?
- How often do you attend synagogue services? Is this more or less than you used to attend in Israel, and do you notice differences in the services here? Why do you attend, and are the reasons different than they were back in Israel?
- What Jewish rituals and holidays do you practice? Is this more or less than you used to practice in Israel, and do you notice differences in the practices here? Why do you practice, and are the reasons different than they were back in Israel?
- How often do you speak Hebrew? Do you always speak Hebrew at home (e.g. with parents/children)? Do you always speak Hebrew when conversing with other Israelis?
- How often do you visit Israel? Call friends and relatives in Israel? E-mail friends and relatives in Israel?
- How often do you read/watch/listen to Israeli news? Follow Israeli sports? Listen to Israeli music? Watch Israeli movies or television programs?
- For youth: what type of schooling did you receive and why? How were you satisfied with your education?
- For adults: what type of schooling did you give your children and why? Did they receive any Jewish education? How were you satisfied with their education?
- For youth: how do your experiences differ from those of your parents? From those of your siblings?
- For adults: how do your experiences differ from those of your children? From those of your spouse?
- Do you plan on staying in Canada and Vancouver?
- Do you plan on returning to Israel?
- How do you feel about the term *yored* (literally, “one who goes down,” which refers to Israeli emigrants and carries a pejorative connotation)?
- Do you consider yourself a Canadian? An Israeli? A Jew?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Israeli Community Leaders

Although my interviews were semi-structured, some of the following questions were asked of each informant:

- What organization/group do you represent and how long have you been involved in it?
What position do you hold in the organization/group and how long have you held it?
- How many Israelis would you say there are in Vancouver? What percentage of the local Jewish population do they constitute?
- What trends have you noticed in the number of Israelis who come to Vancouver each year? How many tend to stay and how many move elsewhere? How many return to Israel?
- What is the history of Israeli migration to Vancouver?
- To what extent do Israeli migrants integrate into the Jewish community?
- What factors influence Israelis' integration or lack of integration into the Jewish community?
- Do Jewish organizations include many Israelis in their staff?
- Does the Jewish community try to cater to Israeli migrants? Does it offer any programs or services specially designed for Israelis?
- Do you have any questions or concerns about the Israeli community that you would like answered in my research?

Appendix C: Research Ethics Certificate of Approval



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Bruce Granville Miller	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Arts/Anthropology	UBC BREB NUMBER: H08-00706
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution		Site
N/A		N/A
Other locations where the research will be conducted: Locations where participant observation will be conducted (all in Vancouver): - Jewish Community Centre (950 West 41st St.) - UBC Hillel (6145 Student Union Blvd.) - Ohel Ya'akov Community Kollel (1965 West Broadway) - Pini's Pizzeria (729 West 16th St.) - Sabra Bakery (3844 Oak St.) Interviews will be conducted in one of the above locations, in subjects' homes, or in public cafes/restaurants according to the choice of the subjects.		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Brent David Harris		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A		
PROJECT TITLE: Identity and Integration among Israeli Immigrants in Canada		

CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: May 23, 2009

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:	DATE APPROVED: May 23, 2008	
Document Name	Version	Date
<u>Consent Forms:</u>		
Consent Form	2	May 12, 2008
<u>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</u>		
Interview Script	2	May 12, 2008
<u>Letter of Initial Contact:</u>		
Letter of Initial Contact	1	March 25, 2008

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

**Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
and signed electronically by one of the following:**

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair