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## 'I Want Them to Learn about Israel and the Holidays': Jewish Israeli Mothers in Early-Twenty-First-Century Britain

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### Abstract

Research has shown that the presence of children in the Jewish Israeli emigrant family intensifies their ambivalence about living abroad, but encourages greater involvement with fellow Israelis as they seek to transmit a Jewish Israeli identity and maintain their children's attachment to the Jewish state. This article explores this assumption by focusing on the experiences of mothering of a group of Israeli emigrants in Britain. Based on twelve oral history interviews, it considers the issues of child socialisation and the mothers' own social life. It traces how the women created a social network within which to mother and how they tried to ensure their children preserved a Jewish Israeli identity. The article also seeks to question how parenting abroad led the interviewees to embrace cultural and religious traditions in new ways.

### Keywords

Early-twenty-first-century Britain; Israelis; Jewishness; Motherhood; Oral history.

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### Introduction

Mothers have always been central to the maintenance and reproduction of the Jewish home. In the diaspora mothers produced and preserved the Jewish

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people in exile (Yeo 2010). Israeli pronatalism has deep political and historical roots, with Israeli Jewish women constructed as national reproducers (Kahn 2000). Within Orthodox Judaism, the only recognised, state-sponsored form of Judaism in Israel, matrilineal descent is the rule. While women's sphere in Judaism is separate and different from that of men, women's particular contributions to Jewish life are viewed to be in the areas of relationship, family and community (Ringel 2007). It is also commonly believed that mothers have the primary role in defining their children's religious identity and the prominence of mothers in the religious socialisation of children has been noted both within and beyond Judaism (Boyatzis 2006; Keysar et al. 2000; Kosmin and Levy 1983).

One reason for the association of mothers with the transmission of religion is their responsibility for the domestic sphere. The home is the earliest environment which influences religious identity (Hartman and Hartman 2003). As parents and children 'clean the kitchen after dinner together or go grocery shopping together, parents have opportunities to communicate their ideas to their children, to evaluate their children's beliefs, and possibly to modify those beliefs and behaviours' (Okagaki and Bevis 1999: 316–317). Secondly, as surveys of religious behaviour in Britain have indicated, women are generally more devout than men. They are, for example, more likely than men to say that they belong to a religion and to say that they are fairly or very religious (YouGov 2014). They are also more likely than men to attend religious meetings (Lee 2012). Past studies of Jewish populations have suggested higher levels of religious belief among women (Schmool and Miller 1994), although recent survey data indicates little difference in the number of men and women in Britain who identify as Jewish (YouGov 2014). Nonetheless, children are likely to be exposed to religious beliefs and practices from their mothers, with mothers viewing their communication as part of their maternal role. Based on her research into Orthodox Jewish Israeli and Roman Catholic American women, Tova Hartman Halbertal concludes that mothers see and experience mothering as inseparable from the transmission of religious beliefs and culture: 'As individuals, and as agents of socialisation responsible for passing on cultural traditions to the next generation of women, mothers are the keepers and reproducers of culture' (Halbertal 2002: 3–4).

Since Adrienne Rich's ground-breaking work *Of Woman Born* (Rich 1976), the distinctions between motherhood as institution, mothering as an experience, and motherhood as an identity have been recognised and developed within feminist scholarship. Feminist historians have uncovered the historical specificity of the construction of motherhood as women's primary and exclusive identity, the encapsulation of women and children in the nuclear household, and the emphasis on mothering as emotional care (Nakano Glenn 1994). More recently Andrea O'Reilly has noted that agency, and the emancipatory potential of motherhood, has emerged as a prevailing theme (O'Reilly 2010). However, in her 2011 discussion of the field, Samira Kawash reflected that while the genre of motherhood studies had grown to embrace diversities of race, class and gender, she asked, 'what about religion?' (Kawash 2011: 994). For Kawash religious faith has been largely overlooked in academic literature on motherhood, despite the fact it is a significant source of meaning for many people (Kawash 2011: 994). This article aims to add to knowledge of the relationship between motherhood and the transmission of religious identity by focusing on Jewish Israeli women's lived experiences of mothering in Britain, but considered in relation to their

understandings of the role of the Jewish Israeli mother. While there are, of course, other forms of religious experience and conceptual frameworks through which to analyse the relationship between motherhood and religion, this article focuses on the issue of identity, in this case Israeli and Jewish, in order to see how emigrant Jewish Israeli mothers relate to these constructs.

The article explores the ways by which Jewish Israeli mothers living in early-twenty-first-century Britain sought to foster a Jewish Israeli identity within their children. It addresses how living in a foreign country – with the resultant social dislocation and change from being the majority to members of a minority group – made these women rethink their national and religious identities. First it explores how the women created a social network within which to mother and how they tried to ensure their children felt connected to Israel. Next it considers how they engaged with the local Jewish community in order to preserve and transmit a Jewish identity. Finally the article examines those mothers who occupied a more ambivalent position in respect to encouraging a sense of Israeli or Jewish identity in their children.

## Methodology

This study is based on twelve oral history interviews with Jewish Israeli women who were living or had lived in Britain and were mothers of young children. The subject of the interviews was their experiences as Jewish Israeli mothers living in Britain, and they had been informed of this in advance of the interview. Oral history raises a number of interpretive challenges, such as the tension between self and public representation, the dynamics between interviewee and interviewer and the function of memory (Abrams 2010; Portelli 2006; Wright and McLeod 2012). There are also challenges in undertaking contemporary history (Berridge 1994; Howells and Jones 1983; Palmer 2010; Preston 2002; Rafeek et al. 2004). However there is great value in bringing a historical perspective and methodological approach to analysing the recent past. An oral history approach enables an engagement with recent historical events but seen through a wider historical trajectory. People are made through their autobiographical narratives (Bruner 1990), with memories constructing identities as well as re-presenting past events (Lambek and Antze 1996). Following Hall, Ang and Brah, identity is understood here as being ambiguous, ever changing and performed (Ang 2001; Brah 1996; Hall 1990). As such oral history is a particularly suitable methodology for exploring women's self-narratives (Lapovsky Kennedy 1998). The interviews were conducted between May and October 2014. Interviewees were found through a combination of an appeal through a Facebook group for Israeli mothers in Britain and through snowballing with interviewees putting me in touch with other Israeli mothers they knew. Eight were members of the Facebook group and four were not. Nine mothers were living in Britain at the time of the interview and three in Israel. The others were divided between those who expected to return to Israel in the next three-to-five years and those who had no plans to return.

The interviewees were diverse in terms of religious tradition and ethnicity (coming from Ashkenazi, Sephardi and mixed backgrounds). Four grew up in religiously observant families; seven in secular families; one had a religious mother and secular father. Most did not consider themselves to be religious

although some attended synagogue. They and their husbands had a range of occupations but (if working) could all be termed professionals. All were married: four had British husbands and moved to Britain for them and eight had Israeli husbands. Six had accompanied their Israeli husbands who were working/studying abroad and two had come to work/study in Britain themselves. Five had their first child/ren in Israel and of these three had a subsequent child in Britain. Seven had all their children in Britain. Five lived or had lived in London; five in the same university city in southern England; and three in different towns in the south of England. The use of snowballing meant the university city was overrepresented as most Israelis live in London. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) reported that 8000 of the 15,000 Israeli-born individuals living in Britain in 2011 lived in London (ONS 2012). The interviews were generally about sixty minutes long and semi-structured around the life cycle. Seven interviews were done face-to-face; four via Skype and one over the phone. All were in English. The interviews were conducted in line with the Oral History Society guidelines and pseudonyms have been used. While this study focused on married, heterosexual mothers who were biological parents, further research is needed to investigate the experiences of fathers, gay parents, lone parents, and non-parental carers.

## Identity, Jewishness and 'Israeliness'

This article aims to consider Jewish Israeli mothers' multiple identities, focusing on the intersectionality between their gendered identities as mothers, religious and cultural identity as Jews and national identity as Israelis. The State of Israel was formed in 1948. By 2001 its Jewish population had grown from about 500,000 to over 5,243,000, the result of natural growth and in-migration from many nations. Forging a single Jewish Israeli national identity from these disparate groups was a difficult task (and continues to be so (Ram 2011; Shafir and Peled 2002; Sobel and Beit-Hallahmi 1991)). A modern Jewish national historical narrative had to be constructed around the twin themes of the unity and continuity of the supposed nation (Ram 2011). However the idea of a shared Jewish Israeli national identity masks many divisions in terms of class, ethnicity, migration history, religious observance and politics (Shafir and Peled 2002). The experience of non-Jewish Israelis, while not discussed here, also shapes how Jewish Israeli identity is understood (Bishara 2011; Shihade 2014).

Jewish identity is also a nebulous concept (Cohen 2010). For Sinclair and Milner, it may be defined 'according to a number of internal and external criteria, including religious law, self-identification, and social categorization' (Sinclair and Milner 2005: 94). While such complexities of identity are not unique to Jews (Satlow 2006), Medding argues that there is something distinct in the 'combination of religion, language, customs and geographic origins' which are present for Jews 'in an intricate and inseparable mix of religion, culture and nationality' (Medding 1987: 26). In this context celebrating *rites de passage* and the holidays can 'create and affirm fundamental connections with the Jewish people, its land, its tradition and its God' (Medding 1987: 28). Discussing Jewish religiosity in Israel, Kedem has noted how 'much religious behaviour can be explained by individual emotions tied to childhood memories and the desire to instil similar memories in children' (Kedem 1991:268). A 2009 Guttman Institute survey of

attitudes towards religion among Jews in Israel found that while 16% defined themselves as non-observant and 44% as somewhat observant, when asked about actual religious practices 90% thought it was important to celebrate the Passover Seder in the traditional manner and more than 90% thought it was important to conduct the main Jewish lifecycle rituals of circumcision, sitting shiva, celebrating a bar mitzvah, and saying Kaddish for one's parents (Keissar-Sugarmen 2012). Furthermore, for Israeli Jews growing up in the 'Jewish State', with the state-supported near monopoly of Orthodox Judaism, thinking of religious identity in terms of personal choice does not reflect the reality of a society with few religious alternatives (Satlow 2006). In the words of Sabar, 'Their Jewish identity is perceived by secular Israelis as being part of being Israeli, without them paying separate attention to their Jewish identity *per se*' (Sabar 2007: 207). For Jewish Israelis the distinctions between nationality, ethnicity and religion are often not clear and as such were regularly conflated in the interviewees' accounts.

## The Israeli Community

The practice of Israeli emigrants socialising with their co-nationals has been amply demonstrated (for example Cohen 1999; Gold 1994, 2002, 2004, 2007; Hart 2004; Moshkovitz 2013; Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010; Uriely 1995). However, it has also been shown that the transition to parenthood encourages greater involvement with fellow Israelis as families seek to maintain their children's attachment to the homeland (Gold 1994; Hart 2004; Sabar 2000; Shokeid 1988). The women interviewed for this study also talked about the important role played by their fellow Israelis in their social networks and that it was they and their fellow mothers who established these connections. Reflecting the association of women with the home and interpersonal relationships, they assumed they would take the lead in forming such friendships. All the mothers interviewed reported they had Israeli friends, although they relied on the Israeli community to differing degrees. The most extreme example was Maya, who lived in London, and told me: 'Our friends are all Israeli. We don't have any English friends, all Israeli.' Many of the interviewees said they had not specifically looked for Israeli friends, but these were the friends they had found. For instance when I asked Ayala if she had wanted to make friends with the Israelis already living in her university city she replied, 'No, actually. We were saying, "we don't care about the Israeli community ... we are international people, we want to have friends from all over" ... But, the big group we actually had friends with are the Israelis.' As mothers of young children the interviewees said they took comfort in friendships with other Jewish Israelis who shared the same language and culture. However their accounts also suggested a tension, as some interviewees indicated regret that they could not establish themselves within wider British society.

Moreover, the fact that these friendships seemed to 'happen' rather than being actively sought led several interviewees to reflect on whether they would have also chosen these new friends in Israel. Tamar said that she and her husband had struggled to settle in London until she began to make friends with the other Israeli mothers whose children went to the same school as her son. While indicating that these friendships were an important source of support to

her she added, 'we associate on the basis of being Israelis, and I wouldn't necessarily pick these kinds of people to be my friends back home.' Tamar's comments reveal the divisions that were masked by the idea of a Jewish Israeli national identity. Discussing the new Israeli friends she met after moving to a south coast town Roni reflected on these divisions more explicitly, and what they meant for her own feeling of Jewish Israeli identity:

It's really fun in the beginning, and you're both really excited about all your shared things, and then you realise all these things that you really don't share. Everybody's sure that they are Israeli, and they know what Israel is, and then you understand ... it's not that straightforward, and everybody's idea of an Israeli identity is completely shaped by their own imagination, and there's not really necessarily such a thing at all.

The main reason interviewees in this study said they wanted their families to be part of the Israeli community in Britain, even if they had misgivings, was to find support in child socialisation. They viewed it as part of their role as mothers to pass on a Jewish Israeli identity and sense of belonging to their children and felt this needed to be acquired communally. While the transmission of Jewish identity may begin in the home, it continues to be reinforced and shaped during childhood and adolescence, and indeed throughout adulthood, by formal and informal networks, such as school, Jewish organisations and activities and events in wider society (Hartman and Hartman 2003). The interviewees recognised this importance of the outer world in the socialisation of their children. Caneva and Pozzi have described the crucial role played by language in the preservation of ethnic and cultural identity:

The mother tongue plays a double role: it permits communication with the family members, also with relatives and grandparents in the homeland, facilitating transnational relationships [and it] represents the vehicle to transmit values, rules, traditions from generation to generation, by the socialisation process acted by the family. (Caneva and Pozzi 2014: 439).

They note that in some religions 'the roles of religion and language interweave', with the knowledge of language crucial to hand down religion through the reading of religious texts (Caneva and Pozzi 2014: 439). While they were referring to Arabic and Islam, it is also the case with Hebrew and Judaism. Although there are differences between Biblical Hebrew and Modern Hebrew, a native Modern Hebrew speaker can read Biblical Hebrew. Bible classes are compulsory in all state schools attended by Jewish children in Israel and as such Jewish Israelis are exposed to Biblical Hebrew from a young age, whether or not they come from religious homes. In consequence when the interviewees talked about wanting their children to understand Hebrew they were not differentiating between Biblical or Modern Hebrew, which would be an artificial distinction for them. Hebrew was both their language of daily life and a religious language. As such, the link they made in their accounts between their efforts to teach their children Hebrew and the importance they placed on celebrating the Jewish and Israeli holidays reflects their intertwining within Jewish Israeli culture.

When discussing how they wanted to pass on an Israeli identity, interviewees regularly conflated their children's learning of Hebrew with observing the Jewish holidays. Maya told me that she had started to attend Shul in London although she would never have done so in Israel because she thought that 'celebrating all the

Jewish holidays' was important for her son, 'and even before being Jewish, having Hebrew.' Rivka moved to London from a university city in the east of England to find an Israeli community in which to raise her children. Her account revealed that the heart of this community were the 'Israeli mummies' who endeavoured to foster an environment in which their children could learn Hebrew and celebrate the holidays together. Before having children Noa said she did not have any Israeli friends in Britain and had not felt the need for them. However after her children were born it had become important to her that they felt a connection to Israel, and Noa felt she alone could not instil this: 'I can't create the thing at home – they need to be part of a group to experience that. So going to birthday parties where the songs are in Hebrew, or [being able to] celebrate the holidays with lots of kids.' Becoming a mother had made Noa feel the need for Israeli friendships because in order to fulfil her perceived responsibility of passing on an Israeli identity to her children she was reliant on the support of the group.

## The Jewish Community

Reflecting the blurred nature of the religious and nationalistic aspects of Jewish Israeli identity, some interviewees turned to the local Jewish community to help them socialise their children and maintain their attachment to Israel. Discussing the Israeli diaspora Gold notes how,

Finding it difficult to sustain an Israeli identity beyond the Jewish State, and seeking other sources of identification, many Israelis explore their connections with Jewish ethnicity and the Jewish religion. They do this in order to find a base for communal interaction, the celebration of Jewish or Israeli holidays and assistance in child socialisation (Gold 2002: 197).

Reflecting Gold's findings, Hart found that parents favoured both Jewish schools and those where there were a large number of Israeli children (Hart 2004). However it was not simply the presence of other Israeli pupils that attracted parents to Jewish schools. A 2008 study of Israelis in London found that 47% thought it was more important to give their children Jewish education abroad than in Israel (Rocker 2008). Parents' desire for their children to attend Jewish schools often reflected their wish for their children to learn about religious as well as cultural Judaism, even if they were secular.

The mothers interviewed for this study who lived in London also discussed what they believed were the benefits of their children attending Jewish schools. It was 'very important' for Maya that her son go to a Jewish school in order for him to feel 'connected'. She explained that she and her husband had chosen to live in a certain area so that he would be in the catchment of the school and had begun to attend the local synagogue so he would be eligible for a place. While it was not something Maya enjoyed – she said that during services, 'I'm sitting there, shutting my mouth, trying not to roll my eyes' – she felt it was worthwhile overcoming what she termed her 'anti-religious' sentiments for the good of her son. Similarly Tamar said she had chosen to send her son to a religious school in London, which is not something she would have done in Israel,

Both of us are very non-religious in the way we see things, and that's the reason why it was very important for me to put my son into a Jewish school, because



when you go to school in Israel, and there's Rosh Hashanah or Pesach or whatever ... and there is a sense of Jewishness in your life. Whereas here, if I was to send him to a regular school, he wouldn't have known that he was Jewish.

Maya and Tamar indicated they felt that it was part of their role as mothers to provide their children with opportunities to be exposed to Jewish religious traditions and beliefs even if they themselves did not adhere to them.

For those interviewees who lived outside of London and not near a Jewish school the synagogue was used as an entrée into Jewish life. Sarah and her family lived in a university town in the south of England where there were no Jewish schools and her children attended a local state school. She explained why, although they were not members of a synagogue in Israel, this changed when they moved to Britain: 'both me and my husband, we come from religious families, and we're not religious anymore, but it is very important for us to give our kids that education. I was teaching Cheder on Sundays, and my husband would take the kids to Playshul.' Similarly Yael, who lived in the same university city, explained that she wanted her children to learn about 'Israel and the holidays, and the festivals, which they will not learn in the usual school or nursery.' Unlike Sarah she did not come from a religious family, but she had also started teaching at the Cheder and the family had become members of the synagogue. She likewise said this was not something they would have done in Israel, but living outside of Israel had made her want the children to 'get a bit of the Jewish education' and a 'sense of belonging.'

However not all the interviewees felt at home in local Jewish community, reflecting wider divisions between Israelis and British Jews. In a 2008 study only 2% of Israelis in Britain thought that they and local Jews belonged to a single community. Fifty-seven percent said they were not active in their Jewish community, 40% said they were to some extent and just 3% were very active. Only a third saw the presence of Israelis as contributing to Jewish continuity in the diaspora (Rocker 2008). British Jews and Israelis have profoundly different identities. While Israelis define themselves in nationalistic terms, British Jews' identity is basically ethnic and religious (Barkat 2008). Israel is also a major source of controversy in the British Jewish community (Kahn-Harris and Gidley 2010). Commenting upon these conflicts in her account of trying to get to know people in the local Jewish community Roni said:

It's very different to be Israeli than to be a Jew ... The minority mentality is something very different, and I don't connect to it at all ... and the whole issue with Israel, and the Zionist ideology. For them, Israel is an ideology, and for me, it's a real place.

Similarly, explaining why she did not go to synagogue in Britain, Avigail said:

I'm such a Zionist Israeli – I was brought up that way. It [diaspora Judaism] just doesn't speak to me at all. Even going to Shul I feel like, why are they speaking in English, the prayer is in Hebrew? And when they speak in Hebrew I think how strange it is that they're praying in Hebrew when they don't understand what they're praying ... it just doesn't work for me at all.

When explaining how they endeavoured to instil a Jewish Israeli identity in their children many interviewees described their efforts to engage with the local Jewish community. However, their accounts also indicated the tensions

that existed between their understandings of Jewishness, as Israelis, and those experienced by British Jews. While some mothers were able to overcome this dissonance because they felt it was in their children's best interest, others said they tried but failed.

## Minority Positions

Furthermore, not all the interviewees wanted to foster a sense of Jewish religious identity in their children, either because they thought it was unimportant or they actively wanted their children to share their secular outlook. Of the interviewees, Tal took the most extreme position in not wanting to transmit an Israeli or Jewish identity to her children. Tal had married a British, non-Jewish man and the couple lived in Kent. She did not speak to her children in Hebrew and said she did not feel the need to socialise with other Israelis. It was not important for her that her children felt any sense of feeling Jewish or Israeli: 'I didn't bother with Israeli passport. We go to Israel just to see the family. I've never thought about [them] being Jewish.' More commonly, interviewees said they wanted to pass on some aspects of a Jewish Israeli identity but not others. Noa, whose husband was also British and non-Jewish, hoped her children would grow up feeling they were Israeli, but for her this was not the same as a Jewish identity. She explained that becoming a mother had encouraged her to separate out what she felt was important to being Israeli from what she felt were unnecessary Jewish religious customs that she did not need or want to observe. As such she decided against circumcising her son. She explained:

When I met [my husband], I told him that for me it's a red line we have – the baby has to, if it's a boy, has to be circumcised. But after nine years here, I realised that maybe that's not exactly who I am, and ... to be honest, I don't think it's necessary. We're not religious, and it's not the most important thing.

However while telling me that she and her husband were not religious, Noa said that she had introduced Jewish religious traditions into the home, which left them somewhat at odds, and revealed the ambiguity within her relationship to Judaism. She explained that her husband, 'really doesn't like anything religion related, but I don't do anything too religious anyway here, so... I do light the candles every Friday, and I say a little prayer, and he's fine with it.' Noa's account revealed a tension between her assertion that she did not want her children to be brought up with a Jewish religious identity and her practice, whereby she did try to observe some Jewish religious customs in the home, such as Erev Shabbat. Orly also indicated that she felt torn between wanting to bring up her daughter as secular while maintaining some attachment to religious cultural traditions. She and her husband had 'stopped doing all celebrations' of Jewish holidays after they moved to Britain. However she said that becoming a parent had made her rethink her relationship to Jewish customs and practice, although not theology, and she now wondered whether they should observe the Jewish holidays, 'so that [my daughter] doesn't get confused with having nothing.' Like Noa, Orly also said she and her husband had differing opinions on the matter: 'I'm a little bit more [keen to pass on a Jewish identity], but [my husband's] not committed to identity at all.' This difference reflects their own personal views, but also suggests that as a mother she felt the need to pass on a Jewish identity that he did not.

Ayala also wanted to pass on a Jewish cultural identity to her children, and 'do a family meal on Friday and stuff like that', but she differentiated this from a religious identity and added that they did not do, 'the God part'. She also rejected some aspects of Judaism, which she felt were sexist and did not respect other ethnic and religious groups, and were therefore opposed to the values she wanted to teach her daughter. For instance, describing how they celebrated Pesach she said,

there's a new tradition ... I learned in Israel a few years ago [to add an orange to the Pesach plate] ... because a few years ago there ... [was a] debate, that women are not supposed to sing, and this rabbi said that a woman's voice in public is like an orange on a Pesach table, so since then, we've been putting an orange on a Pesach table, to make sure a woman's voice is part of it.

She added that they did not read the Hagaddah at the Seder, because 'it's very violent. It's awful; it's very... like, everybody else is bad, let's kill everybody else'. She explained that while she wanted her daughter to grow up with Jewish traditions she did not want to pass on beliefs that she felt were discriminatory.

The mixed feelings some interviewees held about passing on a Jewish Israeli identity to their children also reflected the insecure political situation in the country when the interviews were conducted in 2014. During July and August of that year the Israeli military operation known as Operation Protective Edge took place. In consequence many interviewees reflected not only on the positives of living in Israel but also the difficulties, and hence the benefits of being away. In interviews with Israeli emigrants undertaken between 2000 and 2004 (after the Second Intifada and during a period in which Israel faced a significant recession and political scandals) Gold and Hart had found that while some respondents felt more attached to Israel because of the threats it faced, as a whole they were much more likely to make specific criticisms of Israeli society than were earlier emigrants. Moreover, it was their female interviewees who, far more often than men, mentioned concerns with safety and personal security as being a reason for not returning to Israel. They concluded that Israeli emigrants' feelings of connection to Israel were thus shaped by its ability to provide a secure and un-corrupt society, a decent standard of living and a good place to raise children (Gold and Hart 2013).

The conflict was an undercurrent that ran through the interviewees' discussions of their migratory experience in this study. Sarah found it hard not to be in Israel. She explained, 'with the whole situation in Israel now, and the political situation, I just really wanted to go back. I don't know; it just feels like I just want to.' For Maya, it confirmed why she wanted her son to have an Israeli identity: 'We do want him to care about, if situations like these happen in Israel, we do want him to care'. Yael was more ambivalent. While she said she was 'watching with concern' and hoped 'things will get better', her account also addressed many of the issues highlighted by Gold and Hart as influencing their interviewees' level of attachment to Israel, such as security, standard of living and quality of life. She commented that:

It's not just the war time ... these three or four weeks, they influence the way that people act and conduct themselves, all their lives, every day. I think people are just a bit more nervous, they are a bit more stressed, so it's not just the maybe three or four weeks that you see these times are hard in Israel, it affects all the

year, even in between ... It affects the way children behave in a classroom, the violence level in the education system, the fact that all the resources are always toward security ... in fact everything, not just this three/four weeks every few years, it affects everyday life.

Some of the interviewees explicitly stated that they were pleased that they had left Israel and the current crisis reinforced their decision. They did not agree with the actions of the current Israeli government towards Arab Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, or other policies which they saw as discriminatory. Their decision to leave Israel had been informed by their unhappiness with the politics of the Israeli state and the ethnocentrism and racism that they felt existed among some Jewish Israelis. Becoming mothers had intensified their feelings of discontent as it highlighted the dissonance between the values they wished to pass on to their children and the conduct of the current administration. When characterising Israel as a dangerous place to raise their children, these women were not only referring to the risks to their families' physical safety, but also that living in Israel was morally corrupting. Reflecting upon these issues Ayala explained: 'if Israel will be a better place to be, we will be happy to go back', but she felt contemporary Israel was not a place in which she wanted to raise her children. She said this was both because of the risk of violence that they would face, but also because the current political situation encouraged a climate of fear and hatred towards others which she did not want her children to grow up with. Similarly Roni, who was currently living in Israel with her British husband and daughter, revealed that she was considering returning to Britain. She was both anxious that it was, 'very difficult to lead a happy, content, good-quality life in Israel right now', but was also fearful of the effect of living in Israel would have on her daughter. She expounded on this point when discussing the Israeli education system:

state education in Israel is totally separated into Arab education and Jewish education, which to me, in its core, is corrupt and racist, and I don't want her to be part of it. And it never occurred to me as a child – I don't think it occurs to my parents even now, but there's something really distorting to the mind, to grow up around people who are really homogenous, especially in a country like Israel, where to expose yourself to the other is almost the most important thing, and not being scared of the other.

Discussing why she had first moved to Britain Orly recalled that while she was attracted by what London had to offer she was also unhappy with the political climate in Israel: 'it was an abomination to me fourteen years ago, so I was already feeling like I can't take any more of these people.' She continued by explaining that since leaving Israel she and her husband had become increasingly, 'disillusioned with the Zionist project'. She described this feeling as being, 'beyond even a particular situation. It's more about the trajectory of the project, the fact that, not just what's happening now, but looking back thinking, actually, it was probably bad even when we were children.' In consequence, discussing whether she wanted her daughter to have a connection to Israel Orly said:

when I first came to Britain, I thought it was a little bit sad when I went to an event and ... the daughter [of one of the guests] didn't know anything [about Israel], but now I've kind of, I don't see it's so sad anymore; I just think that's how it is, and you move to a different [place]. And I think I moved to a better place.

It was still important to these women who took a minority stance that, as mothers, they transmitted a system of values and beliefs to their children, but it also led them to distance themselves from those elements of Israeli or Jewish identity that they saw as being at odds with their own ethical codes.

## Conclusion

In recent decades, mothers' experiences of transnational migration have begun to receive scholarly attention and research has revealed the difficulties of mothering while simultaneously developing new lifestyles in a new country (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2003; Ishkanian 2002; Lutz 1995; Parrenas 2005; Phoenix 2011). By focusing on their relationship with their Jewish as well as Israeli identity, this article adds to the existing literature by exploring mothers' attitudes towards religion, which, as Steven Vertovec notes, has as yet received surprisingly little consideration (Vertovec 2004). The study confirms the findings of existing research which has shown how migration can enhance the key role women play in reproducing religious practice, particularly in the domestic realm, and that migration can lead to increased religiosity (Vertovec 2004). Many interviewees discussed how they took the lead in ensuring their children were introduced to Judaism at home or in school and indicated that they felt it was their responsibility as mothers to do so. Consequently it was they who organised playdates and parties with the other Jewish Israeli mothers to ensure their children were exposed to Hebrew and could celebrate the Jewish holidays together. They offered to teach in the Cheder in order to integrate their families into the local Jewish community and enable their children to go to the local Jewish schools. They ensured the family celebrated Erev Shabbat or the Passover Seder, even when they modified the traditions to suit their new circumstances, in order to pass on their Jewish Israeli identity to their children. While none said their religious convictions had changed as a result of parenting in Britain, in that those who said they were secular or did not believe in god did not say their beliefs altered, their practices did change. Several said they had joined synagogues in Britain when they would not have thought of doing so in Israel. Celebrating the holidays and performing other religious rites grew in importance as they wanted to bring up their children with an attachment to Judaism. There were minority voices who were more critical about which aspects of their Jewish or Israeli identity they did or did not wish to transmit, but rarely did interviewees reject all aspects of their national, cultural and religious heritage.

The interviewees also indicated that there were facets of their experience that were particular to their background as Jewish Israelis and their upbringing in a culture in which nationalism and religious identity are interlinked. Discussing the role played by the Israeli and Jewish communities in their lives as mothers, the interviewees stressed the importance of child socialisation taking place at the group level. The women said they sought out other Israeli mothers to provide the communal experience they believed was necessary to instil an attachment to Israel. Often this went in tandem with seeking institutional support from the local Jewish community, with many interviewees valuing a Jewish education for their children, whether at school or Sunday school. While most of the mothers interviewed classed themselves as secular,

when discussing how they wished to transmit a sense of Jewishness to their children they often downplayed their own personal beliefs saying their priority was that their children would maintain a Jewish Israeli identity and this required subsuming their individual beliefs to the group. For example they made friends with people they felt they would not have done so normally, or attended Shul even if they did not see themselves as religious, in order that their children would have the chance to socialise with other Israelis and feel part of the local Jewish community. Moreover they saw it as their responsibility, as mothers, to provide their children with this opportunity. This attitude was, I suggest, specific to their status as Jewish Israelis and born out of the communal nature of Judaism in Israel with which the interviewees had grown up, but it also reflects how mothers see themselves as playing a central role in the transmission of religious culture.

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