January 2020
Volume: 17, **No**: 1, pp. 91 – 101
ISSN: 1741-8984
e-ISSN: 1741-8992
www.migrationletters.com

MIGRATION LETTERS

First Submitted: 1 May 2019 Accepted: 11 October 2019
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v17i1.770

Towards an Emerging Distinction between State and People: Return Migration Programs, Diaspora Management and Agentic Migrants

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Abstract

While Jewish immigration to the State of Israel is a key component of Zionist ideology, emigration has been discouraged and vilified. Yet, Israeli Jewish citizens have been leaving throughout. This paper chronicles the approaches of the State of Israel towards its citizen diaspora, which shifted from rejection to the realisation of Israelis abroad as a fait accompli, and a resource for the state. At the same time, it depicts the self-organisation of Israeli citizens abroad, and their on-going ties to the State of Israel, even if they are highly critical of it. To elaborate on this dialectic, the paper zooms in on Israeli citizens in Germany. In consequence, I argue that the secularised notion of the 'love for the Jewish people' (ahavat yisrael) can be extended to ahava be'ad ha'medinat yisrael (love for the State of Israel) in the present to conceptualise the on-going relationship of Israeli citizens abroad to Israel, and its implementation by the state.

Keywords: *ahavat yisrael; diaspora management; Germany; Israel; return migration.*

Introduction

The immigration of Jews to British ruled mandatory Palestine, and pursuant the State of Israel is key to Zionist ideology. The provisions of immigration are historically linked to the stymying of emigration and the current approaches to reaching out to Israelis in the diaspora. Yet Israeli Jews still left Israel: what happened to them? How did the state react to them? And how did they conceptualise of themselves? This paper will tackle these key questions in front of the historical background from the angle of the state, but also from the side of those Israeli Jews who left Israel, and who moved to Germany in particular. By this token, the paper will indicate that the notion *avahat yisrael,* the love for the Jewish people, can be amended to the love for the state of Israel (*ahava be'ad ha'medinat yisrael*) in the present, since even those Israelis who leave Israel and who are highly critical towards it do not sever their connections to the state and remain citizens in most cases, stressing their Israeliness – as opposed to their Jewishness – throughout (Kranz et al. 2015). Fieldwork amongst Israelis in Germany revealed that Israel constantly plays on their minds and that they engage in various praxes, for example, "voting tourism": they travel to Israel to be able to vote in national elections, which they can only do from within the country.

To capture the issues, structurally, I will start with a review of research on Israeli out-migration, which reveals zeitgeisty notions. Pursuant, I will connect the social scientific finds to return migration efforts geared at Israeli citizens, and how these came to shift in the direction of diaspora management from the side of the state. Israelis abroad came to be seen as a valuable asset from the

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Acknowledgement: Partial funding received: GIF Grant 1186.

point of view of the State of Israel (Cohen, 2007; 2019) despite emigration remaining a fraught subject. That research on Israelis in Germany has been all but missing until very recently is indicative of the double transgression: emigration from Israel, and immigration to Germany. Thus, in the next section, I will describe the diasporic Israeli population in Germany, and how it had been a self-managing diaspora that has only recently been included in diaspora management efforts. Following a quantitative introduction, Israeli migrants will have their own say in the ethnographic description. In the final section, I will analyse the intersections between the different efforts from the side of the state and institutionalising Israeli actors on location, and argue that state capitalises on the emotional ties of Israelis abroad to Israel, which can be conceptualised as the love for the State of Israel, indicating a shift away from the love for the Jewish people, *ahavat yisrael*, indicating initial steps towards an emerging distinction between the state – Israel - and the people – Jews, since these Israelis see themselves as Israeli citizens first and foremost.

The Side of the State, and the State of the Art: Via Return Migration to Diaspora Management

Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, and since the destruction of the second temple, the majority of all Jews was diasporic. Only a small Jewish population remained in *eretz yisrael*, the biblical Land of Israel, whose rulers shifted multiple times. During the Ottoman era, between 2% and 5% of the population consisted of Jews (Scholch, 1985). Jewish diasporic experiences had been multiplex and diverse throughout the pre-State period (Boyarin & Boyarin, 2002), and not limited to a "to a 'caricatured Zionism,' and (…) 'a neurotic attachment to the lost homeland' [eretz yisrael]" (ibid: 13). In the same vein that Jews could, or would not, 'return' to Palestine (or current day) Israel, they showed different levels of integration into the local non-Jewish population, and different levels of belonging: the extreme poles of assimilation and particularism existed (uneasily) side by side, as did various, and recurrent forms of discrimination and physical violence.

An indicator of the integration/non-integration, but as well a sense of belonging, is a language natively shared with the non-Jewish population as in the case of German Jews or Romaniote Jews in Greece, or the lack thereof of amongst Eastern European, Yiddish speaking Jews. Intermarriage is another indicator, which was significant amongst Jews in Germany pre-Shoah (Meiering, 1998). Yet another issue concerns the investment in actualising any Zionist ideology, prevalent among only a small group of Jews from Germany who made *aliyah* (ascent; Jews immigrating to the Land of Israel) before 1933, and the higher numbers of East European Jews. The 1930s and 1940s led to the unprecedented movement of Jews to the Middle East, who sought to escape the Holocaust. This vast scale population movement supported the foundation of the State of Israel as the safe haven for Jews. Various European countries, as well as the US, voted in favour of the Partition Plan for Palestine (UN Resolution 181 (II)), which suggested the foundation of a Jewish, and Arab state. Yet, neither the vote in favour nor the eventual state foundation of Israel should be clouded in idealism. Jews had been murdered in the millions in Europe and persecuted also in North African countries, which had been occupied by the Nazis and their allies (Boum & Stein, 2019). This genocide affected the composition of local populations in Europe and the MENA region, the effects are tangible to date. Germany, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe were all but deprived of their Jewish populations, the effects of the Shoah stretched to the southernmost parts of Greece on the European continent (Lewkowicz, 2006). Jews from North Africa mainly left/fled after Israel was founded. In this light, it is unsurprising that those Israeli Jews who disengage from the joint effort of building a Jewish state can be interpreted negatively, and that their emigration was constructed as *yerida* (descend, physically and metaphorically), and harshly criticised (Sobel, 1986). In some cases, emigration was compared in effect to that of the Holocaust (without murder) (Amit, 2018: 1). Research on Israeli emigrants should be understood in front of this historical background because the issues explored indicate specific underlying issues, and notions prevalent in Israeli society at a specific time.

Research on early Israeli emigration/return to a previous native country was conducted post-factum by historians (Silber, 2008; Webster, 1995). From the early 1970s onwards, social scientists began to analyse the phenomenon of contemporary Israeli (Jewish) emigration to the US in particular. It had been recognised that most Israeli emigrants opted to go there, a fact which was eventually evidenced by Yinon Cohen (2011). Initially, researchers enquired about the attitudes of Israeli emigrants towards returning to Israel (Elizur, 1973), and about how these Israelis could be enticed to return (Toren, 1975). This research fed directly into the Zionist ideology of *kibbutz ha'galuyot* (the gathering of the exiles), only this time around the exilees were Israeli emigrants and not the traditional target group of the *galutim* (diaspora Jews). The notion is compelling: Israelis should return home to Israel (Toren, 1976, 1978).

The first shift in policy occurred when remigration efforts became enshrined into policy developments, and started existing side by sides with efforts to encourage *aliyah* amongst diaspora Jews (Cohen, 2013). This change is crucial as it marks the beginning of diaspora management efforts towards Israelis, and despite Israeli emigration continuing a negative image within Israeli (Hebrew) discourse. Emigrants were constructed as *yordim* (descenders, those who go down physically and metaphorically), and as the opposite of *olim* (ascenders, Jewish immigrants to Israel), and stigmatised discoursively (Amit, 2018; Harris, 2015; Shokeid, 1988).

The research questions gave insights into contemporary construction of Israelis abroad, in particular, the construction of Israel as home, or of self-concepts of the (e)migrants as Israelis. *Children of Circumstance* (Shokeid, 1988) understands Israelis in New York as accidental emigrants; a chapter is tellingly called 'Yordim amongst Themselves'. 'Rhetorical ethnicity' explores Israelis in Chicago along similar lines, and seeks to understand them in front of their (accidental) permanent sojourn (Uriely, 1994). How Israelis in Canada territorialised home (Magat, 1997), and how Israelis in Toronto constructed (their Israeli) ethnicity (Cohen & Gold, 1997) and created community (Cohen 1999) has also been studied. How ex-kibbutznikim experience Los Angeles (Sabar, 2000), became of interest, and again, how they constructed home away from home in the US (Meyers, 2001) and Australia (Cohen, 2011). In line with the recognition of the permanence of Israeli emigration, the parenting praxes of (allegedly) ambivalent emigrant parents raised interest (Korazim, 1985).

The comparative ethnogenesis of Israelis abroad, an issue already formulated by David Mittelberg and Mary Waters in 1992, entered the discourse of Israeli academics. Tellingly, non-Israeli researchers had ventured into this field already: Israelis and emigration from Israel were not charged topics, and not bequeathed with specific identity investments that these researchers had been socialised into (Amit, 2018). Steven J. Gold and his collaborators had begun publishing on Israelis as migrants from a sociological perspective from the mid-1990s onwards (Gold & Phillips, 1996; Gold & Hart, 2009; Gold, 2001, 2002, 2004). Competing academic discourses continue side by side, ranging from Zionist to post-Zionist and, in some cases, anti-Zionist. Hila Amit analyses this phenomenon in her assessment and connects Israeli emigration anxieties directly to academic output on the subject by Israeli academics (Amit, 2018). She establishes that much of the research carries the air of Israelis being out of place abroad and aching for home – that is Israel (ibid.), bearing witness to the dominant Zionist discourse. Yet chronologically, a shift can be traced on this issue.

More recent research analyses developments of identity praxes of Israeli citizens abroad (Cohen, 2008, 2011) or it cuts directly to the core and focuses on return migration efforts (Cohen, 2009, 2013). Nir Cohen demonstrates in his significant body of work in the areas of migration and policy research that it must be conducted from the side of the Israeli migrants, and of the State, in order to understand the dynamics of Israeli policies towards its citizen diaspora, which can be seen as dialectic. In a wider frame, the research paradigm shifted from Israelis as accidental migrants to specific local ethnogeneses (sic), such as Ausraelis as a specific group (Porat, 2013, 2017), or multiplex, ambiguous identity constructions that connect family history, Israel, and emigration (Tamir, 2018). While Josef Korazim (1985) depicted Israeli parents as ambiguous emigrant parents, Lilach Lev Ari and Nir Cohen (2018) seek to understand how the children of Israeli emigrant parents construct their own Israeli identity, thereby questioning the notion of 'Israeli.' With time the stigma of having left Israel diminished amongst Israeli emigrants themselves (Harris, 2015). The research on Israelis abroad reflects discourses about Israeli Jewish migration. It moved from Israelis as ambivalent emigrants who – allegedly – ached for home (Cohen & Kranz, 2017) to second generation Israeli citizens (children of Israeli Jewish emigrants), and their identity constructions (Lev Ari & Cohen, 2018; Kranz, 2019), and Middle Easterners who met other, non-Jewish Middle Easterners in their new places of residence and discovered unforeseen similarities (Roginsky & Cohen, 2018).

With time, efforts to manage Israelis in the diaspora and to 'help' them maintain ties to Israel gained in importance from the side of the State of Israel (Cohen, 2013), proving that the dynamics amongst Israelis abroad were not lost on the policy makers, and leading to an increase in diaspora management institutions (Gamlen et. al., 2017) that go beyond return migration programs. Israelis abroad have become *fait accompli*, and an issue of realpolitik. While emigration remains a touchy area, Israelis abroad have come to be seen as a resource (Cohen, 2007, 2015), who might return (Cohen & Kranz, 2014). By this token, the current diaspora management of Israel has two tiers in regard to Israelis abroad: return migration and diaspora management. According to its manager, the Israeli House Berlin aims at sustaining the ties of Israeli (e)migrants and their children to Israel, and stimulate them to return if the occasion arises but "without pressuring them" (personal interview, March 30, 2019). However, the official website of the global Israeli House program outlines "enjoy individual guidance during the planning of your return to Israel" (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019) reflecting that 'return migration' remains part of the parcel even if an official shift has taken place towards diaspora management. These developments are very recent, however: migration of Israelis to Germany had been heavily stigmatized, and it might still hit raw nerves in Israel. An Israeli official explained as late as 2013 that "We cannot support your research on Israelis in Germany. It might be interpreted as us supporting the *yordim*." This surprisingly candid quote indicates attitudes towards Israelis in Germany, and given its blunt wording, it would be unrealistic to believe that negative attitudes harboured over decades had died out in less than a decade.

From the Side of the Israelis Abroad: Israelis in Germany – since 1949

Around 2011, the alleged exodus of Israelis to Berlin hit the headlines. For ideological reasons, the amount of Israelis had been significantly overestimated on the German and Israeli side and caused strong reactions with Israelis and Germans alike (Kranz, 2018). Israelis had migrated –

emigrated, immigrated, returned – to Germany ever since, and even before, (West) German state foundation.[2] Prior to the migration of Jews from countries of the former Soviet Union Israelis constituted one of the largest groups of Jewish immigrants to Germany (Webster, 1995). This 'large' should not be confused with 'significant' as the Jewish population in Germany was tiny: about 30,000 Jews were registered with the Jewish communities in West Germany. Community membership, which is the only somewhat reliable data set[3], remained stable due to immigration. Besides Israeli Jews, Czech, Romanian, and Hungarian Jews came to West Germany in the late 1950s and 1960s. Polish Jews sought refuge in Germany post-1968, and Iranian Jews arrived after the Islamic revolution in 1979. The numbers, however, should be treated with caution. Post-Shoah, some Jews did not want to be members of the Jewish communities, while others could not as they had non-Jewish mothers or lacked documentation (Steiner, 2015). The total of individuals who self-identified as Jews might have been double that of community membership. Some Israelis were members of the Jewish communities but many were not, as we found in a representative sample of Israelis in Germany (Kranz et. al., 2015). While research on Israelis in the US from various angles has been a long-established phenomenon, and Israelis in the UK (Hart, 2004) and Australia (Porat, 2013, 2017) gained prominence, Israeli migration to Germany had not been studied. Immigrating to Germany still carries the air of a taboo among many Israelis and remains directly connected to the Shoah, even if attitudes towards Germany have been changing amongst Israeli Jews (Cohen & Kranz, 2017; Hagemann & Nathanson, 2015; Kranz, 2018).

We established that the migrants primarily identified as Israeli, as opposed to Jewish, and we also demonstrated that Israelis refer to themselves as migrants, emigrants, immigrants, returnees or re-migrants; some who absolutely opposed Israel or Israeli policies would go as far as referring to themselves as refugees from Israel, or as anti-Zionists. Thus, self-ascriptions carried emotional currency which relates back to Israeli – Zionist – discourse even if it is was wholeheartedly rejected. The issues Judith Butler (2013) described for (some) diaspora Jews were, at best, partial for Israelis in Germany. Butler argued that (diaspora) Jews and Israel are *Parting Ways*. However, while these Israelis physically parted ways, emotionally they did not, some of those who could not envision returning to Israel, or who "left in disgust" showed a near obsessive and constant engagement with Israeli society, and in particular with the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. One might argue at this point that the opposite of love is indifference, and that love can also be expressed by an on-going tie to the State of Israel: in this vein *ahavat yisrael*, needs to be extended, to understand the Israelis residing abroad, and the policy attempts of the state. The tie that connects these Israelis to Israel has outgrown the notion *ahavat yisrael*. It developed into the direction of love for the State of Israel in which these Israelis – their harsh criticism notwithstanding – wished to participate as citizens, alongside other citizens, Jewish, and non-Jewish alike.

As our research concerned Israeli migration to Germany since 1990 (GIF Grant 1186), we cannot ascertain how many Israelis lived in Germany – West and East – prior to 1990. Interviews with statisticians revealed the numbers had not necessarily been collected. Data for Berlin/Brandenburg is available from 1993 onwards only, for example (personal email to author, October 20, 2014). Nevertheless, the data that is available on national, state, and communal level indicates an increase of the Israeli migrant population in Germany. The statistical instrument Mikrozensus 2016 (personal email to author, September 12, 2018) estimates that about 25,000 individuals who are Israeli, dual German/Israeli citizens, or who satisfy the statistical parameter ‘migration background’ reside in Germany; we put the number lower, at about 20,000. Be that as it may, we sought to understand why Israelis migrated to Germany, how they lived in Germany, and what relation – if at all – they maintained to Israel. To amend the data collected within this project, I interviewed Israeli officials and experts within the areas relevant to this specific paper.

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[2] Comparable data does not exist of the GDR. Jews certainly returned (Peck & Borneman 1995), but how many came from Palestine/Israel remains a lacuna.

[3] For historical reasons indicating one's religion upon mandatory registration is not mandatory.

Remaining at the level of quantitative data, we found that the vast majority of all Israelis[4] who took part in our research were Israelis of the third generation[5] (80%, born after 1974). Most hold at last a bachelor’s degree (60%), they are politically left to moderate (80%), most come from Tel Aviv and the surrounding areas. Approximately a third hold German citizenship, and a significant amount has another EU citizenship while of those who are married 54% have German spouses, who are most often non-Jews (Kranz et. al., 2015). 50% came to Germany as singles (ibid.). The migration of families was small, which contrasts with Israelis in the US (Rebhun & Lev Ari, 2010). Israelis in Germany indicate different parameters from the Israeli (Jewish) majority who tend to be more religious, less politically moderate, and who harbour unfavourable views of intermarriage (Burton, 2015). Furthermore, while 70% self-identified as Ashkenazim (Jews of European descent), the latter form the minority in Israel itself. By this token, the migrants differed from the domestic majority, and while about 53.1% outlined they came to Germany as an ‘adventure’ or to seek a challenge, most sought economic (61.1%) opportunities; educational opportunities came third (43.6%). They felt Germany offered a different life-style, including favourable opportunities. Immigration and emigration motives are statistically related. A significant number of Israelis complained about the Israeli labour market, and the lack of professional (56.4%), and even more so economic opportunities (62.7%). Germany has about ten times the population of Israel, and in terms of geopolitics, it is very differently situated. These two factors alone make for different opportunities. Additionally, with 30% emigrating to be with their German (non-Jewish) partner and most Israelis opposing intermarriage, it is not surprising that 45.8% indicate the role of religion and the religious establishment acted as a push factor (Kranz et al., 2015).

Politics were an issue that Israeli migrants brought up regularly during ethnographic fieldwork. Assessments reached from dissatisfaction with the political classes to outright rejections of Israeli policies, particularly in regard to the lack of progress of the peace process, or an end to the occupation of the West Bank. These stances might be constructed as radical left in Israel itself (cf. Wright, 2016). Very few Israeli migrants expressed political right-wing stances (Stauber, 2017: 180). The majority opposed government policies, and criticism ranged from wishes for a two-state solution (however that was to be accomplished remained often shrouded in mystery) to outright rejections and emotional, furious statements such as “I left Israel in disgust” or “We can also see where the place is heading and it’s not pretty.” Yet, however critical these Israelis were of Israel they did typically not renounce Israeli citizenship, and they constantly engaged with Israel, and other Israelis, indicating that they might have departed from Israel, but not separated from it. Throughout, these Israelis stressed their investment as active citizens, by way of activities in Germany, but also by flying to Israel to cast their vote, which Israeli citizens can only do in the country itself.

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[4] Our working definition for Israeli was an individual who holds Israeli citizenship, who speaks Hebrew and who went through school and/or army in Israel.

[5] As Israel is a recently established country, Israeli discourse categorises Israelis by way of generation since state foundation. The third generation are the grandchildren of the founding generation.

In order give their political vision weight in Germany, Israelis are politically active in associations ranging from the long-established Keren Kayemet LeYisrael (Jewish National Fund) to the New Israel Fund (HaKeren HaHadasha LeYisrael) to Keren HaYessod (United Israel Appeal) and the socialist youth organisation HaShomer HaTsair (The Young Guard). Yet others joined forces with local non-Jews and took part in the German Israeli Society (Deutsch Israelische Gesellschaft, partially funded by the German government), or newer efforts that aimed at Muslim/Jewish, or Muslim/Jewish/Christian (German) dialogue, such as the Cologne based iKult. Others publicly endorsed the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement. Wherever these Israelis stand politically, any of this suggests that they maintained a strong political investment in Israel and wanted a say in the/their country.

These political efforts are more or less institutional and connect Israelis to other political actors on an institutional, but also on a personal level. Nonetheless, Israelis self-organised also in order to "just hang and out have a beer (…) you know, just to have a good time, like in Israel", or "to speak Hebrew. I really miss speaking *my* language." These groups were organised on a local basis, voluntarily, and were based on being Hebrew-speaking Israelis: The Hebrew language functioned as lingua franca. It was key within the performance of Israeliyut (Israeliness) that Israelis in Berlin might connect to historical tropes of diasporic Hebrew cultures, which they sought to revive (Amit, 2017). Yet, groups organised by single individuals imploded once the main actor left, while group organised events showed longevity. In other words, these Israelis organised themselves in the diaspora, and as Israelis, without the help (and money) of the State of Israel.

While Berlin is central in the discourse about Israelis in Germany, Israelis live and engage in community building efforts across the country. *Kehila Yisraelit Behakama Nordrhein-Westfalia* (Israeli Community in creation in North Rhine-Westphalia) was set up in early 2018 by Israelis in NRW to enable them to hang out, bring their children along, to speak Hebrew, and to allow their children to speak Hebrew with somebody else than the Israeli parent(s). As the majority of all Israelis were co-parents with non-Israelis and non-Hebrew speakers, the maintenance of the Hebrew language is a recurrent problem (Kranz, 2019). It poses indeed more problems than the practice of symbolic religion (Gans, 1994), which is oftentimes strongly supported, if not driven by the non-Jewish, German, parent (Kranz, 2019). As Israelis in Germany self-identify primarily as Israelis, not as Jews (Kranz et al., 2015) modern Israeli Hebrew functions as a prime marker of Israeliness. With the strong emphasis on Hebrew language, it is unsurprising that Israelis really hang out amongst themselves and that Hebrew is the key marker of belonging to the ingroup. Foreign accents in Hebrew are mostly disregarded, as is the potential lack of halachic (religious) status (that is, the religious and bureaucratic categorisation as "Jew") of the Israeli children. Interestingly, these Israelis also gather across political divides, yet, in line with the finds of network theory, those amongst them who are more similar in terms of values become friends (Miller McPherson et al., 2001). Yet, efforts of the state are so far restricted to Berlin. Israelis in other location remain self-organising, and they do not benefit from an Israeli House.

From *Ahavat Yisrael to Ahava Be' Ad HaMedinat Yisrael*

With the State of Israel recognising the potential of Israeli (e)migrants, and a shift of policies to combine return migration, as well as diaspora management programs to implement and sustain ties to the Israeli citizen diaspora, Israel follows a general trend concerning the increase of diaspora institutions (Gamlen et al., 2017). In January 2019, the Israeli House Berlin was launched, which aims at solidifying the ties of Israelis (in Berlin) to Israel. It aims at offering social events for Israelis to hang out and connect, which is to say its scope is similar to the privately organised *Kehila Yisraelit Behakama Nordrhein-Westfalia*. The manager stated that it is not the meant to convince Israelis to return but that one would be "happy to help Israelis return (…) if they want to." (interview March 29, 2019) This formula replicates the program points of the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption. The representative of the Israeli House Berlin is based in the Israeli embassy, but the endeavour is supported by the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption and not by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. How long the Israeli House Berlin will be running remains unclear, although the representative claimed she "had enough funds" (ibid.). The Israeli House Berlin uses structures that Israelis in Berlin had already created for themselves, as a kind of self-managing diaspora, and which had been built to maintain contact to other Israelis, but as well to the country itself. Despite all their criticisms of Israel, these Israelis had not cut their ties to Israel or to other Israelis. Still, who will become a regular at the events of the Israeli House, who can be reached and who will stick to privately organised events with no involvement of the State of Israel, all these remain to be seen: in other words, it will show on location in due time if the target group is so diversified that some will maintain their ties by way of their own efforts, while others will maintain their ties by taking parting in officially managed diaspora management structures.

While emigration to the US and other countries has come to be tolerated, the migration of Israelis to Germany – Berlin – had met with harsh words by Israeli officials until recent (Cohen & Kranz, 2017). Yet, unlike previous incidents, the migrants did not back down, criticising the political elite – and the religious elite – candidly, and yet, indicating an on-going investment since they did not react with indifference. These acts of resistance can be read as an act of agentic participation that clarified that the State of Israel needed to consider different programs to capitalise on the *ahava be'ad ha'medinat* Israel, the love for the State of Israel, among the migrants. Even those of them who expressed utter dislike for the state of the state engaged with Israel, some nearly obsessively, which is indicative of their emotional ties to Israel: the opposite of love is utter indifference, not hatred. "It remains my home" was an oft-repeated statement, and potentially these Israelis might take a look at the Israeli House since "it is in me" or "I do miss it. Some bits of it" were often amended to the notion of the tie that bound the migrants to the country.

The notion of love for the state ties in with the idea of the love for the Jewish people (*ahavat yisrael*; Kupfer & Turgemann, 2014: 188), a religious, hassidic, the concept is deriving from Jewish religion, which has become increasingly secularised with the secularisation of Jews. The Israeli Jewish population central to this paper primarily identified as Israelis and showed a deeply seated investment, a commitment, in the State of Israel, which was demonstrated in their engagement with Israel, Israeli politics, culture, or the Hebrew language; less so with Jewish religion, evidencing further the secularisation of the *ahavat yisrael*, and its shift to *ahava be'ad ha'medinat yisrael*. The term love might initially sound odd, but as Lauren Berlant (2011) argued, love can be conceptualised politically, while Carry-Ann Morison et. al. (2012) elaborated that love can be spatial, relational, or political. Fiona Wright (2016) centred this notion on specific ethico-politics of Israeli activists and their (emotional) investment, as well as love for the Palestinian 'other', which in turn went hand in hand with an investment in Israeli democracy, and again, Israel as (a shared) home. In this sense, building on the notion of *ahavat yisrael* is not that far a stretch concerning these migrants, who physically left Israel, but who did not part ways (Butler, 2013) emotionally, and whose involvement goes beyond transnational ties (Gold & Hart, 2009) but indicates a deeply emotional connection or as one return migrant put it "(…) it is a love/hate relationship. It feels good to be where you know the things you hate."

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