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Israeli Jews in Contemporary Germany: Social Integration and the Construction of Group Identity

This study examines and analyses the socio-cultural integration and construction of ethnic identity amongst Israeli Jews in Germany. The Holocaust constitutes a major component of Israeli Jewish identity and informs attitudes of individual Israelis as well as the State of Israel as a political entity: this study is informed by the view of many Israelis that connects Germany with the most tragic chapter of Jewish history. The relationship with Germany has always been ambivalent and complex; current anti-Semitism in Germany filters into attitudes of Israelis Jews too. This historical, but as well current context is reflected in the consideration of Israelis who choose Germany as their emigration country. It also probably underpins the reactions of family and friends, as well as interaction with the native population, the local Jewish community, and Israelis on location following arrival. We believe that Israeli emigration to Germany constitutes a unique case. Accordingly, findings from this investigation will add a new dimension to the existing empirical corpus of literature on migration, transnationalism and diasporic identity, and will contribute to the development of new concepts and theories.

To understand the present influx of Israeli Jews to Germany, our study will be anchored historically, drawing attention to shifts in the discourse concerning emigration from Israel in general and to Germany specifically; the policies that facilitate or deter migration to Germany; and changes in Israeli Jewish society concerning Germany, and how these relate to the identity practices of Israeli migrants before, during, and after emigration. By this token, we intend to create a base for comparing migration to Germany with existing research on Israeli emigration, and to add new perspectives.

To examine the uniqueness of emigration to Germany and to create this comparative basis, our scope lies with the immigration of Israelis to Germany from 1990 to the present, a

period during which the flow of migration increased significantly. We seek to explore the volume, motivations and ambivalence of migration, the characteristics of the migrants, their absorption into German society, and the maintenance of Jewish identity and attachment to Israel - the construction of identity, in other words. Whilst a plethora of sources exist on re-migration of German-born Jews (Yekkes) to Germany, which will contribute to the historical context of our project, almost nothing is known about contemporary migration from Israel to Germany.

Like any emigration of Israelis, emigration to Germany is contentious and runs against Jewish national (Zionistic) ideals. It is our aim to understand the uniqueness of the migration of Israelis to Germany in the light of World War II and the Shoah, because unlike 'neutral' receiving countries like the US, Canada, or Australia, references to Germany - and even more so immigration to Germany - triggers strong reactions in Israeli society. We will interrogate whether migration to Germany constitutes (still) a double offence or if attitudes towards Germany have changed amongst Israelis. Preliminary research for this project revealed that the move of Israelis to Germany prompts a host of questions concerning belonging, the motives and contradictions of migration, and identity construction in situ during and after emigration. By way of researching immigration to Germany, the outcomes of this project will shed light on conflicts between national policies and their ideological underpinnings, and the every-day practice of migration.

To this end we shall analyse the life-worlds of Israelis in Germany, their motives for migration, the migration process, and (shifts of) identity once in Germany. Despite the comparative nature of our work, our study complements existing research on Israeli emigration because we contextualise the current phenomenon, use a mixed methods approach, and through this tease out the uniqueness of Israeli migration to Germany.