

**Social identification among Israeli migrants'  
descendants in North America: Is it  
diasporic, assimilative or transnational?**

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# The purpose of this paper

- The aim of this paper is to analyze different dimensions of social identification and the factors which influence them among Israeli migrants' descendants in North America: are they diasporic, assimilative or transnational?



# Transnational Theory

- Transnational migration is defined as the process by which migrants shape and preserve relations that connect their society of origin with that of their new place of residence (Basch et al., 1994).
- The social space that transnational migrants inhabit is fluid and changes continually through a set of connections and commitments to more than one place (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Smith, 2005).

# At Home Abroad – Diasporic Identity

- One possible component of the transnational identity is the *diasporic identity*, in which the values, social norms, and narratives of the homeland (the origin country) are maintained in the destination country.
- Central to the particular identity of members of a diaspora is the maintenance of relations with the origin country, as reflected at several different and complementary levels including the familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political (Shain, 1999; Sheffer, 1986).

# Ethnic Identity

- Ethnic identity is reflected in several indicators: identification as a member of the group, a sense of belonging and commitment to the group, positive (or negative) attitudes toward the group, a sense of shared attitudes and values, and specific components of ethnicity such as language, behavior, and customs. (Berry, Trimble, and Olmedo, in Tur-Kaspa and Pereg-Mario Mikulincer, 2004)

# Ethnic Identification

- The term “ethnic identification” signifies the demonstration of affiliation with a certain ethnic group.
- Some of the identification process also includes acceptance of the values and norms of the group that is targeted for self-identification as guidelines that shape the personality **and behavior** of the self-identifying individual (Rebhun, 2001).

# The Study

- 122 respondents (of 206) filled in questionnaires in the U.S. or Canada (from September 2008 to February 2009).
- 84 questionnaires were handed out to participants in a 'Tzabar group' within a few days of their arrival at six kibbutzim in Israel.
- In-depth structured interviews were conducted in February 2009 with nineteen descendants of Israelis in the U.S. and Canada.

## Indicators of Ethnic Identity and Identification: Comparing Second and 1.5 Generation Immigrants

Second-generation participants are characterized by the following dimensions of hierarchical ethnic identity and identification: transnational (with Israel), Jewish (local), diasporic (with other Israeli emigrants in North America), and North American (local non-Jewish).

Members of the 1.5 generation have almost similar components of ethnic identity but their hierarchy is somewhat different: transnational, diasporic, Jewish, and North American (Table 1)



# Qualitative findings

- *As much as I'm an American, I'm Israeli (Shuly).*
- *I would consider myself an American [...]. Well, that's funny because my name is Darren and Darren is the American, Itzik is Israeli [...]. My mom has never said the word Darren to me once—she only calls me Itzik [...]. Close family and friends call me Itzik. When I'm with my American friends I'm Darren. So there's two people, when I'm Darren I'm an American, an American Jew. When I'm Itzik I'm an Israeli [...].*

## Qualitative findings (cont.)

*The older I get the more I get related and closer, and more, I guess—curious about my Jewish religion and my roots, and my culture [...]. I wouldn't say I'm a religious person. I would say I keep kosher. I do say "Shma Israel" every morning, this is the way I was raised, and this is the way I try to keep it (Darren).*

## Qualitative findings (cont.)

- *The American Jewish community, I don't know them so well, I know it's a very large and very organized community. They love Israel, lots of donations, lots of conferences, most of what they do is for Israel [...]. Most Israelis want to stay with Israelis, they don't get along with the Jewish Americans, it's a different mentality [...] (Haim).*

## Qualitative findings (cont.)

- *It's, you know, being in a predominantly non-Jewish area and having some people around me feel that [...] not lose who I am. It's very special being Jewish, 'cause it's not so common here [...] but because I follow the holidays more and I practice it more in ways so that I don't forget who I am and that's why it's very special to me (Dana).*

# Split Ethnic Identity and Identification

- The second-generation immigrants experienced a split identity that was also dynamic and complementary and treated the transnational aspect as an inseparable part of it.
- Among those of 1.5 generation, the sense of alienation from the local society, both Jewish and non-Jewish, was manifested more conspicuously and was coupled with a preference for diasporic social networks.

# Conclusions

Immigrants' descendants can choose among different identities.

Accordingly, they may choose to affiliate with their origin group in the country of origin, with their origin group in the host country, or to pursue total assimilation.

The choice between “there” and “here,” between living in Israel and being American-Israeli or Canadian-Israeli, is up to these young people.

# Conclusions

- Some of them are influenced by agents of socialization, primarily their parents' attitude toward Israel, and may establish their homes in Israel for this reason.
- Most of them, however, especially those of the second generation, are equally susceptible to the influences of various social groups in North America, including non-Jewish ones.