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Jewish Women, Native-Born and Migrants, in Brussels: Social Integration, "Bubbles" and Acculturation

Lilach Lev Ari[1] · **Efrat Tzadik**[2]

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to compare two groups of Jewish women, native-born and migrants, who reside in Brussels regarding their social integration into native-born Jewish and non-Jewish communities and the acculturation strategies they employ. It seems that Brussels is not as socially and culturally open, as perceived by the interviewees. Hence, the social networks of women in our study, as well as their acculturation patterns, differ in degree of separation between native-born Jewish women, non-Israeli immigrants and Israeli immigrants. The former maintain social networks characterized by fluid boundaries between them and the majority society, whereas non-Israeli immigrants are characterized by shared, not very dense networks with the native-born Jewish community and diasporic networks. Finally, Israeli women are characterized by almost completely closed social networks, which can be defined as a distinct "Israeli bubble." As for their acculturation strategies, native-born women are those who are more integrated among non-Jews and native-born Jews, as expected from their familiarity with the culture and their long-term interactions, despite being partially marginalized as minority. Migrant women are less integrated and more separated from both native-born Jews and – to a larger extent – from non-Jews; so are Israelis. Social networks which gradually become communities are mainly created by women and maintained by them over the years. Therefore, the study of social networks, their structure and construction through daily interactions, and their contribution to the ethnic-diasporic community building have become the source of women's strength in the host country – as immigrants and as a native-born minority group.

Keywords Social integration · Acculturation · Social networks · Migrant women · Privileged minorities

✉ Lilach Lev Ari
llevari@oranim.ac.il

[1] Graduate Faculty, Oranim College, Tivon, Israel

[2] Brussels, Belgium

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to compare two groups of Jewish women who reside in Brussels, the native-born and migrants, regarding their social integration and acculturation strategies among Jewish and non-Jewish communities. In the last few decades, most European Jews are "native-born", whereas migrants comprise more than a quarter of the community. Jews are perceived by the local population at large as a group whose culture and religion are distinct from that of the majority, and thus, they are liable to experience relative discrimination (Lev Ari 2022).

A sociological minority is a group treated differently and sometimes unequally by dominant groups who occupy higher socio-economic positions that enable them control over politics and culture norms (Ben-Porat 2001). A minority was considered in Europe as a group of citizens who hold a non-dominant position in that state, characterized by ethnic, religious or linguistic traits, which differ from those of the majority (Plasseraud 2010).

The United Nations defines international migrants as "persons who are either living in a country other than their country of birth or in a country other than their country of citizenship" (United Nations 2021: 5). Among voluntary migrants, particularly women, high socio-economic status in the country of origin and cultural similarity to the host society enable economic and socio-cultural integration in less than 15 years. In addition, economic and socio-cultural integration are positively correlated (Lev Ari 2008).

Some migrant groups, after their initial integration into a host country or city, develop their own sub-communities or ethnic group, as well as social, cultural and economic organizations, such as places of worship, educational institutions and other communal services (Castles et al. 2014; Gold 2016). Some of these ethnic groups are integrated into the host society, while others are segregated for generations and might become minorities, due to different policies, public attitudes and characteristics of the migrant group. Segregation can be traced in labour markets and residential areas, among other factors (Castles et al. 2014).

Migrants and ethnic groups' social and cultural integration refers to their ability to become part of the receiving societies and nations. The process of integration is gradual, involving mutual accommodation of migrants in the host society until their cultural and social absorption is achieved. Integration also depends on states and civil societies' policies towards these groups. The policy in most highly developed immigration countries, such as the USA and, particularly, Canada, was geared, until recently, towards multiculturalism, which allows migrants and minority groups to participate equally in all spheres of the host society without giving up most of their cultural components. However, with the ongoing "crisis of integration" (Castles et al. 2014, 270), and the entrance of millions of forced migrants from the Middle East and Africa to Europe, multiculturalism is less prominent regarding immigrants' integration, due to security concerns and national identity (Castles et al. 2014).

Most Jews in Western nations, who comprise our research population, constitute a privileged ethnic minority group: Culturally, professionally and

economically, most of them integrate well, even if they remain a distinct ethno-cultural group. However, as such, some might be particularly vulnerable to attacks from the underprivileged, who direct their resentment against mainstream society towards Jews (Lev Ari 2022).

Similarly to other migrants and minorities, Jews worldwide (see also, for example, Eckardt 2018) prefer to live in large cities that provide opportunities for economic, social and cultural mobility. Within these cities many Jews tend to concentrate in neighborhoods that are appropriate to their socioeconomic status, provide nearby employment opportunities, facilitate social mobility and offer religious services and Jewish organizations (Lev Ari 2022).

Since our study focuses on Jewish women, native-born and migrants, we will elaborate on gender components relevant to this paper. In most societies, women are considered a minority group, in relation to men, due to their relative discrimination. Gender discrimination and restrictive gender roles are barriers which women face worldwide. Yet, women might also encounter other obstacles based on their affiliation to a certain race, ethnic or religious group, which exposes them to prejudice and intolerance as such (Macionis 2020). Terms that describe this situation are "double burden", "double jeopardy" and "double disadvantage", and are also used to describe some migrant women groups. As these terms suggest, minority and migrant women experience various facets of oppression in multiple ways, such as economic, political, social and cultural, compared with men in their own group or to majority women (Hughes 2013; Lev Ari 2008). Thus, both groups of women could suffer from double or triple disadvantage and might need multicultural tolerance towards their religion and culture in the workplace (Loenen 2012).

Migration may be an opportunity for both men and women to make changes in their and their families' lives. When the focus is on the cost and benefit of migration for the individual within the family, the concept of gender becomes significant. Due to the distance from social networks in their country of origin, immigrant women might also feel lonely, cut off from family and friends (Lev Ari 2008; Lipkin and Sharabi 2012; Tzadik 2014).

Following previous studies regarding migrant women, it is obvious to us that, although men have their own integration and acculturation difficulties, women suffer from the double burden of being women and migrants. In many cases, women follow their husbands to countries of destination; most of them do not work at the beginning and experience downward mobility as well as loneliness, language difficulties and lack of supportive networks they used to have in their countries of origin (see, for example: Avenarius 2012; Lev Ari 2008; Tzadik 2012, 2014). To better include minority and migrant women in the host society, policy makers should consider their particular needs, for example, accessibility to public spaces, including the labor market and healthcare services (Ugurel-Kamisli 2021).

The setting for this study is Brussels, which is a "world city", namely a global center of business, politics, culture and technology, as well as the center of the European Union. Brussels' EU institutions attract many migrants from all over the world, including Jewish women (Lev Ari 2022). Brussels is considered a multicultural city; it is ethnically diverse and liberal (Deveeshouwer et al. 2015). However, despite multiculturalism, there are ethnic niches in the city, to maintain ethnic identity and

prevent assimilation. It also has a history of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that is rare in Europe, due to the many ethnic groups living in the city. It is a unique multicultural capital city located at the intersection of French, Flemish, German and English languages. It is influenced by each of the languages but is not unequivocally defined by any of them. It is an example of a capital city that is not influenced or controlled by one national society, and its immigrants experience more "Europeanness" than in any other capital city in Europe (Favell 2001).

This comparison of two groups of Jewish women, native-born and migrants, based on semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires, elaborates theoretical concepts such as "social networks," "social bubbles" and "acculturation strategies." In particular, the main contribution of this paper is focusing on the unique experience of women as "privileged minorities" and migrants, in the context of their host-majority multicultural world city, which has not been extensively studied so far.

Transnational Migration and Acculturation of Migrants and Minorities

In recent decades international migration has been referred to as "transnational migration." This approach places emphasis on the differences between past and contemporary migration. Transnational migration is a process in which migrants maintain network ties with their past and forge new ties that connect between their society of origin and the place in which they resettle (Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010). The social space of transnational migrants is dynamic and changing, frequently by means of a set of connections and commitments to more than one place (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). Moreover, these social spaces have more branches, and the migrants remain in contact with their national group in different places across the globe, as well as with long-time local residents from their ethno-religious group (Levitt and Nadya 2007). Most migrants act simultaneously in different transnational spaces, creating a diverging set of mutual social, economic, cultural and political ties. This process has major influence on the patterns of their socio-cultural integration into the host society and sometimes generates dual loyalty to two countries (Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010; Lev Ari 2022). In this context, another possible dimension of social integration is the "diasporic" one, which emphasizes the "otherness" of the immigrants as expressed in the structure of their social networks with other immigrants from their country of origin (Kivisto 2001).

Part of migrants' cultural integration is their "acculturation," namely encounters between different ethno-cultural groups and the cultural and psychological changes that take place among members of each group. These encounters drive group members towards an intercultural intersection, which also has potential for conflict and which produces need for negotiation to achieve results to which both cultures can adapt. Group-level acculturation necessitates changes in social structures and cultural customs, while acculturation on the individual level requires behavioral changes. The acculturation process is likely to continue for many years; some groups reach full cultural assimilation, and others are partially integrated (Berry 2005).

Berry (2001, 2005) described four possible strategies for "acculturation" based on individuals' attitudes towards the integration process and on their actual

behaviour, exhibited in day-to-day intercultural encounters with the majority. Obviously, when it comes to acculturation, most host cultures provide partial freedom of choice. Moreover, the acculturation process also entails individual preferences in the equation between maintaining one's original culture and ethnic identity and choosing the broader culture and other ethno-cultural groups. One strategy is integration. Applying this strategy, migrants and minorities are interested in preserving the culture from which they came while maintaining daily ties with the members of the other culture. Another strategy is separation, in which the members of the cultural group identify with their original culture and are not interested in contact with the other culture. For example, due to feelings of alienation or fear of losing their ethnic identification, they prefer to live in an "environmental bubble" of sorts (see also Lev Ari 2008: 101; Tzadik 2016). The third strategy is assimilation. Using this strategy, members of the cultural group are not interested in preserving their original culture, sometimes due to restrictions of economic mobility, or other reasons, and seek ties and contact with other cultures. The final strategy is marginalization, in which the members of the ethno-cultural group are neither interested in their original culture (usually due to being coerced to lose it) nor in adopting the culture of the host society (usually due to exclusion or discrimination).

The choice of an acculturation strategy largely depends upon the host society and its discourse. In other words, assimilation is possible in societies that espouse multiculturalism by social acceptance, multicultural values, lack of prejudice towards migrants, positive responses to different cultural groups and even a sense of attachment to, or identification with, the absorbing society (Berry 2001; Cunningham and Heyman 2004). Furthermore, the acculturation procedure could be stressful, particularly for migrant women, the ones mostly in charge of the family's integration, when they encounter different values, customs and norms (Kim et al. 2022; Lev Ari 2008).

There are other factors which influence the integration of migrants and ethnic minority groups in a cultural context: For example, integration at a young age is known to be more successful. Immigrants with a higher level of education, with knowledge of the local language and with work experience will integrate better occupationally, culturally and socially (Berry 1997; Berry and Lackland 1997). Finally, cultural distance between the country of origin and the country of destination also impacts integration; immigrants who come from cultures close to the culture of the destination country report more positive integration than other immigrants (Berry 1997).

A further term that relates to integration of migrants is "proximal host." This is a local group that newcomers identify with, as both share a similar external look, national origin and language (Mittelberg and Waters 1992). Social and cultural integration of migrants and minorities is also affected by the degree of inclusion of the group that is close to them ethnically (Tzadik 2016). For example, the proximal host group of native-born American Jews preferred Israelis join the Jewish American group and not create a separate one, whose presence appeared symbolically detrimental to the ideology promoting the existence of Israel and their support for the state. This attitude has changed recently; the Israeli immigrant community has attained recognition, and ties with it have been created (Gold 2002; Lev Ari 2008). A study conducted among Israeli-born people residing in Paris and in London

indicates that they seem to perceive local native-born Jews as different in their norms and values as well as more observant, particularly the younger ones and those who residing in Paris (Lev Ari 2013). Hence, local Jewish community can serve as a proximal host to Jewish immigrants but could also be perceived as unwelcoming.

Social Networks and Bubbles

One of the key concepts in social integration of migrants is "social networks." The term was originally used as a metaphor for social connections in various situations (Mitchell 1974). Today the term is used to denote an array of connections based on family relations, friendships, common national or ethnic origin. According to the transnational theory, social connections in social networks are not limited to one area but are in different geographical and social spaces (Rabhun and Lev Ari 2010; Lev Ari 2008; Vertovec 1999, 2010), and therefore they help maintain contact with the country of origin, with the families of the migrants and with their friends at home (Avenarius 2012; Vertovec 2007).

Already at the beginning of the migration process, social connections and networks influence the decision whether to migrate or not; they provide information about the destination and the appropriate timing for migration and offer help in finding jobs and a place of residence (Ferro 2006). In the country of destination social networks help with difficulties of economic, cultural and social integration. Social networks are built mainly after the initial stages of integration of migrants, which include economic, social and cultural integration (Rabhun and Lev Ari 2010). Since social networks foster a sense of belonging and stability, they have an important role in creating and maintaining a sense of "home" for migrants as well as for minorities, and might help reduce feelings of alienation and difference (Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010; Sheffer 2003). In the current study, the question regarding "feel 'at home'" was part of the questionnaire: Respondents were asked to indicate to what degree they feel "at home" in their country of origin/destination. In the qualitative study, we asked the following: "Where do you feel at 'home'"?; "What is the meaning of 'home' for you"?.

The size of a social network is determined by the number of people in it (Avenarius 2012), and it can be loose or dense. In dense networks, frequent contacts, identities and shared activities with other members of the network (multiplex connections) must be specified, while in loose networks, the individual's connections with friends in the network are around only one activity (uniplex). The density of a network is therefore a derivative of the number of connections within the group. Dense social networks make it difficult for immigrants in their interactions with other groups; thus, women's great involvement in activities in their community might prevent them from interacting outside of their community. Women have an important role in constructing and maintaining social networks. Via social networks women transfer information and provide social, instrumental or emotional support to each other (Avenarius 2012). Women's social networks have several roles, such as providing help and support to recently arrived immigrants facing integration difficulties, due to their lack of social and family networks (Abdulrahim 1993; Erel 2017).

Social networks sometimes turn into bubbles; the term describes relationships between groups of people. Migrants and people from ethnic groups search for familiarity and thus might create intense social networks, based on diasporic and transnational entities (Lev Ari 2022; Tzadik 2012). Bubbles are very flexible; they might disappear when people emigrate, or can be recreated and merge with other bubbles. With their flexible characteristics, bubbles can grow or shrink; they can be created, recreated, change their shape and size and "popped."Bubbles are also transparent: People outside can see what is happening inside them, and people within the bubble can see the outside world (Tzadik 2016). There are four types or forms of relationships between different bubbles in one location: The first type, which is rare, is "no touch"; in this type, bubbles are separated from one another with almost no contact among members of each bubble. The second form is "touching edges," where a low level of interactions occurs in public spheres such as shops or schools. In the third type of relationship, the level of contact between the bubbles is stronger and leads to mutual exchange and social interactions between members of different bubbles. The fourth form is of bubbles within bubbles, when individuals belong to two groups or bubbles and have meaningful relationships in both of them, such as in the case of mixed couples (Tzadik 2012, 2016).

The term "bubble" sheds light on numerous components of social integration, as fluid and flexible. Furthermore, it emphasizes personal need and effort to join the bubble and remain in it. Belonging to a bubble depends on a personal perception of being "in" or "out." Affiliation to a bubble mostly depends on the willingness and interests of the individual, as well as policies regarding social integration of migrants and ethnic groups in the host society (Berry 2005; Tzadik 2016).

Immigrants, Minorities and the Jewish Community in Brussels

After the Second World War, Belgium was facing serious difficulties in recruiting labour for coal production. Domestic recruitment dried up, forcing authorities to look for foreign labor (Adam 2013; Florence and Martiniello 2005; Timmerman 2017). Most of these immigrants were of non-European birth (whether citizens or not) and experienced social exclusion and discrimination. Minorities were segregated in inner-city areas, and were offered low-status, insecure jobs (Castles et al. 2014). During the 1960s, the demand for labor was still strong, and large flows of immigrants came, but they were considered temporary guests with no policy to integrate them in Belgian society. Only at the beginning of the early 1980s did new plans for integration emerge (Lev Ari 2022).

Significant immigration to Brussels started in the 1980s; in 1981, migrants in Brussels were 24% of all residents – some came to work in the many international institutions in the city (Adam 2013). Belgium signed the Schengen Agreement in 1985; this resulted in a commitment to hasten the creation of "Border-free Europe" that allows European citizens to travel freely among all European countries that signed the agreement (Castles et al. 2014). In the past, Belgium pursued a policy of national integration, and ethnic and cultural diversity was not taken into account, but today Brussels is an international and multicultural city. Migrant populations

in Brussels are very active, and have representation in local politics. However, the government faces a high rate of unemployment, opens schools to allow equal opportunity, allows vocational courses for students who drop out of school and encourages the employment of people who are at a low socio-economic level, including migrants (Deveeshouwer et al. 2015).

In 1998, with the support of European bodies, anti-discrimination activity began, mainly in the field of private employment (Tandé 2015). Studies on economic and social integration of migrants in Brussels show that there is still little representation of migrants, especially in more senior positions. On one hand, in the Belgian media, there is a minority of foreigners (Giladi et al. 2015), but on the other hand, in the Belgian transport company STIB there is a high concentration of migrants. This company recruited many workers from Morocco due to their command of the French language, and these strengthened the migrant population that had already worked there. The integration of migrants in the transport company generally proceeded well; however, there were several cases of strained relations between the native-born and foreigners, in addition to occasional tensions between the Flemish and the Walloons (Rea 2015).

In addition to migrant workers, there are also other migrant groups in Brussels, such as "skilled migrants", who report a good quality of life, openness and multiculturalism, made possible by the existence of two nationalities (Walloon-French and Flemish) side by side and by the role of the European Union in the city (Favell 2001).

The first recorded reference to Jewish presence in the Low Countries is from the thirteenth century, after the expulsion of Jews from England and France. Between the years 1815–1914 the number of Jews in Belgium increased, mainly due to immigration. In the nineteenth century, Brussels was the main Jewish center in Belgium, but as a result of increasing waves of immigration from Eastern Europe, Jews moved to Antwerp, where the Jewish community grew significantly from the beginning of the twentieth century (Schreiber 2000). Just before the First World War there were about 40,000 Jews in Belgium. The rise of Nazis in Germany led to the immigration of about 25,000 German and Austrian Jews to Belgium. At the end of the 1930s, 95% of Belgian Jews were immigrants, and there were few signs of integration into Belgian society (Schreiber 2000).

The Second World War left a great impact on Belgian Jews, many of whom returned penniless and without family and friends and had to rebuild themselves on the ruins of the community they had left. The war also affected the image of Jews in Belgian society, and immigration to Belgium stopped almost completely, except for immigration of Egyptian Jews in 1956 and the Jews of Rhodes in the 1960s after passing through the Congo, which was a Belgian colony (Schreiber 2000).

The Jewish population in Belgium is estimated at 29,000, which makes it the world's 16th largest community (DellaPergola 2020; Staetsky and DellaPergola 2022); the majority live in Antwerp (about 16,000, or 56% of the total Jewish population), and in Brussels and around it (about 11,000, or 39%). Most Belgian Jews are native-born (65%). The rest, 35% of the Belgian Jewry, are migrants and are divided as follows: 23%, 6670 Jews, are migrants from different countries than Israel, and 12%, 3500 people, are Israeli-born Jews. Most Belgian Jews are Ashkenazi (above

70%), namely born in Belgium or other European countries, and few came from North Africa during the 1960s (Ben-Rafael 2017; Lev Ari 2022; Staetsky and DellaPergola 2022).

The Jewish community in Brussels is largely secular, and characterized by special relationships of living side by side, religious and secular (Schreiber 2000). About 40% of Belgian Jews consider themselves secular Jews, 15% call themselves liberal, more than a quarter consider themselves traditionalists, and about one-sixth define themselves as Orthodox (Ben-Rafael 2017). In the current study, our participants, in both data sources, belong to the first three groups.

Belgian Jews are mostly characterized by high socio-economic status and a strong Jewish community, including an excellent educational system (Schreiber 2000). Israelis in Brussels develop social relations and create their own social networks. These ties are built through the educational frameworks of their children and through workplaces, such as the embassy or Israeli companies. Israelis married to Belgians have connections through the spouse's social networks, whether Jewish, Belgian, Israeli or international (Tzadik 2012).

The Study

Research Questions and Methodology

The main research questions were answered by the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, and focus on the unique experience of social and cultural choices made by both migrant and native-born Jewish women, living in various communities in Brussels: Do they feel "at home" there or alienated? How do they describe the structure of their social networks and bubbles? How do social boundaries change in light of contemporary social changes in Brussels? And finally, what are their acculturation strategies?

Two studies – a qualitative and a quantitative one – are represented in this manuscript. Two researchers conducted the studies: an Israeli immigrant residing in Brussels and an Israeli citizen, working and living in Israel. Due to the very personal nature of the qualitative research, many questions required ethical considerations; therefore, we followed the rules of ethics delineated by the American Anthropological Association (AAA; American Anthropologist Association 2009). As for the quantitative study, the researcher is not familiar with the participants and resides in Israel. The questionnaires were anonymous: There was no way to identify participants.

The qualitative study was based on phenomenological research design. This method attributes importance to the understanding, description and analysis of a social phenomenon through the participants' subjective experience and their interpretation of their lives (Creswell 2014). The research questions were examined mainly through semi-structured interviews (see also Tzadik 2014). In addition, we used descriptive data taken from wider quantitative research (see Lev Ari 2022) to compare means and standard deviations (SD) regarding differences in social integration patterns between Jewish women, native-born and migrants, in Brussels.

Procedure and Participants

In the qualitative study, 45 native-born Jewish women and migrants were interviewed. Interviewees were selected in a "snowball" method; the interviews were conducted by the researcher, either at the home of the interviewee or in a public space, according to the latter's convenience. We interviewed 18 native-born women, 9 immigrants who came from other countries and 18 Israeli women.

The native-born women belong to the age group between 33 and 56, and are highly educated. Out of 18 interviewed women, only one has no university degree. Three women studied economics or business; one studied marketing; one studied music; three studied literature, languages or translation; four studied medicine; and one studied communication. Three are psychologists, and one studied education. Only 13 practice their field of studies.

Non-Israeli Jewish migrants belong to the age group between 27 and 44 years and came from the following countries: Canada, the USA, France, Turkey and Hungary. Six out of nine have a university degree: one in economics and business, one in education, one a general BA and one in languages, and two studied law. One woman, out of nine, practices in the field of her studies. Based on Lev Ari (2008), those women from western countries and with higher socio-economic status have better opportunities for economic mobility and socio-cultural integration.

Israeli migrant women belong to the age group between 34 and 50 years. Most of them have academic degrees; only one woman has no university degree. Their academic disciplines are as follows: psychology (4), education (4), economy (3), business or accounting (3), law (4) geography (1), architecture (1) and engineering (1). However, only five women practice their field of study.

The two groups of women are similar in their socio-economic background; most women hold university degrees. Compared with migrants, native-born women work in jobs that are closer to their fields of study.

The interviewees included various Jewish groups, such as religious and secular, local Jews and immigrants. It should be noted that within this complex it is difficult to categorize people according to the various religious affiliations, unless they belong to a distinct current, such as Chabad, and conduct their lives according to it. Jewish interviewees in the study are women whose religion is Jewish, but the range of their religious beliefs and their emphasis on religious practice is very wide, from adherence to religious traditions and rituals to connection to Judaism that is not related to religion but to identity, identification and the sense of belonging. In addition, the research population also included women who converted to the Jewish religion either in an Orthodox or in another way.

As for Jewish characteristics, Israeli migrants are mostly secular. Jewish migrants are also mainly secular except for women who are affiliated with religious institutions (Chabad, for example). All native-born women in this study perceive being secular Jews to be their main identity component.

Quantitative data were drawn from a sample of Jews residing in Paris, Brussels and Antwerp; it included 455 respondents (Lev Ari 2022), of whom 60% ($N=268$) are women. The questionnaires were administered by phone, face-to-face or via the internet.

The native-born are younger (mean 37; standard deviation (SD) 12) than the migrants (mean 44 years; SD 10 years).

Since this paper focuses on women in Brussels, 90 women constitute the sample: 48 (53%) native-born and 42 (47%) migrants, mostly from Israel (45%) and Europe (38%), with 13% from North Africa, 2% from Latin America and 3% from North America. Thus, we divided the migrant women into three sub-groups: Israelis, Europeans and those from other countries.

In both groups ethnic origin is mainly Ashkenazi, but to a larger degree among the native-born (79% and 62%, respectively). While most native-born (85%) speak French as a mother tongue, only 29% of the immigrants speak the local language on a mother-tongue level, another third speak Hebrew, and 38% speak other languages.

Although native-born and migrant groups are similar in their occupational definitions as employees or independent, their main types of occupation are somewhat different. A third of the native-born have liberal professions (for example, lawyer, accountant and engineer), compared with 16% among migrants; another 12% of the first group hold clerical jobs, compared with 36% of migrants. In all, 7% of the native-born are teachers, compared with 13% of migrants, and 17% are in business among the first group, compared with only 3% among the second. Finally, 20% among the native-born, compared with 13% among migrants, are students. As for their level of educational attainment, it is higher among migrants, of whom 58% have graduate degrees or PhDs, compared with 45% of the native-born. As expected, 81% of the native-born have their own dwelling, compared with 69% of migrants.

As for their Jewish religious affiliation, there are no data. However, we do know that almost all women, 90% in both groups, are Jewish by birth, 8% are immigrants and 2% of the native-born are converted, and the rest had no religious affiliation.

In both groups (no significant difference), more than 60% consider the Jewish religion and observing Jewish customs as important and very important. Actual Jewish observance, for example, lighting *Shabbat* candles and participating in Passover *Seder*, is also moderate, in both groups: that of the native-born is 3.26 (SD 1.02), and the mean among immigrants is 3.43 (SD 1.08).

Thus, the two groups of women are rather similar in their socio-economic status. Their occupational status, such as the liberal professions, is somewhat different; the native-born have higher occupational prestige, but migrants have higher educational attainment. More native-born own a dwelling. In both groups, most participants were born Jewish and consider Jewish religion and practice as rather important and observe Jewish customs to a medium degree.

Findings

Social integration networks and communities: "There is something among the Jews that connects us" (Karen).

As the capital of the EU, the city of Brussels is multicultural in nature, addressing and accepting cultural-ethnic groups as legitimate and equal to the dominant culture (Ben-Rafael 2008). Yet, both native-born and migrant interviewees perceive it as

composed of segregated, almost impenetrable social groups based on ethnic, religious or socio-economic characteristics.

The decision to withdraw from Belgian society is evident among Jewish immigrant interviewees, who described more closeness towards immigrants from other places. Jewish migrants report social relations mainly with other Jews within the community. When their children study in an international framework, Jewish women have contacts with non-Jewish people, but their best friends, according to them, are Jews. Native-born Jewish women, who are members of social networks where there are non-Jews, face a need to explain topics related to the Jewish tradition and, in some cases, to Israel as well. For example, when Jewish women meet non-Jewish women, they feel that, for them to communicate, they need to explain topics that are familiar to other Jewish women, such as days off for children in Jewish schools for Jewish holidays or Jewish traditions. They also express difficulties entering Belgian social networks. These perceptions seem to be common to both Ashkenazi and Sephardi women in the Jewish community of Brussels.

Dina, a 39-year-old native-born Jewish woman, who grew up in a non-Jewish environment but later on became part of the Jewish community, expressed her sense of alienation regarding social contacts with non-Jews. When she joined the Jewish community, she felt included. She is a secular Jewish woman who claimed that she feels more comfortable within the Jewish community. Dina claims that cultural differences are the ones that determine who her close friends will be:

> We had good non-Jewish friends before we got married that we saw a lot. We do not share the same values, the same way of looking at things. Over the years we have lost it … that's because the dominant identity is Jewish. It affects everything including personal relationships, friendships. I have non-Jewish friends but not so close ones. It's not the same depth of relationship.

Native-born Jewish women also claim that their most significant social connections are with Jews, particularly with those from their childhood or family, while new connections are based on their children's participation in youth movements and schools, which create a Jewish community. Native-born Jewish women in Brussels share childhood experiences and connections. Sometimes their parents were friends, and therefore they shared community life, holidays and activities. Many women recreated these experiences for their children. This community gives them a sense of belonging and solidarity, similar to those of a family. Karen, a 38-year-old native-born Jew, explained:

> There is something among the Jews […] that connects us, something that is not over. When you go on vacation to a place you've never been, usually you meet people who look like you and have an emotional connection to them. You communicate with people who have a common denominator and who have a feeling that you […] understand each other.

Jewish migrant women report having social ties mainly with other Jews within the community. However, when their children go to international schools, Jewish migrant women create social relationships with non-Jewish people, but they claim

they feel comfortable mostly with other Jews. Ruth, a 28-year-old migrant from France, reports about her social ties with non-Jews; however, her most significant ones are with Jews, since she perceives them as more understanding regarding her limitations as a religious woman. Contrary to her feelings or alienation from non-Jewish friends, Ruth feels very comfortable with other Jews, regardless of their ethnicity or degree of observance:

> Other Jews will understand me. Non-Jewish friends will not understand my religion. They are so far from me that … beyond that, other Jews will come to the Jewish community center, they will come for the holidays. This is what builds the relationship. Non-Jews will not feel comfortable coming to all those holidays. Therefore, it does not leave enough space for relationships to develop.

Furthermore, for non-Israeli migrant women, entry into Belgian social networks is very difficult, since most of those are based on childhood friendships and on having common experiences and friendships. For example, Deborah, a 38-year-old migrant from Turkey, has felt uncomfortable when her Jewish friend is not there, as she does not have a common background to join the conversation with non-Jewish participants:

> As a mother when we have young children, our life turns around the children; vacation, activities… we live with people who have children in the same class. It is the same with Christian people. I did a course of art. […] I went with a Jewish friend. We went together. When she didn't come […] the conversation was on their daily life; you feel a little outsider.

Israeli migrant women perceive economic differences between them and native-born Jews as the reason for the distance native-born Jewish women keep from them. Israelis feel they cannot afford the same types of vacations, restaurants, birthday parties and even gifts for events; this prevents real contacts. The distance between Israelis and native-born women is attributed to their temporality in Belgium. Lili, a 36-year-old Israeli, explains:

> The distance is great […] It is a fact that Israelis are coming and going often. I assume that for Belgians it is very difficult for them and for their children to be in touch with Israelis who might leave. It is an unstable feeling. There is also a language barrier. I can't speak fluently. I can be myself when I speak Hebrew, maximum when I speak English and even then […] I feel that the economic situation influences it as well. It relates to mentality.

Social networks have an important role among migrant women. Via these social networks, they receive information regarding various topics such as healthcare or community services. In addition, social networks serve as means for social integration by enlarging the circle of people who might provide help and support. Migrant women describe these social networks as helping them overcome loneliness, particularly during the holidays. Keren, a 49-year-old Israeli migrant, spoke about her experiences when she arrived in Brussels:

> School is a place to meet, for people like me who come to meet, to get information over a cup of coffee. Two weeks after I had arrived, I met a woman who told me to come to a morning meeting [with other Jewish women]. It was a wonderful thing. I was so excited she'd asked me to come. It was so important and very pleasant for me […] so I was able to meet everybody together.

Israeli women succeed in achieving a sense of family through creating meaningful social ties with other Israelis. From the qualitative data of the present study, this seems unique, mostly characteristic of Israeli migrants. The following evidence highlights the importance of friendships in the process of creating a new home. This is how Limor, a 37-year-old migrant from Israel, put it: "Here friendships are very strong because of the lack of family. I think someone who has a family here cannot understand that it's a different kind of friendship. […] in a relatively short time. […] There is an accelerating factor due to the lack of family."

However, Israeli migrant women do not perceive members of the Jewish community as proximal hosts. They do not feel that the community fully accepts them, so they prefer social relations within the Israeli community: Anna, a 44-year-old Israeli migrant, describes her attitude towards the native-born Jews:

> I do not care about them … I don't. At first it was a language problem. No … at first it was because I did not see myself as a part of them. Then it was a question of language … I have no friends from the Jewish community […] I know parents […] but I was never interested in meaningful friendships with them.

Interactions among Israelis are mainly through schools and, in recent years, via events that are organised by the "Israeli house" of Chabad. In these encounters social networks are formed quickly, mainly due to common culture: language, values and norms. Thus, the Israeli diasporic community is perceived as a replacement for the extended family which lives in Israel. Hanna, a 44-year-old Israeli woman, described the need for meaningful social–communal connections when living far away from family:

> Friendships here are more important than in Israel. Take the holidays for example. In Israel, it is very clear where and with whom you do the holidays. Here it is not clear. […] Social relations are very important, very significant and very strong. […] The children are friends, […] during holidays you celebrate with the same friends, in gymnastics, always the same circles.

To sum up, native-born women mainly utilize Jewish social networks they know since their childhood and maintain contacts with their families. They hardly ever affiliate with non-Jews since they are less familiar with their norms and values and prefer their Jewish friends, with whom it is easier to communicate and affiliate. It was also found that the more the woman is religious, the fewer social contacts she has with non-Jews. Nevertheless, non-religious women who have social contacts outside of the Jewish community mentioned that their best friends are Jews. In Brussels, observant and non-observant women belong to the same social networks and even bubbles.

Furthermore, most migrant women in this study find it difficult to enter local social networks of Jews or non-Jews, mainly because they lack common life experiences and contacts that can help them expand their social networks. Although Jewishness is a common ground for Jewish migrants, as mentioned above, there are other aspects, such as background characteristics and particularly spoken language, which might be barriers. While non-Israeli migrants partially integrate into the local Jewish community or in their diasporic groups—from their countries of origin—Israelis maintain mainly their own Israeli-diasporic networks and community, almost without social connections with the local Jewish community that could be their anticipated proximal host (see Lev Ari 2008; Mittelberg and Waters 1992). Similarly, Israeli migrants in the USA, for example, seem to be reluctant to connect to the local Jewish community, as the Jewish-American community ignored them until the late 1980s (Lev Ari 2008; Gold 2002).

Social Networks and Community Structure: Quantitative Findings

Respondents, in each group, were asked to specify whether their close friends are native-born Jews, native-born non-Jews, Israeli migrants, other Jewish or non-Jewish migrants or Jews who reside in Israel. It seems that, in both groups, social networks are made up mainly of native-born Jews and non-Jews, as well as Jews who reside in Israel. The only significant difference was found regarding social networks made up of native-born Jews among native-born women(mean 3.36; SD 1.06) compared with migrants (mean 2.89; SD 0.85).

It is interesting to note that migrants attribute more importance to having social relations with native-born non-Jews (mean 3.72 ; SD 0.81), compared with native-born women (mean 3.29; SD 1.12). In addition, the native-born feel "at home" in Belgium (mean 3.69; SD 1.03) to a larger extent than migrants (mean 3.07; SD 0.96). Although most native-born and migrant women do not reside in Israeli-Jewish neighborhoods, the first group tends to do so to a greater degree, and they also describe their neighborhood as having more Israeli character (Table 1).

Thus, similarly to the qualitative results, for both native-born and immigrants, social networks consist mainly of Jews, residing in Belgium or in Israel. However, whereas the native-born are obviously more integrated among the local Jewish community, and feel "at home" to a larger extent, women migrants are more alienated but also to some extent more prone to assimilation.

Table 1 Type of residential neighborhood (*t*-test, means and SD; 1 = not at all; 5 = to a very large extent), comparing native-born and migrants

	Native-born	Migrants	Significance of difference
Type of Jewish community: Israeli-Jewish	2.17 (0.63)	1.95 (0.30)	*
Current neighborhood – Israeli	1.72 (1.04)	1.33 (0.52)	*

*$P \leq ..05$; **$P \leq ..01$

The native-born are obviously more integrated among the local Jewish community, due to shared history and similar values, and feel "at home" to a larger extent. However, women migrants, particularly those born in countries such as Africa (mean 2.70; SD 1.15), the USA or Latin America (mean 3.00; SD 0.73) and Israel (mean 3.64; SD 1.02), are more alienated than those born in Europe. The importance that migrant women attach to having social relations with non-Jews characterizes migrant women from all countries of origin, which implies some tendency to assimilate. A possible explanation regarding women migrants might originate in alienation from the Jewish community and search for an alternative affiliation group.

Social Bubbles: "I Have Been Looking for the Familiar and Safe" (Inbal)

Some social networks are fluid and open, others are tighter and closed, namely social bubbles. In this section we will describe the structure of social bubbles as perceived by native-born and migrant women in Brussels.

Most native-born and migrant Jewish women perceive social relationships with Israeli migrant women as problematic. The first problem is language, since most Israelis do not learn French sufficiently to create meaningful social connections. In addition, native-born Jewish women describe Israelis as living in a "tribe", which makes forming of social bonds difficult. Kathy, a 40-year-old native-born Jew, described her attempts to make contact with Israelis. It should be noted that Kathy speaks Hebrew:

> I do not have many opportunities to meet Israelis. When I meet them they are very closed in themselves. They do not talk to anyone. […] There is a bubble effect. Togetherness. It's like a tribe […] you can see that they support each other. […] I will not be part of this group. I have nothing to give to this group. Even if I speak Hebrew.

Furthermore, native-born Jewish women refer to Israelis as having a different mentality. Pnina, a 44-year-old native-born Jew, characterizes Israelis she met in Brussels: "I think Israelis have a very big problem. I love everyone individually but as a group they are very rude, uneducated, closed. It's only later when you discover them you see how nice they are."

Although familiar with their society, native-born women report that the bubble provides them with a sense of security, especially in light of the growing antisemitism around. Surprisingly, native-born women described their intimidation and even fear of the non-Jewish majority despite the fact that they have lived in Belgium all their life, whereas Israeli women were less intimidated by non-Jews. Dana, a 33-year-old native-born Jewish woman describes her feelings:

> [Belgian non-Jews] are very antisemitic and racists. I feel it; they reflect a lot on what happens. It could be Arabs, blacks or Jews they say: "they bother us these people." They associate the person with the race […] I don't want to get into a conversation that will get to an endless dispute.

The main role of the bubble is to help native-born Jewish women create opportunities for appurtenance, a sense of belonging for their children. Eva, a 42-year-old native-born Jew, explains: "For me, Belgium is a synonym for my youth, my friends, and the Jewish community […]. [My children] they are also very much part of the community and if we need to leave they could."

An Israeli migrant woman describes feelings of acceptance inside the bubble. They feel protected from the general environment, in which they do not feel integrated. Thus, Inbal, 40 years old, says that she is constantly looking for familiarity with other migrants, from either Israel or elsewhere, which provides her with a sense of security:

> Ever since I came to Brussels, I have been looking for the familiar and safe. […] One needs familiar things: Music, it makes the experience deeper. These are flashbacks that take you back to your childhood, to memories. in the diaspora in Belgium – it's not like that. On Rosh Hashanah, you don't see people going to synagogues, the shops are not decorated, and there are no holiday songs. The experience is on one level.

Non-Israeli Jewish migrants find the bubble a comforting, familiar place to be. They feel that they can be who they are. They can talk about delicate topics, and they feel that they do not need to explain their point of view. Deborah, a 38-year-old Jewish migrant from Turkey, explains: "I know many people. But when you want to feel relaxed, it is always with Jews. It is different. We live in a Ghetto, all the routine we do is always together." It seems that non-Israeli migrant women reside mainly in the Belgian Jewish bubble. These findings are particularly striking among French-speaking Jewish migrants. The bubble creates a safe place where women feel affiliated, accepted and understood. The Jewish community could be a proximal host to Jewish migrants from other parts of the world (see, for example, Gold 2002; Lev Ari 2008). Jewish migrants do not create bubbles of their own but fit into the bubbles that already exist in the Jewish community. In these social bubbles they find familiar elements, which are mainly the religious aspects in their lives. Marina, a 34-year-old Jewish migrant from Hungary, describes:

> Jewish community is such… they like you integrate…they were very welcoming here in Belgium and even in Hungary, it's up to the individual how much he really wants to be involved. I feel very much integrated.

Temporality, which is a factor that generally characterizes many migrants, is also common to all Israelis in the bubble, and therefore, its effect on the feeling of foreignness within the bubble is less. Rotem, a 40-year-old Israeli migrant, explained the connection between temporality and social foreignness: "If I know a woman is leaving tomorrow, I guess I'll have something to keep me from getting too close to her. I see the same thing with my kids – the other kids look at them as temporary and they do not want to invest in a relationship."

Summing up, native-born women, as well as migrants, tend to belong to bubbles, some of which are more fluid and open, while others are tighter. Native-born

Jewish women seem to prefer those friends who were born and raised in Belgium, studied in Brussels or in Antwerp, were members of one of the youth movements and formed their social circles in Belgium; these continue to be their social environment today. Migrant Jewish women are more involved than Israeli migrants in Jewish communities, especially those who come from France, probably since they share the same language. Israeli migrant women reside mainly next to other Israelis, and share workplaces such as El Al, or the Israeli Embassy. Lacking the local language, Israeli women seem to find the Israeli bubble supportive and familiar, compared with native-born Jewish and non-Jewish communities. Women migrants from countries such as Hungary face language difficulties as well, and have a tendency to integrate within more international communities, such as Chabad of the European Union.

Interrelations and Acculturation Strategies

Inter-relations with native-born Jews, in general, are mediocre in both groups but stronger among native-born women. Significant differences were found when comparing the two groups in most components: Women who were born and raised in Belgium have closer social and economic interactions, much stronger marital relations, leisure activities and stronger community affiliation, as one would expect, compared with migrant women, who are less involved in this community, except for sending their children to Jewish schools (Table 2).

As for inter-relations with native-born non-Jews, women who are native-born tend to be more integrated among them, although to a slightly lesser degree than among Jews, whereas migrants are even more segregated from non-Jews than from native-born Jews, regarding economic, cultural, marital and other communal aspects. Thus, migrant women are less integrated and assimilated among the host non-Jewish community, compared with the native-born (Table 3).

Table 2 Inter-relations with native-born Jews (*t*-test, means and SD; 1 = not at all; 5 = to a very large extent), comparing native-born and migrants

	Native-born	Migrants	Significance of difference
Strong social relations	3.79 (1.15)	3.19 (1.04	*
Strong economic relations	3.00 (1.28)	2.47 (1.17)	*
Mutual cultural activities	3.46 (1.13)	3.12 (1.15)	n.s.
Mutual leisure activities	3.46 (1.08)	2.85 (1.07)	**
Marital relations	3.63 (1.25)	2.65 (1.66)	**
Joint children's education	3.92 (1.12)	4.10 (1.27)	n.s.
Mutual aid	3.57 (0.98)	3.24 (1.15)	n.s.
Donating to Jewish organizations	3.26 (1.21)	2.76 (1.24)	*
Acting as a cohesive community	3.34 (1.07)	2.74 (1.06)	*
Summary index (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89)	3.44 (0.93)	2.98 (0.88)	*

*$P \leq 0.05$; **$P \leq 0.0$; n.s. = not significant

Table 3 Inter-relations with native-born non-Jews (*t*-test, means and SD; 1 = not at all; 5 = to a very large extent), comparing native-born and migrants

Native	Native-born	Migrants	Significance of difference
Strong social relations	3.36 (0.98)	3.13 (1.03)	n.s.
Strong economic relations	3.71 (0.95)	3.05 (1.27)	**
Mutual cultural activities	3.39 (1.08)	2.77 (1.16)	*
Mutual leisure activities	3.25 (1.14)	2.55 (1.02)	*
Marital relations	3.20 (1.26)	2.18 (1.30)	**
Joint children's education	2.88 (1.27)	2.28 (1.35)	*
Mutual aid	2.97 (1.17)	2.71 (1.08)	n.s
Donating to non-Jewish organizations	2.77 (1.32)	1.87 (1.04)	**
Acting as a cohesive community	2.67 (1.20)	2.05 (1.16)	*
Summary index (Cronbach's alpha = 0.90)	3.19 (0.88)	2.71 (0.76)	**

*$P \leq 0.05$; **$P \leq 0.01$; n.s. = not significant

When compared by country of origin (Israel, Europe or other countries), it seems that those who tend to be more affiliated with non-Jews in Brussels are the European migrants (mean 3.15; SD 0.82), whereas Israeli migrants (mean 1.51; SD 0.96) and those from other countries (mean 2.73; SD 0.40) tend to affiliate with the local society to a lesser degree. Possible explanations for these findings lie in more familiarity with local culture among European migrants (for example, French) compared with those from other countries and Israel (see also Berry and Lackland 1997). Another explanation might be fear from antisemitism that Israelis particularly expressed; therefore, they tend to hide their origin. They also reported strong attachment with other Israelis as their ethnic bubble, so they are less dependent on non-Jews as part of their social networks.

Finally, regarding inter-relations with Jewish migrants, both groups of women reported similar medium intensity, except for economic and marital relations, of which native-born tend to have to a larger extent (Table 4).

Thus, integration and assimilation within the three communities is not very strong in both groups; the native-born report the highest level of involvement in all of them, primarily the Jewish, then non-Jewish and finally immigrant communities, including Israelis who keep their own social bubbles. Migrant women seem to be more segregated from all of them but in a different order: Jewish community, immigrants and non-Jews. Thus, acculturation strategies among the native-born are more integrative, while migrants tend towards segregation.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to compare two groups of Jewish women who reside in Brussels, the native-born and migrants (from Israel and other countries), regarding their social integration and acculturation strategies among native-born

Table 4 Inter-relations with other Jewish immigrants (*t*-test, means and SD; 1 = not at all; 5 = to a very large extent), comparing native-born and migrants

	Native-born	Migrants	Significance of difference
Strong social relations	3.21 (1.09)	3.31 (1.11)	n.s.
Strong economic relations	2.76 (1.10)	2.21 (0.94)	*
Mutual cultural activities	2.95 (1.01)	3.18 (1.08)	n.s.
Mutual leisure activities	2.90 (1.00)	2.55 (1.02)	n.s.
Marital relations	3.10 (1.18)	2.45 (1.57)	*
Joint children's education	3.42 (1.10)	3.13 (1.29)	n.s.
Mutual aid	3.20 (1.08)	2.71 (1.08)	n.s.
Acting as a cohesive community	3.14 (1.22)	3.00 (1.22)	n.s.
Summary index (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93)	3.04 (0.98)	2.94 (0.91)	n.s.

*$P \leq 0.05$; n.s. = not significant

Jewish and non-Jewish communities. Brussels, as the center of the European Union, is supposed to be multicultural and allows easier integration for immigrants who flock to it from all over the world; most of these have prestigious businesses and higher education (see Deveeshouwer et al. 2015). From our findings, it seems that native-born non-Jewish communities in Brussels are not inclusive to minorities and migrants, so that even native-born women, despite being a privileged minority, report more bubbly networks, consisting mainly of native-born Jews. Interviewees suggest that these ethnic bubbles were created by choice, out of comfort and many years of familiarity, on the one hand. Yet, on the other hand, others mentioned exclusionary factors such as feelings of alienation and closure of women who belong to the non-Jewish majority in the city.

Hence, although most women in our study reported a desire to integrate into the host society, the social networks of women as well as their acculturation patterns differ in the degree of separation between native-born Jewish women, non-Israeli immigrants and Israeli immigrants. The former maintain social networks characterized by "fluid" boundaries with the majority society, accompanied by few bubbles or a denser network with the group of native-born Jewish women. Jewish, non-Israeli immigrants are characterized by shared, not very dense networks with the local Jewish community and with immigrants similar to them, i.e., diasporic networks based on country of origin, such as the USA or France. Finally, Israeli women are characterized by almost completely closed social networks that can be defined as a distinct Israeli bubble and a particularly dense social network: They are aware of other women groups and maintain reciprocal relationships with them, Jewish and non-Jewish, for mainly instrumental needs, but friendship ties are within the Israeli diaspora. Thus, as for their acculturation strategies (see Berry 2005), native-born women are the ones who are more integrated among non-Jews and native-born Jews, as expected from their familiarity with the culture and long-term interactions, but only to a medium extent, being partially marginalized as a minority. Migrant women can be characterized as less

integrated and more separated from both native-born Jews and – to a larger extent – from non-Jews, particularly Israelis.

Therefore, each group of Jewish women reports a different structure of social networks, and the existence of more or less permeable bubbles, in reference to the native-born non-Jewish and Jewish majority community. Apparently, there is a choice between belonging to social networks or not, but in practice the local culture is rather closed to foreigners, despite the declared policy towards immigrants and minorities in Belgium in general, and the multicultural nature of Brussels, in particular.

According to previous studies (for example, Lev Ari 2008), the local Jewish community was supposed to be a kind of proximal host for both groups of immigrants. In practice, the social networks are indeed partly open for them, but to a limited extent, so that both groups are looking for diasporic networks and transnational ones with the homeland. Thus, some networks have become rather closed bubbles. Social integration of Jewish women in Brussels happens within bubbles. This notion was coined before (Tzadik 2016) and developed further in this article. These bubbles can grow when people are coming to Belgium or "shrink" when people leave. Bubbles can pop when people leave, but others are created to replace them. Staying in the bubble is voluntary, and there are no sanctions when someone decides to leave. People remain in it as it serves the need of women to integrate. In some cases, their integration into the bubble refers to their subjective perception of integration into Brussels. Bubbles serve to reinforce attachment with migrants' homelands and help secure transnational life. This continuity is provided via social events where migrants are exposed to socio-cultural events from their homeland, including, for example, media events and music concerts. Bubbles are transparent, and therefore, women also are influenced by trends of the greater society such as sport clubs, clothing and more.

With all said above, the Jewish community in Brussels has its own strength, which is based, according to our findings, on women's efforts, high formal and informal involvement, evident mainly in the existence of educational and religious institutions that serve many members of the community: Jewish schools and youth movements that constitute an impressive supplementary education in its influence and volume. There are also religious institutions that offer diverse services to the members of the community, such as synagogues where Jewish community services are held around holidays. These serve as centers for inner resilience, giving a sense of community cohesion and solidarity.

The innovation in this research is in expanding the concepts of social networks and bubbles and the interrelationships between them, in the context of the experience of Jewish women, native-born but a minority, although privileged, and Jewish immigrants. Comparative research in the future among women belonging to privileged minorities and voluntary immigrants, in the context of a world city, may expand the scope of their unique integration strategies: They are included in the host society, mainly from the economic aspect, but are also partially excluded from socio-cultural circles. As our interviewees perceive, social integration is of great importance to their sense of belonging to the host society, even beyond the economic one.

Hence, gender is significant here, regarding the two groups of women and their experience: Migrant women, who mostly follow their husbands to Belgium, experience downward mobility due to lack of local language proficiency, lack of a work permit and, in some professions, lack of recognition of their academic degrees in medical studies, psychology and social work, as well as loneliness, language difficulties and lack of the supportive networks they used to have in their countries of origin. Most migrant women in Brussels follow their spouse, and hence, perceive their status as temporary. Those who marry a Belgian spouse tend to integrate more. Although they are more socially and culturally integrated, as a privileged minority, native-born women still need to create their own socio-cultural entities. Hence, social networks, which have gradually become communities, are mainly created and maintained by women over the years (see also Lev Ari 2008). Therefore, the study of social networks, their structure and construction through daily interactions, and their contribution to ethnic-diasporic community building, are the source of women's strength in the host country – as immigrants and as a native-born minority group.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Ethical Approval The quantitative part of the study was conducted among participants who were at that time older than 20 years. The questionnaires were anonymous and were administered by research assistants or through the internet and thus anonymous. All participants were free to refuse or quit at any time. The questionnaires included questions about attitudes and perceptions regarding sociological issues, and none were invasive. Participants in the qualitative study were older than 20 years. The researcher explained the aim of the research and the main research questions; the participants gave their consent to be interviewed, knowing data would be published. Information that could reveal a person's identity has been altered. The research abides by the International Anthropological Association's ethical guidelines.

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Lilach Lev Ari is an associate professor at Oranim, College of Education. Lilach is the dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and a lecturer. Her research interests include human migration, contemporary Jewry, ethnic identity and intercultural encounters, ethnic minorities and integration, acculturation and multiculturalism. Lev Ari has published the following books: *The American Dream –For Men Only? Gender, Immigration and the Assimilation of Israelis in the United States* (2008); *American Israelis, Migration, Transnationalism, and Diasporic Identity* (2010; 2011 with Uzi Rebhun, English; Hebrew), *and Contemporary Jewish Communities in Three European Cities: Challenges of Integration, Acculturation and Ethnic identity* (2022), as well as various publications in scientific journals such as: *Contemporary Jewry*, *The Journal of Heritage Tourism*, *Higher Education*, *Tourism Recreation Research*, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* and *Religions*.

Efrat Tzadik's PhD thesis was on Jewish women living in Belgium. Her main question focused on identities of women within the context of great social change such as migration and antisemitism. She published several articles on the topic and on methodology. She coined the term "Bubbles" to use in migration research. Efrat worked as a research assistant in a research about three European cities via Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University and at KU Leuven as an assistant- researcher at the Centre for Migration Rights and Legal Anthropology in the Law department. Efrat lectured at Universiteit Gent in the Department of Languages and Cultures of the Near East and North Africa, Faculty of Arts. Efrat worked as a researcher and teaching assistant at Bar Ilan University and as a research assistant on a study about the experience of women with breast cancer. She also worked as a research assistant at the Rambam hospital in Haifa, Israel.