DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Birthright

A journey of Jewish identity

Ben Kasstan (BA Anthropology, Durham 2011)

kasstan.b@dunelm.org.uk

http://www.dur.ac.uk/anthropology.journal/vol18/iss1/kasstan.pdf

Abstract

This is the first study to explore the ways in which Jewish identities and identifications with Israel are fostered in and articulated by forty British Jews participating in *Taglit*-Birthright, which is a free ten day tour of Israel. Birthright is an institutionalised programme for young Jews from fifty-two countries around the world, which proclaims the primordial link of the Jewish people and the land of Israel through two means; education and experience. Birthright sits at the forefront of the current debate concerning British Jewry, and what it means to be Jewish in the twenty-first century, as the programme admits an array of participants who fall beyond the traditional 'boundaries' of Judaism in order to discover and create their own Jewish identities. This paper serves as an interesting comparison to the American accounts that currently dominate the anthropological discourse of Birthright, by contextualising the aspects of the tour which affected British participants most. It will illustrate that the documents proving Jewish heritage, requested by Birthright organisers in the United Kingdom but not in America, is indicative of the key difference between the two cohorts which harnesses British participants from feeling Jewish. The work then focuses on the *tochnit* ('schedule'), which enabled participants to negotiate their Jewish identities by picking and choosing aspects of Judaism and Israel that they could personally identify with. It then argues that Jewish rather than Israeli identifications were more widely expressed amongst participants. Overall results demonstrate that ethnic Jewish identities, which gravitate less around religiosity, became increasingly favourable amongst this sample of British Jewry. This infers that Jewishness should be measured across a spectrum that encompasses the multifaceted nature of Judaism in the twenty-first century.

Keywords

Taglit-Birthright; Jewish; Israel; identity; tour

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Figure 1. Shuk Mahane Yehuda ('market'). Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

Introduction

> Birthright is hopefully the first step into the Jewish world for those people, who for whatever reason haven't had the opportunity or haven't realised that the opportunity is there. (Birthright representative)

On 27 December 2010 I arrived at Ben Gurion International Airport to observe and participate in *Taglit*-Birthright Israel, which is a journey in every sense of the word. *Taglit* is the Hebrew term for 'discovery', and the programme is a ten day tour of Israel bestowed at no cost 'in order to strengthen participants' personal Jewish identity and connection to the Jewish people' (Birthright Israel 2010-2011). The very name and nature of the trip therefore poses sensitive questions about how personal Jewish identities are constructed, as well as how a connection to the Jewish people and Israel is fostered in British Jewry. This study can be well situated in the wider anthropological discussion of Jewish identities, and

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

also raises questions of theoretical importance, regarding the 'boundaries' and accessibility of Judaism in twenty-first century Britain.

Taglit-Birthright is arguably the most extensively and systematically organised Diaspora-homeland venture, as it operates in over fifty-two countries, and has so far brought a staggering 260,000 young Jewish adults to Israel since its inauguration in 1999 (Saxe and Chazan 2008). Accordingly, the growth and breadth of the programme can be attributed to the strong political backing and endorsement from the Israeli state. This was reaffirmed by Israeli Premier Binyamin Netanyahu, in his address to participants on the concluding night of the 2010-2011 tour:

> My government will give more than double its investment in Birthright and over the next few years we'll invest close to one hundred million dollars. (PMO 2011).

Taglit-Birthright is essentially an umbrella organisation which functions similar to a franchise, whereby coalitions of private donors, Jewish organisations, and the Israeli government provide trips without charge for anybody who possess at least one Jewish parent or grandparent, and have not previously visited Israel on an organised tour (Birthright Representative). The British tours are co-funded and served solely by the United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA), which operates summer and winter trips for students and young professionals between the ages of 20-26.

Taglit-Birthright is a unique opportunity to observe the changing and fluid nature of Jewish identity, and this study contextualises the ways in which Jewishness is experienced, adopted and articulated by forty participants over the course of ten days in Israel. This work is the sole analysis of Birthright from a British perspective to date, and thus provides a unique and valuable comparison to the American academic and media interest, which dominates the current anthropological discourse of *Taglit*-Birthright. However, there are fundamental differences between the American and British tours, which inspired me to explore the lacuna currently existing in research.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

In order to reach the overarching goal of my work I chose to focus on determining the opinions and reactions of the participants to the experiences on offer and to judge the corresponding impact on Jewish identity construction. Therefore, this method prioritised the effectiveness of the tour on those who took part and was flexible in discussing the Birthright programme in some detail as to contextualise the cohort under study. The approach then introduced the role of Diaspora-homeland interactions as the social and political propellant of the programme, yet it did not require a deeper analysis of the physical organisation of *Taglit* which would entail an independent study in itself.

Outline

The present introduction is followed by a review of the current literature, which situates Birthright in the wider anthropological context of Jewish, and Diaspora, identity. I will then discuss the methodological choices I made, and the obstacles faced during the development of my research. The structure of this work emulates the *tochnit* ('schedule') of the Birthright journey, particularly in the composition of the ethnographic chapters, which reflect the changing notions of Jewish identity harboured during the tour.

The Jewish charity that operates Birthright tours for British participants state that '*Taglit*-Birthright Israel welcomes people from all backgrounds' (UJIA). A flowing theme throughout this dissertation will therefore be a discussion of how patrilineal Jews experience the programme and situate themselves within the Jewish prism, as they are not Jewish according to *halacha* ('religious law'), which dictates that Judaism is inherited matrilineally. I also had a personal interest in addressing this debate as I am a patrilineal Jew and have experienced the tension involved in legitimating my Jewishness and place within Jewry. My relationship with Judaism has often been contested, despite the reality of possessing a Jewish heritage and a genuine passion for Jewish culture and traditions. Furthermore, my paternal grandfather was a Holocaust survivor and after emancipation, he took a step back from Judaism, so my father (and in turn I) received a diluted induction into the Jewish world. I was then interested to see whether *Taglit*-Birthright could formalise

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

a link with Jewry and also bestow a Jewish education for participants. To conclude I will demonstrate what Birthright changed for the sample of participants under study.

General research questions

The application criteria set by Birthright explicitly state that participants must possess at least one Jewish parent or grandparent, which is a resolve that the UJIA comply with by requesting documentation that provides proof of Jewish lineage. However, American cohorts are not required to submit such evidence. This propelled me to explore the first research question of this work: What role do the documents requested by Birthright organisers perform in the construction of perceptions of Jewishness in participants?

Providing proof of Jewishness was dependent on the participants being able to access these resources. Here I argue that the documents of Jewish heritage requested by the UJIA are paradoxically an obstacle to participants formalising their Jewish identities.

There is currently no academic literature detailing the ways in which a Jewish identity, and connection to the Jewish people and land of Israel is inculcated in British Jewry over the course of the Birthright tour. I felt this warranted the focus of my second and third research questions by examining the *tochnit* ('schedule'): How does Birthright foster a Jewish identity and a connection to Israel? How were Jewish identities articulated by the participants over the ten day period?

The *tochnit* section will detail how Jewish identities are stimulated and nurtured throughout each step of the tour. Primarily, the *madrichim* ('Birthright leaders'), play a central role in catalysing identity formation in the British participants, by sharing, narrating and projecting their own Jewish experiences and identities for the participants. Similarly, the *mifgash* ('encounter') acquainted participants with life in Israel, as eight members of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) accompanied the tour. The *tochnit* served as a tool of identity formation in the Birthright programme, which consisted of organised events that illuminated the biblical and historical connections to the modern state of Israel, as well as

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Jewish history, heritage and traditions. Furthermore, the *tochnit* was influential in enabling students to develop their own 'personal Jewish identities' and form attachments to Jewry and the land of Israel by visiting an array of sites that resonated within the participants. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Birthright participants were encouraged to negotiate their Jewishness based on what aspects of the tour they felt both compatible and incompatible with.

This study will be concluded by discussing and contextualising what changes the Birthright programme effected in the British participants, and I will also detail how this paper can be used as a foundation for future research.

Figure 2. Tel Aviv. Independence Hall. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Problematising concepts

Identity

Identity discourse requires a keen discussion in this literature review owing to the key role the concept performs in the aims, objectives and outcomes of the *Taglit*-Birthright programme. Here I will briefly address the problematic nature of the term and more specifically, will attend to the Jewish context of identity.

Brubaker and Cooper suggest alternative terminology for what they define as the 'use and abuse of "identity"' (2000:2), and propose the adoption of 'identification' as a less ambiguous alternative due to its active and processual meaning. Conversely, Caplan and Torpey state that the 'relationships [...] between identity and identification are closely interdependent' (2001:415), which signifies that there is in fact little difference between the two terms. However, the word identity is inherently ambiguous, for, constructions of identity *are* multifaceted, fluid and dynamic, due to the many traits that constitute an individual's identity.

Jewish identities are inherently complex for they transcend an array of categories and cannot be dominated by a uniform definition or standard. This was attempted by Kopelowitz (2005), who bases Jewish identification in categories relating to religious practice and denomination. Levy, Levinsohn and Katz further discuss this notion by stating that the degree of Jewish identification 'increases in strength with each step up the scale of religiosity' (2004:273). However, religious observance is not the benchmark of Jewishness, for example, Sheffer (2005) advocates that an ethnic Jewish identity is becoming increasingly preferential compared to a religious identity. Accordingly, Miller signifies that ethnic identification is 'expressed as personal Jewish feelings' (2002:55), which implies a less institutionalised approach to Jewish identity. Jenkins (2002) states that engaging and interacting with others is fundamental to a shared sense of ethnicity, and therefore an ethnic Jewish identity can still be situated in a collective context. However this notion was condemned by Liebman, who argues that 'an ethnic Jewish identity divorced from religious concerns has shown no basis for survival' (2002:349), which suggests that ethnic identity

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

lacks strength, commitment or continuity, despite its collective resonance. My view on this discussion is that Jewish identity is inherently multifactorial and personally constructed, and should not be measured solely by a religious framework, thereby 'ethnic' Judaism should be considered equally deterministic. I also advocate the term 'Jewishness', as I deem it encapsulating of the broad spectrum in which Jewish identities can be understood. This mirrors the ethos of my research questions, as I explore the many ways in which Judaism is engaged by Birthright participants.

Diaspora

'Diaspora' as a concept has been manipulated to fit any minority population who have settled somewhere other than their homeland (Kokot, Tololyan and Alfonso 2004:9). The breadth of this term in the modern world can therefore be applied to ethnic, religious, and economic migrants who may reside anywhere for any reason, yet may 'find themselves negatively racialized and pejoratively characterized as unwanted foreigners [by the host nation]' (Braziel 2008:129). The act of being 'racialized' by the host populace is derived from the perception that Diaspora communities are identified, and identify themselves, with another peoplehood (Shain 2002). In addition, the concept of a Diaspora infers the mobilisation of biology, in order to distinguish one from another, which indicates how Diasporas are differentiated in host populations. This is complicit with Skinner's notion, whereby 'ethnic divisions are becoming increasingly biologized' (2006:482).

The Jewish Diaspora has long been considered the oldest Diaspora, due to the exilic nature of their forced dispersal from the ancient land of Israel (Goldschmidt 2006). In contrast, Sand has criticised this historical belief by declaring that 'there had never been a forcible uprooting of the Jewish people' (2009:188). An analysis of ancient Jewish history is beyond the scope of this work; however it is unquestionable that Jewish communities today have a wide geographical distribution, despite the existence of Israel. This infers that Jews live in, and become part of, host countries out of choice, for 'the vast majority of Jews no longer regard themselves as being in *Galut* ('exile')' (Sheffer 2005:5).

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Jewish communities within the United Kingdom are integrated into both the social and political spheres (Kosmin 2002), and yet British Jews have simultaneously maintained a distinct culture and identity. Valins (2003) relates the term 'boundaries' to Jewish identity, as differentiation deeply informs socio-spatial constructions of Jewish life, with explicit reference to the growing ultra-orthodox community. Valins (2003) analogises such boundaries to 'stubborn' identities, whereby the ordering and division of society is intrinsic to ancient Judaism and Judaic practices, such as the *kosher* dietary laws (Douglas, 2003). (For more details on Jewish social organisation see Tarry 2008; Hughes 2010). Valin's concept of boundaries and Jewish identity can easily be applied to the surge in Jewish families sending their children to Jewish schools as a 'primary strategy for community survival' (2002:245). Miller (2001) contributes to this discussion by identifying the role of education as a tool to halt the assimilation of Jewry into the host population, whilst also noting that Jewish educational establishments consequently separate Jewish youths from the wider British society. Miller's (2001) perception of Jewish schools therefore implies that the institutionalisation of Jewish identity fosters a unicentric ideal of Jewishness, which harnesses young Jews from identifying with the wider social climate. Conversely, it is Scholefield's (2004) ethnographic study of a north London Jewish school that recognises the naturally hybrid and multicentric composition of Jewish identity in the UK. Scholefield exemplifies this by stating that 'being Jewish […] does involve bagels and schnitzel but it also includes eating McDonald's, […] Israel is important but so is Britain' (2004:246), which thus signifies that identity in modern British Jewry is a synergy of ethnic and cultural ties. Moreover, this discussion reverberates throughout my research questions, as I review the ways in which identifications with Judaism and Israel are inculcated in British Jewry.

Diaspora-homeland tours

The Diaspora-homeland relationship has enabled many individuals to re-connect with their national, religious or ethnic roots. Constructions of ethno-nationalistic identity are often propelled by myth and history, whereby ancient links to a homeland are used to legitimise claims of sovereignty, and institute a sense of collective memory and identity (Wistrich and Ohana 1995; Zerubavel 1995). Furthermore, Grillis (1994) indicates that the

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

institutionalisation of national memory enables it to be shared, and interacted with, on a macro scale. Therefore, a collective memory encompasses 'people who have never seen or heard of one another, yet who regard themselves as having a common history' (1994:7). Accordingly Gans situates a shared and national culture as 'a central component of people's identity' (1998) in the modern nation state. This evokes how memory and collective suffering can be mobilised to foster a shared sense of identification between Diasporic and homeland populations.

A shared cultural identity has popularly been embodied through tours to a 'homeland' to which an individual may only have a commemorative connection (Boyarin and Boyarin, 2002). However the notion of a tour is to evoke and foster ties between a particular ethnic group and a distinct land through education, whereby '*individuals construct meaning through the consumption of place* [sic] ' (Kelner 2010:8). Furthermore, there are many cultural constructions of this, as exemplified by Polgreen (2005), and Bruner's report of African American descendants of slaves, who visit Ghana 'in a quest for their roots, to experience one of the very sites from which their ancestors may have begun the torturous journey to the New World' (1996:291). Moreover, Basu (2007) refers to the visit of Scottish-American descendants to Scotland as 'homecomings', whereby their connection to a homeland is founded upon a belief that the removal of their ancestors from the highland territories was analogous to exile, due to the 'callous' fashion in which it occurred. Basu then argues that such 'homecomings' should be perceived as 'instances of diasporic return movement' (2007:20). In comparison, Kelner's ethnography refers to the Birthright 'trips as builders of "Jewish identity"' (2010:34), due to the emphasis on 'Jewish searching' which is facilitated through the education and 'discovery' of the Jewish association with the land of Israel. *Taglit*-Birthright fosters Jewish identification through an emphasis on memory and collective history, whereby Birthright participants engage 'in a host of […] activities designed to inculcate notions of Israel as a phoenix risen from European Jewry's ashes' (Kelner 2003:130). These testimonies exemplify how Diaspora-homeland relations are fostered and maintained, which contextualises my second research question; how does Birthright foster a Jewish identity and a connection to Israel?

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

There are considerable documentaries of the Birthright programme in the North American media (Ritchie 2008; Berger 2009; Nahum-Halevy 2009; Klein 2010; Brackman and Lubitch 2010). Furthermore, American academic circles have researched Birthright tours to determine how short term cultural immersion can have a profound impact on the way participants perceive their Jewishness, as well as future marriage and child rearing choices, and also feelings towards *Aliyah* ('ascent') and immigration to Israel (Saxe, Sasson and Hecht. 2006). However the study neglected to explore the reasons why young Jews chose to apply for Birthright, which is fundamental in order to understand what individuals hope to achieve or ascertain about their personal Jewish identities through Israel tours. In contrast, Cohen (2008) likens the tours to a rite of passage for young American Jews, and regards the tours as a journey which may not be repeated depending on an individual's observance and degree of Jewish identity formed prior to and after the trip. These accounts demonstrate how *Taglit*-Birthright builds ideals of Jewishness in American youths; however, there is a noticeable absence of ethnographic material regarding the impacts of the Birthright programme on British Jewry, which is a lacuna my research questions seek to fill.

Identity and tools of citizenship

Identity can also be constructed through nationality, whereby an individual is linked to a politically and geographically defined entity, through shared descent, history or language. This can be exemplified by Anderson's notion, that 'everyone can, should, will "have" a nationality, as he or she "has" a gender' (1983:5), which signifies national identity as a natural phenomenon in the modern world. Furthermore, the state can control the boundaries of national identity through the concept of *jus sanguinis*, whereby citizenship is inherited through blood and lineage as opposed to birthright (Shachar 2009). This touches upon my second research question which analyses how Birthright fosters a connection to Israel, notably through acts of Israeli nationalism, as in view of the Jewish state of Israel, 'all Jews everywhere are Israeli citizens by right' (JAFI 2003).

The materialisation of national identity can be demonstrated through tools of citizenship, whereby tangible identification documents formalise an individual's connection to a nation.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Accordingly, the passport can be perceived as a materialised emblem of nationality, which 'extend[s] governmental powers over the One and the Many' (Higgins and Leps 1998:95). There is considerable material regarding the invention and use of the passport as a means for the state to control movement (Caplan and Torpey 2001), as well as the perceived need to 'constitute the "proof" of our identities for administrative purposes' (Torpey 2000:166).

The acquisition of a passport can also symbolise a desire for socioeconomic mobility, as opposed to a desire for identification, belonging, or protection, and this can be illustrated by Neofotistos' (2009) case study of Macedonian nationals possessing Bulgarian passports for access to the European Union. For example, Neofotistos notes that 'Bulgarian passports reportedly have no bearing whatsoever on Macedonian citizenship and ethno-national identification, and do not suggest Bulgarian ethno-national belonging' (2009). This then grounds the benefits of materialized citizenship, whereby 'Bulgarian passports emerge as fetishized objects' (2009) due to their socioeconomic agency.

Despite a dearth of academic interest regarding Jews, and in particular Israelis who invest in multiple citizenships for pragmatic reasons, there has been a surge in the fetishization of passports and citizenship amongst Jews with access to European passports, as recorded in the press. The media interest covered descendents of Jews of German descent who were stripped of their nationality, or fled Germany, during the Nazi regime (BBC News 2002; DPA 2010). This practice has been observed primarily in the younger generation of American and Israeli Jews, where access to German citizenship results in the ability to work freely in Europe (Matthews 2007). Accordingly, Rapaport denotes that the national identity of the German Jewish population is not materialised by their passport, however 'Jews acknowledged the instrumental benefits of possessing German citizenship' (1997:153). One can then infer that documents are equated with mobility, as well as identification. This also indicates the growing role that descent performs in identity formation, whereby 'biology is increasingly [being] mobilized in the development and play of identity' (Skinner, 2006:480). The aforementioned relationships between descent, identity and documents inspired my first research question; to analyse the proof of Jewish heritage that participants

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

submitted with their application, and to see whether these documents could materialise Jewishness in any way.

The review of the current literature indicates the complex and fluid constructions of identity in the twenty-first century, and demonstrates that the continued study of Jewish identity is of particular importance, for Jewishness is inherently multifaceted and constantly changing. This also poses integral questions regarding the traditional 'boundaries' of Jewish identity, as programmes such as *Taglit*-Birthright make Judaism more accessible and encompassing.

Figure 3. Yafo. Disconnected: a representation of the Jewish Diaspora. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Methodology

I was able to conduct a study on *Taglit*-Birthright by being accepted on to the programme, which was dependent on a successful application and evidence of Jewish heritage. I then sought permission from the UJIA to carry out this research, and informed all *madrichim* and participants of my intentions. An ethics form was submitted prior to conducting research in Israel, as my research questions were of a sensitive and personal nature. This was approved by the ethic committee of the Department of Anthropology at Durham University.

Participant observation was central to my ethnographic research, as I was sharing the same experiences as my informants. However, a complication I experienced as a result of participant observation was a difficulty in positioning myself both as a researcher and participant of the tour, as I was conscious to build the foundations of my research project, but also of my own Jewishness. I therefore adopted a reflexive approach for this fieldwork in order to incorporate my own experiences, and ethnographic observations, into the study. Reflexivity is a particularly useful methodological approach when, as anthropologists, we 'are part of the social world we study' (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007:18). Accordingly, Davies advocates that reflexivity arises due to the 'breaking down of the distinction between ethnographers and the peoples they study' (1999:15), which resembled the fact that I was partaking on Birthright as a participant just like my informants were. Furthermore, Finlay and Gough state that a reflexive approach 'transform[s] personal experience into public [...] knowledge' (2003:4), which influenced my initial motivations to conduct a study into Jewish identity, and ascertain how Jewishness is constructed in twenty-first century Britain.

The testimonies, experiences and narratives that comprise the roots of this study were accumulated during the Birthright tour. This was primarily facilitated by keeping a field diary, which Ballinger states 'forms a resource in which tentative ideas can be lodged pending further consideration' (2003:70). Furthermore, I found Ballinger's above concept beneficial during the tour, because it enabled me to record occurrences and feelings that arose at sensitive times, such as the *Yad Vashem* and Mount Herzl visits, and then question

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

informants once they were able to articulate their responses. Moreover, this illuminates the disadvantage of using a Dictaphone when conducting fieldwork, as I believed it was inappropriate and invasive to utilise recording devices and question informants during aspects of the *tochnit* which evoked sensitive feelings of Jewish identification and belonging. I also found that the use of photography was instrumental in portraying the development of Jewish identities during the tour, yet was similarly used depending on the nature of occasions in the *tochnit* and with the consent of participants.

Hopkins asserts that 'interviews can be useful for accessing deep understandings and experiences, [and for] exploring complex behaviours and motivations' (2010:35). I then found conducting interviews to be a key method of collating data from informants. However, arranging interviews became problematic during the tour, as we were constantly mobile with excursions organised throughout the days and evenings. Consequently, I had to be opportunistic and conduct interviews whenever free time was available, which meant that interviews could not be pre-planned or prepared. I felt that adopting an informal and semi-structured interview approach would be the most suitable means of collecting data, as it would allow open discussion of the participants' experiences of Birthright, whilst also providing data relevant to my research questions. Informants contributing to this research were carefully selected as to provide an array of responses and thus diverse contributions. I approached informants from different denominational backgrounds and those who had received varying levels of Jewish exposure. The majority of my informants were between the ages of 20–23, as the participants and I comprised the student Birthright tour, known as BRUK1. I was also able to interview one member of the BRUK2 group, which consisted of young professionals mainly aged 23–26 who travelled alongside BRUK1, although their *tochnit* differed depending on logistics. Also included in this work is an interview with one participant from the American Birthright programme, an IDF soldier from the *mifgash*, and the accompanying Birthright Representative from the UJIA. Interviewing members of the IDF was particularly valuable for the outcome of this study, as the *mifgash* performs a symbolic role in the *tochnit* by bringing together young Jewish adults from Israel and the Diaspora. However, there was a linguistic barrier with the male soldiers who found it difficult to express the complexity of the subject matter in English, which resulted in me

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

being unable to include their contributions. I then relied on the female soldiers for interviews as they were able to articulate their thoughts more fluently. On reflection, my inexperience as a researcher prevented me from approaching an interpreter to translate the opinions of the male soldiers.

Focus groups provided the opportunity to separate patrilineal and matrilineal Jewish participants and pose identical questions, which facilitated an open discussion about the common experiences of the trip. Furthermore, by gathering selected participants into different focus groups, I was able to compare and contrast the differing opinions that were aired I also found that the focus groups shed light on intra-group similarities, for example, as the patrilineal Jews shared comparable negative experiences with Jewish communities. In addition, the *madrichim* arranged all 40 Birthright participants into four equal groups of 'families', each headed by one *madrich* or *madricha*,[1] and would meet after particular excursions to discuss what each participant drew. This provided an available means to record how informants, who were not purposefully selected and assembled into groups by myself, related to Judaism and openly articulated their Jewishness.

Specific research questions

The first research question posed in the study, which sought to ascertain the connection between documentation and Jewish identity, was a question that related to the application phase, and could therefore be posed in the opening days of the tour. This enabled me to focus my attention on the second and third research questions; how Jewish identities and relationships with Israel were fostered by the *tochnit*, *madrichim* and *mifgash*, and lastly; how Jewish identities were articulated by the participants over the ten day period. However, after the tour, I found that the Birthright participants continued to maintain relations through social networking websites, and notably, via the BRUK1 Facebook group, which was created by the *madrichim* prior to departure. The Facebook group therefore served as a vehicle to pose open questions to the participants, and to continue observing the effects of Birthright on their Jewish identities. Facebook has changed the location of the tour upon

1 Singular masculine and singular feminine of madrichim.

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

returning to the UK, as it continues to be an accessible and practical medium for the participants to use.

In order to protect the anonymity of my informants, I have omitted their details, and have instead replaced their names with pseudonyms sourced from the *Torah* ('Hebrew Bible'), for example, Ezra, Leah and Hava. This decision was influenced by a session in the *tochnit* on *Kabbalah* ('receiving'), a branch of Jewish philosophy, where Birthright participants were taught the significance and ancestral roots of names in Judaism.

My initial research objectives differed dramatically from the outcome of this work, where I had originally planned to analyse the differences between Diasporic and Israeli concepts of Jewish identity. I commenced dissertation research in April 2010, when I visited Israel for the first time to purposefully conduct interviews with Israeli-Jewish rabbinical, academic and civilian informants, who I had been cultivating since December 2009. The Israeli informants were very forthcoming and provided useful insights into the conflicting views of what constitutes a Jewish identity, from an array of religious denominations and secular viewpoints. Furthermore, the participants came from diverse communities in Israel, which provided interesting comparative data, as respondents were from a range of ethnic Jewish backgrounds, including those of *Ashkenazi* ('European'), *Sephardi* ('Iberian') and *Mizrahi* ('Eastern') origin. In contrast, I found sourcing Jewish informants in Britain much more challenging. Interestingly, this difficulty can be attributed to my patrilineal Jewish background, which proved to be an obstacle in acquiring interviews and building rapport with Orthodox and Haredi (commonly referred to as the ultra-Orthodox) Jewry. Although representatives from Liberal Judaism, reform movements and specialists in Jewish academia were very cooperative, I was thus in a situation with little heterogeneous data to consult. I consequently opted to change the direction of the study upon acquiring access to the *Taglit*-Birthright programme, which resonates Atkinson and Hammersley's notion that 'initial interests and questions that motivated the research will be refined, and perhaps even transformed, over the course of the research' (2007:3). However, I found that the preparatory research I conducted into Jewish identity provided me with a conducive

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

knowledge of Diaspora identity and British Jewry, which are fundamental aspects of Birthright as a Diaspora-homeland tour.

Documents

What role do the documents requested by Birthright organisers perform in the construction of perceptions of Jewishness in participants? The UK *Taglit*-Birthright application form stipulates that applicants must prove their Jewish heritage through documentation, which theoretically formalises the applicant's biological attachment to his or her Jewish lineage. In compliance with this request, applicants had to enclose one of the following documents in their application:

I. Provision of contact details or letter of confirmation from a rabbi/ administrator at the synagogue which an applicant (or his/her parents, or grandparents) have previously attended.
II. A copy of an applicant's parents or grandparent's *ketubah* (Jewish marriage certificate), as well as birth certificates which show a family line to the applicant.
III. A copy of a Burial Certificate or letter confirming burial for relatives buried in a Jewish cemetery.
IV. A copy of a conversion certificate and the details of a referee (e.g. the rabbi who performed the conversion).
V. Letter from a Jewish community leader who is known to you or your family.
VI. Name and contact details of a family member (sibling or first cousin) who has been on a UK Birthright trip in the past.

Owing to my tenuous link to Judaism, I found it problematic to supply the evidence detailed above and to satisfy the criteria of having at least one Jewish parent or grandparent. The criteria itself are based on the conditions of *Aliyah*, also known as the Law of Return, which grants Israeli citizenship to any Jew, or non-Jew descended from a Jewish parent or grandparent (MFA 2001; JAFI 2003). Furthermore, the basis of *Aliyah* is rooted in the Nuremburg Laws implemented in 1935 by the Nazis, which identified Jews, not by religious belief, but through genealogy (USHMM). In the case of Birthright,

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

possessing one Jewish parent or grandparent in order to satisfy the criteria is intended to be a positive and biological privilege for applicants. This is because the policy of admitting participants with one Jewish parent or grandparent is broad and encompassing of people who are typically rejected from the Orthodox interpretation of Judaism. An interview conducted with the Birthright Representative sheds light on this, by noting that the policy is actually symbolic in diverging from the Orthodox monopoly on the definition of Judaism:

> The one grandparent policy of birthright [...] makes it clear that we don't abide by the narrow interpretation of one Jewish denomination [...] we go out of our way to make it clear that no one person can tell you that you are or not Jewish according to their rules.

However it was the access participants had to such resources that proved to be the real privilege, as this chapter explains.

I found that obtaining such proof was a logistical issue, as all familial and ancestral documentation was located at my paternal grandmother's residence in France, and I was also unsure whether the documentation I sourced would be accepted by Birthright. I submitted a letter headed by *La Kehila* ('community') which confirms that my paternal great grandmother, Dora Kasstan, was part of the Jewish community in Paris (Figure 4). I also included correspondence detailing that Dora Kasstan was the mother of my grandfather, Raymond Kasstan, and under *halachic* law he would be considered Jewish (Figure 5). To prove the generational link to myself I included mine and my father's civil birth certificates.

I felt that these documents supported my Jewish claim as they ultimately satisfied the entry criteria set by Birthright and enabled me to partake in the organised tour. As a result of this, I was interested to investigate whether the participants felt the same bond to the documents they included with their application, and whether or not the documentation symbolised Jewishness in any way for them.

The following extract formed part of a focus group conducted with patrilineal Jews to ascertain whether their documentation strengthened their tie to Judaism:

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

> Sharon: I just put down my cousin; he did Birthright last year but the American one.
>
> Tamar: I provided marriage certificates from grandparents
> Author: Does it prove to you that you are Jewish?
> Tamar: No more than I already thought about myself.
>
> Ruth: I just gave the name of my grandparent's synagogue and rabbi.
> Author: Does that have any meaning to you?
> Ruth: Not really at all.
>
> Sara: I found the whole idea of giving in documents really difficult, and it reaffirmed how not Jewish I was. I handed in my grandparent's ketubah and my dad's death certificate to show the links, but if anything they make me feel less Jewish because it made me think it wasn't easy for me to get those documents, I didn't have access to them, it didn't feel like part of me, and I think that was one of the more negative aspects of the trip.
>
> Hannah: I provided my great uncle's death certificate, he quite recently died, so having to ask people about that kind of thing was quite sensitive, so for me it wasn't a nice experience either.

This illustrates that three of the five participants held little regard for the documents they submitted as proof of their Jewish heritage. However, Sara's account discussed the conflict that she experienced in searching for documentation, as her limited access to the resources formed not only a potential barrier to gaining a place on the programme, but also harnessed the interaction with her Jewish identity as 'it reaffirmed how not Jewish [she] was'. Similarly, I posed the same question to a small focus group consisting of three matrilineal Jews, yet neither of whom declared a connection to the documents they submitted. However Levi stated that he experienced similar difficulties in providing proof of his Jewish heritage:

> I sent in my parent's ketubah but I didn't enjoy the process of doing it because it was from my parent's ex-marriage and I didn't know which one of them had it. It pissed me off that I had to dig something up from the past that is now of no relevance to my life [sic].

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

In contrast, Hava was the only participant interviewed who submitted her own personal documentation, as opposed to *ketubahs* belonging to parents or grandparents, and instead provided a religious birth certificate, which was signed by a rabbi and therefore connotes a religious affiliation (Figure 6). Furthermore, Hava signifies that the document emulated her familial background; however the document still failed to attest and ground her Jewish identity:

> Hava: Well I sent in my birth certificate, because in Quebec in the eighties you had to have a religious birth certificate. My parents weren't part of a church and my dad was part of a synagogue so they got me a Jewish birth certificate.
>
> Author: Do you hold any connection to this certificate?
>
> Hava: Not really, it doesn't make me feel Jewish, I guess in a way it differentiates me but it doesn't give me a religious identity. It's more about my background than what I believe in.

The documents requested by the UJIA exemplify a key difference between British and American groups, as the latter do not have to provide proof of Jewish heritage. This was confirmed by a student from an American cohort who stated:

> We did have to answer a couple of questions and then they interviewed us over phone call.

The Birthright Representative attributed the different application process to the volume of American tours, as in:

> Summer 2010 Birthright had 20,000 participants from America and about 2-3,000 from other countries, because of the large Jewish population there. The scale of it in America is much different, so the practical application system is also different.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

This reiterates the need for the observation of British groups, as aspects of the tour negatively affected a sample of BRUK1 participants, in a way that American counterparts did not experience.

The theory that documents may formalise an individual's identification with a collective entity can be situated in the anthropological discourse surrounding identity. For example, Birthright's policy of requesting documentation, which affirms biological attachment to the Jewish people, is complicit with the construction of the passport as a marker of citizenship and national identity. This can primarily be exemplified through the notion of *jus sanguinis*, whereby citizenship is inherited through 'the right of blood', as the term 'confers [an individual's] political membership on the basis of descent and pedigree' (Shachar 2009:120). Israel is exemplary of this, whereby citizenship is extendable to any Jew, or non-Jew born of a Jewish parent or grandparent, and therefore 'all Jews everywhere are Israeli citizens by right' (JAFI 2003). Furthermore, Invernizzi and Williams state that 'citizenship simply denotes the legal status of membership of a nation-state, as symbolized by the right to a passport' (2008:9). This implies that citizenship and thus a connection to the nation, is materialised through a document which is ultimately acquired through the mobilization of biology and heritage.

Conversely, Neofotistos' (2009) study of Macedonian nationals claiming Bulgarian citizenship illustrates the acquisition of socio-economic mobility through a European Union passport. Neofotistos argues that possessing a foreign passport does not dilute a Macedonian identity, as she infers that 'having multiple identification documents [...] is not coterminous with endorsing multiple ethno-national identities' (2009). Furthermore, Neofotistos states that Bulgarian passports become 'fetishized objects' due to the mobility they grant, as opposed to fostering identification with another state.

This echoes the BBC News' report of Israeli descendants of German Jewish origin, who were stripped of their citizenship during the Nazi regime, reclaiming their lost rights to German nationality. The report states the popularity of Israeli Jews claiming their legal right to recover national ties is 'put down to growing fears over security in the Middle

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

East' (2002), as opposed to a primordial attachment to the German state. Interestingly, the report states that 'those wanting citizenship are asked to produce documents proving their heritage before they are issued with German papers' (2002), which further illuminates the relationship between biology, descent and heritage in the anthropological study of identity documents. Moreover, Matthews (2007) discusses the surge in American descendants of German Jews also seeking their ancestral rights to German citizenship. Matthews notes that 'for many people, that means receiving a European Union passport that can pave the way for living and working in Europe' (2007), which reiterates how documents can function as a socio-economic tool as opposed to an emblem of identity.

The accounts cited above infer the mobilization of biology and descent for the purpose of socio-economic gain. Therefore, this draws parallels with the practice of young British Jews sourcing documents that they possess little or no personal connection with, in order to qualify for a free trip to Israel with Birthright. However, one can infer that documents are unable to ground and fix the participant's Jewish identity, because the fluid nature of 'identity is inherently shifting rather than stable' (Hyman 2002:153). Furthermore, participants such as Sara and Levi illustrate that sourcing documentation in order to prove their Jewish heritage can be problematic and distressing, which therefore serves as an ulterior explanation as to why the documents may conflict with their personal Jewish identities.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

LA KEHILA

COMMUNAUTÉ JUIVE A PARIS

הקהלה היהודית בפריס יידישע קהלה אין פאריז

Tél. : TUR. 33-67

73, RUE DE TURBIGO
PARIS (3e)

PARIS le 19 février 195 7

Nous la Kehila, Communauté Juive de Paris, certifions par la présente, sur la demande de Mlle KASSTAN Louise, demeurant 50 rue de la Budassoa, Paris xx?, que feue sa mère KASSTAN DORA était d'origine et de religion juive. -

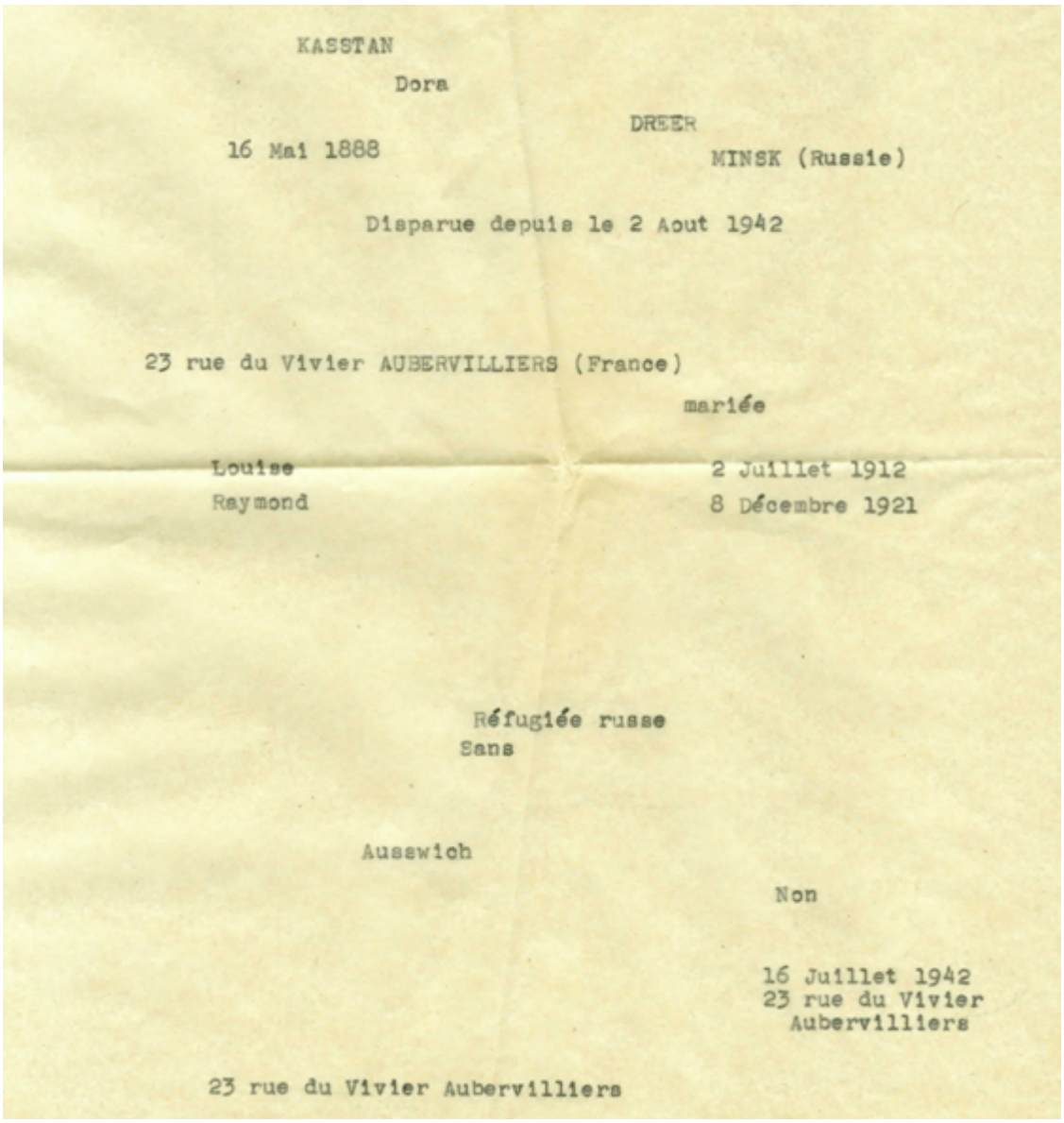
LE SECRETAIRE

M. RAJAK

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal



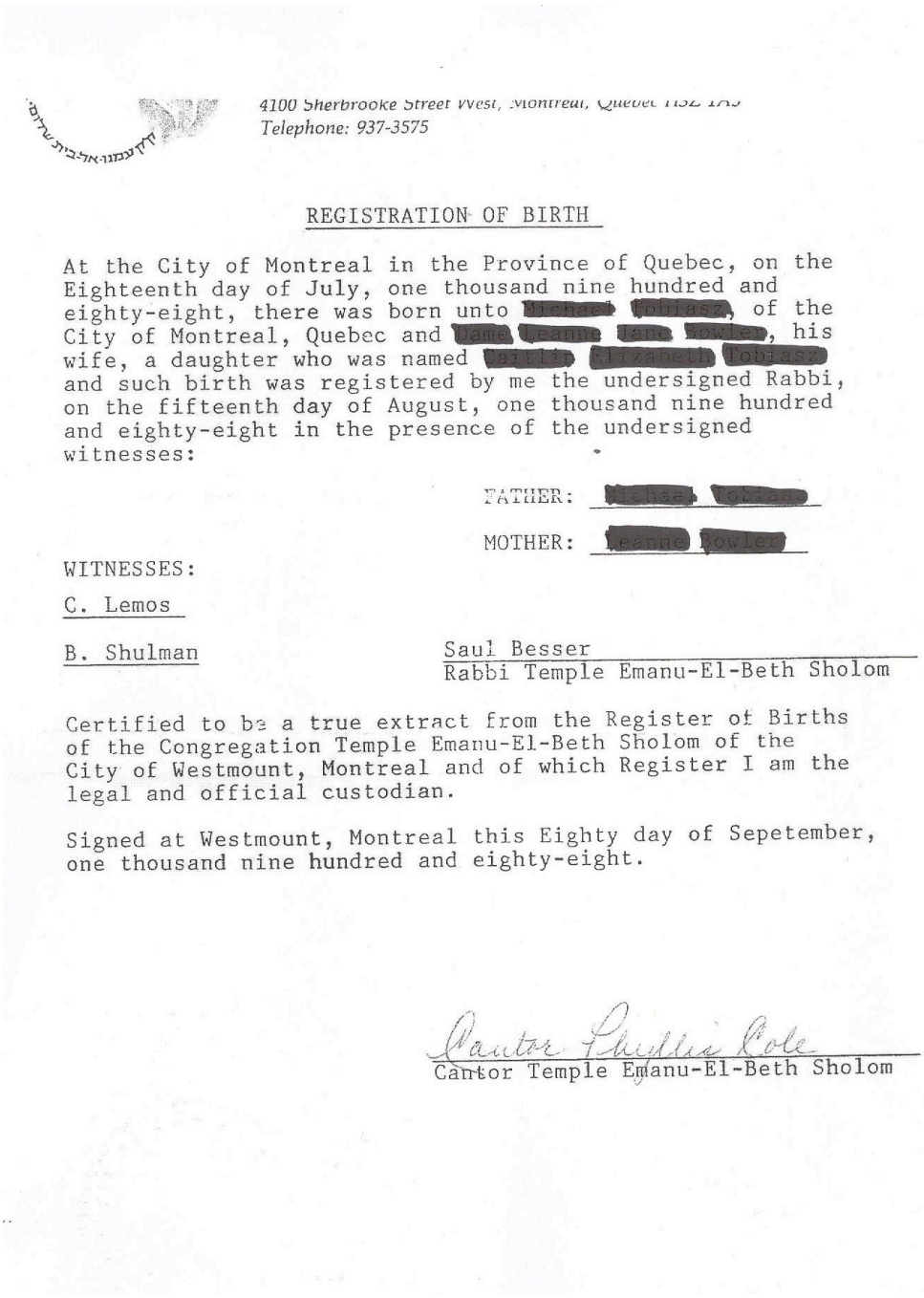
KASSTAN
Dora
DREER
16 Mai 1888
MINSK (Russie)
Disparue depuis le 2 Aout 1942
23 rue du Vivier AUBERVILLIERS (France)
mariée
Louise
2 Juillet 1912
Raymond
8 Décembre 1921
Réfugiée russe
Sans
Ausswich
Non
16 Juillet 1942
23 rue du Vivier
Aubervilliers
23 rue du Vivier Aubervilliers

Figures 4 and 5. Documents I submitted to prove my Jewish heritage.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930



4100 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec H3Z 1A5
Telephone: 937-3575

REGISTRATION OF BIRTH

At the City of Montreal in the Province of Quebec, on the Eighteenth day of July, one thousand nine hundred and eighty-eight, there was born unto [redacted], of the City of Montreal, Quebec and [redacted], his wife, a daughter who was named [redacted] and such birth was registered by me the undersigned Rabbi, on the fifteenth day of August, one thousand nine hundred and eighty-eight in the presence of the undersigned witnesses:

FATHER: [redacted]

MOTHER: [redacted]

WITNESSES:

C. Lemos

B. Shulman

Saul Besser
Rabbi Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom

Certified to be a true extract from the Register of Births of the Congregation Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom of the City of Westmount, Montreal and of which Register I am the legal and official custodian.

Signed at Westmount, Montreal this Eighty day of Sepetember, one thousand nine hundred and eighty-eight.

Cantor Phyllis Cole
Cantor Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom

Figure 6. Hava's Birth Certificate

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Tochnit

Fostering a Jewish identity and a connection to Israel

> I always try to convince the leaders to try and get the participants to connect with at least one item, whether it's a place, a story, a feeling, an experience and hopefully that's something they can connect to and take home with them.

The Birthright Representative's above remark demonstrates that participants were encouraged to pick and choose aspects of the trip that they felt compatible with, which therefore allowed the participants to negotiate their Jewishness and nurture their own Jewish identities. This was facilitated by the *tochnit*, which placed an emphasis on the physical and emotional exploration of the land by visiting areas of archaic Jewish History, for example, Jerusalem and the Western Wall (Figure 7). The purpose of this was to engage participants with the land of Israel, and to recreate a sense of intrinsic attachment to the ancient Jewish state. Furthermore, visiting sites of collective suffering, memory and struggle, for example, *Yad Vashem* Holocaust museum, played a prominent role in the formation of Jewish identities. I will demonstrate that this allowed the participants to interact with, and situate themselves in, the Jewish legacy and heritage.

Figure 7. Jerusalem, the Western Wall. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Madrichim and the mifgash

The *madrichim* were instrumental in sharing the significance of the locations featured in the *tochnit*, as well as their own personal narratives of Jewish life and Israel, which therefore made the relationship between Judaism and Israel more accessible to participants. This was also facilitated through the *mifgash*, where eight soldiers from the IDF accompanied the tour. The *mifgash* was designed to break down the barriers between Diaspora and Israeli Jewry, by showing the similarities that lay underneath cultural differences, for example, military service (Figures 8 and 9). This can be demonstrated by a response from an accompanying IDF soldier:

> Leah: I think [through the *mifgash*] you are able to meet the people, you will get to see how your life would be if right now you were in Israel. You can see the most terrifying thing and see that it's not so scary, like soldiers on TV look so scary, I don't seem scary to you?

Leah's testimony exemplifies how the *mifgash* enables participants to visualise their lives in Israel, which is indicative of Birthright as a prelude to spending lengthier time in Israel, and even *Aliyah*. However, the *mifgash* also performed a secondary role in creating ties between participants and Israel, through socialisation. This can be illustrated by Michal's account, "they get all these fit Israelis in who will flirt with all the girls and they will try and get you to make *Aliyah* basically, shaglit! [Sic].'[2] This signifies the sexualisation that the *mifgash* represented to a minority of participants, who formed a parallel between 'encounter' and enticement.

Rhetoric also played a central role in the construction of Jewish identities, as the use of language encompassed the participants into the Jewish collective and formalised their common fate with the future of Jewry. This can initially be exemplified by a statement made by the Israeli *madrich* who discussed the purpose of Birthright, 'we have to work on our unity to stay together or it [separation] will happen again, only sixty years after the

2 Pun on the Hebrew word *taglit* by joining it with the British vulgar slang word 'shag', meaning sexual intercourse

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

state of Israel.' Furthermore, rhetoric was a powerful tool employed to remind participants that Israel, the Jewish state, was their 'home' and this was an ideal communicated on many occasions, as exemplified by Leah:

> What makes you Israeli is not where you're born; it's spending some time in Israel. No one is really from here, we all came here from somewhere. It's your country exactly it's like mine, because one day if you want to you will have a home here and you will be welcome.

Leah's remark is lucid evidence of how the Birthright programme seeks to foster a connection between Diaspora Jewry and Israel, by accentuating the notion that Israel is, by right, the home of the Jewish people. This infers that Israeli citizenship is extendable to the participants by virtue of their Jewish heritage and relation to Israel.

Figure 8. Mifgash. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Figure 9. Magen David ('Star of David'). Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

Roots

The range of ancient sites featured in the *tochnit* evoked different feelings and reactions to different participants; however the purpose of visiting them was to illuminate the innate ties that Jews held to the land of Israel, and to also connect the ancient Israelite kingdoms to the same land as the Zionist state. In addition, the *tochnit* was dominated by the Jerusalem visit, where five days of the tour were spent (Figure 10). Visiting Jerusalem encouraged powerful displays of Jewishness, by materialising Jewish continuity with the past, as expressed by Daniel:

> At Passover, we always say 'next year in Jerusalem' and it's good to make that a reality. We were here 2,000 years ago and we have a lot of history here, so I think it's nice to go full circle and come back.

These sentiments can also be exemplified by a visit to the Western Wall on New Year's Eve, which was an intense experience for some of the participants, as it was tactile 'proof' of the historic and traditional Jewish association with the land. Interestingly, for some of the

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

participants, a connection to their Jewish heritage was indeed formed through the experience, even if they themselves did not feel an affinity for the landmark, as exemplified by Tamar's and Ezra's testimonies:

> Tamar: It doesn't mean much to me, but I think the idea that it meant something or a lot to people in my family generations ago is quite a powerful feeling.
>
> Ezra: I felt a connection to it for a more personal reason than 'because I'm Jewish'. It was always my grandparent's desire to go to the Western Wall but they never got there, so when I was there, to me I was there for them, and left a note and candle for them.

Conversely, whilst conducting interviews regarding the connections that informants felt to their Jewish roots, I became increasingly aware that participants expressed more of a connection to their more recent heritage, as opposed to their Jewish ancestry. This can be illustrated by comparing responses from focus groups consisting of patrilineal and matrilineal Jews, thus drawing similarities from diverse and heterogeneous data:

> Sharon: Definitely more so to Eastern Europe and America as opposed to Israel, I feel that I can identify more with Jewish American culture, I understand it. And Eastern Europe, I've always been really intrigued by it and I went to Eastern Europe last year specifically to see the land of my people.
>
> Levi: My family are Eastern Europeans and I'm almost more interested to go back to the Czech Republic where my grandparents were born.

The above responses indicate that, although participants could envisage the ancient Jewish relation to Israel, many identified their own personal Jewish ties to Eastern Europe, which introduces the significance of the holocaust in formations of Jewish identity.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Figure 10. Participants being welcomed to Yerushalayim ('Jerusalem'). Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

Yad Vashem

Visiting the *Yad Vashem (*YV) Holocaust memorial exemplified the defining point where the participants began to interact with their Jewish identities, whilst also constructing a connection to the Jewish people and the state of Israel. Initially this was induced by the *madrichim*, who lit candles for the holocaust victims, displayed photographs and selected participants to read testimonies and stories, which enabled the people in the room to engage with the idea of collective suffering. Furthermore, whilst visiting YV, participants were requested to find a holocaust victim and account, which they held no personal or familial connection to, and remember that individual as a human being and not as a 'number'. This act had much resonance with the participants because they related the accounts to themselves, as illustrated by Ezra:

> I come under the label of Jew and therefore if I was alive in that period, they would have wanted me and my family dead, along with a lot of my friends, and friend's friends. It actually did happen to people who were alive

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

> at that time. I think anyone who comes under one of those 'labels' would have a connection to it.

YV therefore played an important role in enabling the participants to visualise the Holocaust, which formalised their relationship to Jewry through a common and shared sense of fate.

The physical design of the museum echoed the narrative of the Shoah[3] ('destruction') and the 'rebirth' of the state of Israel that ensued, and thus resulted in participants identifying the significance of Israel after the realisation of the Holocaust (Figure 11). This can be demonstrated by a focus group conducted that evening, which elucidated that the museum functioned as a tangible role in allowing the participants to experience their Jewish identities, whilst also fostering a connection to the Jewish people:

> Shmuel: The most powerful part was the last thing where you come out and you've sort of been led through this monstrous journey where the entire world turned its back on us, and you look out across Jerusalem and you see what we were all fighting for.
>
> Eden: If all the Jewish people are together in the world it makes us stronger, everybody together, but if you separate the Jewish people all around the world we are weak, we are vulnerable to something like this happening again. I think at the end when we looked out on Jerusalem it made me realise that the six million didn't die for nothing, we are in the place we should be, remembering them.

The use of "we" and "us" symbolises the transition that the participants experienced, as they began to situate themselves in the Jewish collective. Furthermore, not only does Shmuel's contribution appear to legitimise Israel as the Jewish state following the museum's representation of the Holocaust, but it directly places him in the Jewish legacy and entwines himself in the struggle for Jewish self-determination. The extracts therefore illustrate that the participants identified with Israel through the idea of a common fate with

3 Hebrew term for the Holocaust with the general meaning of 'destruction', or more specifically 'annihilation' or 'catastrophe'.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

world Jewry, as exemplified by Eden's proclamation, "if all the Jewish people are together in the world it makes *us* stronger". Such strong responses from the focus group are suggestive that the participants began to visualise Israel and Judaism as indivisible, which is arguably a fundamental aim of the Diaspora-homeland tour.

Interestingly, YV materialized Jewishness for the vast majority of participants in the group. This was influenced by the museum guide who exhibited YV and communicated its symbolism to the forty British participants, as he encouraged them to search the memorial's directory to see if their ancestors had died in the holocaust, and to include their story if it was not already documented. This evoked the first realisation of possessing a Jewish identity for Shoshanna:

> I don't connect to my Jewishness at all, but when I was there [at YV] it was the first time that I connected to it, it was kind of the history of my family. This is why I'm here; it was the first time I managed to connect to my Jewishness.

YV played a central role in fostering a Jewish identity in the group, because it functioned as a tool that allowed every participant to feel a connection to Jewry and Israel by virtue of all the participants bearing a Jewish heritage. This can be illustrated by Hava, who expressed:

> I think the Holocaust is what unites our generation of Jews, whether we are religious or not, the fact that our grandparents still told us stories, or had stories about the Holocaust.

YV also indicated a change in the way many participants began to articulate their Jewishness, for example, by presenting their Jewish identity by wearing a Star of David. Michal's statement demonstrates how the museum catalysed her adoption of the Star of David, which was a motive practiced by many other participants:

> I've started wearing my *Magen David* since Jerusalem and I haven't worn a *Magen David* in like a decade, it kind of drills in to your head, be proud of who you are, because people died and you need to honour their memory.

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Figure 11. Jerusalem, from the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

Mount Herzl

The visit to Mount Herzl (MH) military cemetery followed *Yad Vashem* in the *tochnit*, and thus formalised the connection between the suffering and statelessness that characterised the holocaust, with the struggle for Jewish sovereignty and self-determination as represented by the modern state of Israel. The *madrichim* continued to perform a pivotal role in relating the significance of Israeli landmarks to participants, and particularly MH cemetery as a site of remembrance, for the army is central to life in Israel. This can be exemplified by Liora, a *madricha*, who expressed that 'Mount Herzl is the place where heroes are buried, where people just like you and me fought for freedom, so that we can visit Israel.' Furthermore, as an IDF memorial and cemetery dedicated to Israel's successive war casualties, MH similarly functioned as a tool to engage participants with the notion of collective suffering and also tie the Jewish Diaspora with Israel. This was experienced by the participants in a parallel way to *Yad Vashem*, as the *madrichim* invited the participants to light a candle in remembrance of a soldier and to place it on their grave, a grave which the

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

participants possessed no connection to, other than by reason of a shared Jewish descent. Moreover, participants articulated their attachment and affinity to the Israeli memorial based on a realisation slowly built through the relationships formed with the accompanying soldiers during the *mifgash*, who were identical in age to many of the Birthright participants, and therefore offered a parallel of Jewish life in Israel.

The IDF soldiers portrayed and exhibited their lives in Israel for the participants to engage with, which was facilitated through the use of narrative and the sharing of personal experiences of life in Israel and national service. This can be exemplified by Leah, who discussed what she wanted the participants to recognise by visiting the cemetery:

> We in Israel are carrying so much on our back, like everything that happened, all the wars, and all the people that died because of bombing. I think that you are able to take some of this baggage with you, and now you can see it more through our eyes and to realise that nothing is simple, nothing.

Leah's comments particularly resonated with Joshua; who was training to be a British Army Officer, and thus related to the tactility of MH above other traditional Jewish sites, due to his personal experiences with the military:

> The thing that really struck me on this visit was the war memorial. Every time I go to one, when you know being a soldier or officer, the decisions you make could end your life so that's really where I feel a connection most. It's more of a spiritual thing than even going to the Western Wall, because it has more personal meaning.

However, MH was less encompassing to many of the participants as it was a marker of Israeli identity, as opposed to a specifically Jewish experience like Yad Vashem, and consequently some of the participants were unable to identify with this encounter. For example, Hava demonstrates how the cemetery was problematic for her to ally with:

> I find it very hard to relate religion with land; I just don't get that connection. It doesn't justify so many deaths, and with the majority of the

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

> guys buried in that cemetery being twenty, twenty-one, they were clearly doing their obligatory military service and died doing it.

Hava's account therefore illuminates the tension between developing a Jewish identity and identifying with Israel, which was a conflict that arose and became pronounced in the remaining part of the tour.

Figures 12 and 13. Mount Herzl. Photographs by Ben Kasstan.

Mega Event

The Mega Event was the concluding celebration of the trip, where approximately 3,000 Birthright participants, from multiple Jewish Diasporas, were received by Israeli Premier Binyamin Netanyahu, as well as benefactors and a host of Israeli celebrities in Jerusalem (Figure 14). All attendees were supplied with *Taglit* tee-shirts and Israeli flags to welcome Netanyahu's speech, which was designed to rhetorically ground and solidify their attachment to Jewry and Israel, as the premier professed that 'strengthening Jewish identity is critical for our common future' (PMO 2011). Furthermore, the performances during the evening possessed strong Zionistic overtones, in order to situate Israel at the forefront of Jewish identity, as exemplified by '*Taglit* Forever' which contained the lyrics 'you're in Zion [...] this is your home.'

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

The evening, however, disengaged the participants from identifying with Israel, as BRUK1 chose to leave before the end of the performances, and did not attend the after party disco that was designed to integrate the various Birthright groups (Figure 15). Accordingly, informants provided an array of responses regarding their interpretation of the Mega Event. For example, Ezra's response illuminates how he felt compatible with the Jewish elements of the event, chiefly the Jewish artists and songs. However he also aired the innate cultural differences that exist between Diaspora and Israeli Jewry, as the event was an overtly Israeli experience that British participants found difficult to relate to:

> Oh it was so over the top and dare I say, American! I spoke to [accompanying IDF soldier] after and she loved it. I guess if an Israeli saw the British celebrate England winning the world cup they'd think it was over the top. I enjoyed the first hour because they played music I know and I was able to jump around and enjoy it, but after that I just got bored.

Interestingly, a number of participants analogised the Mega Event to indoctrination, and that consequently negatively affected their Birthright experience and identification with Israel. This can be exemplified by Naomi and Hava, who both expressed sentiments concerning how the event contrasted with the ethos of the tour, which essentially allowed participants to negotiate their own Jewish identities based on what they personally felt compatible with. Naomi and Hava also derided the Mega Event by making puns to emphasise their disdain:

> Naomi: Mega embarrassing! The Mega Event clashed with our British 'reserve', it didn't reinforce anything and was actually counterproductive, as it was the first and only time I felt we were trying to be brainwashed!

> Hava: The trip had gone so well, I never felt pressured into any Zionist beliefs; it was as well-rounded as it could have been. Then all the propaganda we knew was hiding somewhere between the lines of the trip just flew out at us in the form of an X Factor-esque show.

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Although the event did not harness the participants from feeling an affinity for Jewry, it did conflict with the national ties that the BRUK1 participants felt towards their own country, as exemplified by Sharon:

> The mega event was possibly the creepiest thing I've ever seen. The whole thing made me feel very uncomfortable. I would say I felt a part of the Jewish people, but not Israeli, I'm definitely English.

This attitude was also echoed in Hava's response, further detailing her disapproval of the evening, 'we had been given the flag of a country that is not our own. I am not Israeli and have no intention of becoming one.' Moreover, these accounts illuminate how participants did not feel compatible with Israeli nationalism, which instead indicates that participants preferred to articulate themselves as British Jews. These findings therefore raise striking questions regarding the Jewish Diaspora in twenty-first century Britain, and whether British Jews are still living in *Galut*, which will be conferred in the concluding chapter of this paper.

Figure 14. Mega Event. Netanyahu's speech on the concluding night. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Figure 15. Mega Event. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

Figure 16. Mega Event. Mizug galuyot (‘integration of the exiles’ . Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

In comparison with Basu's study of Diaspora-homeland tours, where 'visitors are encouraged to find whichever imagined homeland they seek' (2007:81), Birthright participants were inspired to form an attachment to a particular element of Judaism and Israel that they felt an affinity to. Furthermore, Kelner describes the Birthright tours as 'builders of "Jewish identity"' (2010:34), due to a strong emphasis of 'Jewish searching', which was facilitated by immersing the participants in Jewish education (Mittelberg 2007). Moreover, the Jewish education and the freedom that participant's received in order to discover their own Judaism was actually determined by the *tochnit* and *madrichim*, who 'assert[ed] control over meanings ascribed to sites' (Kelner 2010:89). Participants were therefore able to negotiate their Jewishness based on what they felt compatible or incompatible with. This is complicit with Miller's concept of 'mental ethnicity', where Jewishness is constructed by 'feeling Jewish inside, [and a] loyalty to Jewish heritage' (2002:53), as opposed to bearing a religiously observant identity. My observations concur with this, as aspects of the *tochnit*, notably *Yad Vashem*, elicited sentiments of Jewish identification that were devoid of religiosity.

Grillis states that 'national memory is shared by people who have never seen or heard of one another, yet who regard themselves as having a common history' (1994:7), which therefore enables an array of diverse and disconnected people to feel a collective bond through a notion of shared heritage. Furthermore, Anderson argues how a shared sense of national memory can be mobilised and articulated through death and remembrance, as typified by 'cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers' (1991:9). In relation to Israel, Weiss elucidates how death and memory play a central role in the shared sense of Israeli identity, 'due to the sheer number and frequency of war casualties, bereavement and commemoration have a unique nationalistic significance' (2002:39). Therefore, this situates the IDF and national service as a central component of Israeli identity, which illuminates Mount Herzl cemetery as an important induction to life in Israel.

Yad Vashem proved to be a useful tool in mobilizing the participants to connect to their Jewish heritage, as the museum's design and use of 'memory [...] work[s] to bind present and past generations' (Young 1993:247). Furthermore, the 'journey' of the museum

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

described by Shmuel and Eden, which deeply informed their connection to Jewry, was purposefully designed to foster 'a persuasive link between Holocaust and statelessness' (Young 1993:246). The journey therefore emulated the language of rhetoric, as participants could visualise Israel as a haven for the Jewish people after the trail of suffering that lay behind them. Moreover, the impact of Yad Vashem on the participants' conceptualisation of Jewishness can be characterized through Michal's account, which prompted her (and others) to adopt a *Magen David*. This resonates Hobsbawm and Ranger's notion of the invention of tradition, where 'inventing traditions [...] is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past' (1983:4), as participants engaged with, and in the case of *Yad Vashem*, identified their heritage through symbolism. Accordingly, Geertz states that 'sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos' (1993:89), which reflects the materialisation of Jewishness demonstrated by participants through religious insignia.

Zerubavel (1995) explores how the new state of Israel drew from the remnants of its ancient past in order to cement and affirm Jewish continuity with the land. This concept was instituted during the *tochnit* by visiting sites of ancient Judaism (Figure 7), which formalised a connection between the participants and their Jewish heritage. However, Sand states that 'Jewish nationalism had undertaken an almost impossible mission – to forge a single ethnos from a great variety of cultural-linguistic groups, each with a distinctive origin' (2009:255). This resonates how the UK Birthright participants were unable to identify with the Israeli nationalistic performance of the Mega Event, and is indicative of their identification with Britain, as expressed by Sharon 'I'm definitely English' (4.5). Furthermore, the Mega Event was exemplary of how rhetoric was employed to formalise a link between Israel and the participants. Carrithers clearly explains the interactions involved in rhetoric, where, 'in any moment of interaction, some act to persuade, others are the targets of persuasion; some work, others are worked upon' (2005:580). This was complicit with the ethos of Birthright, where rhetoric played a prominent role in influencing the participants to feel an attachment and identification to Judaism and Israel. The use of rhetoric was particularly apparent during the *mifgash*, where the accompanying IDF soldiers became agents for depicting Israel as 'home'. Accordingly, Kelner illustrates

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

how the '*mifgash* encounter was a highly sexualised one' (2010:137), and thus further demonstrates the style in which rhetoric was employed to impact upon the participants, as previously exemplified by Michal (4.1).

Conclusions

> *Taglit*-Birthright Israel's founders created this program to send thousands of young Jewish adults from all over the world to Israel as a gift in order to diminish the growing division between Israel and Jewish communities around the world [...] and to strengthen participants' personal Jewish identity and connection to the Jewish people. (Birthright Israel, 2010-2011)

Taglit-Birthright is a vehicle that enables young Jews from around the world to 'discover' their Jewish identities and Israel. Birthright immerses participants in Jewish and Zionist education, culture and history, which enables them to experience the different facets of Judaism and Israel. Furthermore, Birthright is an interesting case study to observe, as it admits applicants who fall beyond the boundaries of a *halachic* Jewish identity, or more simply, one born of a Jewish mother (Satlow 2006). This enables Judaism and Israel to become accessible to people from an array of backgrounds, especially patrilineal Jews, who can negotiate their Jewish identities in the face of constraint, by adopting, stimulating and developing their Jewishness in the same manner as any other participant. Accordingly, this situates Birthright in the wider anthropological discussion of identity and Diaspora-homeland identification in the twenty-first century, for which much research has been undertaken, but notably lacking in the British context. The original fieldwork conducted and presented in this paper therefore provides a British academic insight into *Taglit*-Birthright, and the effects of the tour on British Jewry.

Identity is a realisation of tangible characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationalism and religion, which essentially 'denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category' (Brubaker and Cooper 2010:7). However, as Boyarin and Boyarin argue, Jewish identity warrants further study, as 'Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with one

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

another' (1993:721). The study of Jewish identity is currently dominated by the notion of 'boundaries' (Valins 2003), which controls and orders ascriptions of Jewishness, and also halts Diaspora-host assimilations in twenty-first century Britain. However, 'boundaries among Jews are becoming increasingly fluid' (Liebman 2003:345), and this is due to the mobility, accessibility and assimilation of Jewry in modern Britain. Moreover, the flux and changing nature of Jewish identity corresponds with the notion that 'many types of relationships with[in] Judaism exist' (Cohen 2009:170). Therefore, this indicates that the diverse array of Jewish identities can best be measured across a spectrum and prism of Jewishness, as opposed to the traditional notion of 'boundaries' that dominates the current anthropological discourse. A spectrum of Jewish identity would then accommodate and encompass those who consider themselves Jewish, yet fall on the margins of the existing 'boundaries'. Interpreting Jewishness in this way is an appropriate term for the analysis of Birthright, as the programme admits people from an array of Jewish backgrounds and is inclusive of patrilineal Jews. One can infer that *Taglit*-Birthright sits at the forefront of the Jewish identity conflict, as similar to Jewish schooling in Diaspora communities (Scholefield 2004; Valins, Kosmin and Goldberg 2002; Miller 2001), the programme gravitates around young Jews and education, as a 'primary strategy for community survival' (Valins 2002:245) that seeks to secure Jewish continuity.

Scottish and African American homeland tours, driven by the exilic construction of Diasporas, compare well with the ethos of *Taglit*-Birthright, whereby young Jewish adults from fifty-two countries are brought to Israel on a free ten day tour. For example, Basu's account exemplifies how American tourists of Scottish descent undertake 'homecomings' to the Scottish Highlands that are catalysed by feeling 'a sense of "Scottishness", of belonging to a distinctively Scottish community [that] transcends national boundaries' (2007:21). This parallels Jewish identification with Israel. Interestingly, Basu identifies that Scottish-American descendants visit their perceived homelands, and in particular memorials and cemeteries of ancestry, whereby 'sites of collective memory [...] become "sources of identity"' (2007:158). Furthermore, this can also be demonstrated by Bruner's study of African American descendents of the slave trade, who return to Ghana 'in a quest for their roots' (1996:291), and to visualise their ancestral home. Bruner

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

illustrates the role that sites of shared suffering perform in eliciting Diaspora-homeland identification, as 'African Americans focus on the [slave] dungeons at the 500-year-old Elmina Castle because [...] the slave trade is of primary interest to them' (1996:291). Bruner also details that African Americans seek to preserve the tactile and tangible realities of the slave trade, as the Diaspora tourists 'do not want the castles to be made beautiful or to be whitewashed. They want the original stench to remain in the dungeons' (1996:291). These accounts evoke the centrality of collective memory in Diaspora-homeland identification, which is complicit with the importance of *Yad Vashem* in Jewish identity construction (4.3), and forming a connection to Jewry and Israel in Birthright participants. However, the fundamental difference between these examples and the present study is that *Taglit* formalises Israel as the Jewish birthright, for it is instituted by the Israeli government as an opportunity for young Jewish adults to 'discover' their Jewish heritage.

At the same time, the analysis of Documents (3) illustrated that Birthright can negatively affect how participants experience their Jewish identities, as the UJIA request documentation and proof of Jewish heritage which can be problematic for applicants to source. Interestingly, this can be demonstrated across a range of participants, notably by comparing responses from focus groups consisting of matrilineal and patrilineal Jews, who discussed similar obstacles encountered during the application process. My observations also illustrate that the sample of participants uniformly expressed that the documents they submitted did not materialise their Jewish identities. This infers that documentation could not ground Jewishness, as identity is inherently multifaceted, fluid and in a constant state of flux (Cerulo 1997; Hyman 2002; Waters 1990). The documents requested by the UJIA, and the consequential effects this had on informants, exemplify the fundamental differences between UK and USA cohorts, as the American operators of *Taglit*-Birthright do not require proof of Jewish heritage as part of their application process. In addition, I was interested to analyse this aspect of Birthright because the provision of documents confirming Jewish heritage reflects how biology and descent are mobilised in order to construct a Jewish identity, which is complicit with Skinner's notion that 'biologism is [...] providing people with new ways of narrating and experiencing identity' (2006:461).

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

The *tochnit* demonstrated how participants of BRUK1 were encouraged to formulate their Jewish identities based on what they could identify and feel compatible with. Elements of the tour that formalised the participants' Jewishness were particularly Jewish experiences, for example the Western Wall and *Yad Vashem*, which for many participants, notably Shoshanna, provided tactile proof of their connection to Jewry (4.3). However, this study demonstrates that the majority of British participants did not feel that projections of Israeli nationalist culture, such as the Mount Herzl visit and Mega Event, were compatible with their forming identities. This can particularly be demonstrated by participants' reactions to the Mega Event, which conflicted with their strong identifications with the UK, as previously expressed by Sharon and Hava (4.4, 4.5), and by Michal, "I'm very much for Britain, I'm very much a Londoner". Michal's response epitomises the conflict that many participants encountered when trying to negotiate Israeli nationalism into their forming identities. Therefore, my observations of the British cohort serve as a representation, and indication that modern British Jewry no longer perceive themselves to be living in *Galut*, the Diaspora, or as part of host populations, a view also advocated by Sheffer (2005). Moreover, this echoes Sand's (2009:323) notion that:

> Today, Jews everywhere have the option to emigrate to Israel, but the majority of their number have chosen not to live under Jewish sovereignty, and prefer to retain another nationality.

This is a concept that Kokot, Tololyan and Alfonso refer to as 'de-diasporizing' (2004:15). Accordingly, my findings illustrate that BRUK1 participants preferred to negotiate and hybridise their Jewish experiences of the trip with their British nationality, thus forming what Schindler (2007) refers to as 'British Jews' and 'Jewish Britons'.

Birthright has primarily changed how participants situate themselves within Jewry, which can be characterised by a social and ethnic attachment, as opposed to a religious identity, which is also congruent with Schneer and Aviv's view that 'Jewishness [...] is far more complex than religiosity' (2010:267). This can by exemplified by comparing responses

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

from an array of Jewish backgrounds, including Sharon, a patrilineal Jew, and Alon, a matrilineal Jew, who stated:

> Sharon: I feel much more Jewish, but not in the religious sense - more in a social way.
>
> Alon: It's made me want to do more in the [university's] Jewish Society, but I don't think I'm going to be any more religious.

These results also demonstrate how the participants under study began to express themselves as Jews, which compares well with Kelner's study of American Birthright groups, whereby participants engaged in 'self-excavation that enable[d] them to represent themselves as Jewish selves' (2010:182).

Taglit-Birthright's encompassment of patrilineal Jewry is of fundamental importance to the study of their place within Jewish communities, for they experience a liminal situation within Judaism, as I, myself, feel Jewish yet will never be quite Jewish enough. The positive effects of Birthright on patrilineal Jewish identity can be inferred through a focus group consisting of patrilineal Jews:

> Sara: I was worried that I would feel very much like an outsider because that's often how I felt in the [Jewish] community, but actually I found a lot of people with really similar experiences to me and it's been really nice to really feel like part of a community and not be on the outside of it.
>
> Hannah: Same thing really, I expected that I might feel a little bit of an outsider because I have only got one parent who is Jewish and that's my dad, so I was a little bit worried about that but it hasn't even been an issue.

An additional impact of Birthright upon the British participants was to encourage return visits to Israel, as demonstrated by Ezra:

> I'm pining to go and be in Israel with the group to do whatever the hell we like. It's made me want to visit Israel a lot with members of the group and friends.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Ezra's response signifies that group relations are an important feature of Jewish identities, and this situates collective identification as a factor of ethnically determined Jewishness, as well as a religious identity. These findings are therefore complicit with Goldberg's notion that 'Judaism as both a religion and a culture revolves around the proximity of other Jews' (2002:8).

Upon returning to the UK, I have been able to continue observing BRUK1 via the Facebook group (appendix 4), which demonstrated a concordance amongst the majority of participants to return to Israel. This illustrates how Birthright can formalise an identification with Israel that is built on the ideal of a Jewish primordial attachment, whereby the ten day tour can also elicit, in a minority of participants, a desire to reside in Israel for longer periods of time, and even undertake *Aliyah*:

> Asher: I will return for a holiday at some point in a few years but not to live.
>
> Miriam: I'm going back for definite, and intend to move there in later years.
>
> Shmuel: Definitely going back for holidays, thinking of going over there and working/kibbutzing it up for a bit.

The conclusions, taken from what should only be considered as indicative given the sample size, are not as extensive as the study of a 2005 American Birthright cohort by Saxe et al., which demonstrated that 'nearly half of those who participated on recent birthright Israel trips come away at least considering *aliya*' (2006:10). However, the responses do signify that a number of participants contemplate engaging with Israel in the future, as a direct result of participating on *Taglit*-Birthright.

The present study, the first to analyse the effects of *Taglit*-Birthright on British Jewry, raises appealing considerations for future research. Firstly, it would be interesting to further study the impacts of Birthright on a larger sample of patrilineal Jews, by observing how they situate themselves in Judaism after participating in the programme. Secondly, a future study of the 2010 BRUK1 group would provide compelling evidence of the long term success of

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Birthright, by ascertaining what proportion of the group continued to engage with their Jewish identities, and how. As there is now empirical data exemplifying the relationship between Israel experience programmes and British Jewry, it would be interesting to see a detailed comparison between the experiences of American and British Birthright groups.

In light of my observations, this paper advocates a revision of the UK Birthright application process that is perhaps more in line with the American system, and encourages acts of Israeli nationalism that feature in the *tochnit* to be more in tune with British Jewry. However this original study can confirm that the effects of Birthright on British Jewish identity also highlights that the *Taglit*-Birthright programme is achieving its fundamental aims, as the majority of the sample under study discovered something new about their own Jewishness, their place in the Jewish community, or their relation to Israel. Conclusively, Birthright is redefining the ways in which people interact with Judaism and Israel, and is evidently reshaping what it means to be Jewish in twenty-first century Britain.

Glossary of terms

Aliyah – Hebrew term literally translated as 'ascent' and illustrates the migration of Jews from the Diaspora to the land of Israel.
Diaspora – concept for a population living away from their homeland.
Galut – Hebrew for 'exile' and is a term given when Jews live in a state other than Israel.
Halacha –Jewish religious law.
Haredi – sect of Judaism, more commonly referred to as the ultra-Orthodox.
Jewishness – term advocated by the author to encapsulate the breadth of Jewish identities.
Jus sanguinis – Latin meaning for 'right of blood' and often used in citizenship discourse.
Kabbalah – literally translated as 'receiving' and describes a branch of Jewish philosophy and ethics.
Ketubah – Jewish marriage certificate or contract.
Madrichim – Hebrew term for Jewish youth leaders or guides.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Madrich – singular masculine of 'madrichim'

Madricha – singular feminine of 'madrichim'

Magen David – Hebrew name for 'Star of David'

Mifgash – Hebrew translation of 'encounter' and in the Birthright context describes the meeting of Diaspora and Israeli Jews.

Mizug galuyot – Hebrew phrase translated as 'integration of the exiles'. This is a term,commonly used to describe the blending of Jews from the Diaspora within the state of Israel.

Taglit – Hebrew word for 'discovery'

Tochnit – Hebrew meaning of 'schedule'

Yad Vashem – title of the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. The words yad vashem originate from the book of Isaiah and can be translated as 'a memorial and a name'. This reflects the purpose of Yad Vashem; to collect a record of every single Jewish person who perished in the Holocaust and preserve their memory for eternity.

Zionism – movement originally advocating for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Zionism is a term now generally used in support of Israel as a state.

Acronyms

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BRUK1 – Birthright United Kingdom 1, student tour group for participants aged 20-22

BRUK 2 – Birthright United Kingdom 2, young professional tour group for participants aged 23-26

IDF – Israeli Defence Forces

JAFI – Jewish Agency for Israel

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Israel.

MH – Mount Herzl military Cemetery

PMO – Prime Minister's Office, Government of Israel.

UJIA – United Jewish Israel Appeal

USHMM - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

YV – Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks go to Dr. Yulia Egorova for her countless hours of help, inspiration and direction with this paper. Absolute recognition goes to Royi Gutkin at UJIA for allowing me to conduct research on Taglit-Birthright, and to Joshie Colman and Tash Kahn for their help and support over the ten day tour, and since it ended. This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Esther Kasstan.

References

Atkinson, Paul, and Martyn Hammersley. 2007. *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Oxon: Routledge.

Ballinger, Claire. 2003. Navigating multiple research identities: Reflexivity in discourse analytic research. L. Finlay, and B. Gough (eds), *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, pp. 66-77.

Basu, Paul. 2007. *Highland homecomings: Genealogy and heritage tourism in the Scottish Diaspora*. Oxon: Routledge.

BBC News. 2002. Israelis pursue German citizenship. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2050077.stm (accessed February 12, 2011).

Ben-Ari, Eyal. 1998. *Mastering soldiers: Conflict, emotions, and the enemy in an Israeli military unit*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Berger, Paul. 2009. The cure for US secular Jews? Free trips to Israel. http://www.thejc.com/news/world-news/21426/the-cure-secular-us-jews-free-trips-israel (accessed February 19, 2011).

Boyarin, Daniel, and Jonathan Boyarin. 1993. Diaspora: Generation and the ground of Jewish identity. *Critical Inquiry*, 19: 693-725.

———. 2002. *Powers of Diaspora*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

Brackman, Levi, and Rivkah Lubitch. 2010. Study: Israel experience strengthens Jewish affiliation. http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3978429,00.html (accessed February 12, 2011).

Braziel, Jana Evans. 2008. *Diaspora: An introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

Brubaker, Rogers, and Frederick Cooper. 2000. Beyond 'Identity'. *Theory and Society*, 29: 1-47.

Bruner, Edward M. 1996. Tourism in Ghana: The representation of slavery and the return of the Black Diaspora. *American Anthropologist*, 98: 290-304.

Caplan, Jane, and John Torpey. 2001. *Documenting individual identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Carrithers, Michael B. 2005. Why anthropologists should study rhetoric. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11 (N.S.):577-583.

Cohen, Erik H. 2009. Particularistic education, endogamy, and educational tourism to homeland: An exploratory multi-dimensional analysis of Jewish Diaspora social indicators. *Contemporary Jewry*, 29: 169-189.

Davies, Charlotte Aull. 2008. *Reflexive ethnography: A guide to researching selves and others*. London: Routledge.

DPA. 2007. Sharp surge in Israeli applicants seeking German citizenship. http://www.haaretz.com/news/sharp-surge-in-israeli-applicants-seeking-german-citizenship-1.226073 (accessed February 12, 2011).

Finlay, Linda, and Brendan Gough. 2003. *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company.

Gans, Chaim. 1998. Nationalism and immigration. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 1: 159-180.

Geertz, Clifford. 1993. *The interpretation of cultures*. London: Fontana Press.

Goldberg, Jacqueline. 2002. Social identity in British and South African Jewry. Z. Gitelman, B. Kosmin, and A. Kovacs (eds), *New Jewish identities: Contemporary Europe and beyond*. Budapest: Central European University Press, pp. 5-22.

Goldschmidt, Henry. 2006. The voices of Jacob on the streets of Brooklyn: Black and Jewish Israelites in and around Crown Heights. *American Anthropologist*, 33: 378-396.

Grillis, John R. 1994. *Commemorations: The politics of national identity*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Higgins, Lesley, and Marie-Christine Leps. 1998. "Passport Please": Legal, literary and critical fictions of identity. *College Literature*, 25: 94-138.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. 1983. *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Hopkins, Peter E. 2010. *Young people, place and identity*. London: Routledge.

Hughes, Mark. 2010. Justice on London's streets, the Jewish way. The Independent. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/justice-on-londons-streets-the-jewish-way-1857591.html (accessed February 12, 2011).

Hyman, Paula. 2002. Gender and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identities. *Jewish Social Studies*, 8: 153-161.

Jenkins, Richard. 2002. Imagined but not imaginary: Ethnicity and nationalism in the modern world. J. MacClancy (ed), *Exotic no more: Anthropology on the front lines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 114-128.

Jewish Agency for Israel. 2003. The law of return. http://www.jafi.org.il/JewishAgency/English/Aliyah/Aliyah+Info/The+Law+of+Return/ (accessed March 23, 2011).

Kelner, Shaul. 2003. The impact of Israel experience programs on Israel's symbolic meaning. *Contemporary Jewry*, 24: 124-155.

———. 2010. *Tours that bind: Diaspora, pilgrimage, and Israeli birthright tourism*. New York: New York University Press.

Klein, Abigail. 2010. A guided tour of Birthright. http://www.jpost.com/ArtsAndCulture/Books/Article.aspx?id=173235 (accessed February 27, 2011).

Kokot, Waltraud, Khachig Tololyan, and Carolin Alfonso. 2004. *Diaspora, identity and religion: New directions in theory and research*. New York, Routledge.
Kopelowitz, Ezra. 2005. Jewish identities. N. De Lange, and M. Freud-Kandel (eds), *Modern Judaism*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 205-215.

Kosmin, Barry. 2002. Religious identity in the social and political arena: An examination of the attitudes of Orthodox and Progressive Jews in the UK. Z. Gitelman, B. Kosmin, and A. Kovacs (eds), *New Jewish identities: Contemporary Europe and beyond*. Budapest: Central European University Press, pp. 23-44.

Levy, Shlomit, Hanna Levinsohn, and Elihu Katz. 2004. Many faces of Jewishness. U. Rebhun, and C.I. Waxman (eds), *Jews in Israel: Contemporary social and cultural patterns*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, pp. 265-284.

Liebman, Charles S. 2002. Jewish identity in the United States and Israel. Z. Gitelman, B. Kosmin, and A. Kovacs (eds), *New Jewish identities: Contemporary Europe and beyond*. Budapest: Central European University Press, pp. 45-60.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

———. 2002. Jewish Identity in transition: Transformation or attenuation? Z. Gitelman, B. Kosmin, and A. Kovacs (eds), *New Jewish identities: Contemporary Europe and beyond*. Budapest: Central European University Press, pp. 341-351.

Matthews, Karen. 2007. Jews who fled Germany seek citizenship. http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-07-270955086_x.htm, (accessed February 12, 2011).

Miller, Helena. 2001. Meeting the Challenge: The Jewish schooling phenomenon in the UK. Oxford Review of Education, 27: 501-513.

Miller, Stephen. 2002. Changing patterns of Jewish identity among British Jews. Z. Gitelman, B. Kosmin, and A. Kovacs (eds), *New Jewish identities: contemporary Europe and beyond*. Budapest: Central European University Press, pp. 45-60

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 1950. The law of return. http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2001/8/The%20Law%20of%20Return-%201950 (accessed March 23, 2011).

Mittelberg, David. 2007. Jewish continuity and Israel visits. D. Ben-Moshe, and Z. Segev (eds), *Israel, the Diaspora and Jewish identity*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, pp. 30-47.

Nahum-Halevy, Ranit. 2009. Birthright Jewish project: Our budget has shrunk. Haaretz. http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/business/birthright-jewish-project-our-budget-has-shrunk-1.267421 (accessed February 12, 2011).

Neofotistos, Vasiliki. 2009. Bulgarian passports, Macedonian identity: The invention of EU citizenship in the Republic of Macedonia. *Anthropology Today*, 25: 19-22.

Prime Minister's Office. 2011. Address by PM Netanyahu to Taglit-Birthright. http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Communication/PMSpeaks/speechtaglit060111.htm (accessed February 12, 2011).

Polgreen, Lydia. 2005. Ghana's uneasy embrace of slavery's Diaspora. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/27/international/africa/27ghana.html (accessed February 27, 2011).

Rapaport, Lynn. 1997. *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, identity and Jewish-German relations*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Ritchie, Glynis Ann. 2008. Modern love: Rescued by an Israeli soldier. New York Times. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/29/fashion/29love.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1 (accessed February 27, 2011).

Sand, Shlomo. 2009. *The invention of the Jewish people*. London: Verso.

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

Satlow, Michael L. 2006. Defining Judaism: Accounting for "religions" in the study of religion. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 74: 837-860.

Saxe, Leonard, and Barry I. Chazan. 2008. *Ten days of Birthright Israel: A journey in young adult identity*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.

Saxe, Leonard, Theodore Sasson, and Shahar Hecht. 2006. *Taglit-Birthright Israel: Impact on Jewish identity, peoplehood, and connection to Israel*. The Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, pp. 1-19.

Scholefield, Lynne. 2004. Bagels, schnitzel and McDonalds's – 'fuzzy frontiers' of Jewish identity in an English Jewish secondary school. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 26: 237-248.

Shachar, Ayelet. 2009. *The birthright lottery: Citizenship and global inequality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Shain, Yossi. 2002. The role of Diasporas in conflict perpetuation or resolution. *SAIS Review*, 22: 115-144.

Sheffer, Gabriel. 2005. Is the Jewish Diaspora unique? Reflections on the Diaspora's current situation. *Israel Studies*, 10: 1-35.

Shindler, Colin. 2007. The reflection of Israel within British Jewry. D. Ben-Moshe, and Z. Segev (eds), *Israel, the Diaspora and Jewish identity*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, pp. 227-234.

Skinner, David. 2006. Racialized futures: Biologism and the changing politics of identity. *Social Studies of Science*, 36: 459-488.

Taglit-Birthright Israel. 2010-2011.
http://www.birthrightisrael.com/site/PageServer (accessed February 12, 2011).

Tarry, Nick. 2008. Religious courts already in use. BBC News.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7233040.stm (accessed February 12, 2011).

United Jewish Israel Appeal.
http://www.ujia.org/ (accessed November 3, 2010)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Undated. The Nuremberg Race Laws.
http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007695 (accessed March 24, 2011).

Valins, Oliver. 2002. Defending identities or segregating communities? Faith-based schooling and the UK Jewish community. *Geoforum*, 34: 235-247.

DAJ
Durham
Anthropology Journal

DAJ 18(1) 2012: 155–210

ISSN 1742-2930

———. 2003. Stubborn identities and the construction of the ultra-orthodox Jews living in contemporary Britain. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 28: 158-175.

Valins, Oliver, Barry Kosmin, and Jacqueline Goldberg. 2002. *The future of Jewish schooling in the United Kingdom*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

Waters, Mary C. 1990. *Ethnic options: Choosing identities in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weiss, Meira. 2002. The body of the nation: Terrorism and the embodiment of nationalism in contemporary Israel. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75: 37-62.

Wistrich, Robert, and David Ohana. 1995. *The shaping of Israeli identity: Myth, memory and trauma*. London: Cass.

Young, James. 1993. *The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 2000. *At memory's edge: After-images of the Holocaust in contemporary art and architecture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Zerubavel, Yael. 1995. *Recovered Roots*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.