In search of ‘the good life’ in the imagined homeland

Pragmatizing contemporary migration from French diaspora Jews to Israel

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Ella Babila

Amsterdam, April 24 2019
Abstract

This thesis will highlight the experience of Jewish migration from France to Israel. Anti-Semitism and Zionism are often depicted as its main push factors in multiple media outlets. In practice, however, this conceptualization of such migration is overly simplistic. In my research amongst French Jewish migrants in Israel, I discovered that far more facets should be taken into account. In this thesis, I will show how pragmatic current migration from French Jews to Israel is, and why Anti-Semitism and Zionism are not the main push and pull factors. I will describe how being a diaspora Jew in France increases the likelihood of migrating to Israel. Political agents are effective in France by unifying Jews and sustaining a transnational relationship with the imagined homeland. Meanwhile, practical matters, such as the Law of Return and migrant benefits, give diaspora Jews the freedom to migrate to Israel whenever they want. I will show how French Jews can be conceptualized as lifestyle migrants that seek to improve their quality of life and therefore migrate out of self-interest. They do not migrate because they feel like they need to save Israel or because they fear they see no future as Jews in France, as the media suggest. Motivations to migrate ranged from seeking a (Jewish) identity, seeking freedom, pursuing a relationship etc. I will explain how these migrants struggle to integrate in the segmented Jewish population of Israel, and how they find comfort in a French or international bubble. Their internalized structures attract them to people that share similar social, cultural and economic capital, which inhibits French migrants from integrating amongst native Israelis. The migrants assume they are going to ‘Eretz Israel’, the Promised Land of the Jews. Soon they discover that this Promised Land is not the imagined home they grew up with.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

‘Aliyah from France spiked in 2014 and 2015 following rising incidents of violent anti-Semitic attacks and terror....’

Jeremy Sharon, The Jerusalem Post

‘The primary reasons for this emergent immigration wave are threefold: economic, increased anti-Semiticism and a culture of passionate Zionism that runs deep in French Jewry.’

The Jewish Agency

‘As anti-Semitic episodes accumulated, many Jews began to move out of neighborhoods in the greater Paris region....’

Adam Nossiter, The New York Times

‘Another 5,000 French Jews emigrated to Israel last year, (...) continuing a trend that has seen tens of thousands quit the country after a series of attacks targeting the community.’

The Local France

‘A top EU official has warned that Europe faces a “huge challenge” in persuading Jews not to emigrate in response to anti-Semitism.’

BBC news

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1 Bennett to draw up plan to increase aliyah from France.  
4 Why 5,000 Jews emigrated from France to Israel last year. https://www.thelocal.fr/20170109/5000-more-jews-leave-france-for-israel (2/24/19)  
Many news outlets attempt to capture the current trend of *aliyah* from France in response to ongoing anti-Semitism, even suggesting that anti-Semitism is the main reason for French Jews to emigrate. Thinking about a possible future in Israel is a popular topic of conversation but not an easy decision to make. Moving for safety reasons is a logical concern raised during this discussion. However, this causality is too simplistic in the case of French Jews. Despite the suggestion that Jews in France have cause to fear for their safety, many other elements are being disregarded that encourage French Jews to migrate to Israel.

According to Sheffer, Jewish migration to Israel is unique and a whole system on its own due to the transnational relationship with Israel (2005: 4). In the case of French diaspora Jews, the journey to Israel starts in France. In this thesis I will show how French Jews become familiar with the idea of migrating to Israel through transnational relationships with Israel, both personally and via Israeli Jewish organizations in France. I will also show how their upbringing and status as French diaspora Jews helps make them receptive to a possible future in Israel. Some aspects of French Jewish migration to Israel, however, are very similar to an already existing form of migration known as lifestyle migration. Jewish migration is therefore not as unique as Sheffer (2005) suggests. Whereas anti-Semitism is assumed to be the biggest push factor of French Jewish migration to Israel, I argue that this factor is secondary within contemporary French Jewish migration to Israel. I will show why anti-Semitism is secondary by emphasizing that pragmatic motivations are the primary reasons Jews from France decide to migrate to Israel. Conceptualizing current *aliyah* as pragmatic lifestyle migration explains how current migration to Israel can be understood, and how it influences the integration process in Israel.

Other news outlets show decreasing rates of French Jews that make *aliyah* and reflect less on anti-Semitism as the main push factor to migrate to Israel. *Haaretz* reported that French migration decreased by 25% in the first half of 2017. This was attributed to the struggle of finding employment within their expertise and learning Hebrew. *The Jerusalem Post* even stated that by 2018 the rates of Jews from France that were making *aliyah* had decreased for a third year in a row. *The Jerusalem Post* reports that French Jews feel less

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6 Jewish migration to Israel
threatened due to recent terror attacks that did not focus on Jews, such as the Bataclan shooting in 2005 and the Nice truck attack in 2016. The Jerusalem Post also mentions that by now Jews have moved to safer areas, and that protection by the French armed forces has increased around Jewish institutions since 2015. All in all, media conceptualize migration to Israel differently, but they all relate to anti-Semitism as a significant force and dismiss personal motivations that are not primarily related to anti-Semitism. In this thesis, I will contribute to ongoing aliyah discussions by elaborating on pragmatic motivations to migrate.

Whereas diaspora Jews move to a country where their heritage unifies them as a Jewish group, they do not always integrate successfully in Israeli society. Many of my respondents, for example, had difficulty socializing with the local Israeli community. Rather than becoming ‘Israelis,’ the French integrate in their own international or French bubble, because this new home does not necessarily align with how the migrants had conceptualized a home before migrating to Israel. In this bubble, migrants reproduce their internalized structures and social or economic capital that coincides with people alike. I understood this as their way of coping with the hardships they experienced in their new home country. The main question in this thesis is therefore:

‘How can we understand contemporary migration of French diaspora Jews to Israel?’

The concept of home figures prominently in the experiences of migration to Israel amongst Jewish migrants. According to Brubaker, one of the fundamentals of a diaspora is a shared imagined home (2005: 2). During my fieldwork, I frequently heard the notion of Eretz Israel, which means the Land of Israel. This biblical notion was frequently repeated by my respondents. However, they were referring not to what Eretz Israel means but to what it does. The use of the term Eretz Israel contributes to the notion of an imagined homeland, which can be incorporated by Jews all around the world from different generations. This

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imaginative agent is but one of many factors that play a role in the journey of migrating to Israel as a diaspora Jew and the experience of building a new life in Israel.

One respondent who helped me understand that this homeland of Israel is a conceptualized idea was Sandra. She expected to find a home in Israel but realized this home was only imagined and did not meet her expectations or the narratives with which she was raised. Sandra sought to escape her life in France and had the opportunity to move to Israel.

It’s just that I’m learning history and I’m learning courses that are part of some Middle-Eastern class and you are learning... The more I’m learning about this field, the less I’m home in it, because it’s kind of.... It’s difficult, it’s like whatever... It’s like what you say. Like feeling home that I thought would have, but I don’t have anymore. I’m still a minority. I always still feel better with people that are not from here, which is a bit of a sad point and it’s like so many points, like here, I’m trying to do it myself and it just stressful to find people that understand you. On so many levels...

Sentiments of discomfort and misunderstanding are common emotions for immigrants. But what makes Jewish immigrants in Israel different from others? Jewish migrants are familiar with the imagined home that is the foundation of the Jewish diaspora but struggle to feel like they belong to this home. The notion of ‘Eretz Israel’ implies that your home as a Jew lies in Israel. In reality, however, this life in Israel is not always easy. People are unified based on a shared heritage, but everyone has a different background in a different country.

In this thesis I will discuss contemporary migration by French Jews to Israel and will show why current migration to Israel needs to be considered from a pragmatic angle. In the case of French diaspora Jews, current migration can be conceptualized as lifestyle migration, which is a deliberate decision that gives an individual the chance to re-establish a class position through an internalized habitus (Oliver 2010: 50). In the French Jewish diaspora
context, the concept of lifestyle migration comprises migrating with the intent of seeking ‘the good life’ (ibid). Therefore, socializing with a certain group is a means of seeking confirmation in a new setting of whatever the migrant’s perception is of a ‘good life’.

Migrating to Israel as a Jew\(^9\) is known as making *aliyah*, which means ‘to ascend’. The biblical connotation in this case is to ascend towards Jerusalem. The term implies a Zionist decision, because it supports the idea of a Jewish State. However, even though *aliyah* is well embedded in everyday vocabulary, not all immigrants deliberately move to Israel because they perceive themselves as Zionists. I therefore emphasize pragmatic push and pull factors that influence the decision to make *aliyah* that are not primarily related to Zionist ideals.

Throughout this thesis, I will show why these diaspora Jews choose to make *aliyah* instead of simply migrating to other places in the world. I will also explain how the different push and pull factors my respondents experienced developed. To understand contemporary migration to Israel by French Jews, awareness of the circumstances in which the immigrants grew up is important, whether they attended Jewish schools or, were affiliated with Jewish organizations, the significance of Judaism at home etc. Even though these facets were very different for all my respondents, they were all (made) aware of their Jewish heritage in France. They were also aware of anti-Semitism, and outsiders often reminded them that they were different. Ethnicity becomes prominent in social situations, where you are forced to think about the boundaries of your ethnicity (Eriksen 2002: 13). My respondents therefore experienced their Jewish identity in Israel very differently from their Jewish identity in France.

During my fieldwork, one of my friends told me: ‘being a Jew in Israel is different from being a Jew outside Israel.’ Being a diaspora Jew myself, I can confirm his statement as well, after experiencing life in Israel during my three-month stay for fieldwork. Religious observance may vary for everyone, but I appreciated religion as a binding communal factor, being able to buy kosher products in every grocery store and being off on Jewish holidays. Everything that requires a lot of effort for me in the Netherlands in regards to Jewish religion was very easy in Israel. My Jewish identity was changing due to my new

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\(^9\) In the case of *aliyah*, having at least one Jewish grandparent makes you eligible to apply for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return.
circumstances. My experiences illustrate how an oleh (Jewish immigrant in Israel\textsuperscript{10}) can create a different Jewish life in Israel as a way to build a new home.

Some people, for example, are disappointed in their aliyah in financial terms. In this case, people either return, or one family member returns to support the whole family in Israel. Still, many of my respondents were determined to make their aliyah successful, despite the disappointments and the hard life. They refused to return to their old life and felt they had something to prove to everyone they left behind.

In this thesis I will explain how being part of the Jewish diaspora in France can make people more receptive to the possibility of making aliyah. Such people are free to approach aliyah as a deliberate choice determined by pragmatic push and pull factors and without any time constraints. Many factors, such as first experiences, Jewish schools, parents etc. can familiarize French diaspora Jews with the idea of building a new life in Israel. Israel provides them with the opportunity to start over, religiously, emotionally or spiritually. I will use my respondents’ position as a minority and as diaspora Jews to understand their identity and their migration to Israel. Once their identity is understood, their experiences in Israel are easier to comprehend, because their expectations will surface. The decision to make aliyah is a complex combination of multiple factors that are not an isolated development. By approaching aliyah through this pragmatic lifestyle framework, I will explain why and how they live in an international bubble in Israel.

Below I provide a paragraph of the history of Jews in France. I will proceed with an overview of the rise of Zionism and establishment of Israel as background information for my thesis.

**Jewish history in France**

I will provide a brief overview of the Jewish history in France to explain the background of my French respondents and to offer a basic understanding of the position of Jews in France throughout the years. Most of my respondents were the first generation in France. Their

\textsuperscript{10} Plural: Olim
parents originated from countries in North Africa. However, I will start in the late-eighteenth century to explain the history of French Jewish life.

After the French revolution started, France was the first country in Europe to grant Jews equal political rights in 1791. At the time, about 40,000 Jews lived in France (Cohen 2011: 5). Jews in France assimilated with French society and secularized their Jewish identity. They focused on political emancipation and incorporated French cultural values and French patriotism in Jewish education and Jewish institutions (ibid). During the Reign of Terror, however, Jews in France suffered from anti-Semitism and repression of Jewish institutions. Only under Napoleon did Jews once again have the same rights as other French citizens (ibid: 5-6).

The Jewish community was focused on assimilation, and Jews in France perceived themselves as French citizens. However, they were not able to escape the persistent anti-Semitism. In 1894 the Dreyfus Affair made public the hostility towards Jews and instigated many anti-Semitic riots (ibid: 6-7). Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, was falsely being accused of treason (ibid: 6; Herzl 2008: 33). He was denied access to the evidence against him, and the military was authorized not to participate in court (Pereira Mendes 1898: 202). In addition to causing a wave of anti-Semitism, the Dreyfus Affair drew attention to the ‘Jewish Question,’ which highlighted the problem of anti-Semitism and how this influenced Jewish identity and culture in France (Malinovich 1999: 5). In the next section about the history of Zionism, I will elaborate on the ‘Jewish Question.’

Despite the anti-Semitism in France, Jews were better off there than in other countries in Europe (Cohen 2011: 7). With the proclamation of the separation between church and state in 1905, Jews started to assimilate again, and immigration from other European Jews to France intensified (ibid). In 1940, the Vichy regime was established, as France had capitulated to Nazi Germany. Over a quarter of French Jews was killed during the Second World War, and Jewish educational and institutional facilities were destroyed (ibid: 7).

\[11\] A period during the French Revolution, in which the new government implemented execution as a means of governing.
In the 1950s and 60s North African countries under French control became independent and ruled by Muslim-Arab parties. During the period French control, schools opened by the French introduced Jews in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia to French language and culture. Several of these Jews became French citizens and emigrated to France, once France withdrew from the Maghreb in North Africa. When the Maghreb Jews arrived in France, the Jewish institutions in France were redeveloped (Cohen 2011: 8).

**History of Zionism and the establishment of Israel**

In order to understand migration to Israeli, I will briefly delineate Israel’s history. This section will cover the development of Zionism in relation to the establishment of Israel.

Although Jews have been present in France for many centuries, I will proceed with the Dreyfus Affair at the end of the 19th century. Despite the attempt by French Jews to achieve political emancipation and incorporate French cultural values and French patriotism in Jewish education and Jewish institutions, anti-Semitism persisted. One of the first public incidents that confirmed this presence to countries outside France as well was the Dreyfus Affair in 1894 (Cohen 2011: 6). Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, was accused of treason. He was ultimately found not guilty, but this affair exposed a lot of pre-existing anti-Semitism and instigated anti-Jewish protests (ibid: 6-7).

Theodor Herzl, a reporter for *Neue Freie Presse*, covered the Affair in Paris and capture the xenophobia and chauvinism that characterized France (Avineri 1998: 5, 9). Herzl had already attempted to convene important Jews to rally his idea for a Jewish solution for “the Jewish Question”: ‘Are we to “get out” now and where to?’ (ibid: 5; Herzl 2008: 85). Jews had been murdered and oppressed for years and did not have the same rights as non-Jews (Herzl 2008: 85). Herzl illustrated his thoughts and concerns in his pamphlet *The Jewish

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12 The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU), established in 1860 by French Jews, aimed to encourage Jewish emancipation within French colonial territories and protectorates from Morocco to Persia. At one point, 47 AIU schools with 15,000 students and 180 teachers operated in Morocco. The AIU schools accepted Jews and non-Jews, and the language of instruction was French (Winter 2012: 2, 5).

13 A liberal Viennese newspaper
State, which eventually formed the basis of Herzl’s Zionist movement (Avineri 1998: 6). The first Zionist congress took place in 1896 in Basle, where Herzl’s ideas became more known and realistic (ibid). At this congress the following explanation of Zionism was presented: “Zionism seeks to secure for the Jewish people a publicly recognized, legally secured home (or homeland) in Palestine” (Herzl 2008: 52). Many more congresses proceeded, and the Zionist Organization became integrated in Jewish society. The Zionist Organization became the panel for “the Jewish Question” (ibid: 56).

In 1922 the Balfour Declaration was signed, affirming the right of Jews to a National Home and verifying the historical relationship between Jews and Palestine (the Holy Land) (Gold 2017: 9). Fifty-one country members of the Council of the League of Nations signed this declaration (ibid). At the same time, Great Britain promised to assist in creating a Jewish National Home in Palestine, which was under Great Britain’s mandate (ibid: 8). This declaration gave prominent Zionist leaders (e.g. Chaim Weizmann, Ze’ev Jabotinsky and David Ben-Gurion) hope of establishing a Jewish state in the homeland of Palestine. They all intended to found a Jewish state with equal rights for all inhabitants, without distinguishing according to religion and/or ethnicity (Conforti 2011: 573, 576). Even before the declaration was signed, however, many Arab nationalist riots ensued, and the relationship between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, deteriorated (ibid: 570). Not only did Jews already live there in what had previously been part of the Ottoman empire, but Jews immigrated in waves under the British Mandate established in 1917 as well (American Jewish Community 1948: 752).

Though initially committed to a Jewish State in Palestine, Great Britain withdrew from this in 1937. The White Paper, issued by the British government, officially restricted Jewish migration to 75,000 over the coming five years (Ofer 1984: 159). As a result, migration to Palestine became illegal. Illegal migration to Palestine intensified when the Nazis changed their strategy in Europe from encouraging Jews to relocate to concentration camps to persecuting and forcing Jews into concentration camps (ibid). Jewish migrants arrived on ships, and Great Britain started to patrol Palestine’s coastline. Once the ships arrived, Jewish migrants and the ship’s crew were imprisoned, sent back to their countries

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14 Herzl was not the founder of Zionism, nor was he the only Zionist, but his effort and publicized works were of significant influence in the institutional structures of the establishment of Israel and eventually in Israeli politics (Avineri 1998: 7). For this reason I only provided a brief summary of Zionism.
of origin and later deported to Mauritius (ibid: 161, 177). The journey was extremely dangerous, and many did not survive (ibid). Despite this dangerous trip and an insecure fate, illegal immigration by Jews to the Palestine Mandate continued (ibid).

**Aliyah waves and government policies**

Jewish migration to Palestine comprised 6 waves between 1882 and 1948. In the first few waves, Jews came for ideological reasons, which included many early Israeli socialist leaders (Friedman 1998: 52-53). The fourth wave consisted of Sephardi Jews from Yemen, Iraq and Iran, as well as European Jews. The last two waves were between 1932 and 1948 and consisted of European Jews escaping from the Nazis and anti-Semitism (ibid: 53). Migration to Israel had thus been taking place well before the establishment of Israel in 1948 and had multiple motivations.

At the end of the British mandate in 1947, the UN approved the partition resolution that divided the country in an Arab and a Jewish state (Friedman 1998: 51). In 1948 Israel proclaimed independence, and by 1949, Israel was a member of the United Nations (ibid: 51-52). Between 1882 and 1948, the Jewish population grew from 24,000 to 650,000 (ibid: 52). By 2007 Israel had a Jewish population of 5,5 million, which comprised 80% of Israel’s entire population and 41% of Jews worldwide (Cohen 2009: 116). According to Lustick, the three largest migration waves were caused by three historical events: 1930s Nazism, the period following the establishment of Israel and migration from the former Soviet Union after the Cold War (2011: 34).

These numbers are not random as Israel, has always aimed to attract as many Jews to Israel as possible (ibid). In 1950 this policy resulted in the Law of Return (LOR), which was revised in 1970 (Perez 2011: 60-61). This law enables Jews to receive Israeli citizenship. The Law of Return is Zionist, because it acknowledges the right of self-determination to identify as a group of people but also the entitlement to a Jewish state (Abulof 2014: 523).

After diaspora Jews make *aliyah*, they receive the status of an *olim*, where an oleh denotes ‘a Jewish immigrant settling in Israel’ (Silverstone 2007: 541). ‘*Oleh*’ is derived from *aliyah*, which means to ascend, to go up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is mentioned in the Old
Testament as a destination for the Jews, which gives *oleh* a biblical connotation. In addition, a physical element of *oleh* is being fulfilled, because Jerusalem is above sea level. Therefore, it also means ascending to Jerusalem. For that reason, an *oleh* is moving upwards. An *oleh chadash* (new immigrant) is entitled to many benefits, such as housing assistance, reduced taxes, Hebrew courses (*ulpam*), medical insurance etc. These benefits are granted to an *oleh chadash* for a certain period after arriving in the Israel.\(^{15}\) An *ulpam* offers a practical opportunity to meet new people that share the experience of being new immigrants and receiving these benefits.

The Law of Return can apply to anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent, which makes people eligible for Israeli citizenship without being Jewish according to Jewish law (the *Halacha*) According to the *Halacha*, Judaism is matrilineal and is passed on only via a Jewish mother.\(^{16}\) However, the LOR does not define how to be Jewish or how to practice Judaism (Elon 2007: 543). The vagueness of the LOR is both a blessing and a curse for the Zionist goal of the Israeli government of encouraging as many Jews as possible to make *aliyah* and influences current migration motivations. I will elaborate on this point in the third chapter.

Whether or not you are Jewish according to the *Halacha*, have never celebrated a Jewish holiday or have never visited Israel for example, religious parties in the *Knesset*\(^{17}\) make Israeli citizens adhere to certain Jewish rules. State regulations restrict public transport on *Shabbat*,\(^{18}\) religious intermarriage is prohibited etc. Combining Jewish identity and nationality, stresses the Jewish identity component more than people may initiate (Gans 1998: 164). Jewish identity can be of secondary importance, but upon moving to a Jewish state, it becomes far more prominent (ibid). I will elaborate on this topic throughout my thesis.

\(^{15}\) http://www.jewishagency.org/aliyah-benefits/program/8231 (05/24/18)  
\(^{17}\) Israeli parliament  
\(^{18}\) The Jewish day of rest on the seventh day of the week.
Outline

In the second chapter, I will argue that the environment in which my respondents were raised is evident in their receptiveness to the idea of making aliyah. I will explain the fundamentals of a diaspora (Ben-Rafael 2013; Baumann 2000; Brubaker 2005; Sheffer 2005), and how this applied to the lives of my respondents. I will elaborate on how my respondents first became familiar with Israel and the effect of this first impression. I will conclude by examining unifying agents from within the diaspora and from the State of Israel (Burla 2015). These agents strengthen a transnational bond between diaspora and Israel and influence decisions to make aliyah. I will briefly highlight push and pull factors diaspora Jews may experience in France, and how those are established.

In the third chapter I will examine push and pull factors important in individual motivations to make aliyah. I will explain what lifestyle migration is, and how this relates to aliyah (Oliver 2010). The role of external political factors will be highlighted and connected to my respondents’ narratives. By highlighting the motivations of making aliyah from my fieldwork, I will show in this chapter how aliyah is very pragmatic decision.

In the fourth chapter I will explore the current situation of French diaspora Jews in Israel. I will explain how they integrate, and why this is influenced by their habitus (Oliver 2010). French diaspora Jews integrate mainly in their own international bubble, rather than in Israeli society (Zaban 2014). This is a result of pragmatic lifestyle migration, in which they reproduce their lifestyle in Israel. This chapter conveys clearly how the current Israeli society is segmented and does not fully unify all Jews.

Settings

I wanted to conduct my research in a city with a dense immigrant population. One of my relatives offered me accommodation in Netanya, which is a coastal city about 40 kilometers north of Tel Aviv. Netanya has an immigrant population of 35%, and the three largest groups originate from France, Ethiopia and the Former Soviet Union. The 14-kilometer beachline is a popular destination for both locals and tourists, for a holiday or permanent residence. I decided to focus specifically on French immigrants, because I speak some French and hoped
it would be helpful. Netanya is extremely popular amongst French immigrants and French tourists, and the city is known as Little Paris.

Even though I lived in Netanya and was always downtown, I soon discovered that getting in touch with my research population was harder than I expected. Most of those on the street during the day were retired and did not speak English. In addition, many schoolchildren were not conversant in English. I spent a lot of time at the Kikar, the main square at the beach. Spending time here made me familiar with some of the locals that work at the Kikar. I became very friendly with a market vendor who knew everyone. I passed his stall almost every day, and he helped me get in touch with some French residents in Netanya. Maintaining a good relationship with the market vendor was difficult when he expressed his romantic feelings towards me. This put me in an awkward position as I did not share the same feelings and I still depended on his social contacts. Fortunately this turn happened towards the end of my fieldwork and I had already made connections with new informants outside Netanya. I also made friends with the barista at Cofix\(^\text{19}\) near the Kikar. Always very friendly and cheerful, the barista was a familiar face for everyone. He was French and spoke to most customers in French. I got the impression that speaking the same language was one reason people were always excited to see him.

I was able to conduct a few interviews with people from Netanya but eventually branched out to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Modi’in. I struggled to find proper respondents in Netanya and could get in touch with other French people outside Netanya through the snowball method. Most of my respondents were around my age, and the interviews took place either outside or in a café, which made them quite informal. I conducted one interview inside someone’s home, but it was not my first meeting with him, so that setting was also informal. One interview took place at the army base in Tel Aviv, where I met a soldier during her break. I also had an interview at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and at the Masa office in Jerusalem. I always asked my respondents to choose a location themselves to make the situation convenient and comfortable for them.

\(^{19}\) A coffee chain in Israel.
I also tried to explore the digital field. I was on two dating applications and started a blog on social media. This blog featured immigrants with their stories and gave me a platform to approach informants. Broadcasting their stories enabled me to ask for a follow-up interview, and they even introduced me to new informants. The informants I found through the dating applications were not very useful. One person did not know English, but I did learn some new things about the French community through this contact.

I was a member of multiple closed groups on Facebook, such as Secret Netanya, Les Francais de Netanya and Olim Hadachim Netanya. Most of these groups were outlets to ask for recommendations regarding cleaning staff, for example, and sometimes people shared news articles. I approached people that commented on these articles via private message a few times, but these people were not very open to conversation. I messaged some founders of these pages, but they were open for conversation only via email. This information was not very useful, because the answers were very short and added little to the data I had collected. I sought respondents by writing a message in these groups. I had very few responses in general, and only one person showed interest in meeting for an interview. However, when I made it clear to him that this was not a date, he lost interest in participating in my research.

I joined a gym and became very close with the people working at the bar there. I had casual conversations with some people they introduced me to. One staff members put me in touch with someone I was able to interview, and I met him one day outside the gym. The staff also told me a lot about how Israelis perceived the French immigrants, which was very useful to get an overall impression of how migrants are perceived in Israel.

At Sarona market in Tel Aviv I befriended one of the shift managers at a pasta bar. He was French and promised to introduce me to all the French staff members at the market. I started hanging out there a lot and had drinks after work with some of the staff members. By visiting the restaurant daily, the shift manager realized the seriousness of my research and started to approach potential respondents for me in advance. All the interviews I held with the French staff members of Sarona, took place in their stores.

https://www.instagram.com/olimofnetanya/
Methods

My thesis is based on data provided by first generation migrants, because I wanted to capture current experiences with migration from France to Israel. I also had casual conversations on the street with about 20 people during my research. Afterwards, I recorded as much as I could remember from the conversations on a recording device. These data gave me a sense of what life is like for a French immigrant in Israel, which helped me during my more structured interviews. The conversations were not structured, but mostly covered their story of where they were from, how they experienced living in Israel, and why they made *aliyah*.

In addition to casual small talk conversations, I conducted 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Most of my respondents were between 17 and 40 years old and moved to Israel between a year and a half ago and 15 years ago. The interviews were one-on-one, and I was able to record most of them, except for one respondent, who refused to be recorded. I took notes during that interview. The interviews were semi-structured, because I designed an interview guide beforehand but did not always stick to these questions. I tried to get a sense of what was most important for my respondents and had them elaborate on that topic. One interview was completely in French, so I prepared all the questions in French beforehand. All other interviews were in English, but sometimes my respondents used French or Hebrew words to express themselves. In most cases I was still able to understand them. I transcribed the interviews that were recorded, and I wrote a paragraph for every casual conversation I had. I arranged one follow-up interview, because I felt like there was a lot more to her story.

I approached some people on the street but met most respondents through the snowball method. I would ask my respondents if they knew anyone else I could interview, and they would refer me to an acquaintance. I did not have one specific key informant, but the staff at the gym, the shift manager at Sarona and the market vendor were very helpful introducing me to new informants and providing me with general information.
Research limitations

I struggled to communicate with my respondents. Neither my French nor my Hebrew was sufficient to conduct a complete interview in their language. Not only was it difficult to communicate with my informants, but the language barrier also complicated being amongst my informants’ group of French friends. The snowball method enabled me to get in touch with English speaking French olim, but not everyone lived in Netanya, which explains why I broadened my research field.

I struggled with reliability as some people showed interest in my research at first, but then suddenly broke off contact. I experienced this with people I met in real life and on the digital field. Some informants also became disinterested once I it clear that we were not going on a date. There was not very much I was able to do about this situation than just to continue my search for other respondents.

Research reflection

My own position as a diaspora Jew was useful during my fieldwork, because I was able to empathize with my respondents and understand their struggles living as a diaspora Jew. My own background helped me devise questions that were relevant in the situations of my respondents in France and Israel alike. Making aliya is something I had thought about myself at the time, and opening up about this established an equal and trusting relationship with my respondents. This made me feel like I was not completely an outsider amongst my respondents, but more like one them when they were contemplating making aliya. Especially sharing concerns about my own life made the respondents feel comfortable and the conversations very informal.

I often wondered whether identifying as a diaspora Jew would affect my objectivity as a researcher. While this is never inevitable, it certainly helped establish a rapport with my respondents. We had the diaspora aspect in common, but we were not similar in all aspects: because they were French, and I am Dutch. Compared to most of my respondents, I was from a different type of Jewish community. Despite being a diaspora Jew myself, my role as a researcher enabled me to stay objective most of the time and raise questions such as
whether anti-Semitism was real. Being critical of anti-Semitism was not always appreciated, but it was useful for me to analyze imaginative agents. I was always concerned how to approach the relationship and aimed to combine my strengths of being a diaspora Jew and a researcher.

As I was similar to my respondents, I sometimes had difficulty remembering my position as a researcher. But every morning when I woke up to return to my research field of the day, I was reminded that a regular diaspora Jew did not go out every day to learn more about making aliyah. Although I could empathize very well with my respondents, I was the one asking the questions, I was in control of the interview, and I was the one that made my respondents question their aliyah.

What was significant in the relationships with the people at the gym, the market vendor, the barista and the shift manager at Sarona, was my participant observation. I visited the gym, Cofix and the market vendor almost daily. I established very different relationships with everyone and saw most after work hours as well. The staff at the gym bar were useful, because they knew most of the people at the gym and were able to introduce me to people.

I struggled to find French respondents that could speak English. Fortunately, I succeeded and in most cases understood their mix of French, Hebrew and English. At a certain point, I noticed that I started to incorporate frequently used Hebrew phrases in my interviews that I picked up during my fieldwork, and we were both speaking multiple languages. I also noticed I started to speak a lot slower and simple naturally, as this reflected my respondents’ level of English.

Sometimes I would sit on a chair at the Kikar and just observe and listen. This gave me a sense of how French Netanya is. I also walked around Netanya a lot, saw the French stores and products and struck up a few conversations. Even the pigeons in Netanya were fed croissants. At Sarona market and at Cofix, I was able to be a fly on the wall by being a real customer, and I had the opportunity observe how the staff interacted with the customers. These observations were useful, as some of these staff members also became my informants.
Personal reflection

This thesis is only a slight reflection of everything I learned and all the data I collected during my fieldwork. Even though I thought I was privileged by being a diaspora Jew myself and felt like I was one step ahead than a regular anthropologist in conducting this research, I would be lying if I pretended I was already aware of my findings. I have learned a lot about Israel and what it is like to experience living in Israel, but I also learned a lot about making life-changing decisions in general. Olim are people that deliberately leave their life behind and benefit from the opportunity to start their life over abroad. I admired my respondents’ courage and strength to choose to go on this type of journey.

During my fieldwork I became aware of the power of imaginative agents and I really started to feel like Israel was my country that I needed to protect and support. I was surrounded by Jews that repeated these notions, and since my research focused on related subjects, these notions were quickly the topic of conversation.

The hardest part for me was writing my thesis. After returning from being abroad for three months, I struggled to adjust back to my old life, while my perspective on certain things had changed. Writing a thesis is a very lonely and long process and if your mood is severely affected by your environment, it is difficult to bring up the same passion for your research as you did before. I am thankful that I never gave up trying and my supervisor never gave up on supporting me. By constantly trying to improve the process of writing I was able to finish a very important project for myself. I will always benefit from all the skills I learned throughout this difficult process.
Chapter 2. Pre-aliyah: Life as a French diaspora Jew

In this chapter I will reflect on how the pre-aliyah environment influences whether French diaspora Jews are likely to migrate to Israel. Topics like diaspora-homeland relations, Jewish identity and minority status will be highlighted to enhance understanding of the position of migrants prior to their migration to Israel.

Going into the field, I always thought it was important to approach aliyah as a complete journey and not limit my research to migration to Israel. Many factors that influence the decision to make aliyah occur before actual migration. With this in mind, I made a serious effort to examine the earlier lives of my respondents in France and did not focus exclusively on their lives in Israel. In this chapter I will introduce some of my respondents and their stories. I will describe how their past colored their perspective on possible migration to Israel, while they still lived in France. I have focused on the type of environment where they were raised, and on how this environment has shaped their Jewish identity. I will argue that being part of a diaspora and maintaining a diaspora-homeland relationship is evident in their decision to migrate to Israel. In this context I use ‘homeland’ to refer to Israel, because one of the principles underlying the diaspora concept is the perception of a shared homeland (Brubaker 2005: 5). However, not all migrants refer to Israel as their homeland; some conceptualize Israel merely as a country offering new opportunities and new possibilities.

In this chapter, being a member of a diaspora will be an important focal point in conceptualizing the migrant’s preliminary position. Being part of a diaspora involves processes of inclusion and exclusion, which compel individuals to reflect on issues such as which place to call home, and whether this is their current country of residence or a conceptualized homeland. I start by focusing on how heritage and diaspora awareness can affect personal identity by explaining what these concepts symbolize. Focusing on the diaspora-homeland relationship, I discuss political goals of the government through incorporation of diaspora sentiments. Political imaginative agents are consolidated to unify the diaspora and to evoke sentiments of loyalty from the Jewish diaspora towards the State of Israel. Government influences and exposure to pre-immigration diasporic endeavors,
such as Jewish schools, vacations to Israel and connections with people who previously made *aliyah*, may infuse the migrant’s basic perspective on making *aliyah*.

**The fundamentals of a diaspora**

In this section I will explain the basic concept of a diaspora proposed by multiple authors to understand its fundamental principle. I argue that being part of a diaspora ultimately influences how diaspora Jews experience their Jewish heritage and their relationship with Israel. Conceptualizing diaspora in relation to the Jews in France is important, because, as I argue, being part of a diaspora is significant in making *aliyah*.

Diaspora entails the dispersal of a group people throughout the world, with a common heritage (Ben-Rafael 2013: 842). The notion of diaspora can have a religious as well as an ideological implication because dispersion can be caused by some kind of (intense) experience, such as seeking safety in another country as a result of persecutions. Nowadays, the term diaspora denotes an ethnic collectivity that does not live in their ancestral or formal homeland (Baumann 2000: 313). This allows members of a diaspora to regard a former country of residence as a home country instead of their current country of residence. From the top down, states can utilize the concept of diaspora to attract and unify a group of people that would initially not feel like a collective unit without this state. According to Baumann, the concept of diaspora is emotionally charged because it evokes sentiments of homesickness and insecurity that are caused by nostalgic loyalty to certain cultural or religious aspects of a former home country (ibid: 314).

Brubaker uses a more elaborate meaning of diaspora and explains the concept based on three criteria: dispersion, homeland orientation and boundary maintenance (2005: 5-6). Brubaker’s criteria (2005) relate to diaspora offspring that may experience their parents’ homeland differently because they can have a different country of birth. The conceptualized homeland of their parents is thus more an idea among their offspring than a real experience.

Brubaker’s first criterion of ‘dispersion’ can be forced or traumatic and crosses (metaphorical) state borders. The concept of ‘division’ can also explain dispersion in which a
division by state borders is the main requirement for qualifying as a diaspora (2005: 5). The latter extends the term to more settled groups and children of migrants that have never lived in their parents’ former country of residence. The category of ‘division’ can therefore also apply to diaspora members that have not lived in their homeland for thousands of years (ibid).

The second criterion, ‘homeland orientation,’ implies a real or imagined orientation towards a homeland as a leading example in identification and loyalty towards a diaspora. This orientation relies on sustaining a collective memory or myth, identifying emotionally with a true homeland, a country one would return to, committing to caring about the safety and future of the homeland and relating to the homeland on a personal level, in such a way that someone’s identity is influenced and evokes some kind of solidarity (ibid: 5).

Brubaker’s definition, however, indicates that some people believe they are entitled to their homeland and therefore can feel deprived of it. The homeland can be real or imagined and can be constituted through collective memory and active involvement in the homeland (Brubaker 2005: 5). Justification of a homeland is thus socially constructed and can be perceived as real (ibid).

According to Sheffer, transnational relations between the Jewish diaspora and Israel make the Jewish diaspora unique (2005: 4). Common beliefs that uphold a diaspora are very relevant in the Jewish case through circulating narratives about being the chosen people and survivors of traumatic experiences of discrimination. Jewish diaspora members therefore figure in maintaining a Jewish identity (ibid: 3). A common notion I heard during my fieldwork, was: ‘Eretz Israel, it’s our country, the country of the Jews.’ My respondents were not able to explain how they learned this expression, but eventually I understood how their attitude towards Israel as a Jewish state developed and was reflected in this statement. This notion helped my respondents conceptualize the reality of making aliyah. ‘Eretz Israel’ functioned as an imaginative agent that helped them support Israel and instilled a positive attitude towards the country. ‘Eretz Israel’ is a small piece of the puzzle in familiarizing and connecting diaspora Jews to Israel. By conceptualizing Israel as a Jewish state, Jewish diaspora members and Israel stay connected, even if they have never lived there or even have (social) contacts in Israel. Judaism becomes an imaginative agent that connects Israel and Jewish diaspora, without requiring Jewish religious observance.
Jews in France are a dispersed group, thereby qualifying in Brubaker’s first criterion. All my respondents were born in France and had some kind of previous orientation towards the homeland of Israel. Later in this chapter I will elaborate on Brubaker’s boundary maintenance criterion to explain the Jewish diaspora experience in France (2005: 6-7). I will also explain how this relates to the orientation of the French diaspora Jews towards Israel and what forces influence this created image of Israel.

**The current diaspora experience**

The previous section delineated the concept of diaspora according to multiple authors. Being a diaspora can lead to conscious choices as to how heritage is incorporated, and I wanted to examine how my respondents approached this endeavor. In this section I will continue with Brubaker’s (2005) third criterion of ‘boundary maintenance’ by examining patterns and structures that Brubaker attributes to diaspora.

Brubaker focuses on diaspora as an occurring condition and an operating process that enhances understanding of living in a diaspora situation today. Brubaker concentrates on the overall experience of being in a diaspora to look at how diaspora members preserve their identity. He explains how preserving this identity leads to diaspora characteristics that create a collective feeling amongst the diaspora members (2005: 4). Brubaker’s theory is relevant for understanding push factors that drive French diaspora Jews to make aliyah.

Diaspora can have roots that go back many years or even centuries, giving members the opportunity to assimilate and integrate in society. In some cases diaspora is used as an adjective, when focusing on diasporic citizenship or diasporic consciousness, as it has influenced a diasporians mode of life (Ibid). By focusing on diaspora as an influential focal point on identity, Brubaker (2005) leaves room for local factors that influence the individual to be self-reflexive about the meaning of their diaspora heritage. In other words, a diaspora member’s identity will always be influenced by local as well as diasporic factors.

An interesting criterion Brubaker introduces is ‘boundary-maintenance’, which is concerned with deliberate actions taken to preserve or conceptualize personal diaspora heritage (2005: 6). This concept revolves around preserving a group identity through
different measures to distinguish between the minority and the host society (ibid: 6). Diaspora members can create boundaries by segregating themselves from other societies, e.g. through endogamy (ibid). This is one method to resist forms of assimilation. The next two excerpts exemplify how diaspora members consciously socialize and maintain their diaspora boundaries.

Bernard is originally from Paris and currently a dentistry student in Jerusalem. One of his concerns as a diaspora member is to resisting assimilation, because he wanted to continue his Jewish lineage. Almost his entire family was killed during the Holocaust, which made him reflect on the position of Jews worldwide. Bernard used his heritage to motivate his attitude towards the current Jewish population and his objective of continuing Jewish traditions.

I would not want to be assimilated and say ‘ciao,’ when I know that my entire family was killed in the Holocaust. We’re dwindling. The Jewish population outside Israel is dwindling by the day. (...) Thousands of years of Judaism, I think we have more responsibility than people believe we have. I wouldn’t just say ‘that’s it’ and go with the French the gentiles,21 Belgians, Dutch, whatever and cross out thousands of years of tradition and stuff that are important.

This example shows Bernard’s loyalty towards his Jewish heritage by resisting assimilation. As a member of a diaspora, he was confronted with this phenomenon. Living dispersed as a minority always makes you consider how to incorporate your heritage and why. Bernard’s Jewish heritage thus became part of his identity as a diaspora member. Bernard is challenged through his heritage to assimilate with the ‘gentile’ majority. Therefore, Bernard chose deliberately to stay amongst a minority group of Jews, before he made aliyah.

Manon moved from Marseille two years ago, after she met her boyfriend in Israel. She had been contemplating aliyah for years but lacked the courage to do so. We spoke

21 A derogatory word for non-Jews.
extensively about her social life back in Marseille and what measures she took to maintain her lifestyle. She socialized mainly with other Jewish people in Marseille and deliberately chose to enter public spaces popular amongst the Jewish population.

‘I heard that there is a big Jewish life in Marseille. You know there are Jewish schools, Habonim-Dror\textsuperscript{22} etc. Did you take part in this Jewish life in Marseille?’

‘Yeah a lot, I was in a Jewish school. I attended the Jewish school and all my closest friends were Jewish. I used to go only to places where there is ehm you know, the Jewish bar, it’s not a Jewish bar, but there were a lot of Jewish people. I went there because ehm... It’s sad to say this, but all the places that the Jewish people went to in Marseille were good you know. It’s not sad but you know, we love the good things, I don’t know how to explain it. And I also went there to meet new Jewish people. I wanted to marry someone who is Jewish. So to be part of the community, if I would stay in an area with only Jewish people, the chances were higher that I would find a Jewish boy.’

‘And it was always important for you to have a Jewish boyfriend?’

‘Yes. And for my parents haha. I don’t have a choice, I really don’t have a choice. I had non-Jewish boyfriends, but my father never wanted to meet them.’

Manon was well aware of her Jewish social circle and her desire to find a Jewish boyfriend. She made an effort to visit places where other Jewish people were present, because she internalized the idea that these places were better than the other places in Marseille. Manon segregated herself from non-Jews by socializing only with Jewish people in ‘Jewish’

\textsuperscript{22} Jewish Zionist youth movement
places in multiple aspects of her life in Marseille. Conscious socialization can therefore set boundaries but may also serve to maintain existing ones.

Conscious socialization can be a push factor to move to Israel to search for a broader Jewish social life, whether simply for Jewish friendships or for a Jewish relationship. Israel can be an enlarged version of a desired Jewish world that provides the life one was attempting to create in his former country of residence. Therefore, Israel may offer an alternative for someone that segregates himself as a Jew from non-Jews (Boyarin 2015: 712).

Segregation can be a push factor for someone to move away to search for the desired life. When this desired life derived from personal heritage and may be found in the conceptualized homeland, the person may be more inclined to live in this homeland than somewhere else. Moving to Israel is part of Manon’s attempt to maintain these diaspora boundaries. Bernard made aliya to resist assimilation, keeping in mind the fate of his family during the Holocaust. Being part of a diaspora and attempting to maintain these boundaries can make someone feel sentimental about personal heritage. The country able to provide this may become an established homeland.

**French, Jewish or both?**

In my thesis, I argue that being a diaspora member is immensely significant in deciding to make aliya. Clarifying the type of situations where being part of a diaspora is emphasized is therefore important. To this end, I wanted to explore how my respondents related to their Jewish and/or French identity. I wanted to know more about the desire of diaspora members to make aliya, and whether the struggle of being Jewish abroad was relevant to them back in France. According to Sheffer, diaspora members will always have to face intermarriage, assimilation and integration, if they choose not to make aliya. They must make a serious effort, if they want to maintain their Jewish identity outside Israel (2005: 11).

My respondents had their own ways of being Jewish, but I wanted to know how this perception coincided with their position in French society. To what extent did their Jewish identity play a role in feeling excluded or included by non-Jewish French people? Being a
minority in France forced my Jewish respondents to choose between assimilating to or being excluded from French society, rendering their minority status became part of their identity. In this section I will present a few examples from my respondents regarding the challenges this dilemma presented.

According to Erikson, identities are emphasized and defined contextually and are therefore not fixed (2002: 47). Taking this into consideration, I studied the tension between a Jewish identity and disconnecting from non-Jewish French society. Cultural differences are relevant once they are emphasized in a social encounter, which defines groups when they meet with other groups (ibid: 10, 12). Accordingly, I explored how the Jewish identities of my respondents related to their position in French society.

This tension between a French and a Jewish identity became very apparent during my conversation with Bernard. Bernard grew up in Paris but went to university in Leuven. After one year of studying medicine, he realized his future was not going to be as a diaspora member. Bernard’s awareness of his Jewish identity appeared in his mode of speech, because he used certain terms that revealed a lot about his perception of French people. During our interview he used the word ‘goyim’, which denotes non-Jews with a deprecating undertone. Bernard ‘othered’ people to make sense of his position as a Jew in relation to non-Jews. When I asked him why he did not refer to himself as French, he said he never had this feeling because of his upbringing and the (anti-Semitic) comments made at school. His classmates called him a ‘dirty Jew’ on numerous occasions. Bernard was confronted with his Jewish identity because, according to Erickson, an ethnic group needs others to define themselves, and group identities are formed in accordance with identities of people that are not members of your own group (2002: p. 10). In other words, being in contact with a non-Jewish group underlined Bernard’s Jewish identity. By ‘othering’ people in his mode of speech and confirming the status of the other group, Bernard expressed his own identification towards his Jewish heritage. However, Bernard also felt very ‘othered’ himself by non-Jews, which only amplified his feeling of being excluded from French society.

So Israel really became part my identity and who I was. I know that in 2006 it was the second Lebanon war and people would go at me
and ask me why Israel. And it became very natural for me. Every time something happened, people would come to me, and it became very natural for me to read the news every day and uhm.... It always felt like I have to do something for Jews, for Israel. Because I see that we’re endangered.

In Bernard’s case, being confronted with political endeavors revolving around Israel reemphasized his position as a Jew amongst non-Jews.

Bernard initiated the topic of anti-Semitism himself, but when I raised this topic with my other respondents, I soon discovered I could not take for granted that everyone had experienced this. My respondents tried to warn me about not being able to wear a kippah in public, but did not share an experience in which they had personally suffered discrimination at their own initiative. I often questioned whether this fear was real and asked whether they had tried wearing a kippah in public or if they knew anyone that had. Most of them had never publicly worn a kippah: their fear was merely based on circulating narratives. Another problem was that they never saw anyone wear a kippah in public. Still, my impression was that their fear was real and relevant to their feelings about being Jewish in France.

One respondent, Nadia, admitted she had never seen anti-Semitism, but explained how demographic issues in France result in a very hostile environment, which makes people uncomfortable acknowledging their Jewish identity in public in France. Nadia moved to Israel four years ago with her father, when she was conflicted with her mother’s non-Jewish boyfriend. She is now twenty years old, and we met at the army base in Tel Aviv where she is completing her military service. I had never been to this army base and had not expected it to be situated next to the busy Azrieli mall and Sarona market. When I finally found the entrance, I was asked to present my Israeli passport and to explain the reason for my visit. I got through security unusually easily, compared with my previous experience in Israel. Nadia and I met for lunch during her break and I learned that my Israeli passport was the reason my entrance had gone smoothly. If I were not an Israeli citizen, setting up the appointment

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23 A skullcap worn by observant Jewish men.
would have been far more difficult. I was surprised, because I had never told Nadia I had Israeli citizenship when we set up the appointment. I assumed her army base had run some kind of background check on me.

I asked Nadia why the French people I spoke to in Israel referred so frequently to anti-Semitism, despite having barely experienced it.

‘In France I was living in an area that was just with Arabs, black people. I don’t care but it was like this and I wasn’t seeing the reality. I had never felt anti-Semitism, nothing happened to me. (...) Now when I come to France and I’m just in this area I see that I cannot be in this area. I’m not racist but there is only people that they sometimes are not speaking French. They are like wild also and you don’t feel at home.’

‘But this changed, or this was also the case when you were living there and you didn’t see it?’

(...) ‘Yes, it changed, France has changed because of the anti-Semitism. Even if I don’t feel it, I know this is existing. The terror attacks. Just this it’s enough to understand. But no a lot of things, when you are walking on the streets you see that, really I’m accepting everybody, I don’t have any problem with them, (...) there is so many nationalities there that are problematic. Like you have the people from Romania, that are known as stealers and beggars. They are in the subway and they steal things from you. They don’t speak French, this is really problematic. You have the people from Pakistan, they are selling things that are not loyal. So you have this. You have the Arab people that make a lot of problems that are... Not most, but some. Than after an arrest you have the black people. I don’t talk about the black people of the center of Paris, I talk about the suburbs. They are problematic also. They don’t speak French, they don’t work, and they don’t do anything. (...) This is just like a
house of immigrants. So it’s really problematic. I don’t talk about the immigrants that do try in France. They do work and they interpret like everything. But the others are not. The biggest part does not make an effort.’

Nadia admitted she did not observe anything but described anti-Semitism as something real. She acknowledged that her feelings regarding anti-Semitism derive from other general problems in French society. She has not observed anti-Semitism, but she knows it exists. Many Jewish immigrants who came to Israel from France described anti-Semitism in their country of origin in similar terms.

According to Burla, fear as an agent of political imagination does not have to be real to be relevant (2015: 612). I noticed that this fear of anti-Semitism was experienced as real, because it confirmed the minority status in France that my respondents felt they should conceal. When anti-Semitism functions as an imaginative agent, it is capable of creating a transnational bond within a diaspora, between other Jewish diaspora members but also between diaspora and Jews in Israel (ibid: 617). Anti-Semitism as an imaginative agent can unify Jews on the based on experiencing the same threat. As a result of this fear, a Jewish identity can take precedence over a French identity.

Yinon, a 25 year-old male from Paris, told me about how he experienced a clash, when he prioritized his Jewish identity in non-Jewish situations in Paris. In Paris, Yinon claimed he was secular and kept his Jewish identity very private. He deliberately did not speak about his Jewish heritage in public and only considered this aspect of his life at home. He never attended Jewish schools and had many non-Jewish friends. In certain situations, such as Jewish holidays, however, he was forced to reveal his Jewish identity in a space outside his home.

Like I never put my Jewish identity in front because it was private, it doesn’t belong in the public area. Like it’s for me, it’s my relationship with God. First of all it’s for me and also in France like
we are secular, like we do it at home, but outside we are French. We will just be normal. In France it’s hard to be Jewish, like I said the culture doesn’t encourage you and actually it’s forbidden to show you are Jewish. (...) When I was a kid I respected the chagiem [Jewish holidays] and Shabbat, but most of the times, chagiem happen during school days and it’s always the same shit, like you have to visit the Jewish doctor, tell him you are religious and ask for a note to be absent or some bullshit for Pesach. Look, during the chagiem like Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Soekot, it’s two days in France, and like sometimes you are fucked for a month basically. It’s always the same shit like people know you are bulshitting them, and give you a hard time about it. In France you say there is a stream and you feel like going against the stream.

Yinon emphasized repeatedly how his religion was something he kept at home, which was the reason his parents did not make him attend a Jewish school. His parents always insisted that they were Jewish and French at home, but in public their French identity was more important and dominant than their Jewish identity. His parents were religious, but outside they worked and mingled with non-Jewish French people. But when Yinon started to speak about how his religion influenced his public life, I noticed a lot of discomfort and anger in his speech. He cursed a lot, and his French heritage disgusted him.

Once Yinon’s Jewish identity entered the public sphere, being Jewish became more pronounced and distinguished him from those around him. Yinon was prevented from observing Jewish religious customs, because he struggled to align them with his public ‘French’ life. In the scope of fighting assimilation, Boyarin raises the solution of Zionism, in which the Jewish State is a substitute for political and cultural life in Europe. According to this solution, the Jewish State is characterized by tradition, which makes the Jewish State a substitute for the Jewish diaspora in which they are free to practice their religion (2015: 712). In other words, the political goal of encouraging Jews to make aliyah in this solution is

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24 Passover
25 Jewish New Year, the Day of Atonement and a harvest festival.
disguised by religion and tradition. Yinon’s Jewish identity became very dominant, when he clashed with the non-Jewish French population. The solution of Zionism is presented as a possible solution for someone who experiences the same struggles as Yinon in France. In other words, the solution of Zionism can be a pull factor for those who feel pushed by clashes between their Jewish and their French identities.

Another respondent who told me how the public sphere affected him was Roland. Roland is a 25 year-old male from Paris who was pursuing a masters degree in Israel, when I came in contact with him, while was looking for people to feature on my blog. I approached him for a follow-up interview. Like Yinon, Roland distinguished his Jewish identity from the private and the public sphere and altered his appearance when he went outside in France to hide his Jewish heritage. Roland explained how he refrained from wearing a kippah in public in Paris. However, when he was abroad in London, he decided to cover his head with a kippah.

‘You can’t walk with a kippah in France. If you walk with a kippah people will look at you like you are a monster. It is very hard to be Jewish in France. No it’s hard to be religious, you can be Jewish. When I was in London I had my kippah on all the time and someone insulted me in French, because he thought I wouldn’t understand him. He needed directions and his friend wanted to ask me, but he said: no don’t talk to the Jewish.’

‘But in London you were not afraid to wear your kippah?’

‘No, because in London I worked in a company where 90% was Jewish. I even wore it on the street because I lived in the Jewish quarter.’

Roland, explained to me how Judaism was really important in his family. I got the impression that he did not feel at home and was not at ease in Paris as a Jew, because his Jewish identity was different in Paris than in London. In Paris his Jewish identity was very private at
home and inside the Jewish school. He did not show any visible signs of his Jewish identity in public. When he described his life in France, he in fact focused on his ‘Jewish’ life in France. He attended a Jewish school, studied religious books, had Jewish friends, and Judaism was a central theme in his family. He did not miss France, nor did he have any objects in his house as a reminder of France. In London Roland made an effort to seek a Jewish community by working at a company with many Jewish staff and living in the Jewish quarter. He associated with Jews in London and did not feel unsafe to wearing a kippah in public. Roland did not feel at home in France, because he had to conceal his religion. He was more content with his Jewish life in London than in Paris, as he felt more religious freedom in London. One of the push factors that made Roland want to leave France was feeling forced to hide his Jewish heritage.

Many of my respondents spoke about this fear of wearing a kippah in public but had never really experienced any acts of anti-Semitism. Dov, however, did not wear a kippah but a t-shirt with Hebrew letters that made him he victim of an attack in the subway.

‘I was in the subway and I had a t-shirt with a Hebrew sentence on it.’

‘But you weren’t wearing a kippah?’

‘No, in France I wasn’t at all, for security reasons. And you know normally people don’t recognize Jewish people, and not at all Hebrew letters. So I wasn’t afraid. It was in the summer and there was a war here in Israel. Somebody started to stare at me in a really aggressive way. I was young, fifteen, sixteen years old. He just like grabbed me and he was huge. So I couldn’t do anything. He grabbed me and said he was going to take revenge for all the Palestinian blood etc. He said he was going to fuck me up. I remember I was in the subway, and nobody moved. Many people slowly left and everybody was scared. There were so many people in the train, and I thought like “what the fuck I’m French, I’m French why the fuck aren’t you going to help me?” The guy took a knife. By chance the
doors were open, and I escaped. This experience makes you understand how alone you can be. Even though you are French, people don’t care.’

Dov did not distinguish his Jewish identity in France, but he was still the victim of an anti-Semitic attack. He was disappointed in French society, because nobody tried to help him. He used to feel included in French society, but after this incident, he felt disconnected. Dov was already contemplating moving to Israel, and this incident helped confirm his plan to make aliyah.

I continued to ask whether anti-Semitism was real and I noticed my respondents were still heavily influenced by multiple media outlets and circulating narratives. Daniel, a friend of Roland and also from Paris, also emphasized that wearing a kippah outside in Paris was out of the question. When I asked him about his thoughts on anti-Semitism, his initial response was to support his arguments with percentages that he presented as factual information. He wanted to prove a point to the ‘uninformed outsider’ [me]. Eventually he remembered an anti-Semitic incident he had experienced himself.

‘Of course anti-Semitism is real. Because you just have to look at the facts that there are. We represent one percent of the population in France, but if you see all the racism facts and aggression on Jewish people, it represents 70 percent of all the racism in France.’

‘So people educate themselves online or they observe an incident?’

‘No I have never seen something in front of me. Oh no I have. One day we were in the synagogue in July 2014. There was a crowd of Muslim people demonstrating in front of the synagogue about the war in Gaza. At the same time we were with maybe 200 people in the synagogue to pray. They surrounded the synagogue and they
tried to enter. And we were inside. So we locked all the doors, and fortunately they didn’t come in, and the police arrived and it had been like one hour, one hour and a half to wait for the police, and they left.’

This example confirms how effective existing narratives are, when Daniel’s initial response was not to share his own experience of anti-Semitism.

Despite anti-Semitism being real or imagined, it was reflected in the perception of my respondents in events with non-Jewish French people. In social situations, their Jewish identity became relevant, and they were distinguished from non-Jewish French people. Once this becomes an obstacle, it can become a push factor to want to leave France. Being a minority and Jewish in France can therefore influence how French Jews experience life in France and conceptualizes Jewish identity.

**Diaspora as a unifying agent**

Heritage can be incorporated in real life events and experiences that influence the individual from the top down. Jewish diaspora members will experience this in using Jewish social services that distinguish them from non-Jewish French society.

Jews in France can gather in settings unrelated to Judaism, when they wish to enjoy Jewish services that only distributed amongst Jews. These organizations are often run or funded by Jews and unify people from the Jewish community. For example, diaspora Jews can become involved with a Jewish charity group, Jewish education, Jewish organized dinners, Jewish healthcare etc. (Boyarin 1993: 712). In some cases they use these services not because of the Jewish aspect but because of an advantage over other public services. For example, if a Jewish medical center has a shorter waiting list than a public center, a Jewish person may prefer the Jewish center over the public center. As a result, Jewish heritage can be incorporated in everyday life in the public sphere and diaspora are kept amongst each other, if parents send their children to a Jewish daycare for example. This unifies diaspora Jews, without necessarily emphasizing Jewish heritage.
In the next section I will focus on how a top-down unifying agent can be extended to the Israeli government. Within this context, Jewish heritage is used as an imagining agent to justify Israel as a homeland. By sustaining and maintaining a transnational relationship between the diaspora and Israel, the government contributes to an imagined community between Jews in Israel and diaspora.

**Israeli political imagination and unification**

The tension between the homeland and the Jewish diaspora is very interesting, because it shapes the existence of current Jewish diaspora. This relationship influences diaspora members in how they perceive themselves as a minority but also in their attitude towards Israel. In this relationship the specific agents therefore need to be considered carefully. In this section I will argue that the transnational relationship between diaspora and Israel is unifying within a diaspora, amongst diaspora members and their relationship with Israel. This section will foremost elaborate on the political goals of the State of Israel and on some of these measures to maintain this relationship. Two narratives about Anti-Semitism and trauma are enforced as imagining agents to ‘pull’ Jewish diaspora members to Israel.

Heritage is a signifier of a shared history and can establish an identity in reference to this past (Geismar 2015: 72). Heritage can therefore be an important tool for a group, as well as a government, to define and reflect on their identity. Attributing meaning to heritage, can distinguish one group from another, by emphasizing a certain shared history that other groups in society do not share (Goulding & Dominic 2009: 87). For example, heritage can be used as to strengthen a group identity by building a synagogue or a Jewish cemetery (Geismar 2015: 74). One example of how the Israeli government incorporates Jewish heritage to unify diaspora Jews is the Taglit birthright project.

As a government, shared sentiments of symbolic and material heritage can be incorporated to justify national borders, which results in sustaining an imagined community (ibid). According to Burla, the Israeli government encourages ethno-religious diaspora nationalism to justify Israel as a homeland by employing imaginative agents derived from Jewish history (2015: 603-604). The State of Israel is one of the main subsidizers of Taglit birthright. Taglit is an educational trip offered to people outside Israel with at least one
Jewish parent or grandparent and provides them with an opportunity to discover Israel and all its Jewish (historical) sites. On these trips, a group of Jewish young adults tour Israel and visit historical sites that highlight a shared Jewish history. According to their website, the aim of this trip is: ‘to strengthen Jewish identity and Jewish communities and connection with Israel and its people.’ The Taglit birthright project is one example of how the Israeli government incorporates nationalism in maintaining the diaspora-homeland relationship, which can become a fundamental part of someone’s diaspora identity. The Taglit birthright project allows diaspora Jews to conceptualize a homeland and create a diaspora-homeland bond.

Transnational imagination can be a unifying mechanism for diaspora communities. This transnational relationship with the perceived homeland distinguishes the Jewish diaspora from other diasporas (Sheffer 2005: 2). Political agents, imposed by the government of Israel, use trauma to unify diaspora in a political frame. In other words, the government of Israel aims to project a certain image of Israel on the diaspora in a transnational network through agents of imagination (Burla 2015: 602).

One of these agents is the Jewish Agency, which is a governmental organization actively involved in diaspora politics. The Jewish Agency has offices throughout the world and is mainly concerned with migration to Israel and reunifying dispersed communities (ibid: 605). One of my respondents that received help from the Jewish Agency was Roland. He was a student in Paris, when the Jewish Agency started encouraging him to migrate to Israel and supported him in all practical matters during the process of making aliya.

The Jewish Agency approached my friends and I, and told us about master programs in Israel. They knew I was planning to do a master program so they seized the moment to inform me about new opportunities in Israel. The Agency provided all the information necessary regarding aliya and even arranged for me and my friends, also making aliya, to all be on the same plane to Israel.

26 https://www.birthrightisrael.com/about_us_inner/52?scroll=art_1 (11/30/18)
The Agency really wants you to come to Israel and they make everything possible for you.

As Roland’s example shows, the Jewish Agency works very hard to attract Jewish diaspora by promoting certain opportunities available to them in Israel.

In addition to offering practical support to pull Jewish diaspora members to Israel, the Jewish Agency incorporates two narratives about Israel to unify Jews around the world. The first narrative portrays Israel as an ally that is concerned with physical and emotional protection of Jewish diaspora members. In this context, the Agency claims that the diaspora experience a constant threat and entails the risk of a future disaster. By noting the danger and trauma of Jewish exiles as a recurring themes in Jewish history, the notion of Israel as the new Jewish center and rescuer of Jewish diaspora is preserved (Burla 2015: 605). The Jewish Agency claims that anti-Semitism deprives diaspora Jews of a future outside Israel (ibid: 606). Using anti-Semitism as a motivating force is unifying, because it does not address a specific type of Jew. Anti-Semitism relates to all Jews just because they have a Jewish heritage. Different Jewish people are thus unified based on a common denominator.

If migration to Israel is not an option, the Jewish Agency encourages donations to invest in Israel’s future. A diaspora Jew in need of refuge will therefore find a safe haven in Israel, according to the Jewish Agency (ibid: 606). In this statement, the Jewish Agency also highlights Israel as a place of refuge, because diaspora Jews are not guaranteed a Jewish future outside Israel (ibid). Once again, the type of Jew remains unspecified, so that all Jews can relate to it.

The second narrative presents Israel very differently. This narrative seeks financial and political support because Israel remains vulnerable and is under constant threat and at risk of future trauma. This narrative is based on anti-Semitism as a factor validating the state of Israel. Both narratives are ultimately used to encourage diaspora Jews to make aliya, for their own safety and for the safety of the ‘Jewish center’ (Burla 2015: 606.). Some of my respondents experienced these incorporated narratives first hand. During the second
Intifadah,\textsuperscript{27} they still resided in France and experienced more and more anti-Semitic comments, while Israel was fighting a war. In addition to the rising hostility they experienced in their own surroundings, they were confronted with Israel being in danger. Then the question arises of whether to remain in this hostile diaspora environment or to seek refuge, or to help protect a place that is also in danger by migrating there. The push factor is leaving a hostile environment as a diaspora Jew, and the pull factors are seeking refuge or protecting Israel. One of my respondents confirmed that the intensified anti-Semitism he experienced during the second Intifadah at school pushed him to leave France.

Anti-Semitism and historical/future traumas as imaginative agents are used to maintain a transnational relationship between Israel and diaspora. Political imagination can be implemented by a dominant group (Israel) to achieve a desired attitude towards Israel (Burla 2015: 607). I argue that certain environments with which the state of Israel maintains ties, such as the Jewish Agency in France, can instill a particular Israel-diaspora bond, which influences the initial idea of and willingness to make \textit{aliyah}. Governmental organizations can expose people to political imagination through images, practices, ceremonies, memories, myths etc. that send a certain message about \textit{aliyah} (ibid: 608). The impact of news items, for example, may therefore extend beyond simply informing readers and listeners about an incident.

I realized the Jewish Agency was specifically aimed at Jewish diaspora, when I shared my own sentiments about making \textit{aliyah} with native Israelis.\textsuperscript{28} The market vendor at the \textit{Kikar}\textsuperscript{29} told me: ‘being a Jew in Israel is different from being a Jew outside of Israel.’ Like the market vendor, most native Israelis had a very negative response to my plans to make \textit{aliyah}. They tried to discourage me and told me how they dreamed of leaving Israel one day. ‘The economy is better abroad, and life is tough in Israel,’ said some. Whereas the Jewish Agency projects \textit{aliyah} as an upward development, according to some of native Israelis, \textit{aliyah} was perceived as a regression. The pull factors that the Jewish Agency projects, such as safety to live a Jewish life and an expression of support for the state of Israel were of no interest to native Israelis. This example emphasizes that the Jewish Agency focuses mainly

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} A period of intensified violence between Israelis and Palestinians in 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{28} In this context native Israelis denotes Jewish Israelis born and raised in Israel.
\item \textsuperscript{29} A large square in Netanya in front of the beach with market stalls.
\end{itemize}
on diaspora Jews and does not always convey the experiences of the local Jewish population of Israel. This confirms that political imagination can feel real but is not necessarily true.

The first perceptions of Israel

Willingness to migrate to Israel is largely contingent on how people are initially familiarized with Israel. Orientation towards the perceived homeland of Israel is a very powerful mechanism that evokes a sense of loyalty and group solidarity (Brubaker 2005: 5). In this paragraph I illustrate how the first contact with Israel manifests in forging a bond between diaspora Jews and the perceived homeland of Israel. The first perceptions of Israel affect their outlook on Israel and ultimately influences their perspective on a possible aliyah in the future.

Many of my respondents had family members or friends that already made aliyah and provided a continuous flow of positive narratives about Israel. My respondent Roland first learned about Israel in his Jewish school.

All the Jews in France are strongly Zionist through Jewish schools. I think that Jewish schools in France are more Zionist than Jewish. There are a lot of people that do not observe Shabbat or anything else but are very interested in Israel and want to come. I have no idea why the school is more Zionist than Jewish. That’s a good question. The school organized a lot of trips to Israel. We did a lot in history class and of course learned a lot of history about Israel. We took Hebrew courses and studied the Misjnah and the Torah.  

The example Roland presents about his Jewish school being very Zionist is very significant in his first contact with Israel and the possibility of making aliyah. He received an extensive and highly multidimensional education about Israel. Both Israel and the Jewish religion were

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30 Jewish holy books
emphasized at school without being interdependent. Roland’s classmates were not very involved with Jewish religion, despite the classes on religious Judaism, and Roland states that religion was not important, but that people always showed interest in Israel.

By attending a Jewish school, Roland was pretty alienated from non-Jewish French society. However, his parents considered Jewish religion to be very important, especially in regards to finding a Jewish marital partner. For this reason Roland was not encouraged to socialize with non-Jewish people or to enter non-Jewish surroundings. Roland never mentioned being involved with non-Jewish people in France, nor did he tell me anything he really about France. Being educated about Israel from such an early age and a possible connection between school and home, made Israel a very familiar concept for Roland. Remaining in touch with Israel made aliyah a very simple decision.

Like Roland, many people were influenced by their first contact with Israel. The first visit to Israel can leave pleasant memories and forge a transnational bond with Israel. Jonathan made aliyah in 2015 and is now volunteering in the military. We met in Modi’in and he told me about his first visit to Israel.

My first visit to Israel was when I was 13 years old for my Bar Mitzvah. I was amazed by the country and the special history. This is a country with an amazing culture and I truly believe everyone can live together. The historical sites were beautiful and I left Israel very satisfied.

A Jewish child celebrates his Bar (or Bat for a girl) Mitzvah when he becomes an adult according to Jewish law. Some parents take this opportunity to bring their child to Israel as a gift and the occasion of Jonathan’s trip was therefore very joyful. A trip to Israel is a reward for all the hard work the child has invested in preparing for his Bar Mitzvah. This gift instilled a very positive image of Israel on Jonathan. After Jonathan finished college, he wanted to be

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A Jewish ceremony upon reaching adolescence. According to Jewish law, girls reach this age at 12 and boys at 13.
somewhere where he could actually help people and therefore enlisted in the Israeli army. Jonathan could have gone anywhere to help people, but the positive attitude he developed after his first trip to Israel was one of the reasons he chose Israel.

Sandra is from a suburb of Paris, where she obtained a degree in dentistry. Four years ago she moved to Israel and is now pursuing a masters in Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. As a child, she listened to many fascinating stories from her parents about their period in Israel. Her parents have always been strong supporters of Israel, because they spent their happiest years as a couple there. As a result, they instilled a very positive image of Israel in Sandra and her siblings. When Sandra found herself in an unpleasant family situation, she decided to make *aliyah*.

I think it’s more the way you see your family unhappy and you hear them talking about a happy time, which you never saw. So they have that from Morocco when they were young, but they have that from Israel when they got married. But I could never really see this happiness in France. (…) When I came here I was very excited, because I thought of going home. Like I felt I was going home.

The many happy stories about Israel had given Sandra high hopes of a bright future in Israel. The unpleasant family situation was a push factor to leave France, but the reason she chose to live in Israel, of all countries, was the positive image she had from the happy stories of her parents. When she tried to build a new life in Israel, however, she no longer found it to be a joyous place. Her parents’ stories did not match her own experiences. Sandra was likely to hear happy stories about Israel, but not the hardships she might face, once she made *aliyah*.

I thought I was going to have a feeling of home in Israel, but I don’t have that anymore. I’m still a minority. I always feel better with people that are not from here, which is a bit of a sad point. I’m
trying to do it myself and it is just stressful to find people that understand you. But I think four years of living here is a short time to find a home. (...) But when I came I was very excited, because I thought of going home.

Sandra internalized the idea of Israel as her home during her childhood. This explains why she decided to make aliya, when her family situation in France became unbearable and made her want to leave.

Transnational relations and positive broadcasting about Israel familiarize diaspora Jews with a possible future in Israel. This positive image is a pull factor to choose Israel over any other country to start a new life. The only necessity is a final push factor to migrate. I will elaborate more on push factors in the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described how my respondents experienced living as a diaspora in France. My aim was to convey how a diaspora environment already confronts a member with a possible future in the conceptualized homeland. One of the influences is the transnational bond forged with Israel through vacations or acquaintances in Israel. The childhood environment and first contact with Israel can also frame Israel as a realistic option for future settlement.

The three basic concepts of dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance help Jewish diaspora in France. Social situations between Jews and non-Jews in France can cause a social chasm that makes the diaspora status more pronounced. Diasporans face assimilation and defining their Jewish identity in France. Examining the effort diaspora Jews make to cultivate their Jewish identity is therefore interesting. Conscious socialization with Jews may enhance Jewish identity, other respondents altered their Jewish identity in the private and public spheres.
One concern my respondents raised was anti-Semitism in France. Their fear was real, not because they experienced frequent discrimination but because of other related disconcerting societal issues and circulating narratives in France. Being or feeling limited in facilitating Jewish identity or desiring an enhancement of a Jewish identity can be a push or pull factor to make aliyah. Israel can be a substitute for this desired Jewish life diaspora members feel they are missing.

Israel becomes a realistic option for residence due to many imaginative agents from within the diaspora community and external forces. The Israeli government utilizes experiences with anti-Semitism to promote cohesion, because diaspora Jews are victimized in the same way, despite different attitudes towards their Jewish identity. The Jewish Agency presents two somewhat conflicting narratives to strengthen the unification of diaspora Jews more in relation to making aliyah. The Jewish Agency presents the ongoing threat of anti-Semitism and claims that diaspora Jews have no future outside Israel urging all Jews to make aliyah. In the other narrative, the Jewish Agency presents Israel as needing help and therefore encourages diaspora Jews to migrate to Israel and offer political and financial support. Again, these narratives can be push and pull factors for diaspora Jews to migrate to Israel. In one narrative, however, diaspora Jews are being saved by Israel, while in the other narrative Israel is to be saved by the diaspora Jews. Nevertheless, the narratives succeed in unifying diaspora Jews. This unifying experience can strengthen Jewish identity and the relationship diaspora Jews have with Israel.

In addition, the Jewish Agency strengthens this transnational relationship through active involvement with diaspora Jews by introducing them to programs in Israel and the Taglit birthright project. The aim of these endeavors is to give diaspora Jews a positive experience in Israel and inspire them to make aliyah in the future. In the next chapter I will explain more about how programs in Israel drive the process of making aliyah.

Positive experiences and first impressions can be significant in the decision to make aliyah. Diaspora Jews are frequently confronted with the quest to move to Israel. The ultimate decision by diaspora Jews to migrate, however, is often based on very practical considerations and not very complicated. In the next chapter I will explain why contemporary migration to Israel is very pragmatic.
Chapter 3. Making aliyah: Why and when?

In this chapter I will focus on push and pull factors that drive contemporary migration to Israel. Based on pragmatic motivations, I will describe the features of current aliyah and explain how they are typical for diaspora Jews in France.

In the previous chapter I focused on a diaspora background to explain why diaspora members are likely to migrate. In this chapter, I will discuss at what point a migrant decides to move to Israel. I argue that this decision to make aliyah is very pragmatic and often caused by the repercussions of practical life changes. The practical nature of these events makes the decision to make aliyah very pragmatic. A diaspora background can render migrants susceptible to pragmatic events that ‘push’ or ‘pull’ them to migrate. These events can range from a divorce experience to seeking new opportunities in Israel.

I will start by discussing the Law of Return,\(^{32}\) because I argue that the possibilities this law offers diaspora Jews are conducive to the ultimate decision. This law is based on having a Jewish heritage, which diaspora Jews may invoke at any point. I will proceed to pragmatic push and pull factors to make aliyah that I encountered during my ethnographic fieldwork.

In this thesis I aim to bring about a more analytical understanding of Jewish diaspora migration from France to Israel. I argue that this type of migration is interesting because current aliyah combines lifestyle migration with diaspora migrants. I will illustrate this point by focusing on ambiguities arising from government policies that accommodate pragmatic motivations to migrate. Migration therefore becomes a choice and is influenced by the desire to make practical changes in life, which prevail over anti-Semitic push factors.

Israel encourages Jewish migration by granting Jewish migrants many state benefits through the Law of Return. This law makes migrants eligible for multiple grants towards transportation, rent subsidy, health coverage, tuition benefits, Hebrew courses, tax

\(^{32}\) A law that grants Jews Israeli citizenship.
These benefits can make the first few years very pleasant for a migrant and are considered part of the ‘homecoming’ process in Israel (Shuval 1998: 18). The new migrant benefits can be a pull factor for migration to Israel by making the *aliyah* experience easier and more positive. Granting new Jewish immigrants many benefits serves the purpose of increasing the Jewish population in Israel. This makes the LOR a Zionist law in that the increase in the Jewish population supports and promotes the continuity of the Jewish state.

Shuval argues that *olim* are not perceived as refugees, because they receive migrant benefits based on their Jewish heritage (1998: 18). Establishing a Jewish state with the LOR leaves Jews free to apply for Israeli citizenship whenever they choose, based on their Jewish heritage. Diaspora Jews are not required to present an official statement that they are in danger and fleeing their country, when they apply for Israeli citizenship (ibid). However, the narrative Israel projects abroad to attract diaspora Jews that I presented in the previous chapter frame diaspora Jews as being in danger and needing refuge in Israel. Israeli policies on new immigrants are therefore very ambiguous in terms of the message the Jewish Agency conveys, because the ‘homecoming’ process does not necessarily involve sheltering refugees. Providing all these benefits also supports new immigrants throughout their integration in Israeli society. The aim of the State of Israel to support *olim* by providing all these benefits indicates that the new immigrants will and should be part of the Jewish population in Israel. The vague wording of the LOR also ensures that *aliyah* appeals to non-refugees who move to Israel for practical reasons, confirming my argument that pragmatic push and pull factors for making *aliyah* prevail over anti-Semitic push factors. In addition, the *aliyah* provisions reflect that the establishment of Israel and the composition of the LOR date back at least 60 years. These rules and regulations may obviously be outdated, compared with contemporary Jewish diaspora issues. The next section will focus more on the ambiguities that derive from the LOR.

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34 New immigrants
35 Law of Return: a law that grants diaspora Jews Israeli citizenship.
The Law of Return

This section will clarify the repercussions of the Law of Return in relation to current aliyah. Anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent may request Israeli citizenship, without being very involved with personal Jewish heritage or even Jewish according to the Halakha. Some of my respondents have never been involved with Judaism and merely view it as part of their heritage. Other respondents were closely involved with Jewish institutions. Such involvement, however, does not make them more Jewish than others with Jewish ancestry.

This different ways of being Jewish is one factor that leads to the composition of Jewish Israeli citizens to be deeply segmented. On the other hand, people with only a Jewish father are not always accepted as Jewish by those who adhere rigidly to the Halakha. For this reason, Perez argues that the LOR can be legitimized as a cultural law rather than an ethnic law, as it provides immigrants with ‘the right to national self-determination in the destination country’ (2011: 59). In other words, Perez conceptualizes the LOR as a liberal law that ultimately accommodates different types of Jewish immigrants (ibid). This flexibility of the LOR unifies people based on their Jewish heritage with a Jewish nationality in Israel (Elon 2007: 543). Religious practices and traditions vary amongst Jews, but they are not indicators of whether someone is more Jewish than someone else. The flexibility of the LOR also strengthens and maintains the transnational bond of diaspora Jews with Israel, because a larger group of people can be unified (Perez 2011: 81). Due to such a large target group and given how to be Jewish is not subject to debate, the LOR attracts not only a diverse group of Jews but also a broad range of migration intentions (Luthra, Platt & Salomońska 2016: 2). This leaves room for a pragmatic orientation toward migration.

According to Gans, immigration policies favor one group over another (1998: 162). Diaspora Jews therefore receive priority over others who want to migrate to Israel. Israel has always had a diverse population with multiple religions, even before the State of Israel was officially established. The LOR favors Jews to promote a Jewish state, but a homogenous state is not realistic in any nation-state (Perez 2011: 75). The LOR provides diaspora Jews with the right to self-determination but excludes people who do not have

Jewish ancestry from returning to their homeland, such as Palestinians. These people may have previously fled from Israel and want to return. Diaspora Jews, however, may never have lived in Israel but are granted Israeli citizenship immediately through the LOR (ibid: 60). The LOR makes migration for diaspora Jews very easy, because it applies to a wide group and does not restrict eligibility to a specific time frame.

**Pragmatizing aliyah**

In the previous chapter I argued that a diaspora environment was very evident in the overall decision to migrate to Israel. In this section I will argue that push factors to migrate can be very pragmatic and may not seem to align with this diaspora environment, where narratives about anti-Semitism can be popular. The moment diaspora members decide to make aliyah, they can be heavily influenced by practical considerations. Having a diaspora background may, however, make people more receptive to these push factors and ultimately migrate to Israel. Most Jews in France that grew up in this diaspora environment were already familiar with the idea of a possible life in Israel. Being eligible for the LOR, does not lead a diaspora Jew to make aliyah at a certain moment in specific circumstances. Pragmatizing migration to Israel accommodates a contemporary perspective on aliyah and makes my respondents more relatable in understanding the topic of migration to Israel today. A pragmatic approach targets French Jews from a Jewish environment, as well as French Jews not from a Jewish environment.

After World War II, diaspora Jews in Europe were already migrating to the Palestine Mandate, but under different circumstances. Jews struggled to integrate in post-war society and were encouraged to migrate to Israel by the Zionist movements already present in Palestine (Brasz 1994: 325). According to Shuval, Jewish migration to Israel is unique compared to other migrants because regular migrants leave their home in search of a new one. Diaspora Jews were already treated as outsiders in their country of origin and moved to a conceptualized homeland to find a new home (1998: 4).

Although this statement may be true for some people, most of my respondents did not claim they lacked a home in France. They all spoke about how they missed their friends and left their family behind. Only Sandra specifically mentioned she was really looking for a
new home in Israel. The general reasons people migrate may be economic, but most of my respondents moved out of self-interest. For most, ending up in Israel was not a life-long dream. There were multiple motivations that ranged from migrating for love, seeking adventure, leaving an unpleasant situation or personal development (Luthra et al. 2016: 2). According to Anderson, the migrants’ motivations are obviously self-interest, because it is a rational decision in the hope of improving their quality of life (2016: 388). I learned throughout my fieldwork that improving quality of life is very subjective, because ideas about what would bring happiness in Israel are very personal. Still, my respondents were realistic about economic prosperity and realized this was not to be taken for granted. Emotional reasons to emigrate, such as love, the search for (Jewish) identity or personal development, were therefore more obvious motivations for my respondents. Practical and emotion-driven migrations were motivated by the desire to escape a situation, such as seeking independence from parents or escaping unpleasant family circumstances.

Oliver conceptualizes voluntary and deliberate migration as lifestyle migration, because it gives an individual the chance to re-establish a class position through an internalized habitus (2010: 50). In this context, the concept of lifestyle migration comprises migrating with the intent of seeking ‘the good life’ (ibid). Mobilizing yourself to a certain group or area becomes a means seek confirmation in a new setting of whatever the migrant’s perception is of a ‘good life.’

Perception of motivations to make aliyah differed between native Israelis and olim Chadashim. Native Israelis thought that anti-Semitism, Zionism or a pursuit of a more religious Jewish life were primary motivations for making aliyah. However, these were not the first topics my respondents mentioned. People have this idea of olim, because this image is constructed by the French and Israeli governments. Many newspaper articles focus on the prevalence of anti-Semitism and on how Jews in France suffer as a group, but the individual diaspora Jew seeking a new adventure is not a topic of discussion in these news broadcasts.37 When I spoke with native Israelis or even diaspora Jews in the Netherlands, they envisioned France as a very hostile and dangerous environment for Jews. My

respondents did mention that it was difficult to be openly Jewish, and that there was anti-Semitism in France, but they rarely listed this among their reasons for migrating to Israel. In the next sections I will present my field data regarding push factors for making aliya.

A new beginning

Some of my respondents were unhappy about their social circumstances in France. I heard people describe their desire for a new beginning. Some even sought to ‘escape’ from their old situation. Most of my respondents were students or young adults. According to Williams et al., members of this group have behavioral characteristics that make them more likely to migrate (2017: 2). Williams’ research on young adults in Europe shows that students are more eager to be flexible and mobile, because they have fewer constraints that would hold them back from migrating. They are less tied to the responsibilities people with a job or a family may have (ibid). Williams, also claims that students therefore have greater means to accomplish migration (ibid). Otrachshenko and Papova associate life-satisfaction with macroeconomics in non-CEE countries38 in regard to migration (2014: 47). A high macroeconomic level implies that the unemployment rate is low and there is a good national income, for example (ibid). Therefore non-economical related factors like personal freedom and a desire to start over were relevant for students from non-CEE countries in their intentions to migrate (Williams et al. 2017: 2, 5).

Sandra moved to Israel out of self-interest to improve her family situation. Her parents had lived in Israel previously and had always spoken about this as a beautiful period. Sandra used to go on holiday to Israel and assumed making aliya would be a solution to her situation. She was raised with the idea that life in Israel was good, because her parents had been happy there. She found herself in an unpleasant family situation in France and wished to break free and start over. The decision to migrate to that happy place her parents had experienced therefore came easily to her. Her parents had taught her that Israel was their home. In reality, however, making aliya was not a solution for Sandra.

38 Non-central and east European countries.
In France we grew up French because I was born as a French. But it’s like we always grew up with the idea that our country is Israel. So I don’t know, like I don’t have the sense of home in France as much as I thought I had here. (...) We used to come for vacation and we built a house in Israel that had something special. I had this big drive all my life to come to Israel... The truth is also that I had to be away from my family. That was the big reason I made aliya. Even though I had that drive all my life, I didn’t have the drive to actually leave France. My family situation was the big push. (...) It was not healthy for me at all. I’m pretty sure it’s a new beginning for me. Like I didn’t come here because it was advertised or like I ran away from the threat of Muslims in France. Absolutely not, I mean, things do happen. Terror, threats whatever... But it’s not like I thought I have to go. Because it never got to the point of like I was not safe and I had to leave. I feel like there is not really a place where you can say you are safe. Like here it’s also not good in some places. It’s not safe. Let’s be frank. So it’s the same over there.

It was interesting how Sandra always thought Israel was where she was supposed to be, but when she finally reached the point where she left France, she was disappointed. She was very hopeful about her future in Israel, because that is how she was raised. She had been contemplating living in Israel throughout her life, but the push factor to make aliya was when she sought a solution to leave her family in France. Sandra’s intention was to improve her life by moving to Israel, but she realized this did not solve her problems. She struggled with local Israelis and thought she would adapt to life in Israel naturally.

Anita also moved to recover from an unpleasant family situation. After seven years of marriage she divorced and she wanted to leave France as soon as possible. Israel was not the only country where she could move, because she was also a U.S. citizen. She had lived in the United States previously, however and wanted to try something new. Two other factors
that were significant to Anita were the benefits she would receive as an olah chadasha,\textsuperscript{39} including a temporary residence, and that her mother had also moved to Israel a few years before.

I wanted to leave France quickly because I didn’t have an apartment anymore. At the end of December of the year of my divorce, I had to move out of my apartment. My husband kept it, so I had to rent a place until I received my aliya ticket, and everything was arranged. Then they offered me a place at the Mercaz Klita\textsuperscript{40} in Ra’anana and I said ‘ok! I will take it.’ I was prepared to take anything to leave as soon as possible.

Anita’s divorce released her from responsibilities and constraints she experienced back in France. The severity of the situation made her want to leave France and start over in a different place. She had the opportunity to move to Israel, with many benefits of being an olah chadasha, which influenced her decision to move to Israel. During our conversation, I got the impression she wanted to convince me she was in control of everything in Israel. She told me she was very flexible and able to adapt to new situations, which made her aliya successful. She seemed to suggest that this was her way of coping with the divorce. She repeatedly emphasized how much she was in control of her situation in Israel, whereas what happened with her ex-husband was not something she had anticipated. Williams et al. claim that a characteristic of someone planning to migrate is the ability to be in control of new situations and to deal with risks (2017: 6). The latter was very evident in Anita’s narrative, and I felt she improved her quality of life, because she reclaimed this control by making aliya. She chose a relatively easy option, knowing that she was eligible for many benefits as an olah chadasha. Anita’s push factor was her desire to start over after her divorce and the pull factor to migrate to Israel was her eligibility for Israeli citizenship.

\textsuperscript{39} Female version of oleh chadash.

\textsuperscript{40} An absorption center that offers Hebrew language courses to olim chadashim (new immigrants).
Personal freedom

Roland had a strong desire to break free from his parents and presumed that making aliya would offer such an opportunity. He had been to Israel many times before, and his parents even owned property in Netanya. His brother had preceded him in making aliya, also to seek personal freedom, and Roland admired his brother’s leap of faith. Roland invited me to his home. The first thing he said to me was that making aliya was the best decision he ever took.

‘But why was aliya the best decision you ever made?’

‘Because uhm... First of all, I live alone here. That’s the biggest point. Like my parents are 5,000 kilometers away. Yeah it’s a break from everything and you restart your life. You know some people here, and you just have a friend that you met some time ago, and everyone becomes your family very fast so that is something very great. I finally made the decision, because I broke up with my girlfriend. So I thought that was the best moment, and I wanted to start my masters somewhere else and I could have like a new beginning.’

Making aliya for Roland was within his reach, and his idea about improving life quality by seeking personal freedom, was an easy goal to achieve. As soon as he had the opportunity, he packed his bags and left. According to Williams et al., relationships can withhold people from migrating, because the intent to migrate is less significant when someone experiences stronger local (social) ties (2017: 9). When Roland’s relationship ended, Roland was not risking much by making aliya. He already had a place to live, he had a transnational relationship with friends and family that already lived in Israel, and his brother had already set the example with his parents. The pull factor for Roland was the opportunity to have freedom and a place to live, and his break up was one of the push factors.
In search of an identity

I also met French Jews that did not grow up in a Jewish environment. These respondents were aware of their Jewish heritage, as was everyone around them, but they experienced this alone. They did not conceptualize a meaning for their Jewish heritage, and their environment had little to offer towards developing a Jewish identity.

Louis grew up in Marseille and experienced a lot of anti-Semitism at school. As a consequence he never really knew what type of attitude to have towards his Jewish heritage. His family was not involved with a Jewish community, nor did they show much interest in their Jewish heritage at home. At seventeen, Louis found a program on a Kibbutz in the south of Israel and decided to move. Louis moved to Israel, because he basically did not really know what he wanted to do with his life but certainly felt no attachment to Marseille. He had never been to Israel, nor had his parents ever visited, but they did not hesitate to let him go. Williams et al. argue that people with a strong local identity are more likely not to migrate (2017: 6). This explains why Louis did not think twice about leaving Marseille.

I was always aware I was Jewish and in the beginning this was not a problem. After the first Intifadah, people started to get more hostile towards me, because they blamed the Jews for what was happening. When I was seventeen years old, I came to a point in my life where I really did not know what I wanted to do with my life, and I did not want to stay in Marseille necessarily. So I decided to go to Israel and I volunteered at a Kibbutz where I also took Hebrew classes.

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41 Palestinian uprising in 2000
Louis is a clear example of a diaspora Jew that felt excluded from society but needed a pragmatic reason to move to Israel. When Louis was younger, people always knew he was Jewish, but this aspect was never emphasized. At school Louis was forced to eat meals with his Muslim classmates because they both did not eat pork. However, when Louis was older and tension mounted between Palestinians and Israelis, anti-Semitic comments at school increased as well. The push factor for Louis to leave France was that he did not feel connected there. The pull factor was going after a new opportunity in Israel. Therefore Louis’ motivation to migrate was pragmatic and not economically oriented, which allows a motivation such as seeking an identity.

Louis spoke very casually about making aliya as if it was not such a big deal to him and a logical next step. He gave the impression that aliya was a trend for diaspora Jews nowadays. You can obtain citizenship, enjoy numerous benefits and get the chance to start your life over. You are ascending and strengthening the Jewish community in Israel (unconsciously).

Another respondent searching for a Jewish identity was Thalia. I met Thalia at the Sarona market in Tel Aviv. She was working at the Le Creuset stall, which is a French chain for cooking utensils with shops worldwide. All staff at this Le Creuset store were French olim. Thalia was born in a small town in the south of France, but when she was a year old, her parents moved to Martinique, a small island in the Caribbean. Thalia was one of the few white people on the island and did everything to be black so that she would be like her friends. When she was ten, her family moved back to France, because her parents wanted to live in more Jewish surroundings. When Thalia experienced difficulties at home, however, her parents sent her to a Catholic boarding school. All her friends were Catholic, as was her boyfriend at the time. There was no Jewish influence in any way, shape or form. When she attended art school, she had many assignments that involved her Jewish roots. After she completed her degree, she felt lost and unsure about what to think of her Jewish heritage.

So, I looked for an internship in Israel and I found one for developing applications. My boss gave me an assignment to build an app that connects someone’s identity with the biblical meaning
of their name. I really didn’t understand why he gave this to me, because I know nothing about biblical stuff. I had to meet with the rabbi twice a week, and the more he taught me, the more I was impressed. I started to think that maybe I had a place here in Israel. So I decided to make aliya and to discover who I was.

Since Thalia made aliya, she felt like she found what she was looking for. She was looking for a Jewish identity and was introduced to this through biblical endeavors. When her internship ended, however, she realized that it was not Jewish religion that made her feel Jewish but the Jewish people she gathered around her. Thalia’s push factor to leave France was to discover her Jewish identity. The pull factor that made her want to make aliya, was her idea about her Jewish identity during her internship. Despite her incorrect assumption, making aliya gave her the chance to discover her Jewish identity. Thalia moved to Israel out of self-interest and was able to improve her quality of life by exploring how to give meaning to her Jewish identity.

Another respondent who made very clear he was trying to find his Jewish identity was Doron. Doron is a very religious 25 year-old male from Paris, an American friend of mine introduced me to. We met in a café in Jerusalem and both ordered a drink. Before he took a sip, he raised the glass and said a bracha.\footnote{Blessing} He explained to me this was something he did all the time, but was not necessary for me, because I was not religious. Doron conceptualized himself as a chozer betshuva.\footnote{A secular Jew that becomes more religiously observant in an orthodox way.} Doron used to live in a suburb of Paris where a Jewish community was virtually non-existent and was conflicted about his Jewish identity. Doron had a non-Jewish girlfriend, but after three years they broke up. She had difficulty accepting certain Jewish aspects about Doron, such as not eating pork or wanting to spend Shabbat with his family. He wanted to break free from this situation and went to Montreal to see paintings of the artistic movement Les Automotistes. During his visit, he met someone who told him about a movie about Jerusalem. For Doron, Israel and Montreal were the same: he
had never visited Israel and his family was not Zionist. Still, they watched the movie together. After seeing the movie Dov felt something very special.

So the next day I was with him and one other girl, a French girl, and we saw this movie with 3D glasses, and it was exciting for me. (...) And I saw the movie and I felt something very special in my head. I can’t explain to you what it is, but it was very, very special. (...) The atmosphere was very special, because my parents are from Tunisia. And there are a lot of people from Tunisia in the Jewish community, but in my age, they don’t know Tunisia. They are 40 and they didn’t visit Tunisia. But for me, it was different, because my grandparents lived in Tunisia, and my parents left Tunisia at age 23 or 24. There are a lot of problems with Arab people, and it was very difficult for us. So I know Tunisia. And when I saw the movie, I feel the energy of the orient. I love the oriental. I love it and I feel it in this movie and I thought I need to go in this place. I felt the energy of the Arabic music, when I heard the sonorous instruments, I love it, I love it. And I feel something. I get up in my energy. I am very spiritual and I feel something. So when I saw this movie, I felt this energy. This movement Arab. Something very oriental. And I need it in my life. So it was very good. It was very good, and at the end of the movie, I cried. I cried. I was very emotional. I’m not very emotional, but in this movie. Wow.

After seeing this movie, Doron wanted to visit Israel. He returned to Paris and decided to enroll in a program in Israel for a few months. He took an ulpan in the morning and in the afternoon went sightseeing. On his first day in Israel, Doron decided to stay permanently.

When Doron and his non-Jewish girlfriend broke up, Doron finally had the freedom to create his own meaning towards his Jewish identity. This was the push factor Doron needed to leave France. When he saw the movie about Jerusalem, he realized that he was
searching for a connection to his Tunisian Jewish roots. The movie about Jerusalem solidified this connection and ultimately became the factor that pulled him to Israel.

**Migrating together**

Some of my respondents never felt sure about whether to make *aliyah*. They were finally able to make this decision, when they knew they were not making *aliyah* alone. Manon had enrolled in a Masa[^44] program in Tel Aviv because she was unsure whether to make *aliyah* and hoped this program would help her make up her mind. Manon really enjoyed her temporary stay in Israel but lacked the courage to make *aliyah* and returned to Marseille.

> ‘I never lived alone. In five months I managed my life and I tried to have a lot of Israeli friends.’

> ‘Specifically Israeli friends?’

> ‘Uhm no, French but also Israeli. A bit of everything. And then what happened, I didn’t feel so good, I started a new job in France. But it felt like something was missing. But also I didn’t have the courage to make *aliyah*. Then two years ago my best friend that lived in Netanya asked me to come visit her in Israel. I decided to take her up on the offer and booked a vacation for two or three weeks and then I met my boyfriend. From then we never separated. So I wouldn’t say I made *aliyah* for him, but for a big part it was about him, but also I think it was just the final push I needed. He was Israeli, so he also helped me a lot in the administrative stuff, and I didn’t feel lonely. But at the beginning I didn’t want to go to Israel. Our relationship was nice but I was on vacation. But then I saw that the relationship was still going strong, and we kept in touch. He came to visit me in France. So I said to myself I have the opportunity

[^44]: An Israeli organization that facilitates internships, educational programs and volunteer projects for young adults worldwide. [https://www.masaisrael.org/](https://www.masaisrael.org/) (6/4/19)
to continue a beautiful story, or I stop and like... I was in the time of
my life that it was now or never. You know I didn’t like my job...’

Manon’s boyfriend gave her with a sense of safety. The life she built with him took away any
doubt or anxiety she felt. Manon moved out of self-interest and hoped to improve her life.
She felt that if there was any right time, this was definitely it. As a young girl, she had
imagined marrying an Israeli, because she had always felt her mindset was different from
her French friends. Manon’s pull factor was her relationship, and the push factor that gave
her courage to migrate was the feeling that she was not making aliya alone. Manon is a
clear example of how her diaspora background always made her think about living in Israel
one day. She did not just want a Jewish boyfriend: she wanted an Israeli Jewish boyfriend.
She could have made aliya years before, but the pragmatic reason eventually pushed her
over the edge.

After the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015, Daniel’s parents planned to make aliya. Daniel thought about it but was not really interested. He did enroll in a Masa program with
a few of his friends, just for fun, but then the situation changed.

Yes because my parents, they decided to make aliya because of
the attack it was six months earlier. So when they told me they
were going to leave, I understood that it was for that. I was
supposed to do a Masa program in Tel Aviv where you can learn in
the morning and in the afternoon you are off. This is what I was
supposed to do in September. But from the two friends that were
going to join me, the first one made aliya, and the second one
went to the Yeshiva\footnote{A Jewish educational institution dedicated to studying Jewish religious texts.} in Jerusalem. So I was alone, I cancelled it and
I decided to come to Israel with my parents to Netanya and not to
follow a Masa program.
Daniel made aliyah only because his friends changed their plans, and his parents were making aliyah. He explained to me that he had experienced anti-Semitism during a service at a synagogue once, and that the environment grew increasingly hostile towards Jews, but this was not a push factor for him to leave France. The push factor for Daniel was to accompany his parents after his initial plan fell through. He wanted to try Israel for six months keeping in mind that he could always return.

**State-funded programs**

In this section I will elaborate on state-funded programs, and how they influence people in deciding to make aliyah. Some of my respondents never planned on making aliyah but were convinced after a temporary stay in Israel while participating in a state-funded program. Others people were considering making aliyah but were indecisive and used this program to experience life in Israel. I will start by explaining what these programs entail and then analyze my respondents’ narratives. I will argue that those state-funded programs are intended as a pull factor for diaspora Jews because Masa’s goal is to provide a positive experience of life in Israel and ultimately to convince participants to make aliyah.

Masa is a Jewish organization run by the Israeli government, the Jewish Agency with its partners and the Jewish Federations of North America. The broad selection of programs includes courses of study in academic subjects or Jewish religion, gap-year programs and volunteer projects. During these months, participants learn about Israel and can adjust to the idea of making aliyah and living in Israel. The programs last at least 4 months, and Masa even grants and assists in applying for scholarships. During these programs many trips to Jewish historical sites in Israel are offered as opportunities for memorable experiences with others to form a bond with Israel. Some programs also offer housing, which can really add to the experience of being abroad and living with people experiencing the same. Even after the program ended, many participants I spoke with stayed in touch with fellow participants. The State of Israel funds these programs and provides an oleh chadash with other benefits to attract diaspora Jews to make aliyah (Burla 2015: 615).

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46 https://www.masaisrael.org/meet_masa_israel (4/1/19)
Yinon never really thought about making *aliyah* and was very satisfied with his life in France and never desired to move to Israel. When he was required to do an internship abroad as a part of his studies, however, he attended a program organized by Masa. Yinon chose Masa over any other organization, because he was familiar with Israel and was impressed with what Masa had to offer. He did not try to search for anything better. During our conversation, he started by describing his childhood in France with great fondness. However, I noticed that once he made *aliyah*, his attitude towards Israel changed, as did his thoughts about his life in France.

My parents didn’t encourage us to make *aliyah*, but they were big supporters of Israel. They never really supported us to go out on an adventure. Like I said, we were trying to be normal people in France, we never thought about being somewhere else. And I only went to Israel for vacations, I never thought about Israel as a place I could live and it was never presented to me as a place for that. But I didn’t have the mentality to make *aliyah*. I was more trying to stay in France. 95% of my friends were non-Jews and in Hebrew I would say it wasn’t my calling. It was just like I was having a good time in France, like why would I ever go? So I heard about the Masa program, that it was like for Jewish people that want to come to Israel and do a lot of stuff, and they offered great internships. I told myself: “you know what, let’s go!” The first month I asked myself what I was doing here and I wanted to go back to France. By the third month I thought “no way I’ll be going back!” I fell in love with the country. In France it’s hard to be Jewish, you can’t show you are Jewish. (...) And then you arrive in the country, and people are like you. Like you go to places, and everyone knows that you are Jewish, but it’s just so easy to be Jewish here, it’s just so easy. Like out of nowhere your Jewish identity can become public, and you don’t have to hide it anymore. I was hiding it in France. I was not lying, but you live your Jewish identity at home and not outside. I didn’t
know it could feel so good, until I came here. This is the main reason
I made aliyah. And also Israel is a very nice place to be, like Tel Aviv
is the best. Partying, having a good time at the beach, like it’s a
very young city where there are only people like you. Not a religious
city, there are people from outside, it’s very cosmopolitan. And
yeah also like I had a love story with a girl. My internship was great,
and you gain so many responsibilities and you feel part of
something now.

According to Dashefsky and Lazerwitz, diaspora Jews can be very dissatisfied with what their
original country offers Jews and therefore desire the benefits they enjoy in Israel, such as
celebrating the holidays nationally and the greater availability of Kosher food (1983: 268).
Yinon realized this only once he actually lived in Israel and experienced how easy it was for
him to be Jewish. He did not have to make an effort anymore to distinguish his Jewish
identity from his French identity in public. When Yinon talked about his life in France, he
actually admitted he was hiding his Jewish identity. That was when I really noticed the effect
of making aliyah on Yinon. According to Hertzberg’s writings about diaspora, people are
attracted to the majority and act friendly amongst each other (1998: 508-509). The
international community of which Yinon became part in the Masa program made him
realize he could surround himself with people that were alike at a different level than he
experienced amongst his non-Jewish friends in France. Yinon is now part of an international
community in Jerusalem, where members share the experience of being diaspora Jews in
Israel. Yinon’s pull factor was the experience of being able to express his Jewish identity in
public amongst other Jews.

Masa gave Yinon the chance to experience life in Israel. He came into contact with
an international community and had a sensational time in Israel. Masa achieved its goal of
providing an experience that was so positive that the person made aliyah.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained different push and pull factors for making aliya. This chapter also showed how the factors are pragmatic and mostly out of self-interest. Existing narratives also motivate aliya as result of anti-Semitism and Zionism, but these topics were never mentioned as the final push or pull factor that led to the decision to migrate to Israel. However, this does not mean that these narratives were irrelevant in the decision to make aliya. The Israeli government makes it very easy for diaspora Jews to migrate by granting them Israeli citizenship through the Law of Return and giving several benefits to olim chadashim. Some people who are offered the choice of living wherever they want may find the benefits they will receive as a new immigrant to be decisive. The vagueness of the LOR does not restrict diaspora Jews to a timeframe or impose any specific Jewish religious observance. This flexibility appeals to all diaspora Jews, because they are aware they will always be eligible for Israeli citizenship, which leaves room for practical changes in life that may make living in Israel a more relevant option later on.

Another method the Israeli government applies to attract diaspora Jews is by organizing and partly funding programs and internships to give diaspora Jews a sense of life in Israel. As a result, the diaspora-Israel relationship is established and influenced. For some, a temporary experience in Israel was the final push they needed to make aliya.

I have shown how motivations to migrate are very pragmatic, because my focus group was able to be very flexible in deciding where to live and when to leave France. My respondents were not forced to leave France and were able to make a deliberate decision. Many respondents moved, when they were released from restraints and sought to improve their lives. These migrants are conceptualized as lifestyle migrants. Lifestyle migrants move out of self-interest and have multiple pragmatic push and pull motivations, such as a desire to get a new start in their lives, searching for a Jewish identity, seeking personal freedom or migrating together.
Chapter 4. Post-aliyah: life as a French Jew in Israel

In this chapter I will reflect on how French Jews currently live in Israel. The international French bubble gives French migrants a chance to replicate their previous standard of living, but also results from the struggle to integrate in Israeli society.

In this chapter I will focus on the period after migrants make aliyah and on their integration in Israel. Reflecting on the integration process may offer an indication of the extent to which migrants become immersed in Israeli society. Initially I became interested in Jewish migrants in Israel because I noticed that returning to the perceived homeland as a diaspora may not always lead to the desired outcome. People who have an idea about living in the homeland may be disappointed, when they realize that life in Israel does not meet their expectations.

The previous two chapters clarified the push and pull factors that encourage diaspora Jews to make aliyah. One of the pull factors to make aliyah was the entitlement to many benefits as an oleh chadash. Israel offers benefits to new immigrants as a means to facilitate a homecoming and integration process (Shuval 1998: 18). In this chapter I will show the effect these benefits have on building a new life in Israel. Like the previous chapter, the State of Israel is important, because it introduces migrants to an international bubble. Entering this international social bubble limits interaction with native Israelis.47 In addition to becoming familiar with an international circle through benefits for new immigrants, I will argue that how migrants choose to integrate in Israel derives from a habitus and can therefore make them feel comfortable in this international setting.

I will argue that the bubble is an alternative way of integrating to cope with the unfamiliar and sometimes unpleasant life in Israel. As a result, French olim are segregated from native Israelis, and the Jewish population as a whole in Israel is very segmented. First-generation migrants have difficulty becoming like native Israelis and are not perceived as Israelis. Despite the challenges of connecting with native Israelis, French olim find a place to belong and feel at home in Israel, when they are surrounded by people that share a similar habitus. This bubble can add new meaning and intensify their French heritage. Especially in

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47 Jews that were born and raised in Israel.
cases of deliberate lifestyle migration, the migrant’s desires are vital, and the emotional experience of migration is a crucial success factor. The bubble provides an opportunity to facilitate these emotions.

In this chapter I will show how French olim chadashim may try very hard to integrate but never become ‘real Israeli.’ Regardless of expressing their desire to become ‘real Israeli,’ the habitus always influences how they pursue this goal, unconsciously directing them towards an international or French community and distinguishing them from native Israelis. I will discuss what being a ‘real Israeli’ entails according to my respondents, and how they thought they would be able to become one. From an outsider’s perspective, the French are always easy to recognize by their appearance or language, for example, and native Israelis almost never perceive them as ‘real Israeli.’

There is also a difference between settling in an international city, such as Tel Aviv, and the heavily French populated city of Netanya. The French habitus is more noticeable in Netanya, when it comes to choosing who to socialize with and where to work. The large French network in Netanya comprises multiple French-speaking synagogues and companies. French migrants in other cities, however, do not behave very differently from those in Netanya, because they also live in an (international) bubble and do not mix with Israelis. In the previous chapter I described the government’s efforts to nationalize Jewish ethnicity by encouraging diaspora Jews as a whole to increase the Jewish population in Israel. In reality, however, many olim struggle with ‘native Israelis’ and remain amongst other internationals, which causes a very segmented Jewish population. My respondents talked about their struggle to communicate in Hebrew and expressed feelings of being misunderstood by native Israelis. The international community was easier on them, and they spent time with people that shared the same experiences. Olim find a place of understanding within the olim bubble, because they find people with a similar habitus. These similarities will be highlighted throughout this chapter. Especially once the new migrants stop receiving state benefits, they face more social and economic struggles and may even decide to return to their previous country of residence.

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48 Jews that were born and raised in Israel.
**Current integration of the French community**

In this section I will describe my observations of the integration of French migrants in Israel. Overall, I noticed that most French people in Netanya only socialized with each other, so can we really speak of integration? I was curious how the French themselves reflected on the current situation. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I made some mistakes in approaching French people in Netanya. I was mainly present in the field during the day, when those I saw were either retired or children playing hooky. Even though most children were able to speak Hebrew, I noticed their group of friends consisted of French speakers as well. I tried to ask many people why the French did not mix with others, but most answers were limited to French contact being easier and having a basic level of understanding because they were French.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, my questions were very closed and one of my questions was why French *olim* made *aliyah*. Locals as well as French *olim* answered that the French *olim* were in search of the ‘good life,’ by which they meant the beach, Jewish people and nice weather. However, I noticed that the French population was segregated from the local Israelis. One reason was the disgust displayed by local Israelis towards French *olim*. Local Israelis felt that French were financially privileged by receiving funds from France and were therefore driving up the housing prices. As a result, the locals thought they were being sabotaged and deprived of opportunities, which the ‘privileged’ French were given. According to my respondent Roland, this was a myth and you could tell by the French migrants in Netanya that they did not have a high income.

Through many small talk conversations, I discovered that some French migrants in Israel return to France for work, because they are unable to earn what they see as a decent living. This results in segregated families in which one parent returns to France for work. While this is not the case for all French migrants in Israel, it facilitates a normalized disgust among local Israelis toward French migrants. This is not conducive to interaction between the two groups.

I asked Roland what he thought of the French community in Netanya. Roland has a large group of French friends with whom he spends his free time. They celebrate holidays together, have some common interests, speak the same language and even dress the same style. When I approached Roland and his friend at the *Kikar*, they were some of very few
people wearing a jacket despite the warm weather. Even though Roland had a large group of French friends, he thought it was important to learn Hebrew and was trying hard to learn the language properly by taking an ulpan. However, I did not hear many French people speak Hebrew, and I asked Roland why they tend to stay amongst other French people.

That’s the problem, that’s my huge struggle with my French friends that do the same. They don’t want to learn Hebrew, and they only want stay amongst French people. And they told me that they didn’t know how to be a part of Israel. I still don’t understand. You can’t live like this, you won’t be able to work anywhere.

Roland confirmed my observations of the streets in Netanya and how this is the reality for many French people. They do not really want to try to blend in with society, because they do not know how. Remaining amongst French people is easier. This immigrant field is a place for exchanging mutual desires and thoughts.

In cities that were not so heavily populated by French people, French olim lived in a very international setting. I interviewed Yinon in Jerusalem and he told me that he met most of his friends at an ulpan.

In the ulpan there were a bunch of people together, only olim chadashim. And in the evening you go out. So then out of nowhere you gain so many new friends. (...) I was doing many activities with them. You know each other like olim chadashim, you are trying to build a new family. When you make aliyah, it’s something that is important. The first thing that you do is that you are trying to get back what you just lost. You lost family, you will try to find back family. And people out of nowhere become your best friends. You lost friends, you decided to put them behind you and out of nowhere you will become very sociable, you build friends, circles and
stuff like that. You don’t know your environment, but out of nowhere you will try to go out and explore. This is how I coped with loneliness.

Yinon explains how he used the ulpan to make up for what he ‘lost’ or left behind in France. He sought for a new family and a new group of friends to feel comfortable with his new life in Israel. Yinon’s narrative is also an example of how he got a chance to start over and had to search for whatever made him happy at the time. He made many new friends and still has a big group of olim chadashim around him to this day. The free language course Yinon received through the state helped him adjust in Israel by providing a way to cope with the loneliness he experienced after making aliya.

As an olim chadash it is common to mix with people that share an experience. The example above shows how this social circle is an easy way to find comfort in a new setting. Throughout this chapter, I will explain how an international bubble helps cope with the migration process.

Creating a home and the habitus

In the previous section Yinon explained how his international friends helped him find the family and friends he had ‘lost’ by making aliya. In this section I will elaborate on how migrants make a new home for themselves. French migrants have distinctive traditions; personal religious practices; social ties and skills in the work field (Shuval 1998: 11). I will focus on the way French migrants make their home, and why this may or may not show traces of their previous life in France. Making a home comprises the process of recreating a new home in a different place. In the process, people react to displacement through material culture, emotion or embodiment (Walsh 2011: 524). The shape and form of homemaking can continue a previous way of life or symbolize building new one in a new country of residence. Homemaking supports the experience of emigrating and integrating (ibid). These choices and preferences are always influenced by internalized structures (the habitus), which can lead to finding a home within the international bubble.
In the previous chapter, I argued that French Jewish migrants in Israel can be conceptualized as lifestyle migrants. According to Oliver’s study, lifestyle migration gives an individual the chance to re-establish a class position through an internalized habitus (2010: 50). In this context, the concept of lifestyle migration comprises migrating with the intent of seeking ‘the good life’ (ibid). Therefore, socializing with a certain group is a means of seeking confirmation in a new setting of whatever the migrant’s perception is of a ‘good life’.

Despite this gap between French olim and locals, French olim can try to blend in with society. According to Oliver, however, their habitus will always influence their behavior and daily and general life choices (2010: 56). Within one’s habitus are ‘internalized structures, dispositions, tendencies, habits and ways of acting that are both individualistic and typical of one’s social groups...’ (ibid). As a result, class and lifestyle are reproduced while creating a new life in accordance to someone’s economic, cultural, linguistic, social and physical capital that is derived from their character and preferences. These choices in the new country of residence are based on one’s internalized structures (Oliver et al. 2010: 52; Noble 2013: 343). Habitus is particularly evident in different fields, because it influences how someone behaves. According to Bourdieu, a field is an independent web of relations between positions and establishments with its own cultural and social capital (Noble 2013: 351). Whenever someone enters this field, these power relations are forced upon the individual. The members that are in control of this field, are able to govern there, because they can utilize their own forms of capital (ibid).

The (French) olim bubble

Lifestyle migration and the habitus in which a migrant gets the chance to reestablish class and lifestyle result in interaction with the French/international olim bubble. According to Grusendorf, individual social capital that comprises a network of relationships with mutual desires leads to membership of a group (2016: 3-4). One of the reasons many of my respondents in Netanya moved there was that they already had friends or family(homes) in this area. Weinberg claims this bubble is a way to organize and structure society by making a distinction between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ (2003: 258). A communal enemy is therefore a means to create a personal identity and to construct a social sense of belonging to a group (ibid).
This theory about ‘othering’ to create a sense of belonging, explains why some people want to connect more with French people in Israel, while others try to blend in with Israelis, attempting to become members of the group. In other words, the people you choose to associate with are ultimately a way to define your own identity.

The case of lifestyle migration to Israel, however, adds a new dimension to integration by *olim chadashim*. Not only are *olim chadashim* lifestyle migrants, but they also receive a type of ethno-national homecoming because their citizenship and nationality is combined (Zaban 2014: 1006). The migrants endure a naturalization process framing them as exiles returning to the historical national homeland. While attempting to integrate in a new place, however, migrants may realize that they feel more attached to their country of origin while being part of an international group of ‘exiles’. They struggle with social, religious, linguistic and cultural challenges in their new country, which can contradict their original idea about belonging to the homeland of Israel (Zaban 2014: 1006). Zaban also confirms my previous arguments that migrants tend to socialize with people like themselves, as conceptualized in the bubble. This bubble provides a comfortable home as a means to cope with their new life in Israel (ibid: 1007). Therefore, acceding to the French or international *olim* bubble is a form of creating a new home in Israel. This bubble gives migrants the chance to build a new life in Israel, without taking up Israeli behavior such as impoliteness, aggressive driving and uptightness (ibid: 1011). As a result, the bubble segregates migrants from native Israelis, and integration amongst the native Israelis is discouraged. Migrants integrate more easily in a space with others who experienced a similar journey, and the French or international *olim* bubble functions as an alternative to integrate in Israel. The bubble is a space where people experience empathy and support from those like them. Once they find their place in this bubble, they become locals within but not really outside this bubble (ibid: 1007, 1011).

Not only is a bubble a space people can use to develop their identity, the bubble is also a space where people can seek confirmation of their identity and a field where social and cultural capital are important in gaining group membership. Habitus makes a migrant seek a field with similar capital, which explains why diaspora Jews in Israel connect with each other when their capital coincides (Noble 2013: 351).
The next sections will show the influence of habitus and lifestyle migration in the current integration of French olim. I will provide examples of location, language, appearance, social interaction and religion.

Location

In the previous chapter I showed how the Jewish French migration to Israel is pragmatic and can be conceptualized as lifestyle migration. This gives individuals room to create a new life according to their personal preferences incorporating internalized structures (the habitus) from their previous residence. Incorporation of habitus in migration can explain why Netanya is heavily populated with French olim. Amit et al. claim that French immigrants in Israel tend to live in Israeli cities with characteristics that coincide with their standard of living in France (2016: 112). These cities match their previous experiences with education, religion, tradition and a middle class population (ibid). These migrants enter a field where the desires and expectations of their fellow residents resemble their own. The French olim I encountered in Netanya chose to move to this city because of the French atmosphere and the beach and in most cases already had transnational relations with people residing in this area. There were many French stores, restaurants and synagogues. The percentage of French residents in Netanya was so high that store vendors initially approached customers in French. Regarding French olim in Netanya, therefore, Oliver’s argument about habitus influencing the migrant’s choice of residence in Israel is very evident (2010: 52-53). Living in a place that aligns with their economic, social and cultural capital re-establishes class position (ibid).

Netanya is not the only place where French olim reside. Despite choosing not to live in a city dominated by French immigrants, habitus can still be affective in a different setting. I met many French olim in other cities that socialized mainly within an international community. My French respondents in Tel Aviv, for example, did not have strong ties with French people in Netanya and therefore did not feel compelled to live there. Still, one characteristic common to French people from Netanya and Tel Aviv alike is that they do not interact much with native Israelis. Sandra from Jerusalem told me that she never feels understood by Israelis and finds this comfort amongst internationals that have experienced the same. In this example, habitus becomes significant, when Sandra socializes with people like her and gets the
opportunity to reproduce her concept of lifestyle. One’s habitus is attracted to an identical habitus, not to feel like the odd one out (Oliver 2010: 61).

Religion

The Israeli boundaries between religion and state are very blurred, which makes Israel an enthno-national state (Kravel-Tovi 2017: 1). The declaration of independence states: ‘Israel was the birthplace of Jewish people. Here its spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped.’ (Burla 2015: 604). This quotation shows how Judaism and the state are intertwined from the very basis of the establishment of Israel. This encourages people to think about how they will observe their Jewish heritage in a Jewish State. Upon arriving in Israel, immigrants will be confronted with redesigning their Jewish life in a somewhat unfamiliar country. Since religion is not a clearly defined concept, it may serve to connect people and expose a visible form of a shared practice (Hausner et al. 2010: 1). Religion is a very transformable concept that can be adapted to different situations on an individual and a collective level, while establishing a sense of belonging. Religion may be a strong factor in moving to Israel but at the same time is not always a dominant characteristic in individual identity. Sometimes, religion is mainly a way to sustain and uphold the diasporic life but changes in importance, once someone is not part of a diaspora anymore (ibid: 5).

The first time I met Yaniv at Sarona market, he told me about his own journey from Marseille. He moved to Israel with his family when he was just 8 years old. The first few years he refused to speak Hebrew because he was too embarrassed by his French accent. He was afraid people would make fun of him. As a result, he had a hard time adjusting and felt misunderstood by his classmates. He did not get high grades and had to transfer to many different schools. However, the one thing he was really good at was studying the Thora, and he became very religious. He also lived in a town with many religious immigrants.

Religious studies were the one thing Yaniv excelled at, and for which he received great acceptance and approval from the other religious olim in his town. He used religious capital to enter a field of religious immigrants that shared the same interests. This field gave Yaniv a way to cope with being an immigrant in Israel. Yaniv used religion to enter this
bubble of religious migrants that helped him cope with feeling disconnected from native Israelis. By becoming a member of this religious bubble, Yaniv confirmed his own identity in regards to the ‘other’ native Israelis. Therefore this bubble was a way for Yaniv to cope with the struggles he experienced being an oleh chadash.

**Language proficiency**

Another method to get in touch with the international community is through the language programs funded and organized by the state and available to every new immigrant. The Israeli government has always been very involved with the absorption of new immigrants through granting funds and designing a political, organizational and economic structure for the immigrants. As a result, immigrants enrolled at certain educational, political or labor institutions (Ya’ar 2005: 93). The role of the government in absorption of migrants cannot be dismissed, because the government is vital in bringing internationals together. Promoting this international type of socialization may constrain overall absorption of immigrants. By providing free language courses, Hebrew can indeed be conducive to integration. Literature suggests that language proficiency is evident in employment and social mobility and can even contribute to a permanent stay in Israel (Remennick 2004: 445). However, this holds true only if migrants enter an Israeli field as well and make an effort to incorporate Hebrew in their daily life. At the Kikar I mainly heard French and noticed that parents raise their children in French. This indicates that France is still incorporated in their daily life in Israel. On top of that, many olim work in international companies, which results in very poor Hebrew language proficiency. The current labor market in Israel is comprised of many international companies, which do not require strong proficiency in Hebrew. Some migrants are not challenged to incorporate Hebrew on a daily basis. This can lead to isolation from the local Israeli job market, Israeli culture and Israeli contacts (Zaban 2014: 1013-1014).

Daniel emphasized that speaking Hebrew is a very big part of integration in Israel. He explained to me how French olim do not always have the chance to learn proper Hebrew and end up living in isolation from native Israelis.
‘We don’t have to learn Hebrew to work, but we have to find work in Hebrew to integrate.’

‘So why are there so many people that don’t speak Hebrew, but do have a job?’

‘When you arrive here, you don’t have so much time to get integrated in the country. You have to earn money, and you have to live to survive to live. Therefore they leave it. But I think they regret it. They would like to be integrated and to learn Hebrew and to learn about the culture, but they don’t have time, they have to make money, they have to make it work, so the first thing they have to do is to work in French, because they don’t have the choice.’

Many companies specifically require native French or English speakers, because they are international or are involved with olim chadashim. Manon had many job offers from French telecom companies but sought work in an Israeli company for integration purposes. She made a huge effort to learn and work in Hebrew and said it helped her understand the Israeli mentality. Everything has to happen quickly and you have to be loud to get anything done. She felt pressure to improve her Hebrew skills to be treated as equal to her Israeli co-workers. Manon’s Hebrew was actually very decent, but sometimes it was not enough. In some cases she would call a company, and they would not follow up on her request. If her Israeli boyfriend made the call, he would always succeed. She did not know why she failed, but she thought they were able to recognize her French accent and feared she was not convincing enough. Despite Manon’s efforts to immerse herself in Israeli society and recreate her life, she was still recognized as an outsider. It is possible to infiltrate in a new field, but there are limits to what you can achieve by altering your habitus (Oliver 2010: 63).

Social interaction

I realized it was not only the French accent that distinguished my respondents from native Israelis. The people migrants interact with indicate how they are integrated in society. I
noticed the importance of social contacts in comparing similar informants from Netanya and Tel Aviv.

I met two 26 year-old men that moved to Israel from France as a child. They were both proficient in Hebrew and both worked in a restaurant. They wore a uniform, so their personal style was not represented when I approached them at work. The only difference between the two was that one worked in Netanya (Ramon) at a coffee bar with mostly French customers and the other in Tel Aviv (Yaniv) in a restaurant frequented by tourists and Israelis. Ramon, spoke to his customers in French, and Yaniv conversed with his customers primarily in Hebrew. If they were tourists, Yaniv would switch to English or French. Yaniv and Ramon both seemed very natural in how they interacted with people, like it was their first language. They joked with their customers and seemed very involved and understanding. Their facial expressions appeared sincere and aligned with what they were saying. However, when Yaniv spoke with his staff and customers in Hebrew, he came across as more Israeli than Ramon. Ramon had the same background as Yaniv but worked in a coffeehouse in Netanya, where most customers were French. Ramon conversed mainly in French, even though his Hebrew was really good as well. The sound of Hebrew is more aggressive and harsher than French. Israelis tend to speak louder than French people, and I definitely heard these characteristics in Yaniv and Ramon’s conversations with their staff. Yaniv came across as more demanding, and Ramon seemed like the kind, gentle boss. Therefore, in practice acting like an Israeli can depend on your social surroundings. In both cases, language was used as a way to conform to that nationality.

At the restaurant Yaniv seemed like a ‘real Israeli’ by mastering Hebrew and adopting its harsh characteristics. As soon as he took off his uniform and changed back his own clothes, however, he made a different impression. Yaniv wore a cap, a long necklace, rolled up jeans and low canvas sneakers. There were no creases or tears, and dark colors and soft materials completed his look. Yaniv definitely looked different from those around him. In the next section I will explain how habitus can permeate appearance.
Habitus and appearance

Language is one way to blend in, but French people in Israel are distinctive in many other ways, such as their style of dress. I always struggled to describe the distinctive appears of the French people correctly, but Anita told me that it is very common for people in France to dress up.

In France we have to get dressed up every time, even when you want buy bread down the street, you get dressed up and put on make-up. I don’t like that. I prefer to just wear comfortable clothes.

After my conversation with Anita, I finally knew how to distinguish the Israeli and French styles of dress. French people were always very clean, and their outfit was complete. Anita says she does not like to dress French, but Roland said this is one thing that he would never change. Dressing up is a clear example of how habitus is still relevant in a different situation. Despite Anita denying she liked to dress up, her appearance suggested that she thought carefully about what she wore. Unconsciously, her internalized thoughts about style of dress influenced her appearance in Israel. Anita’s clothes matched, and she looked clean and neat. This was not the impression I got from Israelis all the time. Some Israelis looked like they grabbed the first pair of pants they saw and appeared a bit sloppy. In the evening at a bar, however, I noticed that the local Israelis looked much more dressed up. Habitus regarding appearance became evident in the motivations of French migrants to dress up, whenever they appeared in public. With Israelis, I noticed they made more of an effort with their appearance when they went to a bar at night for example. Choice of clothing style, however, was different sometimes in which Israeli styles were more loosely-fitted and torn, and French styles were clean, neat and tight-fitted.
Blending in with Israelis

Many informants stressed the importance of learning Hebrew and interacting with local Israelis. Despite making a huge effort, these immigrants still feel like outsiders. Manon tried hard to socialize with Israelis, and her Israeli boyfriend made the integration process a lot easier. Despite her efforts to blend in with Israelis, she still felt very alone and very French.

‘Why do you think some of the French immigrants struggle to integrate?’

‘Ehm... Maybe because they don’t have an Israeli boyfriend like me. You know it plays a big role, because I don’t have a choice. I’m with Israeli people all the time. In the beginning it was hard, because they didn’t understand me, and I didn’t understand them, but slowly I became part of the group and I started to act like them. But if I had a French boyfriend, I’m sure that the *aliyah* would’ve been completely different. I have some French friends, but I feel like I lost my French. I lost my French language, I only think in Hebrew. It’s weird to say, but even if I want to be very integrated here, I still consider myself French. Because of my roots, my childhood and my memories from France. I still feel like a French that is living abroad. (...) If my boyfriend is not here, I think “what am I doing here.” All my real friends, the good, good friends that I used to see, they are still in Marseille. And here I don’t have, for me the friends that I have, it’s only his friends. And if one day, something happens, his friends will take his side. It’s obvious. Like my friends would be on my side. Even though we go out and we do a lot of things, I feel like the friends are not my real friends. I love them, but I feel that they love me also because I’m ‘the girlfriend.’
Manon still feels different from Israelis because of her French heritage. In her boyfriend’s field Manon feels lonely and like an outsider. These feelings emphasize Manon’s heritage, despite making an effort to master Hebrew and have Israeli friends.

Another respondent who made a huge effort to blend in with native Israelis was Jonathan. When we met, he came from his army base and was still wearing his uniform. He made aliya in 2015 and decided to be a volunteer in the army. Jonathan explained to me that he volunteered for the army, because he thought it was the best way to integrate and be accepted in Israeli society. Even though he really makes an effort to fit in and integrate, within his unit, he is still considered an outsider:

Sometimes life is difficult here and the way to cope with it is to just scream back. When people are annoying me or giving me a hard time, I just sit back and listen. Then when they’re done talking I act all cool and just ask them if they are done being difficult. I like that you can be the same here as everyone, but people do make fun of my heritage. Like if they hear me complain, they say: ‘ata Tsarphati,’ which is like: oh the French guy.

Despite the harassment he endures from his unit, Jonathan was proud of his occupation in the army. He was very mysterious about what unit he was in, because he was prohibited from sharing details. I got the impression that Jonathan felt superior to immigrants who did not volunteer in the army, because he repeatedly mentioned how important his ‘secret’ unit was, and how everyone is supposed to help Israel and the Jews. Despite his secretive attitude, he did not sugarcoat his love for the army and Israel at all. It was really important for Jonathan to ‘do something’ for Israel, and he used the army to facilitate an Israeli identity.

Bar-On Cohen explains how training the soldiers increases their aggression and endurance, and once the helmet is on, their personal identity disappears (2011: 517). They
train together, experience hardships together, share the same enemy etc. Like Bar-On Cohen suggests, they lose their own identity and they become a unit with the same language. In theory, Jonathan’s desire to integrate through the army would therefore work. In practice, however, his fellow soldiers still distinguished Jonathan from the rest. For Jonathan, the army gave him the chance to be like everyone else, because he functioned in a group where his participation was equivalent to that of the others.

By focusing on Jonathan’s fields, it becomes evident that he wanted to give me the impression he mastered the military field by expressing the social capital he derived from this. In front of me, he made his position as a heroic diaspora Jew clear by volunteering in the army. Jonathan imposed power relations on me because he was a volunteer for a service relevant for me as well. Jonathan used this opportunity to expose the capital he derived from volunteering and being involved with Israeli society. Within his unit, these power relations were imposed on him, and he was made to feel like an outsider. His fellow soldiers had different forms of capital and did not emphasize Jonathan’s forms of capital. The interests were different, as evidenced through the internalized structures of Jonathan’s habitus.

In Jonathan’s narrative his repetition of the narrative the Jewish Agency presented as Israel being under threat and in need of help was striking. By repeating this narrative to me, the diaspora Jew, Jonathan presents himself as an Israeli hero. In the army, however, Jonathan is the French guy, indicating that Jonathan’s identity is bound to the situation. Jonathan uses the army to seek confirmation of his identity and projects this on me.

Jonathan’s military service can help him after he completed it in being integrated amongst native Israelis because they share an experience. Jonathan can use this capital to gain membership to native Israeli groups. This does not ensure Jonathan of complete membership amongst native Israelis because his French habitus can still become evident in different type of situations.

I often discussed the topic of how to become an Israeli with my respondents. They focused mainly on learning the language as a way to be a real Israeli. One of my respondents said he would be Israeli, if he sent his children to an Israeli school. Yinon had a more elaborate answer to what being an Israeli is:
‘In France, if I had a “no” for an answer, no is no, that’s it, go home. Now I would never accept that for an answer. Now I feel like I don’t belong in Paris and French culture in the way that I don’t accept to be lied to.’

‘You think other people see you as an Israeli?’

‘Israeli? Why? I guess not because I’m new in here, like a baby. They will instantly recognize I’m not Israeli by everything I do. The way I behave, the way I dress, the way I talk to them, the way I answer them, the way I laugh. That’s why it’s hard to be an olim chadash. You left everything, but you’re not still everything you wanted to be. And people don’t recognize you as part of them. No they recognize you as part of them, but you’re like a brother basically. You will not feel like you are exactly like them. You realize that people... Look I didn’t go to the army, I didn’t go to high school here. Most of my friends are olim Chadashim. Every Israeli speaks about the army, what they did in high school the trips they did. Olim Chadashim don’t have any landmark in here. Like you arrive, and you have nothing.’

Despite Yinon’s feelings about being an Israeli due to his change of character, he senses that people do not perceive him as an Israeli. Yinon mentions people will notice he is not Israeli by his speech, his style of dress, the way he argues etc., revealing how his French habitus becomes apparent in social situations.

In this section I showed how socialization and behavior can determine how migrants integrate, and how they feel about immigrating. Migrants struggle to adapt to Israel due to preconceived notions that Israel is their homeland, while they share only the same heritage as their fellow citizens. In reality, migrants do not feel connected with locals and prefer to socialize with people like them, as a result of reproducing internalized structures. The bubble
is an alternative way of integrating and creating a sense of belonging amongst people with the same background. After migrating, the identities of migrants change, and their country of origin is attributed a new status of belonging. The bubble is a way to cope with struggles and difficulties migrants experience in Israel and gives them an excuse not to adopt certain Israeli traits.

Conclusion

In this chapter I focused on the current integration of French migrants in Israel. Being a lifestyle migrant in an ethno-national state makes this case interesting, because habitus becomes very evident in the choices migrants make in pursuit of ‘the good life’. These decisions will always be influenced by internalized structures from their past and represents their integration process in Israel. This mostly results in socializing with people like them, because migrants struggle to connect with native Israelis and suffer from preconceived ideas about French immigrants. When immigrants find comfort in this international bubble, they will experience social contacts with people that share the same interests.

Internalized structures and interests can influence the choice of residential location, such as the heavily French populated city of Netanya. In other examples, people find comfort in international communities that share the immigrant experience in Israel. As a result, migrants integrate in an international bubble but not with native Israelis. This international bubble has a set of power relations maintained and controlled by people with the coinciding capital. Therefore the bubble can replicate the migrant’s habitus, which is different from the local Israeli society.

Another aspect migrants struggle with is the Hebrew language. Poor language proficiency can lead to isolation from any contact with different Israelis, and most of my respondents mentioned that French people do not feel compelled to socialize outside the French or international community. This familiar environment gives migrants an opportunity to re-establish class structures with people that share the same preferences. Migrants also get a chance to seek confirmation of their identity by joining a certain group.
Some people make a huge effort to learn proper Hebrew and to be present in Israeli institutions. Despite feeling like an Israeli, however, they are very aware that native Israelis will never perceive them as one of them. The migrants in these settings actually feel quite lonely. People will always be able to distinguish them by their accent or appearance. Migrants may go to great lengths to alter themselves to adapt to their new surroundings, but their habitus will be an obstacle to becoming completely Israeli.

Diaspora Jews can be disappointed when they realize Israel is not the imagined home country they thought it would be. Whereas they grew up with the idea that all Jews can be unified in this ethno-national State, they realize that the Jewish population of Israel is very segmented and they turn to similar people. Not only are their preferences and choices regarding integration influenced by the habitus, their habitus also influences the way outsiders recognize them. This makes integration in Israeli society very difficult and a community of fellow olim very comfortable.
Chapter 5. Conclusion

In this research I captured how current aliyah by French Jews can be understood. Media outlets, circulating narratives and Israeli organizations highlight anti-Semitism and Zionism as central themes within this endeavor. In this research however, I demonstrate how these concepts are secondary in decisions to migrate, and how such decisions arise primarily from pragmatic reasoning.

I started by focusing on what a diaspora is, and on how French diaspora Jews experienced this concept. Being a part of a diaspora means that they have been exposed to an imagined homeland by different sources. Some Jews are not involved with their Jewish heritage at all, but all experienced a clash between their Jewish heritage and non-Jews in France at some point. As these Jews are French as well, they are challenged in how to conceptualize their Jewish heritage in France.

Circulating narratives about anti-Semitism and Zionism, whether real or imagined, unify the Jewish community in France. Other factors such as celebrating Jewish holidays or Israeli politics can disconnect French Jews from French non-Jews. Feeling excluded from the non-Jewish French society can be a push factor to leave France. Other Jews do not involve anything from their Jewish heritage in their daily life but still migrate to Israel. They are pulled to Israel or choose to make aliyah instead of any considering any other country of residence for various reasons.

First, they are influenced by their childhood and how they became familiar with Israel. In addition, Israel is very involved with the diaspora Jews and presents narratives to pull them to Israel or facilitates travel to Israel through special programs. The Jewish Agency introduces diaspora Jews to political narratives that emphasize fear of a Jewish future outside of Israel and positions Israel as being in need of help. Nationalizing ethnicity contributes to conceptualizing Israel as a real home. These narratives function as unifying mechanisms that make diaspora Jews feel connected to each other and to Israel. Personal affiliation and political influences therefore create real or imagined transnational bonds with Israel. Therefore, diaspora Jews in France are more receptive to a possible future in Israel.
Practical factors such as the Law of Return and new immigrant benefits may lead diaspora Jews to prefer settling in Israel over any other country. Having the freedom to benefit from the LOR at any time or for any goal may conceptualize them as lifestyle migrants seeking ‘the good life’ in Israel, resulting in very pragmatic push and pull factors to make aliya. French Jews are not forced to leave France and can make a very conscious decision when to benefit from their right to Israeli citizenship, especially when they are not constrained by responsibilities. The push or pull factors that eventually result in making aliya are therefore very practical. Jews from France can migrate for multiple reasons, such as seeking freedom and new opportunities; leaving unpleasant personal situations; trying to discover their Jewish identity, being able to migrate together, pursuing a relationship or because they were convinced by a previous experience. Making aliya to secure a Jewish future and to help Israel financially or politically, were rarely mentioned as the main motivators. Therefore, pragmatic push and pull factors to make aliya are predominant over anti-Semitic or Zionist push and pull factors.

Once French Jews make aliya, they struggle to build a new life in Israel. These lifestyle migrants seek ‘the good life,’ and their internalized structures connect them with those who share a similar habitus in an international or French community. Within this field, people coexist with mutual desires and present similar social, cultural and economic capital. Finding support within the international or French community is also conducive to finding ‘the good life’ in Israel. French and other olim turn to each other for support, share the experience of migrating to the imagined homeland and face the same struggles in Israeli society. As a result, French olim tend to stay in a French or an international bubble and do not integrate in Israeli society. Many French synagogues, French stores and other international facilities unify people of French heritage.

French olim struggle to master Hebrew and connect with native Israelis. Language can be vehicle toward social mobility. Despite extensive efforts to master Hebrew or to work for an Israeli company, however, internalized structures will always distinguish French olim in Israel. In many cases a French accent, behavior or appearance exposes their French heritage, setting them apart from local Israelis. If the life they build in Israel does not match their expectations of ‘the good life,’ French olim return to France. In such cases, their redesigned life did not coincide with their economic, cultural and social standards.
The French migrants thought they were migrating to *Eretz Israel*, a country that is supposed to unify Jews all over the world. In Israel they struggled to connect with native Israelis, which explains why French migrants find the social, economic and cultural capital deriving from their habitus in bubbles where these notions converge. Unfortunately this habitus also makes them distinguishable by outsiders, which makes it even harder to integrate amongst native Israelis. Existing negative narratives about French *olim* do not stimulate native Israelis to seek contact with French migrants either. These factors eventually lead to segregation.

Through this thesis I drew a parallel between *aliyah* as unique enterprise and similar to a more a common form of migration. Focusing on their lives as diaspora Jews in France and conceptualizing them as lifestyle migrants enables us to understand contemporary migration by French Jews to Israel, in which pragmatic reasons are dominant over anti-Semitism and Zionism. Their internalized habitus, however, makes it difficult for French Jews to integrate in Israeli society and diverts them to an international or French bubble. In this bubble they find similar capital that coincides with their notion of ‘the good life,’ confirming that they are concerned primarily with their own pragmatic goals, rather than with Israeli society overall. The segmented population in Israel confronts French *olim* with their initial idea of Israel being the imagined home country and their French heritage gains new significance.

**Future research**

In future research, focusing on more settled migrants that moved to Israel 30 years ago and comparing them to my group of recent migrants might be interesting. How do older migrants perceive the new generation of migrants? Israel is a very young state, and many things have already changed and are still changing. Conducting the same type of research in twenty years and examining whether Jewish migration to Israel and more common forms of migration is different from what I present in this study might also be worthwhile.
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