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**IMAGINARY SUITCASES IN THE LIVES OF ISRAELI
EXPATRIATES IN CANADA: A PSYCHOLOGICAL
LOOK AT A UNIQUE HISTORICAL PHENOMENON**

I

Since Israel's inception in 1948, several hundreds of thousands of Israelis have left the country for the United States and Canada. Israeli emigrants, though ethnically Jewish, are remarkably different from other Jewish immigrants. With the exception of a small group of German Jewish refugees in the 1930s, they are the first group of Jewish immigrants who came to North America with the expectation, or at least the stated intention, that they would return home. They are also the first generation of Jews in thousands of years who voluntarily exiled themselves from the Jewish Promised Land for life in the Diaspora. The traditional aspiration of Jews to return to the Promised Land notwithstanding, Israeli immigrants are the only Jews in North America who see themselves as temporary residents and as people who belong somewhere else (Neusner, 1986). For most Diaspora Jews the Promised Land is defined in spiritual terms, and is the stuff of epic and religious legends. For Israeli emigrants this mother country is defined on the basis of an existing nation state which figures as an essential element in their individual identity (Meyer, 1990; Kaplan, 1986; Freedman, 1986). Meyer (1990) claims that the designation "Israeli" connotes not just a legal status as citizens of the state, but also a category of ethnic identity which separates existence in the homeland from existence in the Diaspora.

Contrary to outsiders' perceptions, the relationship between

Israelis and Jews is not straightforward, and is often described as ambivalent (Kass & Lipset, 1982; Meyer, 1990; Shokeid, 1988). While most ethnic groups are said to function in a role of socializing and supporting agents for the immigrant (Kolm, 1980), this does not seem to be the case with the North American Jewish community in regard to Israeli immigrants (Kass & Lipset, 1982). The literature suggests that a mutual rejection may be symptomatic of this relationship (Fish, 1984; Kass & Lipset, 1982; Meyer, 1990; Shokeid, 1988). The shared ethnicity does not entail unanimity of vision, as Israelis and Jews perceive each other as different in regard to values, mentality, culture and definition of Jewishness. Both groups are caught up in patterns, images, stereotypes and misconceptions rooted in the past.

The attitude of many North American Jews towards Israeli immigrants is often expressed by puzzlement and at times hostility (Kass & Lipset, 1982). The “understanding” between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora consists of the “arrangement” under which Israelis are to be the guardians of the Jewish state, which provides shelter for all Jews whenever they may need it, while the Jews abroad are to provide political and financial support for Israel. The appearance of Israelis in the Diaspora seems to fly in the face of this agreement and to create anxiety for the Jewish community (Shokeid, 1988).

For the secular Israeli, Jewishness often provokes ambivalence rooted in the historical fact that Zionism was in fact a revolt against the traditional Jewishness of the Diaspora and was supposed to transcend Jewish passivity. Thus Israelis often perceive their identity as “post-Jewish” (Meyer, 1990, p. 73).

In addition to feeling unwelcomed by their ethnic group, Israelis who emigrate from Israel have been exposed to various social sanctions and pressures such as attacks on their reputation and their moral character. Historically, whenever emigration was perceived as a threat to the existence of Jewish life in Zion or Palestine, the leaders of the community used legal, religious or moral sanctions against those who left (Avi-Yona, 1976; Twersky, 1972). The Hebrew term for Israeli emigrants is *yordim*, a biblical word meaning those who descend, while the opposite term is

'olim, meaning those who ascend (Gen. 12:10, 46: 4), used to refer to immigrants. Modern use of these terms still includes a value judgment. The label *yordim* and its negative connotation are rarely denied by the emigrants, and their struggle with it may result in identity vulnerability (Fish, 1984; Shokeid, 1988).

While immigrants intend to make their host country a permanent new home, the literature suggests that Israelis rarely reconcile themselves to the factors that ultimately make their immigration permanent, and, unlike other immigrants, they often present their circumstances as getting stuck in the host country as a result of an unplanned turn of events. Most do not give up their emotional and legal membership in Israel (Fish, 1984; Kass & Lipset, 1982; Katriel, 1991; Peleg, 1989, 1990; Shokeid, 1988). For example, even when they have acquired landed-immigrant status in Canada or have become citizens, Israeli immigrants retain dual citizenship. This dual citizenship until recently has cost them over \$100 per person when visiting Israel, because of Israeli taxation. Few, however, waived their Israeli citizenship.

Despite having left the country, Israeli emigrants perceive themselves and are perceived by the government of Israel as citizens of Israel (Fish, 1984; Peleg, 1989; Shokeid, 1988). Sojourners are defined as temporary immigrants who arrive for a specific goal and with a time frame for return (Berry, 1991). Since they display some of the characteristics of the sojourner, Israelis abroad have been described as self-defined sojourners (Kass & Lipset, 1982). Like sojourners, their reasons for leaving Israel include pursuit of academic degrees, commercial interests, economic advancement, or search for emotional refuge. They tend to cling to the original culture of their group, and their intrinsic purpose is to achieve their goal as quickly as possible; yet with time, sojourners often become vague and uncertain about the termination of their stay because they have made some adjustments to their new environment and acquired an old-timers' attitudes (Siu, 1952, p. 34). While most sojourners initially speak of a wish to return, many eventually openly state a wish to remain in the host country. Israelis, however, are rarely able to make this transition, or to admit to it openly. Israelis also do not develop some other

identified characteristics of sojourners. For example, although in certain geographical areas they constitute a community of similar size to that of other newcomers, they do not set up ethnic colonies or cultural areas such as Little Tel-Aviv or Israel Town. Neither do they concentrate in particular professions, economic enclaves, or evolve an easily identifiable ethnic presence. On the contrary—in most countries in Europe and in North America, they keep a remarkably low profile (Shokeid, 1988).

Shokeid suggests that the classification best approximating Israelis abroad is that of expatriates as described by Cohen (1977). In this description, the term “expatriates” refers to “transnational participants,” voluntary, temporary, relatively privileged migrants who are “less fleeting than the tourist and less permanent than the immigrant.” Expatriates are transients who come for a specific job or project and intend to leave on its completion. When they stay on, they are usually able to leave for home or another country whenever they wish. “Hence the expatriates’ . . . presence in a foreign land is normally characterized by permanent impermanence” (Cohen, 1977, p. 18).

Many Israelis, even those who are reconciled to life in the host country and no longer consider returning to Israel a viable and realistic option, nonetheless continue to feel a strong sense of uprootedness and a loyalty to the homeland (Fish, 1984; Peleg, 1989; Shokeid, 1988; Student, 1991). Similar to refugees, Israeli expatriates look back to what they have left, and are characterized by ambivalence since they cling to the myth of return, however unrealistic (cf. Harell-Bond, 1986; Kolm, 1980; Richmond, 1988; Westwood & Lawrence, 1990; Zwingmann & Pfister-Ammende, 1973). Like other exiles their ambivalence seems to be centered around feelings of shame, guilt and a sense of violation of moral, ideological imperatives or values (cf. Richmond, 1988; Walzer, 1988).

Unlike other studies on Israeli expatriates, we argue in this paper that the emigration experience of Israelis involves an important transition process which is experienced as a “non-event.” Non-events are life-shaping expectations, hopes or dreams that fail to materialize, and their nonoccurrence changes the

person's life (Schlossberg, 1984, 1989, 1990). These transitions have received virtually no attention in migration literature. According to Schlossberg (1984, 1989), much of our appraisal of ourselves and of our lives revolves around our dreams and our imagined possibilities which are the key to our identity. Markus and Nurius (1986) stress that when we perceive ourselves we see not only our present situation but also our potential—what we hope to do or become, or that which we fear of becoming. Yet most research on dreams and expectations has been concerned with what people hope to accomplish with their lives, while hardly any has focused on what happens when the dream fails to materialize (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

The term “non-event” has only recently appeared in adult development literature. Most of the research on adult transitions has focused on normative or non-normative life events, and to a lesser degree on chronic personal problems. However, the phenomenon of non-event has been recognized and the importance of studying this type of transition has been stressed (Beeson & Lowenthal, 1975; Cummings, 1979; George & Siegler, 1981; Neugarten, 1976; Schlossberg, 1981, 1984, 1989). Proposed examples of non-events include the marriage that never took place, the promotion that never happened (Schlossberg, 1984), or the child that was never born (Chiappone, 1984). Until recently, the study of non-event among immigrants has not been suggested. Using our findings (Barkan-Ascher, 1992) we posit here that the phenomenon of non-event — the unfulfilled expectation to return to Israel — is essential to the immigration experience of Israeli expatriates and thus to our understanding of them. Schlossberg (1981, 1984, 1989) has proposed a general formulation of non-event transition. Following this formulation, Barkan-Ascher (1992) demonstrated that the unfulfilled expectation to return to Israel held by Israeli expatriates constitutes a major non-event, the resolution of which unfolds as a life transition.

II

Although *yerida* (emigration from Israel, literally “descent”) is not new in Israeli history, it has become a topic of research only in recent years, and is often seen as one of the most paradoxical phenomena in the contemporary Jewish and Israeli experience. Since the creation of Israel was meant to end the anxiety, suffering and insecurity which had been the existential factors of Jewish life in the Diaspora, the emigration of native Israelis is often seen as being in a direct contradiction to the Zionist vision (Meyer, 1990; Katriel, 1991; Shokeid, 1988).

Academic research on Israeli expatriates has focused mainly on instrumental issues such as academic adjustment and the prospects of returning to Israel (Fein, 1978); resolution of adaptation tasks through adult education (Mastai, 1980); demographics (Kass & Lipset, 1982); socioeconomics and use of social services (Korazim, 1983); migration decision-making and the relationship with the Jewish community (Fish, 1984); and reasons for planned emigration (Sobel, 1986). Most of these studies allude to moral, emotional and identity conflicts experienced by these emigrants. Yet by focusing on instrumental issues these studies adhere to a low-profile attitude typical of Israelis abroad, who seldom publicly discuss the intensity of their feelings (Peleg, 1989; Shokeid, 1988). Shokeid’s anthropological study is an exception. Working as a “professional observer,” Shokeid (who is not an emigrant himself) explores the wrestling of Israeli expatriates in New York with their cultural identity.

Another exception to the typical low-profile and instrumental focus of the research on Israeli expatriates is Peleg’s work (1989, 1990). His work analyzes the link between separation from the homeland and depressive reaction among Israelis in the United States. Peleg’s findings suggest that a high level of attachment to loved objects and to the ideology of return contributes to the question. These two variables were found to be highly correlated, with the ideological commitment to return being weaker in its contribution to depression. Peleg suspects that the stigma attached

to not returning may have created a defense mechanism in the form of denial, which influenced this result. It is also possible that this result has been a function of the study's definition of the commitment to return. This definition constitutes mainly ideological and religious aspects. However, the majority of Israeli emigrants are secular (Sobel, 1986) and their commitment to the country likely begins with personal loyalty, not with religious dogma. Moreover, while the ideological dimension is likely an integral part of the Israeli's commitment to return home, qualitative studies (Fish, 1984; Shokeid, 1988), as well as an autobiographical account (Student, 1991), illustrate that while Israeli emigrants seem to have accepted and internalized the ideological baggage of Judaism and Zionism to some degree, only few define their commitment in a strict ideological sense, while most consider it more an emotional, moral identification. Peleg's restricted definition and reliance on a mailed questionnaire with prepared answers, and on statistical analysis (compartmentalizing and separating rather than integrating variables), probably resulted in many aspects and nuances of the phenomenon as lived and experienced (Giorgi, 1985) remaining obscure.

A common claim of the literature on the subject is that emigration from Israel may provoke a unique emotional distress owing to a "peculiar social pathology of over-identification," which is the hallmark of the relationship between Israelis and their country (Sobel, 1986, p. 168). It is often suggested that individual identity, for most Israelis, is embedded in their national identity, and thus separation from the nation may result in a heightened sense of loss (Fish, 1984; Meyer, 1990; Peleg, 1989; Shokeid, 1988). Two related sources of identity ambiguity for Israeli expatriates are suggested in the literature: (i) an ambivalent relationship with their natural ethnic group, the Diaspora Jews; (ii) a unique psychological, historical, moral and ideological attachment to Israel. According to Shokeid (1988), to be born or raised in Israel is an irrevocable act of identity transformation, one that separates Israelis from other Jews. Meyer (1990) posits that the dilemma for Israeli emigrants is embedded in a perception that one can be a Jew in both the Diaspora and in Israel, but one can be an Israeli only

in Israel. Living away from Israel, yet identifying primarily as Israelis, Israeli expatriates are said to suffer from identity conflict (Fish, 1984; Meyer, 1990; Shaked, 1986; Shokeid, 1988).

Israeli expatriates may also find difficulty seeing themselves as Zionists in the modern definition of the term, which is people who support Israel financially but have little connection with the state otherwise (Meyer, 1990). This identification conflict is rooted in the ideology that only being Jewish in Israel is authentic living and being a Jew in the Diaspora is unauthentic (Ben-Gurion, 1953). This ideology was sustained by the Israeli education system which for many years emphasized a negative character of the Diaspora, and the doctrine of negation of the Diaspora (Kaplan, 1986; Yehoshua, 1980). Clearly, the idea of adopting into, and identifying with a group which represents a negative value, is likely to create an identification conflict (cf. Weinreich, 1983).

A recurrent supposition in Israeli research is that Israelis may have a hypercatheted national identity such that it represents a cornerstone of the self. As a country committed from its inception to a collective self-determination and to an ideology which emphasizes the needs of the collective over those of the individual, the Israeli value orientation stresses the individual obligation to live in Israel and to use individual strength and talents for the common good. As noted by an expatriate Israeli psychotherapist: “[According to] the education we got at home . . . everything must go to the nation, to the state where we were finally born after the Holocaust, all, including [the possibility] that we may die doing so” (Student, 1991, p. 89).

The living memory of the Holocaust and other violent uprootings has a profound effect on Israeli society. One central value instilled by this society is the myth of the hero, which demands outstanding altruistic deeds for the welfare of the country. This myth is in part a reaction to the tragic consequences of the Holocaust: the creation of a strong Israeli vs. the helpless Jew (Lieblich, 1978, p.134). Conscription to the military at age eighteen is an accepted fact of Israeli life and non-service is viewed as a serious departure from the accepted norm (Gal, 1986; Student, 1991; Linn, 1989; 1995). Lifelong service in the reserves until the age of fifty-five

is an entrance ticket to Israeli society, and an important biographical reference throughout the life of most Israelis (Ben-Ari 1990; Sobel, 1985). The role of the army in fostering a sense of group orientation, group loyalty, dedication and connectedness cannot be overemphasized. Linn's studies (1989) suggest that lifelong Israeli civilians in uniform who selectively refused, based on conscientious grounds, to serve in the army (at specific periods and sites), indicated that the only possible posture they could adopt if further frustrated is emigration. Being a *yored* implies not being part of the Israeli enterprise in terms of both physical obligation and spiritual gains.

Implicit in most of the research on Israeli expatriates is the assumption that their dilemma is related to tension existing between their striving for personal development and rewards, and their commitments to their society's norms and values, which call for daily shouldering of the national burden (Fish, 1984; Peleg, 1989, 1990; Shokeid, 1988). The broken commitment to return intensifies the dilemma.

Kaufman and Raphael (1987) suggest that the development of national identity parallels the development of personal identity, and that it is through this identification with a particular national group that we experience inner security and a sense of belonging and loyalty. The need of Israeli expatriates to identify with the motherland is a need for rootedness, connectedness and belonging. Focusing on the performance dimension of their conflicted cultural identity, Shokeid (1988) identifies the phenomenon of the sing-along, as the most salient and expressive statement of Israeli identity on the part of Israeli expatriates. He observes that this communal singing serves as an occasion to "act out an existential predicaments rooted in a state of social and cultural liminality in both American and Israeli societies" (p. 125).

However, just as they are not necessarily religious or strictly ideological, the ties of Israeli expatriates to Israel are not simply nostalgic ties. Kass and Lipsett (1979) suggest that Israelis feel the link to their country in a deeper, more emotional way than those raised in a society whose existence has not been called into question. The psychology of secular Israelis is said to be implicated

in a definition of self as inextricably connected with peers and family, to be sensitive to and influenced by political, social events, and to be embedded in a moral world view (Levine, 1986; Student, 1991). Therefore, the experience of Israeli expatriates includes a threat to a sense of connectedness, loyalty and responsibility to a people, to cohesive units of friends, comrades and birth cohorts and to the idea of a nation, all of which are components of the self. Regarding the nation as part of themselves, Israeli expatriates are bound to find separation from the part of the self very difficult. "You can't stop being connected to Israel, but you slowly become separated. You continue to belong but there is a growing gap. You have to make an effort not to become separated," claims an Israeli expatriate (Barkan-Ascher, 1992, p. 78).

III

The following discussion identifies the non-event experience of Israeli expatriates in Canada. The descriptions have been culled from a larger study (Barkan-Ascher, 1992), the major thrust of which was to explore the lived experience of non-event transition and its implications to theory and counselling. To that end a phenomenological case study mode of enquiry was utilized. Before proceeding with the descriptive accounts of the nonevent transition, we provide a brief profile of the research participants.

A total of twenty Israeli expatriates (eleven women and nine men) participated in the study. Their ages ranged from thirty-nine to forty-eight. Most (80%) were Israeli-born, the others immigrated to Israel as young children. 85% were married and 15% were divorced; among those married, 55% were married to Israeli expatriates, 25% to Canadian Jews and one individual to a European gentile, and 75% had adolescent and older children. 65% came from the three major cities in Israel, 20% from cooperative farming villages (*moshavim*), 10% from kibbutzim and one person was from a small town; 95% of the participants had served in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). A large majority (90%) were secular. 30% had postgraduate education, 20% with PhDs. They represented a variety of occupations.

At the time of the interview 95% of the participants were still Israeli citizens, 90% had Canadian or American citizenship; the longest time span since leaving Israel was thirty-five years, the shortest eight years, with an average of nineteen years. A desire to see the world and a wish for relief from the constant pressure were the most often mentioned (75%) reasons for departure from Israel; 40% combined this wish with a motivation for academic pursuit (of either self or spouse); for 20% of the participants the primary reason for departure was their marriage to a non-Israeli who wished to return home.

For the great majority (95%) the central issue of their emigration experience was the broken expectation of returning home. Most participants (95%) had left Israel with the clear expectation and intention to return and 40% of participants had made an active attempt to return to Israel(!) The average duration of the return was one year, though two participants remained in Israel for four and five years, returning to Canada thereafter. Most (90%) claimed they could not completely relinquish some hope of returning one day; 45% were still planning in principle to return. However, 55% said that they had learned to live with the reality that their expected return had not occurred and will not occur.

It is important to note that none of the participants had given their Canadian-born children non-Israeli names. More than half of the participants (65%) continued to speak Hebrew with their children, though only 30% reported that their children responded in that language. Economically the participants represented a relatively well-to-do group: 95% were homeowners, and all were employed and could be generally described as having middle-to-high income. The various rewarding elements of life in their host country, as described by the participants, included peace of mind and stress-less life, (cited by 80%), 55% cited professional or career opportunities and growth, and 55% referred to financial comfort.

IV

The non-event experience of Israeli expatriates begins with the expectation to return home. The centrality of the imaginary suitcases, the fabled expectation to repatriate, arose spontaneously in all the interviews, and emerged in every questionnaire. Examples are as follows:

I left with a very specific goal, to get my Ph.D. It was in an area that was just beginning to develop in Israel and which had a promising future. Getting this education was supposed to make me more employable in Israel. Returning was something I always promised myself, I counted on it in planning the direction of my academic pursuit and the continuation of my life plan. I didn't think much of it, it was the expected future unfolding. And then, it did not happen. Paradoxically, the attainment of this career goal blocked my way back.

I left with a definite intention and expectation to return. We planned to stay for a while. . . . It has been already thirty-five years. I had a key that I took with me and it's always in my wallet. Now it's like a habit. I transfer it every time I change wallets.

All participants had the definite intention to return. The participants' expectation to repatriate is rooted in an emotional connectedness, in cultural, ideological and moral commitment. The accounts reveal that the expectation of return is implicated in self-perception, self-presentation, a sense of historical connection, a history of persecution, a moral obligation, loyalty to the country, loyalty to parents, living as part of a majority, myth and ideology. Why return? Because I was born there, because my parents were Zionists. . . because I buried a lot there; friends, relatives, acquaintances . . . and above all because I don't want to live in exile.

I don't know, I belong to what I belong. I'm a part of Israel. I have no other identity. My parents, refugees from Morocco, had another identity, an identity of anomaly, of not belonging. In Israel the issue of identity was put to rest. I'm an Israeli, I felt you can be an Israeli only in Israel, and yes I felt it was my duty to return.

A large part of it, I think, has to do with my parents being Holocaust survivors. The theme of their return to our land is very powerful, and our upbringing was saturated by it. Because we were born after that war we were raised with the notion that Israel is the solution to the Jewish problem. And my friends, also those who were killed, they constitute a powerful peer pressure on the notion that Israel is very important and it's difficult to free yourself from all these feelings.

I felt I was in debt to my mother, to the memory of my father who was killed in the Six Day War, even to the kibbutz, though we were not going to live there, and I guess, yes, to Israel.

It is the feeling of belonging to something larger than us, the land, the community. . . . It is also the ability to make a difference as an individual . . . to leave my mark.

The accounts of the participants reflect a life of people diverted from the taken-for-granted path of existence by the nonoccurrence of an expected pivotal life event. While their emigration was an elective act, the expected outcome of this act was to return home. Not returning home was experienced as a thwarted expectation, a possibility not actualized, or a dream not realized:

I've been here seventeen years too long. Seventeen years longer than I had expected, planned or wished.

. . . We were going to return within a year, and here I am. . . . Every night for seventeen years I have been going back home in my dreams . . . but you know, a dream is something you wake up from. . . .

Not returning home was identified by the participants as the central and most difficult aspect of their emigration experience. It changed the expected sequence of their lives and was often perceived as a threat to their values, commitments and assumptions about the self and the world. And because these values and assumptions were held as essential to their identity, the unfulfilled expectations often produced anxiety:

We did not intend to stay away from Israel more than the few years needed to accomplish my academic goal. Israel is not a country that you can just leave, that you want to leave. . . . You know, it was only a matter of time . . . and suddenly you wake up to see that your plan hasn't materialized, that you have not gone back, that it is not likely to happen. It's a very difficult thing to deal with. You know, it seems like there's a choice but there really is no choice, you're stuck. Your temporary stay has become permanent uprootedness. . . . It's hard to accept, everything is in flux, in conflict, who you are, what you believe in, where you belong and with whom. . . . and you feel guilt, maybe shame. . . . Why? Turning upside down everything that we were taught to see as right and good. It's like a betrayal of the entire national history, and a betrayal of my family values and of a sense of loyalty to the country . . . but it's a personal issue, not a societal one, because all that stuff is part of me.

Since all participants expected, indeed counted on the event return, they held on to a self-presentation as temporarily uprooted for a long time. Many described years of living as if in a "waiting room" with their "imaginary suitcases" ready:

You plan for years for this to happen. I had a shipping container full with stuff for years, ready to go back. Everything was ready. You gamble on years of your life and then it doesn't happen.

We named our kids these distinctly Israeli names: Yaron, Asaf, Timra, Yuval, Rotem and Ofra. I think all of us probably had the same intention when we named our kids; we were expecting to go back and we were sure they would grow up there.

For the first five years we didn't even buy a cake blender, you know, a \$12 worth of a hand blender, because we kept thinking: We are going back home next year.

The illusory nature of the temporary sojourn is eventually challenged. Yet it was not unusual for the non-event reality to go unrecognized or denied for a long time, since there was no tangible event to mark its nonoccurrence.

V

For some, life in the shadow of the non-event felt like living in the presence of a painful absence; for others, like being on an emotional roller-coaster. The anxiety-laden transition begins with the sometimes vague realization that the temporary stay has become permanent. The initial confrontation with the broken expectation to return evokes pain, anxiety, a sense of loss and a feeling of personal fragmentation. There is a gap between where one is and where one has expected to be, between what is and what ought to have been. Many participants described this experience as a concrete presence, using metaphors such as an internal wound, a severed limb, a scar. Unable to make the return to reality or to let go of this expectation, many found themselves caught in an existential conflict. Previously taken for granted, self-images and the meaning of personal identity become severed from their

familiar mooring.

The broken expectation entails a threat to the values and world view which was held as fundamental to the security of identity. Failure to return was often experienced as a failure to live up to the expectation of the community in which the participants were emotionally embedded. The attachment to the homeland was not merely functional but rather it was implicated in the foundation of the participants' identity. Regarding the nation as part of themselves, the loss of that part of self was felt as most difficult. The break with Israel had rarely been a complete break. Despite being geographically separated, the participants' lives and politics were shaped to a large extent out of their primary loyalty which they were unable or unwilling to sever. Indeed, a dominant theme in their non-event transition constitutes a struggle to maintain the ties to the community.

At some point there is a powerful need to accept the reality of the non-event. Yet accepting the finality of non-return is often avoided as it means confronting one's own mortality. It was not unusual for the participants to be in transition for many years as they continually reevaluated, reconsidered, attempted and hoped for the fabled return to occur. The closer they got to the realization of the finality of the non-event, the stronger a grief-like reaction was experienced.

The notion of hope permeated the accounts. The imaginary suitcases were integral to life even when the reality of non-return had been acknowledged. The accounts seem to suggest that hope may not necessarily reflect another facet of denial of the non-event, but rather a healthy reaction aiming to negotiate the threat. Holding on to hope facilitated working through a conflict and warding off depression. Indeed, the accounts reveal that when one has lost hope, depression ensued. It should be noted that contrary to crude optimism, the participants' sense of hope was embedded in reality. In the resolution phase of the non-event transition, the suitcases are imaginary. They do not require immediate or tangible fulfillment.

By not returning, the participants found themselves caught between two images of themselves, at once connected and

separated. They found themselves criticized for the very thing they suffered from—a betrayal of connectedness. Paradoxically, perhaps, they refused to reject the society within themselves, though the society was unsure about accepting them as the loyal expatriates they conceived themselves to be. Thus, the non-event acquired an additional dimension in fostering a transition from a valued status to a devalued status, from the status of Israelis to that of *yordim*. The closer they came to having construed themselves in this new alien and demeaning manner, the more their sense of self was threatened.

The non-return, however, which resulted in a self-imposed exile did not entail an ability to forge a complete new identity, to become detached from the fundamental sense of connectedness. Yet this sense of connectedness was never without conflict. Inner dialectics often brought awareness that the forms of connectedness they were nostalgic for had not always been so desirable. Connectedness at best was associated with harmony, care and a sense of belonging. Yet it also connoted a sense of over-involvement, denial of individual difference and various forms of enforced conformism, i.e., oppressive connectedness. While yearning for the togetherness typical of their homeland, many reveal a fear of being smothered by it. Not returning allows for relief from the strains of connectedness, yet most participants reported oscillating emotionally between the poles of connectedness and separatedness.

The essential underlying theme of the transition was the struggle to maintain or reconstruct a self-respecting, connected, morally sensitive identity. The overwhelming feeling of the participants was that not returning home, even though it was an event which did not happen, had changed their emotional/social world and called into question their images of themselves. While some had remained in a state of chronic grief, most had in time found ways to integrate the thwarted expectation.

The resolution of the entanglement between the poles of what is and what ought to have been involves a difficult task of balancing the opposite poles. This study suggests that the resolution of non-event among Israeli expatriates does not entail a “letting

go,” a burial of the past or an achievement of separation. Rather, it observes that resolution entails an acknowledgment of the moral ambiguity of being caught between two images of the self, at once connected and separated, implicated and innocent, responsible and a victim of circumstances. The movement towards resolution is towards both separation and connection, towards an acceptance of the tension between these poles as an existential given. The resolution phase is open-ended. One has learned to live with the losses, yet the imaginary suitcases are kept. However, now their presence is mostly spiritual, a reminder of one’s origins, a reminder that neither the loss nor the hope have totally disappeared. These suitcases are more often like a “sleeper” presence: They appear and disappear, sometimes forgotten and sometimes hurling the person back into transition.

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