Buffered mobility: parenting strategies of religious Jewish global middle class families

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ABSTRACT

This study adds to the emerging body of literature on parental practices and trajectories of globally mobile middle-class families, by focusing on families belonging to diverse religious Jewish communities. Through an interview-based, in-depth analysis of three internationally mobile families representing various Jewish religious factions, we illustrate the complex matrix of interrelations between mobility, religion, and parenting. Our analysis shows that a mobile lifestyle offers these Jewish religious families a liberating encounter, but that parents work to maintain their religious links while simultaneously securing the necessary advantages middle-class families generally aspire to. We found that religion plays an important role in social reproduction of these particular mobile families, acting as a buffer to reduce the uncertainty and shock integral to regular mobility. Furthermore, we illuminate how various forms of religiosity are reproduced through different strategies across the participating families.

KEYWORDS

Religion; mobility; global middle class; families

Introduction

Increasingly, globalisation blurs the geopolitical boundaries between countries, leading to the construction of international spaces wherein human, economic, and technological capitals are entangled in different configurations (Ball, Dworkin, & Vryonides, 2010; Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). These new spaces enable the emergence of a new middle-class group consisting of highly educated and economically resourceful professionals and their families (sometimes referred to as Global Middle Class (GMC)), who move between countries regularly, usually for work. This population is characterised as having a “Western” lifestyle with a “global” orientation, who are experienced and comfortable with working in multicultural teams in the service of global organisations and corporations (Burrows, 2015).

Alongside the emergence of such groups who appear to be breaking down national and identity boundaries, scholars have noted an increasing commitment to more isolationist policies and sentiments, which seek to preserve cultural identity and foster certain forms of ethnic nationalism (Hvithamar, Warburg, & Jacobsen, 2009; Obadia, 2012; Ram, 2005). Such processes are becoming visible through concrete segregation...
strategies being implemented by a number of nation-states and communities worldwide (Sassen, 2013), even amongst highly educated populations and economic elites including intellectuals, politicians, and entrepreneurs. Religion and religiosity appear also to be one of the drivers for seeking to differentiate and segregate oneself from others (Agbaria, 2019; Hvithamar et al., 2009; Obadia, 2012).

In the present study, we are particularly interested in the intersection between mobility and religion, and how it shapes parenting and education-related strategies. There are three reasons for this. First, the emerging field of the study of globally mobile professionals and their families has never, to date, focused on the role of religion in both the desire to be mobile or in how religion forms a significant part of how parenting and education are shaped by being mobile (Agbaria, 2019). Second, there is a long history of mobility of religious people – to “spread the word”, flee prosecution, pilgrimages, connect religious communities based all over the world (Eade, 2012). Third, being “religious” is often understood as having an uneasy relationship with modernity (Ben Rafael & Ben Haim, 2006). Global mobility is a key characteristic of modernity, so the potential tensions and re-negotiations within religious families who are mobile, and how they manage this tension, are of scholarly interest.

In this paper we focus on how families who belong to different Jewish religious communities engage with the ever-increasing possibilities and expectations of mobility in today’s world. To examine in-depth how mobility is practised, and specifically how mobility is shaped by and in turn shapes religious and other family practices – this paper will focus on three Jewish families who represent three of the key Jewish religious segments found today across different parts of the world (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform). We embarked on this work as a complement to our broader studies on globally mobile families (Maxwell & Yemini, 2019; Yemini & Maxwell, 2018, 2020; Yemini, Maxwell, & Mizrachi, 2019). We demonstrate below why these religious Jewish families constitute members of the so-called GMC. In this paper we seek to empirically add to our understandings of the parenting and education strategies of GMC families, with a particular focus on the intersection between mobility, parenting, and religion.

**Theoretical orientation**

In this section we briefly review the concept of Global Middle Class (GMC), referring to previous work that has been done on the parenting strategies of people categorised as members of the GMC. Then, we develop a way of thinking about the intersection between mobility and religion, and conclude this part of the paper by providing some contextual details about the specific population that this study focuses on.

**Global middle class**

Globally mobile professionals as a group have emerged in the context of the growth of multinational corporations. These employees provide the expert knowledge and skills needed for the operation of such business entities by participating in global networks of production, consumption, and bureaucracy. According to Ball and Nikita (2014), GMC professionals are the intermediate level “servants” of corporations run by the global elite (Burrows, 2015). These are highly skilled workers of diverse national origins who
circulate the globe – mostly between key global cities such as New York, London, Berlin, Sydney, San Francisco, and Hong Kong – and serve as high-tech, financial, and legal specialists; middle managers; engineers; and other professionals (Beaverstock, 2005; Higginson, McLeod, & Rizvi, 2019).

Frequent, spatial mobility is a key characteristic of the GMC. However, spatial mobility implies the breakage of various links (with nation, with local communities, with extended family or social networks) alongside the formation of others (Hof, 2019; Maxwell & Yemini, 2019). Through mobility, people move outside known cultural, social, education systems and become exposed to new ones, often finding themselves navigating “where I am from” and “where I am going” (Krutzsch, 2011; Yemini & Maxwell, 2020). Favell (2008) found in his study of young professionals moving across Europe for work, that mobility was articulated as “liberating” them from some of the national social and cultural structures they perceived as oppressive back “home”, while Andreotti, Le Galès, Fuentes, and Javier (2013) argued that relationships to home might shift when these professionals must take into account the needs of children (and spouses). Parents who engage in almost constant (every few years) geographically multidirectional mobility employ various strategies to facilitate such movement and to seek to sustain their own status in an ever-changing environment (Yemini & Maxwell, 2020; Yemini et al., 2019).

Some theoretical writings on the GMC argue that the state of being constantly mobile leads to a “rootless” existence, the emergence of “third culture kids” and becoming “global citizens” (Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock, 2010). Nevertheless, some newer empirical work (Maxwell, Yemini, Koh, & Agbaria, 2019), has, instead argued, that such forms of persistent mobility might be closely connected to an active retention of ties to a “home nation”. However, what is still missing from the literature is an understanding of how differently constituted groups within the GMC category, engage with the opportunities and challenges of constant relocation, make educational and cultural capital accumulation choices, and develop transnational relations. Here, we want to open up understandings of the role religious observance and strong familial religiosity plays in shaping both global mobility and its subsequent management within families.

**Religion and mobility**

Religion is a social and cultural activity that all humans have access to (Beyer, 2015) and an essential component of life for many (Agbaria, 2019). Some sociologists even claim that religion lies at the core of most societies, including traditional Western societies (Ben Rafael & Ben Haim, 2006). For centuries, religion has served as a main source of self-identification, as well as a guide to social norms, behaviours, identities, values, and relationships (Agbaria, 2019; Almog & Perry-Hazan, 2011; Eade, 2012). Organised religions seek to preserve their followers’ faith and embed it within future generations (Brink-Danan, 2015; they provide a way to amplify important narratives and distinguish between their own members and other groups (Agbaria, 2019; Beyer, 2015; Doherty, 2018). Moreover, religion operates through global organisations and communities) Kong & Woods, 2018), which provide a source of security during experiences of mobility abroad and opportunities to meet members of one’s own religious community in a foreign country (Bava, 2011). As such, religion contributes to building relationships
around the idea of shared beliefs, through unique rituals regularly performed in religious institutions or organised gatherings (Doherty, 2018).

Monotheistic religions, in particular, appear to be significant historical motivators of spatial mobility and have always been global in their assertion and reach. The Abrahamic religions have developed, and continue to sustain, global educational, social, and cultural networks that seek to preserve traditions, heritage, and culture (Bava, 2011; Kadir, 2011; Obadia, 2012; Wood & Black, 2018). Indeed, the connection between religion and globalisation is symbiotic. Religion has contributed to globalisation through missionary activities. Religious leaders utilise spatial mobility to disperse ideas, sustain global communities, and support religious believers everywhere (Beyer, 2015; Eade, 2012). Cross-country mobility provides fertile ground for the dissemination of religion, helping to create international religious centres and encourage religious pluralism by spreading teachings from one community or society to another (Beyer, 2015; Dawson, 2014; Lehmann, 2009; Tapp, 2013).

This dialogue between religion and globalisation plays out in ever-evolving ways. In recent decades, two contemporary processes have been documented. On one hand, the ever-growing secularisation of the middle classes appears to signal the virtual disappearance of the influence of religion from public and private arenas. On the other hand, scholars have noted a resurgence in the commitment to, and identification with, religious affiliation among various communities worldwide (Agbaria, 2019; Xu, 2012). The sense of solidarity amongst those committed to the same religious faction easily transcends geo-political boundaries (Eade, 2012).

To some, the Jewish religion is conceived as a “home” that facilitates a sense of belonging wherever the religion is practised, connecting any believer anywhere to a geographically boundless spiritual nation (Bartel, 2004). Furthermore, some argue that in Judaism there is no distinction between religion and nation (Ben Rafael & Ben Haim, 2006). Therefore, Judaism plays an important role not only in religious identity but also in preserving the Jewish national identity in exile (Conforti, 2015). Jewish communities in the diaspora (i.e. those communities found all over the world), are a significant support for religious families that move between countries and contributes to the sense of unity for Jewish peoples (Bava, 2011; Dawson, 2014). There are argued to be three major communities within the Jewish religion: the Orthodox, Conservatives and Reformers. The Orthodox adhere to the so-called traditional faith, the written and the oral Torah and emphasise their full commitment to the laws of Halakhah. Conservatives, on the other hand, perceive the laws of Halakhah as obligatory but at the same time believe that the laws of Judaism should also reflect the scientific-critical approach and be allowed to follow similar opportunities and lifestyles as other members of their local, secular communities. In contrast, the Reformers support an understanding that the laws of Judaism should be fully adaptable, mirroring broader ways daily lives are changing, but continue to emphasise the importance of strict Jewish moral values are shaping their daily practices (Shavit, Moskowitz, & Suad, 2005). In this paper, we examine how mobile Jewish religious families understand their religious background as driving their mobility, enabling it, and the role it plays in curating the kinds of values and identities they seek to instil in their globally mobile children.
Religious families

In general, religious families face opposing processes of conservation versus innovation and openness versus closure when interacting with modern society (Toren, 2003). In these families, religion may be a factor affecting family relationships (Marks, 2004), since it functions as a significant element in day-to-day behaviour and educational choices (Toren, 2003). Jewish religion emphasises family, parenting, and community; therefore, religious Jewish families are typically characterised by a high birth rate, since reproduction is seen as a collective goal in the service of multiplying Jewish communities (Marks, 2004). Religion, as in many other religious communities, is also about cohesion, where weekly ceremonies are performed, participation in the local religious community expected, and long-term relationships with family and friends outside the current country of residence are actively maintained (Ben Rafael & Ben Haim, 2006).

Highly structured religious family ceremonies require collaboration, thus contributing to the sense of cohesion, unity, and the generational transfer of customs and traditions (Beyer, 2015; Doherty, 2018; Marks, 2004). These family activities encourage the acquisition of embodied cultural capital among their children. This kind of cultural capital is acquired in a long and complex socialisation process from childhood, continuing throughout a person's life. It sets expectations for an array of behaviours, preferences, education, religious values and principles (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu, Wacquant, Chernilo, & Fine, 2013). In many cases, religious activities are often seen as standing in contradiction to modern life's technological demands (Beyer, 2015; Doherty, 2018; Marks, 2004). Toren (2003) notes that many 21st-century religious families are having to find ways to, at least partially, adapt to the pervasive global technological culture, thus encouraging a need to confront pressures to liberalise. Therefore, some religious Jewish parents find themselves in constant tension between religious values and the norms of Western countries and processes of modernisation (Shalev, Baum, & Itzhaky, 2012). For other religious Jews, who are educated and work in secular disciplines such as high technology, science, and real estate, this tension between religion and actively engaging in modern life may be arguably less fraught (Irshai, 2013; Krakowski, 2017; Seigelshifer & Hartman, 2011).

Various forms of mobility can be found across different Jewish religious communities. Some of the traditional Jewish migrations include arranged trans-national marriages, trade (mainly Judaica and diamonds), and some forms of pilgrimages. Some Rabbis are also regularly mobile, as they move to serve the different Jewish diasporic communities abroad, often accompanied by their families. Furthermore, a growing number of religious Jewish families are mobile for their professional work, taking up employment opportunities that are not related to their religion. In these latter cases, these families fall under the general criteria of GMC. Mobility for trade, is also, we suggest, performing a form of labour for corporations with transnational links, and mobility for religious professional work is also a professional service to a transnational organisation (the Jewish faith and the many connected groups – for-profit and non-for-profit – that sustain religion).

Previous research has delved into the formation of religious communities by migrants who settle in new places of residence (Faas, 2016; Soysal, 2000). Some of this research has focused on how communities are formed around religion as people migrate to
a particular place and how informal learning opportunities, religious schools, visits to the “homeland,” community activities and so forth, help embed religion and religious connectivity between people constituting a particular religious group (Meer & Modood, 2013). Most of these studies have focused on marginalised migrant communities (Ben Rafael & Ben Haim, 2006; Stolow, 2004), so there is a significant gap in our understanding of the role of religion in driving middle class mobility, in shaping experiences of relocation among globally mobile middle class groups, and how religious affiliations are articulated through trajectories of mobility among the middle classes (Agbaria, 2019). The present study seeks to address this lacuna in the research, specifically focusing on the case of mobile religious Jewish middle class families. We seek to understand the interplay between religion, mobility and parenting, and to enquire into the experiences of being mobile, in moulding the kinds of education choices and family practices of these globally mobile religious Jewish middle class groups.

Methodology

This paper presents a detailed analysis of in-depth interviews with three families, broadly representing three of the main Jewish religious groups found today (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform). In each family participating in the study, both mothers and fathers were interviewed separately, to enable comparison of their answers. It was assumed that due to the often more traditionally-articulated gender roles between mothers and fathers across religious Jewish groups (Irshai, 2013) that we might find differences in narratives constructed.

All interviewed families were approached and chosen according to a strict set of inclusion criteria, developed from previous studies by the research team (Maxwell & Yemini, 2019), to ensure they could be defined as GMC.

As shown in Table 1, we recruited families who self-defined as belonging to a particular religious Jewish community, had at least one child of school age, had experienced living in at least two countries over the course of the last ten years, and had clear intentions to move again in the future. We aimed to recruit families from across the spectrum of religious Jewish communities. Therefore, we identified the major Jewish streams (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform), and set out to invite families who are members of these communities with different demographic profiles (i.e. families located in different countries, families with younger and older children). Data collection for this study took place over a year. We started by drawing on the personal links of the first author and subsequently used a snowball technique to recruit more families in each of these different segments of the religious Jewish communities. This method of participant recruitment is particularly well-suited to closed communities (Lee, 1993). In total, we interviewed ten families, meaning 20 parents. To enable us to show in-depth how religion shapes family and education practices of these mobile middle class families similarly and differently across our sample, we have chosen to focus our analysis on three of these families (six parents). In total, we interviewed ten families, meaning 20 parents. To enable us to show in-depth how religion shapes family and education practices of these mobile middle class families similarly and differently across our sample, As shown in Table 2, we have chosen to focus our analysis on three of these families (six parents).
| Workplace | Frequency and duration of mobility | Education | Family structure | Lifestyle; social, religious and political perceptions | Religious self-definition |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Their workplace is characterised by a global environment that involves daily international contacts and frequent short- and long-term mobility | Frequently moving internationally. Moved with their families abroad for extended periods (over a year) at least twice over the last ten years | Highly educated; religious education$^2$ (Yeshiva,$^3$ Rabbinate,$^4$ Kollels) or academic education (at a minimum, a bachelor’s degree from a recognised academic institution) | At least one primary-school aged child | Engaged in a personal, inner dialogue between science and religion | Define themselves as religious Jews |
Table 2. Characteristics of the three selected families.

| Family name | Education | Occupation | Family unit | Mobility background | Number of citizenships | Spoken languages | Religious self-definition |
|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Orman (Orthodox) | The father-Rabbi The mother-teacher | The father work as Chabad facilitator and a Rabbi for the local community in Israel. The mother responsible mainly for household duties. | Six children (between the ages of two and 12 years) | The father: Israel-Canada-USA-Germany-Israel. The mother: Argentina-USA-Israel. All the family: USA-Israel. | Israeli and both parents and some of the children held American citizenship | English, Hebrew, Spanish and Yiddish. | Haredi (Orthodox) Hasidim (of the Chabad community). Devoting the most time to following religious practices and investing the most resources in sustaining a religious lifestyle |
| Romano (Conservative) | The father and the mother are Rabbis | The father is a local Rabbi in Geneva. The mother is as a Talmud Torah teacher, a conversion teacher, a family and bride counsellor, a lecturer in Judaism, and the person responsible for the mikveh | Five children (aged: 13, 12, 10, 4 and 7-month). | The father: Italy-Israel-Mexico. The mother: Mexico-Israel-Mexico. All the family: Portugal-Italy-Geneva. | All members of the family have Israeli citizenship. The mother is also a Mexican citizen, while her husband and children all have Italian citizenship. | (Continued) |
Table 2. (Continued).

| Family name | Education | Occupation | Family unit | Mobility background | Number of citizenships | Spoken languages | Religious self-definition |
|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| All the family members speak six languages (Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, and Hebrew). | | Furthermore, the four school-age children learn also seventh language, German. | | | | | |
| Feldman (Reform) | The father: M.A in Real Estate and Law. The mother: B. A in languages. | The father: businessman, involved in financial investments, capital markets, and real estate. The mother: manager at an investment company. | They have four children (two of whom are twins), between the ages of 12 and 18 years. | Define themselves as part of the “Rambam stream”, modern, humanistic towards human beings and engaged in intellectual literature. | All the family members have four citizenships (American, Israeli, French and English) | All family members speak Hebrew, English and French, except the father who speaks only Hebrew and English. | Reform Jewish. perceived the promulgation of Jewish values and education as the top priority driving their parenting. |
The process of data collection was challenging for several reasons. First, it is difficult to identify and encourage participation from members of closed and religious communities (Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2017; Steinmetz & Haj-Yahia, 2006). Second, given that the study involved highly mobile families, located in various places across the world, who also travelled regularly, scheduling interviews with both parents was complicated. Third, a female research team seeking to interview religiously conservative male participants was met with some resistance; some men refused to participate for this reason alone. Even when both the father and mother in a family agreed to be interviewed, great care had to be taken to select religiously appropriate clothing by the interviewer and facilitate narratives using respectful gestures and forms of language. Fourth, we had to use Hebrew and English interchangeably during the course of interviews, depending on the background of interviewees. Fifth, as all but one of the interviews was conducted over Skype and Zoom, we had to give some consideration to how best to build trust. Notably, we found that the digital medium facilitated better access to religiously conservative men than face-to-face interviews would have, due to Orthodox Judaism’s prohibitions on live conversations between men and women. To aid the transcription of the audio-recorded interview, the first author took extensive notes during and after the interview.

The process of qualitative data analysis (as per Charmaz, 2014) was fully integrated into the ongoing research process, performed as a constant reflexive activity that informs data collection, writing, further data collection, and so forth. First, we arranged the data which emerged from the transcripts into inductively-developed themes (meanings of mobility, future plans, school choice, religious practices, difficulties while moving, advantages of being mobile etc.). Next, we further refined the themes through a process of continuous analysis. Our data analysis used the “constant” comparison approach (Charmaz, 2014), whereby analysis was data-driven and theory-driven simultaneously, working both inductively and deductively. Thus, towards the end of our initial analysis (before commencing the writing of the paper) – we settled on three themes (education, religion related education activities and anticipated futures) as the main themes to examine more closely across the participants in each religious Jewish sub-group, based on the inductive analysis and our knowledge of the broader literature in the GMC field. Given the similarity in narratives within each sub-group, we chose to write in-depth about 3 “case study” families in this paper. Through the careful and relatively extensive use of quotes in this paper, we have aimed to maintain the informants’ authentic voice to the best of our ability, being mindful of the potential danger of speaking for others or asserting our own opinions over those expressed directly by the participants. Surprisingly, to us, we did not find significant differences between the mothers and the fathers interviewed; therefore, we present the findings by family. Ethical clearance was received from the ethics committee at the university, and all interviewees provided their informed consent.

**Findings**

To consider the intersection between mobility, religion and parenting, we have applied the notion of a “buffer”, which is used as an explanatory concept to address the balancing-out role religion plays in these families’ management of their frequent mobility, anticipated future movement and the futures imagined for their children.
Drawing on the use of this term in Chemistry – as an agent that balances out the acidity or alkaline levels to reach pH-neutral, we believe the term buffer captures the ways families use religion to cope with changing conditions that are disruptive to family lives, identities, but also central to these families’ attempts to distinguish and ensure the social reproduction of their middle class status. Across all the families we found similarities in the way they conceived of the role of formal education for their children – in terms of the acquisition of particular values, skills, and future imaginaries of mobility. Meanwhile, the parents we interviewed tended to prioritise values related to Jewish religion in order to address matters of “the soul” and emotional and spiritual sustenance. However, they simultaneously promoted the need to acquire linguistic, physical, academic, and cultural skills, and a commitment to pluralism and cosmopolitan values. The future they imagined for their children was global and mobile, where Jewish religion would continue to either direct such mobility and the type of future professional lives they aspired to, or at least, act as the main source of sustenance that underpinned their children’s successful future-making trajectories.

The findings are arranged as follows: we present each family in turn, discussing the links between religion, parenting, and mobility. Then, we offer several conclusions to demonstrate the study’s broader contribution to debates within the field.

The Ormans (Orthodox)

Of all the families in our study, the Orman parents reported devoting the most time to following religious practices and invested the most resources in sustaining a religious lifestyle. Haim, the father, was born and educated in Israel, and had subsequently lived in Canada, the USA, and Germany. Mushki, the mother, was born in Argentina, and had lived in the USA. When interviewed, they were living with their six children (between the ages of two and 12 years) in a peripheral town in Israel, serving the local Chabad community. Haim and Mushki’s mobilities were strongly linked with their religious obligations within the Chabad community, which included studying in the US for a year before moving to volunteer in various Chabad communities around the world. In these different locations, they provided religious services to local and visiting Jewish families. When interviewed, Haim was serving as a Chabad facilitator and a Rabbi for the local community, while Mushki was responsible mainly for household duties, though prior to the birth of her sixth child she had also worked at a childcare centre in the Chabad community. All children were educated in religious schools run by Chabad. Mushki spoke to the children only in English, while Haim communicated with them in Hebrew. Mushki’s family spoke mainly Spanish, which was also present in daily household communication. Additionally, the couple spoke in Yiddish (“to have a grown-ups conversation,” according to Haim).

While both parents defined themselves as Haredi (Orthodox Jews) Hasidim (of the Chabad community), they said that their parenting practices are quite different from those of the families in their surrounding community, who have not been similarly mobile. Both parents and some of the children held American citizenship, and the family travelled to the US during many of Mushki’s pregnancies to ensure their children would be eligible for citizenship. Mushki explained that citizenship and a Green Card
were very important in order to provide their children with greater choices of where to live in the future.

In general, Haim portrayed a sense of being stricter about their family’s religious routines and anticipated that all children (mainly the boys) would continue with the ‘Chabad lifestyle’ and serve the community in Israel or elsewhere. Mushki, however, linked her own and her family’s mobility to offering them a more liberal choices in terms of her children’s futures. She explained:

In Brooklyn, there is an openness to everything. It’s another world, especially among the ultra-Orthodox. In the way we communicate, dress, speak – in everything, we are much more open than in Israel. Even in Argentina, you live among non-Jews, so it affects you somehow. It affects you knowing that you are Jewish and you are different and there is some strength to it, which allows you some freedom and choice. Here in Israel we are all the same, and the same rules must be followed and that is it.

Here, Mushki was clearly articulating the dual role that mobility and religion played in their lives: on the one hand, mobility afforded them more choice in terms of kinds and levels of adherence to the community’s codes; while on the other hand, religion provided order and balance during the course of their mobility (Bava, 2011; Seigelshifer & Hartman, 2011).

When asked how she imagined her children’s futures, she said:

I want them to be happy. Obviously, I would like them close to me, but we [members of the Chabad community] wander around the world … I have nieces in California and in Russia, so they will probably be somewhere [near family]. But we are open. We are not closed to changes.

Similarly, Haim stated, “I think they [the children] are less narrow-minded [than other Israeli-based Chabad children], more open to the world.” Thus, the parents argued for the benefits of mobility and noted the advantages they were able to provide their children, which other families in their current neighbourhood could not.

There was a naturalness with which Haim and Mushki described their children prospering and adapting to the larger world outside Israel. They considered their children’s fluency in languages, especially English, to be critical (Koo, 2016; Song, 2011). But unlike more “typical” middle class families that seek to cultivate these skills through formal learning activities (Carlson, Gerhards, & Hans, 2017), the Ormans believed that through the mere act of being mobile and maintaining transnational links, their children would become competent in such a lingua franca. Mushki explained, “I went with friends to Canada, I didn’t open my mouth for two months. I absorbed, learned, listened, but I couldn’t get [the English language]. I tried to say something and it didn’t come out. But one day, I got up and started talking and that’s it. It’s the best way to learn a language.”

Haim concurred matter-of-factly:

English is very important, and they speak English with their cousins. They just speak … Should I send him [his son] to English lesson? I don’t think so, but I’m more likely to send him to study in the US or to a [Chabad] summer camp [abroad]. There he will ‘catch’ English just like that … If someone really wants to know a language, the best way to actually learn it is just to be in a place that speaks it.
Haim and Mushki acknowledged that the mobility and future success of their children should correspond with and complement their religious lifestyle and strong affiliation to the Jewish community. Mushki explained:

You see, we are Jews, we are Jews everywhere, it does not matter where we live . . . a Jew is a Jew; it has nothing to do with where we are . . . This is our nationality – we are Jews everywhere.

In fact, the Ormans experienced mobility as bounded to their religious commitments, as a practice that must be sustained by future generations to achieve their religious goals (Ben Rafael & Ben Haim, 2006; Shalev et al., 2012). But the family also employed the attributes made available to them by mobility (exposure to languages, looser religious regulations) to enrich their children’s arsenal of skills and capabilities, thus deepening the gap between them and the non-mobile members of the community. In this regard, the Ormans acted like a typical middle class family, with religion serving as both the reason for their mobility and the constant anchor that ensured their identity would remain coherent.

The Romanos (Conservative)

The Romano family consisted of Nathaniel (who was born in Italy; educated at an Israeli yeshiva); served in the Israeli Defence Forces; and then lived in Mexico, Portugal, and Italy), Leah (who was born in Mexico and lived in Israel, Mexico, Portugal, and Italy), and their five children aged between one and thirteen years. At the time of the interview, they lived in Geneva and served the local Jewish community, with Nathaniel as the local Rabbi. The couple met in Israel, after which they had moved to three different countries before their current residence in Geneva. These relocations were all related to Nathaniel’s work as a community Rabbi. However, Leah actively participated in managing (mostly women’s) religious lives in all these communities as well, through the various roles she had held during the course of their relocations – as a Talmud Torah teacher, a conversion teacher, a family and bride counsellor, a lecturer in Judaism, and the person responsible for the mikveh.

All members of the family had Israeli citizenship, and it was evident during the interviews that being Israeli was an important part of their self-identification. The parents explained that they wanted their children to live in Israel for at least some time during the course of their childhood. Yet the family mentioned no immediate or concrete plans for relocating there when asked directly. “Israel” seemed to take the place of a desired future in a more abstract form. While Leah appeared to feel closely connected to Israel, Nathaniel referred to himself more as a “Wandering Jew,” part of the “worldwide army of Torah Jews” (Stolow, 2004, p. 112) who are scattered around the world and tasked with promoting an “authentic” Judaism.

In addition to having Israeli citizenship, Leah was a Mexican citizen, while her husband and children all had Italian citizenship. Leah explained that Italian citizenship was very important because it gave them the freedom to remain in Europe. Although Leah was not an Italian citizen herself, the couple described themselves as Italian religious Jews. This rather fluid relationship with national identities is an interesting facet of their self-identification. Another more stable foundation of the identity they
narrated was their membership of the conservative religious community of Jews know as the “Rambam\textsuperscript{10} stream.” This articulation of Judaism, they explained, supported a humanistic, rational lifestyle that included reading and exploring intellectual literature combined with religious studies. Indeed, Leah defined them as “not part of Chabad . . . we are . . . not extremists like in Israel. We are like the Rambam, engaged in intellectual literature. In that way, we are modern.”

Nathaniel supported such a self-positioning. “I think our kind of religiosity is humanistic. I do not use the term ‘humanistic’ as in the liberal world, like in the US, but in the world of human beings. The creation of God and the wisdom that exists in human beings is very important to me.” Yet alongside a well-articulated religious identity, the Romanos also expressed confidence in belonging to different nation states – being Italian and simultaneously seeking to ensure their children had a close connection to Israel, as the parents themselves both had during their formative years.

Noting how they managed to secure and reproduce their religious identity despite continuous mobility for work, Nathaniel and Leah both frequently mentioned during their interviews that they made great efforts to preserve and replicate religious traditions within their family. They always went to live in local Jewish communities when they relocated, and used the synagogue as a physical and symbolic space for creating and embedding the children’s sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Leah noted that the kids “have religious studies, even at home […] It is important, they only learn half of what is needed at [their private Jewish] school, so my husband and I do the other half at home.” She stressed that their children “can be doctors or school principals or whatever they want – the most important thing for us is the love of God and observance.” Nathaniel confirmed this view, saying, “I believe that God’s commandments must be kept. I am sure that this is the key to a good life and to being Jewish in the world as well.” The Romanos perceived religion as a constant anchor, which could be found anywhere in the world to which they relocated. This anchor allowed them then to travel, study languages, and provide a good education for their children.

While the Romanos invested heavily in inculcating their children into a religious Jewish way of life, this was not necessarily so they too could become Rabbis, but simply so they could continue to adhere to the teachings of God. Thus, in order to ensure that their son and daughters could find professional vocations they could pursue in adulthood and enjoy, Leah and Nathaniel sought to invest in cultivating secular skills and interests as well. All the children played sports and engaged in various interests in science and philosophy. The parents argued that these activities would open up avenues for their children to become doctors, scientists, managers, or other kinds of professionals, anywhere in the world. Nathaniel noted:

We always sent [our kids] to sports activities … we did a lot of sports like Brazilian wrestling, judo, and swimming … I think it’s important to nurture the body, to maintain a healthy body … it is very important to me that my children become Jews with a strong Jewish identity; this will enable them to learn from the wisdom that surrounds us besides Judaism. The Rambam said, ‘one should accept the truth from whatever source it proceeds’\textsuperscript{11}. It is not simple, but I think this is the best way to have spiritual life. It is difficult with a religious identity, it is a bit like walking in two opposite directions [religion and science], but previous generations have succeeded and we need to continue their path.
Despite being religiously conservative, both parents were committed to ensuring their son and daughters have equal access to a good education and support in pursuing their desired professional interests. Leah explained:

I study halakha. My daughters see me sometimes reading the Talmud [a book of Jewish law traditionally studied only by men] and they want to know, they want to learn … so my husband explains it to them. We don’t say, ‘No, because you are a woman then you cannot know’ … We do not pressure our children to do things – they decide according to what they learned, understood, and decided, according to Torah and mitzvot [commandments]. For example, my daughters see that I am modestly dressed in a skirt or a dress, so at the age of six they asked me, ‘Mum, can I dress like you?’ So I said okay. It was not due to pressure [from me], it was their choice.

Through their mobility, the children acquired various language proficiencies, supported by daily communication in their home occurring in six languages (Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, and Hebrew). Furthermore, the four school-age children studied at a private Jewish school, where they learnt a seventh language, German. Leah shared that, “it’s important to open the door to the world of languages. My children, god bless them, have visited many places and speak many languages with all kinds of people from all over the world.” Nathaniel explained that:

If we could speak all the languages in the world, I would be very happy. Until not long ago the Jews were all speaking many languages. Rabbi Chaim Flangi from Izmir, Turkey could speak 16 languages! Unfortunately, we have reached the lowest level in the ultra-Orthodox schools in Israel. They do not even want to teach English! I think that language learning does not challenge religion at all. On the contrary, previous generations of rabbis were polyglots.

Just like the Ormans, for the Romanos, the advantages facilitated by their constant mobility were interwoven with religious education and tradition. Religion played a buffering role in helping to ease the challenges and disruptions of constant mobility. At the same time, constant mobility was also used to carve out future possibilities for their children, and middle-class cultivation activities pursued as part of this “project” (Agbaria, 2019; Beyer, 2015; Brink-Danan, 2015).

The Feldmans (Reform)

The Feldman family belong to the Reform Jewish community. Gilad, the father, was born in England; educated in England and Israel; served in the Israeli army; and had worked in France, the U.S., and Switzerland. He was a businessman, involved in financial investments, capital markets, and real estate. Eleanor, his wife, was born in France; educated in Israel; and had lived in France, the U.S., and Switzerland. She was a manager at an investment company. They had four children (two of whom were twins), between the ages of 12 and 18 years. They currently lived in the metropolitan area of Tel Aviv, Israel. All children had four citizenships (American, Israeli, French and English) and had attended Jewish religious elementary schools in Switzerland and the U.S.

At the time of the interview, the twins were serving in the Israel Defence Forces while the two younger children were attending a secular high school focused on STEM subjects. The Feldman parents perceived the promulgation of Jewish values and
education as the top priority driving their parenting. Unlike the Ormans and Romanos who always and only chose Jewish schools, the Feldmans were most concerned with the quality of the academic education and the influence of the peer group in promoting aspirations of high achievement. These priorities drove their school choices. Therefore, in Israel, they had decided not to send their children to a religious school. As Eleanor explained,

In the U.S., we chose a private Jewish school that had an excellent name; yes, we went to the best school. Religious schools in Israel are not like those abroad. [Abroad,] you don’t have to be very religious or ultra-Orthodox to be in a religious school. Everyone is Jewish and wants to be accepted. Here in Israel, it’s more extreme, a bit like Yeshiva. So at first, we put the kids in a religious school. But they were very frustrated. They said, ‘Mum, it is not what we are used to. Dad, it is too religious here, we spend most of our time studying religion and not secular fields.’ They were looking for this balance [between religious and secular subjects], so we moved them to a secular Jewish school.

The Feldmans’ focus on academics is understandable given that the parents did not aspire to have their children’s future professional lives driven by their religious affiliation. Gilad and Eleanor saw the academic institution as being central to imparting knowledge to their children that was needed for their future professional lives, hence the school’s academic standard was critical. All parents in our study chose to develop cultural capital for their children through mobility – familiarity with different cultures and languages, and social skills such as self-confidence, self-expression, creating collaborations, cosmopolitan values. However, the Feldman family preferred to prioritise institutionalised forms of cultural capital (academic certificates and certifications), while the Orman and Romano families focused on embodied cultural capitals (religious teachings, multi-lingual fluency etc.) (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu et al., 2013).

In relation to linguistic skills accumulation, the Feldmans were polyglots, communicating freely in three languages: Hebrew, English, and French. Gilad explained:

I speak with two of my children English regularly. When we speak as a family, not everyone has the same level of the same language, so we use words in a different language for everyone to understand . . . It depends on who is talking and on the topic of conversation.

The role of religion in the Feldman family was less explicit in general, but nevertheless, it was present on a daily basis in the values and traditions they upheld. When the family relocated outside Israel, the need to be religiously observant became stronger. Religion was utilised to ensure a common family routine and maintain a set of values (through Jewish schools, as well as presence at religious ceremonies and Shabbat meals) (Doherty, 2018). Still, the Feldman children were encouraged to attain proficient multi-lingualism, experience multiculturalism, and confidently and expertly use of technology – capabilities that the Feldman parents perceived as critical in building successful futures for their children, anywhere in the world. Schooling was seen as one of the main ways to ensure future success (Yemini & Maxwell, 2018), a more “typical” middle class position. As Gilad explained,

The achievements of the school that they study in are important to me; I look for schools where the students graduate with the best skills. In the U.S. I asked the high school principal before enrolling my boys, ‘What percentage of students continue to higher
education?’ He told me he couldn’t remember the last time a student wasn’t admitted to the university. That shows the quality of the school.

Eleanor too noted that she looked for top-ranking schools and assessed her children’s success in a global comparative frame:

I have a son who wants to be admitted to the Technion [a top-ranked Israeli university] and I hope he will achieve his ambitions. My other son wants to study at Oxford in England, so I also hope he gets what he wants. I hope all my children will fulfil their aspirations. The most important thing is that the university and the education will be good. No matter where it is, no matter in which country, that is less important . . . It is important to me that my children receive a higher education so that they have a good livelihood and that they reach the peak of the profession and in the field they choose and maximize their careers.

For the Feldmans, religion was critical to their identity and values, but they seemed to relate to it as a more private matter, since their socio-economic position was driven by their professional identities. Thus, religion did not drive their mobility, but it did act as a buffer when relocating – preserving their sense of connection to a broader, fixed entity, and to one another as a family. Furthermore, when living outside of Israel, their Jewish religious affiliation directed their school choices.

Conclusions

Increasingly, scholars are investigating how global middle-class families undertake the work of parenting (Higginson et al., 2019; Yemini & Maxwell, 2018; Yemini et al., 2019). Recent literature has explored how these families draw on different kinds of resources to facilitate their own constant mobility. In our previous work, we demonstrated how such parents use the home nation as a central resource for anchoring themselves, their identity and cultural practices during their lives of being constantly mobile (Yemini & Maxwell, 2018). However, the literature has largely overlooked how religion (in contrast to the nation state and national identities) plays a role in the lives of global middle-class families.

Through this study, which draws on in-depth interviews with 10 Jewish religious families, we examined the broader question of how religion, nationality, mobility and education intersected, and explored how belonging to different factions within one larger faith community may also have shaped these intersections. We argued that these intersections are multifaceted and that relations were negotiated and re-negotiated during every act of mobility – depending on the location of the next move (in the case of our families – relocating to Israel was different to relocating elsewhere) and on the particular religious communities a family belonged to. We argued that mobility in all these families is buffered by religion, facilitating the successful navigation across various locations and contexts by being the constant feature in these families’ lives – in terms of traditions they upheld, communities settled into and schools chosen, as well as their reliance on the synagogue as a symbol of home and belonging. But the particular religious faction these global professionals were part of affected the reference points they used when comparing their parenting strategies and aspirations. Thus, the Ormans understood mobility as enabling them to secure advantages not available to their Israeli
Chabad peers; the Romanos used the image of “wandering Jews” as their reference point for thinking about their aspirations for their children; while the Feldmans looked to other secular members of the global middle class as counterpoints for conceiving of ways to secure their children’s advantages and futures.

Religion, therefore, always played a balancing role, acting as a buffer in relation to identity, family togetherness, and a set of routines that remained constant no matter where in the world they were currently living. But even more critical, in terms of our contribution, is the suggestion that religion played a dual role in the processes of class reproduction in these families. First, the religious communities they belonged to became a reference point from which they imagined their futures and sought to actively secure and extend their position in relation to their religious community peers. Mobility brought substantial benefits to this process of distinguishing the self from peers – as demonstrated by the Orman and Romano families. But precisely because their mobility set them apart, they used strict religious adherence as a buffer from the outside world, to ensure they could continue to secure their religious standing and credentials within these particular communities.

Second, these families’ mobilities allowed them to potentially move outside their relatively closed religious communities – as spaces in which their children’s futures could be conceived in (in terms of where they might live, what professions they would pursue, the kinds of people they might meet, their freedom to engage with the “modern” world); but also granting them access to more “traditional” middle class capital accumulation strategies. Thus, families like the Feldmans and Romanos extended their children’s horizons by being mobile transnationally and through their education strategies (academic schools and intensive extra-curricular activities, respectively). However, religion, across all three families, continued to act as an important buffer – to secure a sense of belonging and routine despite the continuous disruption. Furthermore, religion acted as a form of distinction in their self-identities and positioning vis-à-vis other middle class peers.

**Notes**

1. Educated parents (Bachelor’s degree or master’s degree at least), which their workplace has a global environment that involves daily international contacts. They maintain frequent mobility in the short and long term, meaning they moved with their families abroad for extended periods of time (over a year) at least once.
2. An institution of higher education of Torah studies for Jews according to Jewish tradition.
3. Certification to be a rabbi.
4. An educational institution for married students (called Avrechim) who continue to study after marriage.
5. The Chabad community is part of the Orthodox Jewish Hasidic movement. Chabad is one of the world’s best-known Hasidic movements, particularly for its outreach activities. It is among the largest Jewish religious organisations.
6. A “Chabad lifestyle” generally means a life devoted to service as an emissary. Unlike the typical concept of a religious missionary, the Chabad community does not attempt to convert non-Jews to Judaism. Rather, their mission is primarily directed towards Jews themselves, seeking to bring non-observant Jews closer to the Jewish religion (Berman, 2009). Thus, an integral part of Chabad’s mission is to have meaningful encounters with “others” outside their community, as participants in this outreach.
7. A Jewish ultra-Orthodox institution of advanced Tora learning for adults.
8. Jewish studies that have been practiced for thousands of years.
9. The ritual bath based on Jewish laws of purity.
10. The Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon) was a philosopher, scientist, physician, researcher, and leader. He held an absolutist rationalist mantra, expressed in his writings.
11. The truth does not depend on the speaker’s religion or education, but on its own and its content is the main thing. According to this rule, the study of the Holy Spirit can be based on secular sources.

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