

**The Chosen Universalists: Jewish Philanthropy and Youth Activism
in Post-Katrina New Orleans**

by

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DEDICATION

To Rachel

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INTRODUCTION

I arrived at 6:00 pm with a bag of chips and a jar of salsa, the best potluck offering I could muster from the convenience store across the street. The email announcement for the event had read: “ALL are invited to join a ton of awesome groups who are partnering for this event! Moishe House NOLA, Jewish Newcomers, JGrad, Minyan Nahar, and LGBTQ Jewish NOLA are all so excited to get everyone together this Friday” (email correspondence, October 19, 2010). I had traveled to New Orleans earlier that week, and was eager to meet members of the youth activist community, a group that I imagined would figure prominently in my study of post-Katrina Jewish service, philanthropy, and activism. The home where the event took place, Moishe House NOLA, was the local chapter of an international not-for-profit agency dedicated to engaging Jewish young adults. The organization provides rent subsidies and programming budgets to select groups of young Jews living in cities around the world; in exchange, Moishe House residents host events for their Jewish peers.

The sparsely furnished home, a second-floor duplex apartment, included a series of rooms in a row—a living room, followed by a dining room, a kitchen, and finally a large, carpeted den. The residence, presumably chosen for its expansive common spaces that could accommodate large groups, was located in the Irish Channel, an uptown New Orleans neighborhood. In the front room, a mostly empty space used for the storage of bikes and shoes, the hosts had set up a table with nametag labels and promotional

materials describing the various potluck sponsors. In addition to Moishe House NOLA, the event was sponsored by an independent prayer group called Minyan Nahar (“the river prayer fellowship”), a nascent and soon to be name Jewish LGBTQ group, and two Jewish-federation sponsored initiatives—the New Orleans Jewish Newcomers program, and JGRAD, which helped recent university graduates find jobs in the area.

While the email invitation had indicated that the prayer service would begin at 6:15 pm, it was only around that time that attendees began to trickle in; friends greeted one another and newcomers were welcomed and introduced. No one seemed to mind that Naomi, the service leader, arrived forty-five minutes late with a freshly baked dessert. Shortly after her arrival, Naomi gathered the group in the den and began the structured part of the evening with a round of introductions. I noted at the time that the group included teachers, employees of not-for profit agencies, people passing through town, and a number of entrepreneurs—a woman starting a bagel business and a peddler of homemade popsicles. The crowd taking part in the service was not exclusively Jewish; two receptionists from the Jewish Community Center were in attendance as were a number of non-Jewish activists who had developed strong connections to the Jewish community. Over the next two years, I would often encounter these activists at Sabbath dinners, reading groups, and other events. The group was predominantly female.

When it was my turn to introduce myself, I explained that I was an anthropologist studying social justice activism in New Orleans. Responding to this revelation, another attendee joked, “So, you are working right now.” And, of course, she was correct. This moment of introduction was both critical and strange. By introducing myself as an anthropologist, I signaled my role as researcher and their possible roles as research

subjects, a dynamic that requires the cultivation of both trust and distance. This need for a measure of detachment was strange for this particular anthropologist, who had spent a great deal of time in such contexts as a non-anthropological participant.

After the round of introductions, the evening continued with a short prayer service consisting of selections from the Friday evening liturgy. The prayers and songs were sung collectively while those unfamiliar with the Hebrew words were encouraged to hum along. I swayed to the comforting melodies familiar from many years of synagogue attendance. This was not a typical service and did not follow a standard liturgy. The songs, poems, and prayers were selected seemingly at random by the gathered participants, who sat in a circle facing one another. The traditional service was deconstructed, reordered, and augmented from the melodies, prayers, and songs recalled by those present at the service in an act of liturgical bricolage. The service concluded as it had begun, with a round of introductions. This round focused primarily on the initiatives and organizations sponsoring the potluck and provided those who had arrived during the service with an opportunity to introduce themselves.

By the time the service concluded, the crowd had nearly doubled, and the proportion of men to women had become slightly more balanced, though there were always many more women than men. I note that the presence of many more women was a typical feature of the Jewish youth activist community and of the service trips that I studied during the two years I conducted fieldwork in New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The group then moved to the dining room, where two long plastic tables lined the wall and were filled with edible offerings, large disposable aluminum trays with food

from a local kosher eatery as well as side dishes and salads furnished by the potluck attendees. The dishes were mostly homemade, wholesome, and vegetarian. In the middle of the room, an oval dining table was set up with homemade challah bread, wine, and desserts. We recited blessings over the wine and bread and then filled our plates at the buffet.

I spent the next few hours mingling. I met Hillary, a recent alumna of AVODAH, the Jewish service corps in New Orleans. Hillary would soon leave New Orleans to spend a year working for a public health NGO in Panama. Over the next few years, Hillary would periodically return to New Orleans, a location that served as a home base for her during the years I conducted research. I met Ethan, a college senior who was taking time off from school to work for a Vietnamese youth empowerment organization that was established in the post-Katrina era. The organization coalesced when a number of young Vietnamese Americans living in Versailles, a Vietnamese American community in East New Orleans, successfully opposed the reopening of a landfill in their neighborhood for the disposal of post-Katrina debris. Ethan reported that the director of his organization saw Jews as a model immigrant group and sought Jewish employees as a result. These two individuals exemplify the group of energetic, ambitious, and progressive young Jews I met that evening. This group would play a central role in the ethnographic research I was to conduct in New Orleans.

Top Down Grassroots

Perhaps the most striking feature of the potluck was the role philanthropists and philanthropic organizations played in bringing everyone together. The grassroots potluck

aesthetic might mistakenly be associated with earlier countercultural and anti-institutional formulations of Jewish life (e.g. the Havurah movement, which dates to the 1960s and in which lay-led prayer groups provide alternatives to mainstream synagogues). While the event was hosted in what seemed like a private home, the residence was, in fact, a Jewish institutional space funded by an organization that was, in turn, supported by prominent Jewish family foundations. While the Havurah movement was named after the egalitarian idea of “fellowship,” Moishe Houses are named after the program’s original funder, Morris “Moishe” Squire, a wealthy patron who made a fortune as the owner of a chain of psychiatric hospitals (Sanders 2007). A 2007 profile written in *Tablet*, an online Jewish magazine, describes Moishe House as a project that emerged through the collaborative efforts of David Cygielman, a charismatic social entrepreneur, and the aforementioned “Moishe” Squire, an eccentric octogenarian who seemed to relish the opportunity to fund a free-flowing, home-based youth culture (Sanders 2007). In the article, Eli Sanders compares Moishe House and the Havurah movement:

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Havurah movement took more of a grassroots approach, seeking to reinvent Jewish life using the terms of the counterculture movement. That meant college kids and recent college graduates—people mostly in their twenties, just like the Moishe House participants—leading their own non-denominational study groups and feminist services, and employing collective leadership stratagems... In a sense, the Moishe House movement is a hybrid of Hillel and Havurah, tailored to the lifestyle of the millennial generation. (Sanders 2007)

Sanders is also quick to note that, in contrast to Moishe House’s philanthropic support, the Havurah movement “was never so lucky—or so dependent on outside cash. But it never had outposts on four continents, either” (Sanders 2007). Highlighting the centrality of philanthropy and of wealthy funders is crucial for understanding contemporary

American Judaism and American Jewish youth culture in an age defined by extreme wealth and by a donor class with disproportionate cultural influence.

As the organization grew and Squire could no longer support Moishe House independently, the group became a 501c(3) not-for-profit organization and secured significant foundation support. Funders were attracted by the promise of reaching out to large numbers of young Jews who might not otherwise be engaged with Jewish institutions for what in the field of Jewish philanthropy was considered to be a relatively modest investment. Additionally, as the agency grew, it developed more standard policies to ensure that philanthropic investments were achieving their goals. House residents are now required to send the national office photographs from each event they host in order to document that they are living up to their commitments as Moishe House residents. Thus, while I was observing the Jewish youth gathering, a philanthropic organization was also, in some sense, monitoring the event and, more generally, the social life of young Jews in New Orleans.

In addition to the family foundations that support Moishe House, the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, the local chapter of the national Jewish federation network, was also involved in this event. The Jewish Federation Newcomers program and the JGRAD program are both sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans. The Newcomers program provides financial incentives to Jews who move to New Orleans and the JGRAD program provides networking opportunities to Jewish graduates so that they might stay in the city after graduation. Lastly, Jewish social justice initiatives were also involved in this event. Many of the young Jews present first came to New Orleans in order to take part in AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps, an intensive,

year-long program that involves employment at an anti-poverty non-profit outside of the Jewish community, Jewish communal living, and a yearlong educational program that addresses the connections between Judaism and social justice. AVODAH is part of a larger trend that has emerged over the past quarter century, namely, the establishment of Jewish philanthropic organizations dedicated to aiding non-Jews from within a Jewish communal context.

This potluck illustrates how Jewish philanthropy provides young Jews with both opportunities and constraints. The opportunities in this case are rather straightforward; funders provide residents with highly subsidized rent and with funds to host social and educational events for extended social networks. The constraints are harder to identify in this particular example and have more to do with the dynamics of subjecting oneself to Jewish philanthropic structures that have a variety of (often competing) agendas.

Philanthropic Judaism

Philanthropy has become a defining feature of Jewish life in America. The topic of Jewish giving is not simply a matter of charity or alms, of serving specific needs, but rather about the very question of what it means to be an American Jew and what might constitute an American Jewish community (as opposed to a series of communities). A philanthropic definition of Jewish identity, citizenship, personhood, and community must be understood in relation to competing notions of what might define Jewish individuals and collectives. My concern with a philanthropic definition of Jewish individual and collective identity is not meant as a rejection of alternative characterizations that

emphasize religion, biology/genealogy, nationality, and ethnicity; rather, my intention here is to emphasize the importance of philanthropy to contemporary Jewish life.

Observers of American Jewish life have commented that one of the notable achievements of American Jewry has been the establishment of a thick matrix of philanthropic organizations (Zeitiz 2007). For much of the twentieth century, the field of Jewish philanthropy was dominated by a network of Jewish charitable federations that raised funds for a variety of local Jewish social service and cultural institutions while at the same time providing support for Jews overseas and in the State of Israel. Commenting on the system of Jewish community federations in the postwar era, J.J. Goldberg, a journalist who reports on Jewish life, has described Jewish philanthropy as the locus of Jewish power in the United States (Goldberg 1988). Additionally, in the postwar era, Jewish philanthropy integrated a representative function that led observers of American Jewish philanthropy to describe this field as a polity (Elazar 1995), as a Jewish public sphere (Cohen 1980), and as assuming state-like functions (Kelman 2013). In other words, Jewish philanthropy played a central role in the cultivation of what Benedict Anderson might describe as an “imagined” American Jewish collective (Anderson 1991). While the system of Jewish Federations is structurally similar to the United Way, the former has come to play an important role in political and social solidarity in the Jewish community.

More recently, a number of competing Jewish philanthropy networks have challenged the centrality of the Jewish federation system within American Jewish life. In particular, the emergence of a donor class of extremely wealthy individuals eager to have more direct control of Jewish public policy has eroded the stature of the federation

system. Similarly, the emergence and growth of Jewish social justice organizations, loosely joined in the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, has lessened the centrality of the federation system within American Jewish life and culture. These emergent formulations of Jewish philanthropy have contributed to the development of a field of overlapping and interconnected networks that compete to define American Jewish social responsibility. I suggest that despite its more recent diversification, Jewish philanthropy continues to provide a framework—a Jewish public sphere—within which ongoing and vigorous debates about the nature of Jewish social responsibility occur. One particular point of contention is the idea that being part of the American Jewish mainstream involves support for the State of Israel and its policies. This dissertation is about those debates, focusing in particular on the intersection of youth activism and Jewish philanthropic agencies in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Studying American Jewish life and, in particular, American Jewish philanthropy from sociological and historical perspectives represents well-established research paradigms. These studies have considered the structure of American Jewish life. On the one hand, there are various religious denominational movements. In the American context, Jewish religious denominations have proliferated and include groups with beliefs and practices ranging from staunch, traditionalist Hassidic and ultra-Orthodox sects to a variety of progressive religious denominations. Alongside this denominational structure, there exists a dense network of national and local Jewish communal agencies (Woocher 1986). These agencies serve and represent the Jewish community. In fact, with the notable exception of Hassidic and ultra-Orthodox groups, participation in these communal agencies spans and transcends Jewish denominational life. Drawing on Robert

Bellah's notion of an American "civil religion," Jonathan Woocher (1986) elaborates on this idea when he describes the network of local and national Jewish communal agencies as central to an "American Jewish civil religion." Writing in the mid-1980s, Woocher perceives a trans-denominational Jewish non-profit sector that "gives transcendent meaning" to the American Jewish polity and thus provides moral underpinning to the very existence and definition of an American Jewish community (Woocher 1986:21).

Lila Corwin Berman (2008) argues that sociology has emerged as a dominant practice of Jewish identity construction. This practice, and its focus on documenting rates of intermarriage, has involved Jewish demographic studies for cities around the country and for the American Jewish community as a whole. The two most recent Jewish community-sponsored national demographic studies occurred in 1990 and 2000 and revealed rates of intermarriage at over fifty percent. A 2010 survey did not occur due to lack of funding. The most recent demographic survey, which was conducted by the Pew Research Center rather than by the Jewish community, was released in 2013. The Pew study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, reported that approximately two percent of the U.S. population is Jewish, which represents 5.3 million adults and 1.3 million children (Pew 2013:25). This percentage represents a fifty percent decrease from 1950, when approximately four percent of the U.S. population was Jewish. This decrease is due in part to the increase in the general population; the actual number of Jews in the United States has stayed about the same.

Increasingly, American Jews do not define their identity in religious terms. Many Jews define themselves as secular or cultural Jews while not identifying as Jewish by religion. The percentage of people with Jewish ancestry who describe themselves as

Jews of no religion in contrast to Jews by religion has grown significantly. In the study, of self-identifying Jews born during the “Greatest Generation” (1914-1927), ninety-three percent identify as Jews by religion while only seven percent describe themselves as Jews of no religion. In contrast, the percentage of Jewish “Millennials” (those born after 1980) who were categorized as Jews by religion dropped to sixty-eight percent with nearly a third, thirty-two percent, identifying as Jews of no religion (Pew 2013:7). Within the group of those who identify as Jewish by religion (from all generations), the report indicates that most American Jews think that being Jewish is “more about culture and ancestry than religion” (Pew 2013:8). This finding accurately reflects the attitudes held by the Jews I studied in New Orleans. The vast majority of people I interviewed described themselves as cultural Jews, even if they regularly attended synagogue.

Perhaps the most notable shift in Jewish demography in the second half of the twentieth century is the increase in exogamy. Until the 1970s, Jewish endogamy was the norm. The rate at which Jews marry non-Jews has increased significantly since the 1970s. The current rate of intermarriage for those married between 2000 and 2013 was fifty-eight percent (Pew 2013:9). Intermarriage rates of over fifty percent (first reported in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS)) alongside low birth rates has led many observers to perceive the American Jewish community as being in a state of decline. A not insignificant number of the young Jews I studied came from families in which one parent was not Jewish or in which one parent had converted to Judaism.

The Anthropology of Jews and Judaism

Despite a few notable exceptions, such as Mary Douglas' (1966) classic *Purity and Danger*, Mark Zborowski's (1962) *Life is With People*, and Barbara Myerhoff's (1979) *Number Our Days*, and the prominent role of anthropologists of Jewish origin in the early history of American anthropology, the study of Jews and Judaism was not considered for anthropological consideration until the mid-1980s. How might we define the anthropology of Jews and Judaism? What are its primary concerns? How do/should anthropologists of Jewish origin position themselves in relation to their subjects and in relation to disciplinary anthropology?

Contemporary studies that address Jews and Judaism must be understood in relation to the "crisis in anthropology." Beginning with the publication of Malinowski's (1967) diaries and intensifying throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in response to Said's (1979) *Orientalism*, anthropologists have expressed acute awareness of the disjunctions between the realities of ethnographic fieldwork and the representations that emerge in ethnographic writings. This critique has led to the development of a transformed discipline increasingly focused on questioning and unearthing anthropological epistemologies. Virginia Dominguez (1993) offered the following charge in a review article considering two books that she thought were likely to be marginalized for being too Jewish:

As anthropology debates the ethics and delusions of its historical orientation toward "Others," shouldn't we seriously ponder anthropology's stance(s) toward Jews? Does anthropology have "a Jewish problem?"... Large numbers of American anthropologists come from Jewish families, yet very few have done any research or writing on Jews or have actively used what Boyarin calls Jewish resources. (Dominguez 1993:621)

Dominguez's position initiated an interest in the study of Anthropology's Jewish roots as well as reflection on the study of Jews and Judaism within anthropology.

A survey of anthropological studies of Jews and Judaism must take into account the position of Jews in American society in relation to notions of race. Karen Brodtkin (1998) argues that the successful integration of Jews into American society must be understood in racial terms. Pointing to popular early twentieth-century views that asserted the existence of "European races" ranging from "the superior Nordics of northwestern Europe to the inferior southern and eastern races of the Alpines, Mediterranean, and worst of all Jews," Brodtkin narrates the process of the whitening of the Jews that accounts for their success in the American context (Brodtkin 1998:28). Similarly, Henry Goldschmit (2006) focuses on the intersections of "race" and "Jewishness." Analyzing the relationship between Lubavitch Hasidim and Black Hebrew Israelites in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, Goldschmit rejects the notion that the categories of "race," "religion," "Blackness," and "Jewishness" are clearly bounded and understood terms. These categories, argues Goldschmit, "function, above all, as symbolically charged tropes within historical narratives, rather than clearly bounded categories of identity formation" (Goldschmit 2006:390). Mirroring the insights of Frederick Barth (1969) on the construction of ethnic identity, Goldschmit asserts that categories that are popularly perceived to be primordial are always in the process of being reconstructed and reimagined within any particular historical and cultural context. In a larger disciplinary framework, the study of ethnic identity, as opposed to the study of the linguistically and geographically contained "cultures" that defined early American anthropology, facilitates a sustained focus on Jews and Judaism.

One trend in the anthropological study of Jews and Judaism is to focus on site-specific “Jewish spaces.” For instance, marginal synagogues are the focus of both Kugelmass’ (1986) study of the lone remaining and literally crumbling—yet vibrant—synagogue in the South Bronx and of Moshe Shokeid’s (1995) study of *A Gay Synagogue in New York*. Though not focused on a synagogue, Barabara Myerhoff’s (1978) study of a Jewish senior center is similarly “sited” in its focus on a Jewish building where marginalized seniors celebrate a secular Yiddish culture that has not been transmitted to their upwardly mobile and highly Americanized children.

Another predominant mode for attempting to identify a Jewish field site is the rather amorphous notion of studying the ways in which Jewish collectivity transcends time and space. Jeffrey Shandler’s (2005) *Adventures in Yiddishland*, for example, considers how post-vernacular or symbolic usage of Yiddish works to establish concrete, expansive, and complicated collective identities. Shandler argues that Yiddish, even if used symbolically rather than as a vernacular, helps to construct a sense of peoplehood that is independent of “conventional notions of nationhood” (Shandler 2005:57). A similar academic/collective instinct underscores the Boyarins’ (1993) concern with diasporic identity; likewise, the notion of peoplehood is central to Dominguez’s (1989) study of Israeli Jewish collective identity.

My research synthesizes site-specific approaches to the study of Jews and Judaism with a focus on unpacking translocal formulations of Jewish collective identity. On the one hand, the *Chosen Universalists* is ethnographically focused on a number of relatively confined spaces within the New Orleans Jewish community. On the other hand, the project’s ultimate objective is to understand the mechanisms through which

Jewish individual and collective identities are constructed and how these identities engage a series of larger frameworks such as the institutional infrastructures of American Jewish life as well as a series of modernities—American, Israeli, and global. Locating my study in this way relates to Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of “habitus” and Ortner’s (1984) exposition of “practice,” both of which consider the relationship between individual agency and the larger structures that define and confine a person’s understanding of self and world.

A Relational Approach to Universalism and Particularism

In the pages that follow, I often describe intra-Jewish debates in terms of universalism and particularism. These terms require explication. Universal/universalism and particular/particularism can be understood in relation to deep cultural histories, in relation to specific practices, and as discursive, relational, and political terms. Tensions between universalism and particularism emerge from early distinctions between Judaism and Christianity, a historical correlation of significance for understanding Western notions of morality and ethics. For example, Gillian Feeley-Harnik (1994) focuses on the early history of Christianity and its connection to the establishment of the ideological divide between Judaism and Christianity. In particular, according to Feeley-Harnik, competing symbolic food practices encoded notions of Christian universalism set forth in opposition to Jewish particularism:

The eating behavior described by early Christian symbolists—the feeding miracles, the fasting, the dietary indiscretions, and especially the last supper—was intended to contrast their more universalistic politico-religious beliefs, attributed to Jesus Christ, with the more nationalistic conceptions of other Jewish sects, symbolized above all by the Passover meal. (Feeley-Harnik 1994:2)

Feeley-Harnik's analysis of Jewish and Christian food symbolism indicates that the concepts of the universal and of the particular are deeply encoded cultural symbols that continue to be reinforced by the ongoing rituals as well as everyday eating practices of Jews and Christians.

In studying *The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity*, Feeley-Harnik's work anticipates the renewed anthropological interest in Judaism and Christianity, topics that were historically avoided by anthropologists. In order to explain this disciplinary lacuna, Feeley-Harnik—quoting Edmund Leach—notes the “squeamishness” that anthropologists have displayed when it comes to analyzing Judaism and Christianity, ““religions in which they themselves or their close friends are deeply involved”” (Feeley-Harnik 1994:2). In the twenty years since the publication of Feeley-Harnik's study, Christianity has become a central concern within anthropological discourse (Cannell 2006) and the study of Jews and Judaism has emerged as a discourse field within anthropology (Brink-Danan 2008).

Similarly, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin (1993) argue that the correlation of Judaism with particularism and Christianity with universalism is a deeply encoded cultural norm with significant contemporary relevance. In particular, the Boyarins assert that the early history of Christianity provides a crucial context for understanding contemporary attitudes regarding the value of cultural difference. Focusing on Paul—the inventor of Christian thought—and the opposition he established between Jewish particularism and Christian universalism, the Boyarins discuss the ongoing implications of Paul's efforts to universalize Judaism. According to the Boyarins, this project resulted in a dual Christian attitude toward Jews and Judaism. On the one hand, Christianity was

viewed as the refinement of Judaism. On the other hand, Pauline Christianity presented Jews as a prime symbol of difference (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:697). By relegating Jews to this symbolic role, Pauline Christianity left little room for actual Jews and for a lived Jewish experience characterized by distinction and difference.¹ The Boyarins argue that this attitude toward Jews persists and continues to inform Western philosophical approaches to difference with significant ramifications for the project of ethnic identity, pointing to Walter Benn Michaels' assertion that all acts of ethnic identity have racist underpinnings as an illustrative example of the influence of Pauline Christian thought on contemporary discourses relating to diversity and multiculturalism (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; Michaels 1992).

This is not to say that the Boyarins reject universalism; rather, they seek a syncretic approach that embraces a universal ethic while allowing for the assertion of difference. In particular, they suggest that the concept and reality of diaspora allow for particularistic identities that lack the political power to do harm. For Jews living in diaspora, minority status represents just this type of opportunity for the expression of particularistic Jewish identity that at the same time can incorporate Christian notions of universal concern. By framing universalist challenges to ethnic identity formation in relation to the history of the contest between Judaism and Christianity, the Boyarins challenge the sense that ethnic identification has an essentially racial foundation. The Boyarins argue that preserving distinct Jewish and other ethnic identities outside of the

¹ Rayna Green (1998) makes a similar argument about the representation of Native Americans in the United States. Examining the history of "playing Indian" both in the United States and in Europe, Green argues that American and European collective identities were often constructed in opposition to Indian identity. These representational "games" leave little room for real Indians.

context of the ethnic nation-state provides a framework for the assertion of ethnic difference that neutralizes the risk that particularism will harm others.

Writing at a moment when the popularity of post-nationalism was surging in the social sciences, the Boyarins set forth a notion of diaspora that represented an aspirational, post-national cultural form that would allow for cultural difference while avoiding the often oppressive and violent tendencies associated with ethnic nationalism. According to the Boyarins, Christian universalism has become naturalized and de-theologized as hegemonic, secular humanism. Whatever one might think about diasporism as a political position, the historical analysis upon which the Boyarins' argument is based highlights the deep cultural roots that give the terms particular/particularism and universal/universalism enduring significance.

While acknowledging these deep cultural formations, I call our attention to the ways in which the terms universalism and particularism are used in contemporary intra-Jewish discourse. In the context of Jewish philanthropy, there is a functional definition that relates primarily to the direction of aid. Jewish giving in support of issues of Jewish concern such as Jewish education, the Jewish poor, and the State of Israel reflects a particularistic approach whereas Jewish giving to non-Jews is often described as an expression of universalism. This reductionist binary can be correlated with the popular use of the term *tikkun olam*, literally “to repair the world,” to invoke a sense of responsibility that extends beyond the Jewish community. Universalistic acts of “repair” predominantly include Jewish service and philanthropy meant to aid those outside of the Jewish community.

However, it is insufficient to distinguish universalism from particularism in contemporary Jewish philanthropy based on whether aid is given to Jews or to non-Jews. When we consider the ideologies that motivate specific acts of giving, a more complicated picture emerges. Jewish agencies that give to those outside of the Jewish community are often motivated by a concern with specific Jewish interests. Similarly, the very act of labeling a universalist initiative as Jewish necessarily implies some level of concern with Judaism and with Jewish community. The main point I would like to suggest here is that, while the terms universal/universalistic and particular/particularistic have deep cultural histories, their expression within intra-Jewish community debates is always discursive and relational. Many of the debates I analyze in this dissertation are focused on the question of what might define the binary between universalism and particularism and whether such boundaries can be collapsed and in some sense resolved.

At the heart of tensions between Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism lies a debate about the claims that Judaism and Jewishness can or cannot make on a person's identity. Jewish particularism demands a primary allegiance to other Jews whereas Jewish universalism demands a primary concern with social justice broadly defined.² Taking this idea beyond individual responsibility, I suggest that debates about universalist and particularistic ideologies are often really debates about who gets to define Jewish social responsibility and what that means for the Jewish community. A critical element of this discussion involves the question of which agencies and figures are entitled to make representative claims—that is, who can speak on behalf of Jews and Jewish communities. Thus, my concern here is not only with the claims Jewishness can

² I would like to thank Lila Corwin-Berman for suggesting this formulation of the distinction between Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism.

make on individual Jews but also with the claims Jews can make on the Jewish institutions that purport to represent them. Ongoing debates about Jewish social action—which often play out as debates about universalism and particularism—constitute the very processes through which the meaning of Judaism is defined and redefined.

Why New Orleans?

In the years following Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans became a center and a symbol of American Jewish philanthropy. Though not a major Jewish population center, New Orleans has a very old Jewish community and has, in the years since the storm, become a prominent travel destination for Jewish service tourism. Additionally, since Katrina, New Orleans has become home to several hundred young Jewish social justice activists who are part of the nearly 2,000 newcomers to have joined the city's Jewish population. The city has become a symbolic location through these actions and has allowed for communal reflection on Jewish philanthropic priorities. New Orleans thus represents a fitting ethnographic location from which to tell a series of overlapping narratives about how American Jews express their complex identities through acts of charity, service, philanthropy, and activism.

John Chase's (2010 [1949]) *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children* describes the development of New Orleans along religious, ethnic, racial, sociological and geological lines. In New Orleans, social stratification is mapped onto the city's topography. The Mississippi continues to function as a working river and New Orleans remains one of the busiest ports in the United States. As a result, the neighborhoods located closest to the Mississippi, on the river's natural levee, were historically populated by laborers working

on the river (Chase 2010; Campanella 2006). More exclusive areas, such as the Garden District, a neighborhood known for its stately mansions, tend to be more removed from the river and still on the relatively high ground of the river's natural levee. Moving farther away from the river, toward what was historically described as the "back of town," one finds relatively low-lying, historically depressed neighborhoods near what was once swampland. In other words, historically, areas closest to the river tended to be working class, those removed from industrial areas and still protected by being located on the natural levee were upper middle and upper class, and those yet farther from the river on marginal land entering the swamp were the poorest areas of New Orleans. While this socioeconomic and geographical equation shifted when the swampland was drained and middle- and upper-class neighborhoods were established on land farther away from the river in areas that were once uninhabitable, Central City, a neighborhood located directly to the north of the gilded Garden District in what would once have been the "back of town," remains one of the poorest and most blighted neighborhoods in New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina reaffirmed this pattern of development when those working class and exclusive neighborhoods on the river's natural levee were the only areas in the city not to flood when the engineered levees meant to protect the city failed. Though many of the neighborhoods most affected by the storm were socioeconomically depressed and populated mainly by African Americans, there were also middle- and upper-class, mostly-white neighborhoods that suffered extensive damage. This challenges the notion that that the storm most adversely affected poor and African American communities. That said, those in areas that were more socioeconomically depressed faced significantly

more challenges in their efforts, first to evacuate, and subsequently to rebuild their homes and neighborhoods (Finger 2008).

Historically, Jews have played a central role in the civic and social life of New Orleans. Jews first arrived to New Orleans in 1757, although these early Jewish pioneers had little interest in practicing their religion (Lachoff and Kahn 2005:7). It wasn't until 1827 that Gates of Prayer, the city's first Jewish congregation, was founded. After the Louisiana Purchase, a number of Jews who would become prominent citizens arrived to the city: "The two Judahs, Touro and Benjamin; Samuel Hermann; and Samuel and Carl Kohn all found tremendous success in their varying endeavors, and all, save one, had no connection to the local Jewish community as it began to create religious institutions" (Lachoff and Kahn 2005:7). As the community grew, a number of congregations, both Reform and Orthodox, were established. Judah Touro, who is known for his philanthropy in New Orleans and around the United States, supported some of these early congregations; one of New Orleans' Reform synagogues still bears his name, as does one of the city's major hospitals.

By the 1960s, the Jewish population had reached 10,000 people, a level it more or less sustained until Hurricane Katrina. When Katrina hit in 2005, the Jewish community population was already in a state of decline, as young people were leaving for cities with more opportunities. This trend mirrored population decline in the city as a whole. Additionally, many Jewish families had moved to Metairie, a nearby suburb, as well as to Lakeview, a suburb-like neighborhood in the Northern part of the city, on what was once swampland near Lake Pontchartrain. Jews who lived near Lake Pontchartrain were most likely to have their houses destroyed by the storm as a result of levee failure, and Beth

Israel, the Orthodox synagogue in Lakeview, was destroyed as a result of post-storm flooding.

When compared to Jewish communities with similar population levels, New Orleans has historically sustained a robust Jewish community life, including three Reform synagogues, one Conservative synagogue, two Orthodox congregations, two Jewish Community Center campuses, a day school, and two Chabad-Lubavitch outreach centers.³ We might link the community's ability to support some of these congregations with Southern American culture's emphasis on affiliation with a house of worship. Furthermore, the local federation raises approximately three million dollars annually, a relatively large amount for a community of this size; this may also correspond to a local culture that encourages official affiliation with religious and civic institutions. A book on the New Orleans Jewish community published right before the storm commented on the vibrancy of Jewish communal life in New Orleans:

Jewish service organizations thrive. The Jewish Federation of New Orleans provides valuable services to all aspects of the local community. The local Hadassah chapter has an active membership. Indeed, it is through institutions such as the National Council of Jewish Women, B'nai B'rith, the Jewish Endowment, the Jewish Children's Regional Services, and the two Jewish community centers that most of the Jews of New Orleans act out their Jewishness. (Lachoff and Kahn 2005:8)

New Orleans Jewish life is thoroughly infused with New Orleans culture. While Mardi Gras originated as a Catholic celebration and Jews are not integrated into the original krewes, the super krewes that emerged more recently and are more inclusive include

³ Chabad-Lubavitch is a fervently devout Jewish group devoted to including nonobservant Jews in ritual practice.

many Jewish members. There are even two competing Jewish Mardi Gras krewees, Krewe du Jieux and Krewe du Mishigas.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the Jewish community lost approximately 3,500 members, dipping from a pre-storm population of 9,500 to 6,000 in May of 2006 (Weil 2008:1). The Jewish population of New Orleans has steadily risen since that time, reaching 7,000-8,000 by early 2008 (Weil 2008:1). In the years following the storm, the Jewish population grew steadily, in part due to newcomers encouraged by financial incentives offered by the Federation. The 2008-2009 annual report published by the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans stated, “More than 900 Jewish newcomers have been welcomed to the city, including 300 beneficiaries of the Newcomers Incentive Program” (Federation 2009). While that report did not include a number for the overall Jewish population, subsequent Federation reports document a steady population increase (8,747 Jewish residents in 2011, 9,570 Jewish residents in 2012, 9,877 Jewish residents in 2013, and 9,886 Jewish residents in 2014). The quick pace of post-storm growth appears to have reached a plateau in 2013 with a population of slightly less than 10,000 Jewish residents, a number slightly higher than the pre-storm Jewish population. By contrast, a New Orleans Times-Picayune article published on the eighth anniversary of the storm reported, “As of July 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau has estimated New Orleans’ population at 369,250, or 76 percent of its 2000 population of 484,674. The metro area, with 1,205,374 residents, has 92 percent of its 2000 population of 1,316,510” (Waller 2012).

One of the questions that I have struggled to answer in this project is whether this dissertation is about New Orleans. There is no simple answer to this question. On the

one hand, the ethnographic data is from New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast and is drawn from an explicitly post-disaster context. And yet I hesitate to claim that this is a dissertation about Katrina or New Orleans in the traditional ethnographic sense. The questions that motivated this research did not originate in New Orleans but came from a desire to understand broader shifts in contemporary American Jewish life. This project stemmed from my desire to understand the ways in which Jews, and young Jews in particular, were reformulating their identities in pursuit of a specifically Jewish progressivism. In my analysis, Post-Katrina New Orleans figures both as an actual location and as a symbolic location in relation to which individuals and institutions situate themselves. This dissertation is not about the most vulnerable Katrina victims but rather should be understood as a form of what Laura Nader (1972) calls “studying up,” that is, as a study of middle-, upper middle, and upper-class white Jews grappling with ethnoreligiously defined notions of social responsibility. It should come as no surprise, then, that my analysis concludes, not on the West Bank of the Mississippi, but on the West Bank of the Jordan River.

This Jewish Katrina story is much like the broader American Katrina story insofar as the hurricane and its aftermaths can be described, figuratively, as both endemic and pandemic. This is to say that while the storm damage was localized to a particular swath of land on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and surrounding areas, Katrina’s significance goes far beyond the specific issues related to the storm. While situated within the Jewish community’s material responses to the storm, this dissertation ultimately considers yet another way in which responses to the storm highlighted and were symptomatic of

broader cultural phenomena. In particular, I use an analysis of Jewish responses to this disaster to motivate an investigation of contemporary American Jewish life and culture.

First, there were implicit and explicit debates about the appropriate Jewish community response to Hurricane Katrina. These debates centered on the extent to which Jewish philanthropic efforts should focus on aiding Jewish Katrina victims or on aiding in the larger project of post-Katrina aid and recovery. While many in the Jewish community suffered severe losses to their homes, businesses, congregations, and institutions, critics of the Jewish federation system's primary focus on aiding the Jewish community observed that the Jewish community had many advantages when compared to most other Katrina victims. Second were meta-level debates whereby Post-Katrina New Orleans was used strategically as a lens for thinking about the broader implications of contemporary American philanthropy. For instance, in the years following the storm, an emphasis on service emerged within the American Jewish community. Differently situated players understood the value of these trips in vastly different ways. For Jewish social justice organizations that focus on progressive activism, post-Katrina New Orleans served as an experiential classroom to inculcate a broad progressive agenda within the Jewish community. For such organizations, the goal is twofold: to advocate progressivism to mainstream Jews and to advocate a universalist version of Judaism to progressives who happen to be Jewish. From the perspective of trip leaders, the objective of service tourism to New Orleans was not so much to provide volunteer labor but rather to allow trip participants to learn first-hand about the implications of inequality and racism in American society. New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast served as icons for larger societal ills. Conversely, enthusiasm about post-Katrina service inspired a

number of Jewish funders to support wide-ranging Jewish service initiatives that sought to reformulate Judaism in relation to community service. The idea here was to build on eagerness to participate in community service in response to Hurricane Katrina to cultivate and to solidify Jewish identity formation.

Lastly, there were intra-Jewish debates about the nature of Jewish social action that occurred in New Orleans and that feature prominently in this dissertation but that are not about New Orleans at all. Most prominently, during the course of my research in New Orleans, debates about the politics of Israel-Palestine would periodically emerge. These often highly disruptive and contentious debates challenged the hegemonic norm that American Jews are Zionists. While I could have explored debates between Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism and debates about the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in many locations, Post-Katrina New Orleans was a place where various practices, fault lines, and projects played out in a rather localized and intensive manner. Post-Katrina New Orleans represents a generative location from which to consider and to analyze some of the larger debates within contemporary American Jewish life.

Field Sites, Methodology, and Chapter Summary

Like most Jewish communities in the United States, Jewish philanthropic efforts in New Orleans are coordinated by a central Jewish philanthropy agency, the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans.⁴ The Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans,

⁴ The Jewish federation system is similar in structure and has an overlapping history with other mass charity agencies such as the United Way. It is important to note that the Jewish federation system has declined over the past few decades as a result of a shrinking donor base and as a result

working with its national coordinating partner, The Jewish Federations of North America (formerly United Jewish Communities), organized what might be described as the “official” Jewish communal philanthropic response to Hurricane Katrina. Focused primarily on helping Jewish Katrina victims, these efforts reflected a type of Jewish philanthropy status quo that defines Jewish philanthropy as aid by Jews and for Jews. My ethnographic research on the federation system began at the 2010 General Assembly, the federation system’s annual conference, which focused extensively on reflections on post-Katrina Jewish philanthropy. Subsequent research on the Jewish federation in New Orleans was both historical and ethnographic and included archival research, interviews with federation staff and lay leaders, and participation at federation events.

In addition to the work of more inwardly focused Jewish federated charity, post-Katrina New Orleans became a symbolic center of Jewish social justice initiatives. One manifestation of this development was the fact that, in the years following hurricane Katrina, New Orleans became a prominent destination for Jewish service tourism trips. These trips provided service labor primarily outside of the Jewish community and continued long after immediate post-disaster recovery work had been completed. In fact, during the time I conducted fieldwork (October 2010-August 2012), dozens of Jewish volunteer groups continued to arrive in order to participate in “post-Katrina” service-tourism. I conducted participant observation research on five university trips and traveled to each campus in order to conduct in-depth, post-trip interviews. The university trips that I studied represent the collaboration between more particularistic on-campus Jewish agencies and a more universally-orientated Jewish social justice agency.

of donors and funders who increasingly give directly to charitable agencies. Notwithstanding this decline, the Federation system collectively raises approximately three billion dollars annually, making it one of the largest philanthropic agencies in the world.

Consequently, differing and at times contradictory notions of the value of Jewish service in New Orleans resulted in complicated trip dynamics and provided rich opportunities for ethnographic study of the politics and practices of American Jewish philanthropy.

My study of Jewish social justice efforts in post-Katrina New Orleans also focused on AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps. The service corps expanded to New Orleans in 2008, in an effort to enact a long-term Jewish social justice response to Hurricane Katrina. Each year, the service corps provides ten post-college Jews with a yearlong position working at a local anti-poverty organization outside of the Jewish community; corps member live together in a communal house and are required to participate in weekly educational sessions that address the connections between Judaism and social justice. During the 2011-2012 program year, I assumed the role of honorary corps member, serving as friend, interviewer, and sometimes mentor to the ten program participants (one male, nine females). Together, we learned about a variety of social justice issues and were encouraged to imagine ourselves to be both members and critics of the American and New Orleans Jewish communities.

These formal contexts and programs stand alongside more informal efforts to establish a Jewish social justice community in New Orleans. In the years following Katrina, New Orleans became home to a group of young Jews who viewed themselves as Jewish social justice activists. This group, which was constantly in flux, consisted of twenty to forty core activists at any given time, as well as many other peripheral members. During my time in New Orleans, these young activists became my friends and informants. They shared their lives with me and included me in their social and activist pursuits. There are two salient features of this group that bear mentioning. First, many

of these young activists spent a great deal of time and energy attempting to understand what it might mean to be a Jewish social justice activist. Second, it is important to note that the life narratives and paths of these young activists were, to greater or lesser extents, influenced by their encounters with Jewish non-profit agencies. On a number of occasions during my time in New Orleans, these activists sought to establish an “official” Jewish social justice community. Even though such efforts were often short-lived, they reflected the sense that more particularistic Jewish non-profit agencies did not adequately represent this community’s desire to merge its Jewish and progressive political identities. This sense of dissonance was particularly pronounced when it came to the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In chapter one, “Establishing and Challenging the Jewish Philanthropy Status Quo,” I introduce archival materials that document the formation of a postwar Jewish philanthropic status quo defined by a national system of charitable federations primarily concerned with Jewish needs. I then analyze the late twentieth-century emergence of Jewish social justice organizations that challenged prevailing assumptions about Jewish philanthropy by focusing on aiding non-Jews from within a Jewish communal framework. The chapter goes on to examine the ways in which post-Katrina New Orleans emerged as a symbolically significant location for universalist and particularistic formulations of Jewish philanthropy as well as for those hoping to integrate the two.

Chapter two, “Rebuilding Justice: Jewish Philanthropy and the Politics of Representation” considers the intersections of race politics, the politics of representation, and the idea of community. I focus in particular on a contentious debate that emerged in response to a partnership between the St. Bernard Project and the Jewish Community

Federation of Greater New Orleans. By analyzing this debate and then situating it within theoretical literature on the political nature of aid, I think through the implications of calling Jewish humanitarian action “political” or “apolitical” in nature. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the ways in which this debate illuminates competing notions of Jewish community and the always political process of Jewish community formation.

Chapter three, “Reciprocating Justice: Political Dissidence and Jewish Privilege” argues that an awareness of Jewish identity as social privilege can sometimes motivate progressive activism. This sense of Jewish privilege, which has recently emerged among young American Jews, must be understood in relation to initiatives funded by extremely wealthy philanthropists to promote Jewish continuity in the face of concerns about the biosocial reproduction of Jews and Jewish institutions. Anthropological theories of the gift illuminate the ways in which young activists label their activism as “Jewish” in order to reciprocate the benefits they receive from Jewish philanthropic agencies and individuals working to encourage Jewish identification.

Chapter four, “In the Service of Jewish Identity,” argues that the emergence of a Jewish service movement in the years following Katrina reflects efforts to synthesize Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism. Building on this analysis, I situate Jewish service tours to New Orleans in relation to broader neoliberal economic trends and as a prime example of episodic Jewish culture.

In chapter five, “Structure, Practice, and Agency in a New Orleans Jewish Service Corps,” I apply practice theory, as well as its demand that we consider the relationship of “structure” and “agency,” in order to account for recently developed yet normative

experiences in contemporary American Jewish life. I focus on AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps as both a product of an agentive project and as a structuring framework that provides young Jews with a set of opportunities and constraints in relation to which they understand their own identities and agency. This chapter also explores syncretic elements of Jewish social justice efforts, specifically AVODAH's use of the Lutheran Service Corps as a model program.

Chapter six, "National and Anti-National Intimacies: Zionism, Diaspora, and the American Jewish *Mishpokhe*," analyzes a series of debates and protests within Jewish philanthropic contexts related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I argue that while Jewish social justice agencies are de-centered or post-diasporic, the American Jewish Zionist mainstream and Jewish anti-Zionists can be understood as inverted and opposite formulations of a diasporic Jewish identity centered on the State of Israel.

Ethnographic Subjectivity

The impetus for this research began with my own experiences with the diversity, complexities, paradoxes, and contradictions of contemporary Jewish life. In late adolescence and early adulthood, the paradoxes of my Jewish upbringing began to accumulate. How might I understand the moment at which I learned that a childhood friend from my Orthodox synagogue was not Jewish by Orthodox standards? What was I to make of the progressive politics my parents embraced both in the United States and in Israel, where we lived for part of my childhood, while remaining members of a traditional Jewish community that included many who embraced neoconservative political views alongside racist attitudes toward Arabs? How could I contextualize my involvement during and after college in a nascent Jewish ecological movement that rabbis at a

religious Zionist seminary I had once attended would likely have castigated as uncomfortably close to Pagan earth worship? While some of the Jewish frameworks I encountered, especially those emerging from within Orthodoxy, claimed an ancient lineage, others drew upon ancient texts and traditions as part of efforts to reformulate Jewish praxis, culture, and theology. While Judaism within these various contexts was often understood by practitioners and observers as an object, that is, as a set of relatively stable propositions and practices, the juxtapositions I experienced as I moved from one community to the next led me to develop a relativistic perspective on Judaism and Jewishness and to consider both to be ongoing processes that adapt while making normative claims about Jewish history, theology, and practice.

I first encountered anthropology while visiting the Abayudaya Jewish community in Eastern Uganda. While constructing shelves as part of a project to organize books the community had received from American suburban synagogues, I happened upon a Master's thesis written about the community. Fascinated by the perspective taken in the thesis, I turned to the study of anthropology. Moving forward, anthropological notions of cultural relativism and the practice of participant observation provided me with a framework and methodology for making sense of the competing and contradictory religious, ethnic, and political positions I encountered as I traveled from one iteration of Jewish life to the next.

As I became increasingly integrated into various research contexts in New Orleans, one of the challenges I encountered was the need to differentiate between my roles as friend, fieldworker, family member, and community member. Put another way, the challenge was to differentiate between my role as participant and my role as observer.

Ethnographic research typically involves moving from observation to participant-observation. However, for ethnographers studying their own groups, the process is reversed and involves moving from participation to participant-observation. I have many connections to the Jewish community in general and some strong connections to this community in particular. For instance, my sister and her husband moved to New Orleans in 2009 and my brother-in-law serves as the rabbi of the Conservative congregation attended by many of the young activists I studied. As the newest congregation in the city, his synagogue lost many of its members as a result of the storm and my brother-in-law came to New Orleans as part of a cohort of charismatic religious leaders who were attracted to the project of community rebuilding after the storm.

As a Jewish anthropologist or anthropological Jew, I am always writing with a number of audiences in mind. While my primary audience remains scholars in anthropology, Jewish studies, and religious studies, I also write with and for the organizations and individuals I study. The project of writing for a number of audiences is complicated, and I am never entirely certain for and to whom I am writing and to what ends. The predominant ethos of contemporary anthropology, especially since the publication of *Writing Culture*, has been to understand writing as part of the continuously ongoing and relational project of cultural formation. In the introduction to that volume, Clifford writes: “Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent. Representation and explanation—both by insiders and outsiders—is implicated in this emergence” (Clifford 1986:19). Despite this awareness, anthropologists tend to be “outsiders” who create texts based on ethnographic research primarily for other anthropologists or scholars in related fields. In some sense it has to be so because, even when anthropologists embrace an

“engaged” approach to anthropological research, writing, and teaching, their career advancement and their very ability to practice anthropology is dependent on the approval of academic mentors and colleagues. For anthropologists who are insiders, or perhaps insiders who are anthropologists, these dynamics are intensified when the researcher represents his own group and/or views his own group as a central audience for the representations he produces. Thus, I write about contemporary Jewish life with a number of goals in mind. First, though not foremost, I engage in the study of Jewish life in order to participate in Jewish life and culture and in order to play a role in shaping that culture. As an active Jew concerned with the many pressing questions of contemporary Jewish life, I draw on anthropological theories and methods in order to provide a sociocultural mirror so that I might participate in contemporary American Jewish life and its ongoing—and often contentious—debates. An interrelated project is to put the anthropological study of Jewish life and practice into conversation with a variety of discourses in anthropology and religious studies including discourses on religious giving, religion and secularism, and the recent interest in NGO studies. I embrace what Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin (1997) describe as a “new Jewish cultural studies” that suggests that Jewish studies can enrich Jewish life while at the same time contributing to broader ethical and academic discourses:

Thus there is room for a Jewish cultural studies, one that will function in two ways; first by seeking to discover ways to make Jewish literature, culture, and history work better to enhance Jewish possibilities for living richly; and second by uncovering the contributions that Jewish culture still has to make to *tikkun olam*, the “repair of the world.” The question that Jewish culture studies raises might be said to be this: Is Jewishness up to the challenge? (Boyarin & Boyarin 1997:vii)

I hope that this ethnography of American Jewish philanthropy lives up to this challenge and can contribute to Jewish life and culture, on the one hand, and to larger questions—both academic and political—on the other.

CHAPTER ONE

TikkuNOLAm: Asserting and Challenging the Jewish Philanthropic Status Quo

Introduction

After landing in Louis Armstrong International Airport in late October 2010, I was greeted by a full-size billboard visible from the airport's access road that read: "We welcome you to the General Assembly and International Lion of Judah Conference." My arrival came a few weeks before the yearly gathering of Jewish philanthropy professionals and lay-leaders sponsored by the Jewish Federations of North America, an umbrella group that unifies and represents the system of local Jewish community charity federations and that is, collectively, one of the largest not-for-profit organizations in the world. The roadside billboard and the giant sign that was located on the conference downtown hotel's façade—markings that typically are not part of the conference—inscribed the conference on the city, calling particular attention to its location.

The 2010 General Assembly was not simply located in New Orleans but was about New Orleans and, in particular, about the Jewish response to Hurricane Katrina. We might take this idea even further—by placing massive signs at the airport and at the downtown hotel, conference organizers were in some sense claiming the city of New Orleans as a location of particular significance for American Jews. In a similar move, a smaller-scale Jewish federation conference that was held in New Orleans the previous year melded the city of New Orleans with the conference's theme of repairing the world

to create the name TikkuNOLAm. While I was in New Orleans for several weeks prior to the conference, the 2010 General Assembly served as one introductory point to nearly two years of ethnographic research on Jewish philanthropy, service, and activism in post-Katrina New Orleans.



Figure 1: Billboard welcoming travelers to the 2010 General Assembly conference (Nathan-Kazis 2010)

Figure 2: Picture of facade, conference hotel, 2010 GA (Esther Kustanowitz 2010)

Figure 3: Promotional image advertising tikkuNOLAm conference (currently online at thedailykibitzer.com)

I note that the placing of large, public signs is not a typical practice at General Assembly conferences. The idea that the Jewish community could in a sense “claim” New Orleans as an important symbolic location reflects the city’s doubled identity in the American Jewish imagination, both as a familiar and as an exotic location, as a place that might be claimed and a place in need of rescue. Furthermore, as a majority African American city removed from the centers of Jewish life but also home to a longstanding Jewish community, New Orleans symbolically functions as both Jewish and non-Jewish, both mainstream American and “minority.”

The yearly conference is organized by the federation system and has historically focused on issues of particular Jewish concern. The conference’s high status is reflected by the fact that top U.S. and Israeli government officials often speak at the plenary sessions. For example, the 2010 conference included speeches by Vice President Joe Biden, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and leader of the Israeli opposition Tzipi Livni. The 2010 conference was notable in that it brought together a number of elements of contemporary Jewish philanthropy that are sometimes viewed as being in opposition to one another. Conference organizers focused on the ways in which the Jewish federation network played a crucial role in “saving” the Jewish community of New Orleans. By emphasizing this element of Jewish philanthropy, conference organizers were asserting the continued relevance of a postwar Jewish philanthropy paradigm with a primary focus on specifically Jewish concerns. The 2010 conference also included the inaugural participation of Jewish social justice organizations often viewed as being in competition with the Jewish federation network; such organizations included American Jewish World Service and AVODAH: the Jewish Service Corps. At

the conference, these organizations celebrated the public introduction of The Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, a loose federation of organizations dedicated to elevating “social justice to the center of Jewish life and to advanc[ing] an explicitly Jewish framework in the pursuit of social justice.”⁵

In order to bridge the Jewish federation’s concern with Jewish needs and Jewish social justice organizations’ focus on aiding non-Jews (what we might think of as particularistic and universalist goals), the conference incorporated a mass service project as well as a number of panels dedicated to discussing the role of service in American Jewish life. Imagining that a focus on “service” might reinvigorate Jewish life, especially among young Jews, conference organizers sponsored the attendance of nearly 600 college students at a conference that usually attracts an older demographic of Jewish philanthropy professionals and lay-leaders. I note that the possibility that “service” might unite internally-focused (Jewish federation) and externally-focused (Jewish social justice) approaches is an idea promoted by a number of prominent family foundations that had by this point invested significant funds to promote “Jewish service-learning” programs integrating community service with Jewish education. In this way, the conference’s focus on service speaks to the increased influence of individual funders within the field of American Jewish philanthropy.

In addition to these officially sanctioned efforts to expand the scope of what had been a more limited conference, the 2010 General Assembly was the target of a number of protest actions that challenged the American Jewish community’s position with regard to the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and with regard to Jewish community

⁵ Taken from the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable website, <http://jewishsocialjustice.org/about-us>, accessed November 16, 2014.

approaches to the project of post-Katrina aid and rebuilding efforts. Thus, the conference included activist voices that conference organizers had not intended to include. The General Assembly thus provided an ethnographic introduction to many of the key institutional players included in this dissertation: (1) mainstream Jewish philanthropic organizations (often described as the organized Jewish community); (2) Jewish social justice organizations; (3) extremely wealthy Jewish philanthropists who play an increasingly influential role in determining the course of contemporary American Jewish life; and (4) progressive activists who challenge the Jewish community from the left.

In this chapter, I take the General Assembly conference and the various players that made it a fascinating site for anthropological inquiry as a starting point for archival and ethnographic analyses of federation-sponsored responses to the storm as well as Jewish social justice approaches to post-storm recovery and rebuilding. In chapter one, I focused on introducing the youth activist community and on Jewish demographic trends. In this chapter, I situate Jewish community responses to hurricane Katrina in relation to organizational and institutional trends. I begin by accounting for the emergence of a post-World War II Jewish philanthropy status quo defined by a primary concern with global Jewish needs. Starting with the establishment of federated charity in New Orleans, I move to its subsequent merger with the ecumenical community chest, and its ultimate separation from the community chest in the postwar era. I suggest that these institutional shifts parallel always changing conceptions of Jewish community and Jewish social responsibility. Central to this postwar paradigm is the idea that Jewish philanthropy serves a representative function and that American Jewish philanthropy operates as a type of polity for determining American Jewish public policy (Elazar 1995).

I argue that the federation system's response to Hurricane Katrina reflected this postwar paradigm. In particular, I investigate the Jewish federation response to the storm, highlighting its primary focus on aiding affected Jews in comparison with its secondary focus on participating in the broader project of post-storm aid and recovery. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to an examination of the emergence, growth, and influence of Jewish social justice organizations, ideologies, and activism in order to introduce Jewish social responses to Hurricane Katrina. The chapter concludes by returning to the General Assembly conference and to moments of rupture that complicate efforts to bridge universalist and particularistic formulations of American Jewish philanthropy.

Federating Jewish Philanthropy

They say in the North that if I have a hobby, that hobby is federation and never have I been connected with anything that is so great a pleasure with which to work for a cause, as is federation work.

Julius Rosenwald (Daily Picayune, June 5, 1913)

On March 28, 1913, Julius Rosenwald, the famed philanthropist and president of the Sears-Roebuck Company, traveled to New Orleans to advocate on behalf of federating the city's Jewish charitable agencies.⁶ In a federated model, charitable organizations affiliate with a centralized body responsible for fundraising on behalf of the various subsidiary agencies; The United Way is a prominent contemporary example of federated charity. Developed in the early twentieth century, federated charity applied

⁶ All of the archival materials included in this chapter come from Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans 1914-1994 archive that is held in the Howard Tilton Memorial Library Special Collections, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. Hereafter, I will cite box and folder numbers.

market-based approaches to solve issues in the field of philanthropy in an age defined by extreme wealth and extreme wealth inequality. The role played by Julius Rosenwald, who at the time was the foremost American Jewish philanthropist, is analogous to that played by today's extremely wealthy donors. While the middle class was dominant in the post-World War II era, both the beginning and end of the twentieth century were marked by significant income inequality alongside the emergence of a donor class of ultra-wealthy individuals eager to leverage their status and resources to achieve a variety of large-scale social projects. For example, Rosenwald is known in particular for his support for establishing a network of schools throughout the American South for African Americans. Additionally, Rosenwald's philanthropic initiatives are notable because he expended all of his vast fortune during his lifetime (Ascoli 2006).

Building on industrial notions of streamlined production and economies of scale, Jewish communities around the country reorganized their charitable agencies to favor coordination as opposed to competition (Waldman 1918:112). It was widely held at the time that the proliferation of individuals and organizations soliciting charitable funds was a social problem in need of a solution. The problem of too many solicitations was a particular concern for the extremely rich who often felt hounded for donations. The application of purportedly rational approaches to the project of philanthropy created an institutional buffer for philanthropically inclined wealthy donors (Zunz 2012:18-19). The barrage of solicitation was not only a nuisance but also provided cover for prospective donors who could claim that they had already given to other charities. Federated charity was thus perceived as a way to protect the public, and large donors in particular, from nuisance solicitations while holding donors accountable; under a federated system,

donors would be subject to social pressure to donate and could no longer claim that they had expended their resources through donation to other agencies (Waldman 1918; 113).

By 1913, New Orleans and New York were the only major cities where Jewish charities had yet to federate, and Rosenwald, an avid supporter of federated Jewish charity, was dedicated to completing the task. Speaking at “one of the largest affairs ever given in New Orleans,” Rosenwald asserted that federation would foster mutually beneficial cooperation among charities that had previously competed with one another (Jewish Federation 1914-1994:box 1, folder 1). The project of amalgamating the various local Jewish charities in New Orleans faced little or no opposition. A brief two months later, on June 4, 1913, Rosenwald returned to celebrate the launch of the newly formed Jewish Charitable and Educational Federation. The federation incorporated eighteen mostly local organizations and a number of national Jewish agencies that the New Orleans Jewish community regularly supported (Feibelman 1941:96). While institutional consolidation may seem like a rather dull, bureaucratic development, the Federation’s establishment was celebrated with a lavish gala banquet. A Daily Picayune article described the occasion in great detail:

The Athenaeum [large, Jewish community-owned, multi-purpose building that often hosted Mardi Gras balls and other society events] was beautifully decorated in national colors for the occasion... When the diners took their seats the staging for the occasion was perfect. Many beautifully gowned ladies offset the more somber attire of the men, making a gorgeous scene, scarcely if ever equaled in the annals of New Orleans society. (The Daily Picayune June 5, 1913)

This high profile event speaks to a group wishing to display its high social and economic status as generous Jewish Americans. While it was not until after World War II that Jewish philanthropy reached its fullest expression as a solidifier of Jewish collective

identity and as a locus of Jewish power, this event illustrates the ways in which Jewish philanthropy served a unifying function.

Federating Jewish philanthropy not only served a practical function but also might be understood as part of an effort to cultivate Jewish ethnic and cultural identity. Writing in 1918 for *The Menorah Journal*,⁷ Morris Waldman, a prominent Jewish philanthropy executive active in the first half of the twentieth century, asserts that “[p]hilanthropy or social service constitutes, in a very large measure, the common ground on which most of the Jewish elements can combine... So it has not been a very difficult task to persuade the different Jewish charitable agencies in most cities to get together” (Waldman 1918:112). Waldman began his career in 1900 as a congregational rabbi in central New Jersey, though he quickly reoriented to a focus on social welfare initiatives. Waldman played a central role in efforts to organize Jewish Federations in New York, Boston, and Detroit. Over the second half of his career, from 1928-1945, Waldman served as the executive secretary of the American Jewish Committee, where his work focused on combating anti-Semitism and securing minority rights.⁸

Waldman’s understanding of federated Jewish philanthropy builds on the assumption that becoming American does not necessitate the erasure of group identity.

While acknowledging the idea and value of “universal brotherhood,” Waldman, drawing

⁷ The Menorah journal was dedicated to a humanistic approach to Judaism and was published by the Menorah intercollegiate association, a prototype for today’s national on-campus Hillel association. Published from 1915-1962, the magazine, especially in its early years, was a prominent aspect of Jewish intellectual life and featured works by prominent Jewish scholars, writers, and intellectuals (Alter 1965). Matthew Kaufman (2012) traces how the application of evolutionary theories to Jewish sociality in articles published in *The Menorah Journal* played a significant role in the cultivation of Jewish identity understood in terms of culture and ethnicity.

⁸ The American Jewish Archives Website, Morris D. Waldman Papers Finding Guide, accessed December 28th, 2014. <http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0023/#series5>.

on the ideas of John Dewey, rejects the ideology of the melting pot and asserts that “[t]he same feeling that leads us to recognize each other’s individuality, to respect individuality between person and person, also leads us to respect those elements of diversification in cultural traits which differentiate our national life” (Waldman 1918:111). Indeed, one of the main ideas I wish to advance in this project is that it is through philanthropy—as much as any other component of Jewish belief, practice, or culture—that American Jews have historically defined (and continue to define) their individual and collective identities.

It thus seems as if there were two competing principles behind the idea of federating Jewish philanthropy. On the one hand, federated Jewish philanthropy was advanced as a more rational and efficient approach to providing social services. On the other hand, federating Jewish charitable organizations served a unifying function within American Jewish life. While the establishment of the Jewish Charitable and Educational Federation in New Orleans appeared to serve both these objectives, these two principles ultimately lead to different institutional trajectories. The focus on efficiency led to further consolidation, often as part of interfaith mergers, whereas the focus on Jewish solidarity led to the expansion of the Federation’s specifically Jewish mission. In New Orleans, an initial focus on efficiency and assimilation first led to the Federation’s subsequent incorporation, in 1924, as part of a local ecumenical Community Chest. However, beginning in the late 1930s, concerns for the fate of European Jewry led Jews in New Orleans and in cities around the United States to refocus philanthropy on issues of specific Jewish concern and on Jewish solidarity. This shift in focus led the New Orleans Jewish Charity Federation to leave the Community Chest. This institutional

maneuver was part of a broader national trend that helped to establish a postwar Jewish philanthropy paradigm defined by a primary focus on issues of Jewish concern alongside the development of a representative function within the field of Jewish philanthropy.

Ecumenical Consolidation

In 1924, the New Orleans Federation merged with Protestant and Catholic charities as part of a Community Chest, an agency that was subsequently renamed the United Fund and that ultimately became the United Way of Southeast Louisiana (Jewish Federation 1914-1994:box 3, folder 4).⁹ This merger extended the utilitarian logic that first drove the federation of Jewish charities in New Orleans by establishing a centralized fundraising arm that would free local agencies from the burdens of fundraising. As a member of the Community Chest, the Jewish Federation ceased its fundraising activities and assumed an intermediary role that included financial coordination with various Jewish agencies to present a unified budget to the Community Chest. While no longer a fundraising agency, the Jewish Federation “approved the budgets submitted by its agencies, and these, in turn, were approved by the Chest” (Feibelman 1941:97).

Jewish individuals played a central role in the establishment of the Community Chest in New Orleans. In particular, Rabbi Emil Leipziger of the Touro Synagogue, a prominent, Reform congregation, was a leading figure in these efforts. A resolution entered into the meeting notes of the Jewish Charitable and Educational Federation celebrates the merger as well as R. Leipziger’s role:

⁹ These institutional developments followed a national pattern of philanthropy consolidation. By 1929, Community Chests had been established in 285 American cities. Of the 121 cities where Jewish social service agencies existed, 83 had one or more Jewish agency incorporated as part of the Community Chest (Freund 1931:30).

WHEREAS, Rabbi Emil W. Leipziger was one of the moving spirits, first in making possible the establishment of a Community Chest in our city, and secondly in influencing the Jewish Federation and its Affiliated Organizations to enter the Chest, and in this way gave additional evidence of his value and effectiveness in service of the general and especially the Jewish community.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Board of Trustees of the Jewish Charitable and Educational Federation express its sense of appreciation for the splendid services of Rabbi Leipziger, and convey to him its thanks and best wishes for many years of continued service.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution be spread upon the Minutes of this Board, and a copy thereof sent to Rabbi Leipziger. (Jewish Federation 1914-1994:box 4, folder 1)

Rabbi Leipziger's role is significant because it indicates that the Jewish community not only joined the Community Chest but also played an enthusiastic and central role in its establishment. These efforts seem to indicate that the Federation's merger with the Community Chest was not a controversial move. Furthermore, we can understand the integration of the Jewish Federation into the Community Chest as a reflection of a view of Jewish philanthropy primarily concerned with local and not essentially Jewish needs. This move should also be considered in relation to melting pot ideology geared toward the diminishment of group differences. The merger of Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant charities indicates a shared sense of social responsibility that muted but did not entirely erase interfaith differences. The fact that Jewish community contributions to the Community Chest regularly outpaced the funds distributed to Jewish agencies points to the social integration function of Jewish involvement in the Community Chest (Feibelman 1941:98). We might also consider the Federation's eagerness to join forces with Catholic and Protestant charities in the name of local giving

as an assertion of the Jewish community's high status in a New Orleans society in which Jews were fully integrated (exclusion from Mardi Gras crews being a rare but significant exception to this general rule).

Jews in Crisis

In a sociology dissertation written about the New Orleans Jewish community in the early 1940s, Julian Feibelman, who would later become a congregational Reform rabbi in New Orleans, notes that “[t]here were a few strands, however, which could not be woven into the community [chest] fabric as a whole” (Feibelman 1941:99). A number of minor initiatives in the mid-1920s, such as a community-sponsored Hebrew school, were maintained by private donations. However, these specifically Jewish concerns soon became unwieldy and Jews in New Orleans and in other cities around the country organized Jewish welfare funds devoted to Jewish causes that could not be accommodated by community chests.

As conditions for Jews in Europe deteriorated, American Jewish communities mobilized to aid their struggling coreligionists. Writing about the late 1930s, Feibelman writes that “within recent years this overseas demand has become critically pressing due to the persecution tactics of the National Socialists in Germany, and the starvation-level condition of Jews in Poland” (Feibelman 1941:100). Because of their inclusion in the Community Chest, the Jewish community's ability to respond to the crisis in Europe was limited. As part of the Community Chest, the Federation was unable to raise funds independently and could not redirect funds in support of these pressing Jewish needs. As a result, a parallel agency, the Jewish Welfare Fund, was established in New Orleans in

1936; this also happened in cities across the United States where the Jewish federation was integrated into the local community chest. While closely affiliated with the New Orleans Federation, the Jewish Welfare Fund maintained its own board and was financially independent from the Community Chest. As the 1930s progressed, the monies raised by the Jewish Welfare Fund soon matched and then outpaced the Jewish contribution to the Community Chest. In 1936, the first year that the Jewish Welfare Fund held a campaign, the agency raised \$40,666.50; Jewish contributions to the Community Chest that year totaled \$112,470, of which \$85,857 were redistributed to Jewish agencies. By 1940, the Jewish Welfare Fund campaign had increased to \$140,000 while the amount that the Jewish Federation received from the Community Chest had declined to a little over \$80,000 (Jewish Federation:box 4, folder 5).¹⁰ By 1949, the Jewish Welfare Fund campaign raised over half a million dollars (\$526,000) (Jewish Federation:box 5, folder 2). While these may seem like rather dull figures from the archive, I emphasize them here in order to illustrate both a major expansion in the financial scope of Jewish philanthropy and a shift in priorities that would continue in the postwar era. In fact, the current scale and orientation of mainstream Jewish philanthropy remains a product of Jewish responses to the Holocaust and to the founding of the State of Israel. We can speculate that, without these traumatic events, Jewish philanthropy might still operate on a smaller scale and be significantly more integrated into nonsectarian and ecumenical philanthropic organizations and initiatives.

Another element of changing, World War II-era conceptions of Jewish philanthropy was the formation of community councils in New Orleans and around the

¹⁰ I was unable to locate information regarding Jewish contributions to the Community Chest in 1940, but would assume that the amount given was less than that donated to the Jewish Welfare Fund.

country. While I address the topic of community councils in more detail in chapter two, I note here that such councils embraced the idea that Jewish philanthropic organizations included a representative function, that is, that they could speak on behalf of Jewish communities. While councils varied from city to city, in New Orleans, a community council was established for the express purpose of representing the Jewish community. The council also worked to marginalize individual and minority voices the positions of which might otherwise confuse or undermine the majority position within the Jewish community. By the late 1930s, community councils were beginning to appear and were imagined as providing a measure of “social or communal control” that would allow Jewish communities to speak “as one voice” while also integrating “a more representative and democratic group spirit” (Feibelman 1941: 123).

In the postwar era, increased awareness of the magnitude of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel added momentum to these wartime philanthropic trends and contributed to the development of a transformed field of Jewish philanthropy fundamentally reoriented around a specifically Jewish mission. Furthermore, a focus on Jewish ethnic identity and collective solidarity became a defining characteristic of American Jewish philanthropy; by the 1950s and 1960s, Jewish philanthropy had emerged as the primary institutional mechanism for the expression of Jewish ethnoreligious collective identity. Increasingly, Jews and Jewish philanthropy professionals imagined Jewish collective identity and the function of Jewish philanthropic organizations in explicitly political terms.

In the post-World War II era, Jewish philanthropy’s emergent political function as well as an increased focus on global Jewish needs were integrated into the structures of

Jewish philanthropic organizations. Writing in *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, Herman Pekarsky, a Jewish philanthropy professional from northern New Jersey, described this shift in focus and its implications for Jewish philanthropic structures and notions of collective identity:

In Newark and Essex County, as elsewhere in the United States, until recently the primary interest of the central Jewish community organization was limited to local social welfare problems... With the rapid growth of overseas needs and financing projects, the community made every effort to broaden the base of participation on the worker and giver level. It could be said that the organized Jewish community made the first real effort toward democratic functioning in the extension of its appeal for manpower and funds to the large masses in the community. As a corollary, there gradually began to develop wider participation and more representative organization in other areas of Jewish life. (Pekarsky 1947:332)

Pekarsky's observations describe a fundamental shift in American Jewish philanthropy and the emergence of representative and political function for Jewish philanthropic institutions. The move toward a representative conception of Jewish philanthropy was institutionally inscribed in the formation of community councils, agencies that were explicitly political in nature. In fact, Pekarsky's description of these major shifts in Jewish philanthropy was part of an article describing the establishment of a community council in New Jersey's Essex County that included individual Jewish residents as voting members. The mid-century development of Jewish philanthropy's representative function is significant for understanding Jewish philanthropy as a type of polity (Elazar 1995).

As in cities around the country where the local Jewish community Federation had become integrated as part of Community Chest, by the 1950s, Jews in New Orleans were no longer interested in ceding control of local agency finances to decision makers outside

of the Jewish community. The bureaucratic process of disaffiliating from the Community Chest took nearly a decade. Ultimately, this process resulted in the merger of the Jewish Welfare Fund and the New Orleans Federation, effectively ending Community Chest oversight over Federation finances. In contrast to the unanimity that marked the Federation's original formation and the relative ease with which the Federation had subsequently merged with the Community Chest, the process of disentangling was met with opposition from those within the Jewish community who questioned the idea that the Jews of New Orleans should institutionally and symbolically remove themselves from the broader community. Proponents of Jewish philanthropy's assimilationist objectives, and especially Community Chest board members who were Jewish, strongly opposed the Federation-Jewish Welfare Fund merger. For instance, Dudley Yoedicke, a prominent New Orleans lawyer and a member of the committee responsible for the Federation-Jewish Welfare Fund merger, challenged the social solidarity elements of postwar Jewish philanthropy. Meeting notes recorded during this time include Yoedicke's dissenting minority view regarding the correlation of Jewish community and Jewish philanthropy:

Mr. Yoedicke informed the group that he is against the use of the words Jewish community, he didn't believe that there was such a community. He stated that Jews are a part of the total community, that there are no separate communities, in the total community and that he wished to have the words Jewish Community changed to "Jews of New Orleans or Jewish institutions." (Jewish Federation 1914-1994:box 2, folder 1)

Archival documents reveal that, at nearly every meeting, Yoedicke filed a motion to discontinue the merger efforts; these motions were always defeated (Jewish Federation 1914-1994:box 3, folder 3). While Yoedicke's position regarding terminology and his subsequent opposition to leaving the Community Chest was a minority view, it illustrates

the value that such ecumenical integration continued to hold for some Jews in New Orleans.

Ultimately, Yoedicke's opposition, a holdover from an earlier era, was overruled by the vast majority of those involved who now imagined a more explicitly Jewish vision of American Jewish philanthropy. The merger of the Jewish Welfare Fund with the Jewish Federation was ultimately completed in 1961; the resulting Jewish Welfare Federation marked the end of Community Chest oversight over Jewish philanthropy in New Orleans. The merger process was the institutional expression of a shift in American Jewish identity and philanthropy. Many Jews today understand the particularistic focus of mainstream American Jewish philanthropy as an extension of historic Jewish parochialism. The institutional narrative I have presented thus far suggests that mainstream American Jewish philanthropy can be understood as institutionalized Jewish community responses to the Holocaust and to Holocaust memory. This particularistic postwar agenda continues to motivate the efforts of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans and the broader network of Jewish community federations of which it is a part. In fact, the Jewish federation system's response to Hurricane Katrina as well as its primary concern with Jewish needs are an expression of this postwar Jewish philanthropy paradigm.

The Jewish Federation Response to Hurricane Katrina

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, United Jewish Communities (UJC), the umbrella agency that unifies the system of local Jewish community federations, organized a centralized Jewish community response to the storm. A

laudatory, self-published 2007 report, *UJC Hurricane Katrina Fund*, describes how the roughly twenty-eight million dollars raised within the Jewish community for Katrina relief were allocated; the report also accounts for the principles that were used when deciding how to distribute Jewish post-Katrina aid. The report opens with the following explanation for why the United Jewish Communities focused their efforts primarily on helping affected Jews: “First, it was vitally important to meet the ‘Jewish needs’ that no one else would meet. As we always do, whenever there are Jews in need, we come to their aid. The axiom that ‘all Jews are responsible for one another’ is at the heart of our mandate” (Katrina Fund 2007:4). In addition to this primary obligation, the report asserted that the Jewish community had a secondary ethical mandate to participate in the broader project of post-Katrina rebuilding and recovery: “But from the start, we were also committed to help the general community. We targeted our limited long-term funds to areas where we believed we could have real impact” (UJC 2007:4). Whereas this axiomatic sense of responsibility to other Jews incorporates an implied primordialism (Barth 1969), Jewish responsibility to non-Jewish Katrina victims is presented by the report as “limited” and “targeted.”

The idea that Jewish philanthropy’s primary objective is to address “Jewish needs” can be understood as a refraction of Jewish legal texts that present giving to non-Jews as a means of achieving positive Jewish-gentile relations; by contrast, these same Jewish legal texts assert that there exists an essential *a priori* obligation to care for the Jewish poor. The Babylonian Talmud states that “[w]e sustain non-Jewish paupers along with Jewish paupers, we visit the non-Jewish ill along with the Jewish ill and we bury non-Jewish dead along with Jewish dead on account of peaceful relations” (Gittin 61a).

Normative *halakhic* or Jewish legal interpretations assert that giving charity to non-Jews is more of a strategic than an imperative Jewish concern. For example, this hierarchy of priorities is explicated by the twelfth-century rabbinic scholar Maimonides, who, in his code of Jewish law (*Laws of Giving to the Poor*, Chapter 7: 1-6), describes an axiomatic responsibility to provide a Jewish poor person “what he lacks” (Chapter 7:3). Quoting the Talmudic passage cited above, Maimonides then asserts that helping needy non-Jews is a secondary and public relations-oriented obligation.

In particular, traditional distinctions between helping Jews for ethical reasons and helping non-Jews in the name of coexistence resonate with the Katrina Fund Report’s description of the “axioms” and “mandates” by which Jews always help other Jews as opposed to a context-specific “commit[ment] to help the general community” that coincided with the “start” of the storm. At the same time, the historical trajectory I traced earlier in this chapter suggests that we avoid assigning too much import to these cultural continuities. While philanthropic commitment to other Jews is often framed in relation to Jewish texts such as the rabbinic axiom that “all Jews are responsible for one another” (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 27:b), we must consider the application of these texts and attitudes in their particular historical and cultural context and not as prescriptive ideas that determine Jewish philanthropic responses. The integration of Jewish philanthropy as part of community chests and the more recent emergence of Jewish social justice initiatives illustrate the ways in which notions of Jewish social responsibility in the United States often depart from classic views that prioritize giving to Jews over giving to non-Jews. That said, the ideology that informed mainstream Jewish responses to the storm conforms to the hierarchy set forth in classical Jewish legal texts.

In the first weeks after the storm made landfall, the Jewish Federation system contributed \$1 million to an interfaith coalition in support of immediate food assistance to the many Katrina evacuees in Houston, Texas. Through this interfaith collaboration, the Jewish federation system worked to meet the basic needs of Katrina evacuees. Additionally, the Jewish federation system provided immediate assistance to Jewish Katrina victims via need-based cash grants (approximately \$700/person) to assist with immediate post-disaster expenses. The UJC report describes how the Jewish federation system provided \$1.74 million in cash grants to 2,400 Jewish individuals. In a parallel effort, the federation system distributed \$268,000 in a combination of cash and retail gift cards to 600 non-Jewish individuals. It bears mentioning that while Jews were provided cash, non-Jews were provided cash and/or gift cards. This seemingly slight distinction hints at a broader theme underlying the ways in Federation giving to Jews differed from Federation giving to non-Jews. Over the course of a long-term Federation response to Hurricane Katrina, Jews and Jewish institutions were given monetary support to sustain their recovery and growth while non-Jews were much more likely to be given goods and services—volunteer labor, structures such as playgrounds and homes, and so forth. This tendency to differentiate between the type of aid given to Jews and the type of aid given to non-Jews can be seen in the early distinction between immediate cash grants to Jews and charitable gifts to non-Jews that often took the form of gift cards. As opposed to cash grants, gift cards are discrete insofar as they explicitly target specific needs; for example, a gift card to a grocery store can be viewed as “goods and services.”

One additional component of the immediate Jewish Federation response to Katrina involved financial support for the Baton Rouge Jewish Federation. In the days

and weeks following the storm, the Jewish population of Baton Rouge grew with the addition of 1,000 displaced Katrina victims (from 1,500-2,500); to serve this increased population, the federation system provided the Baton Rouge Federation with a \$1 million grant to support services, such as daycare and counseling, for Jewish Katrina evacuees. Calculating immediate giving by the federation system, we see that the Jewish community provided 68% (\$2.74 million) in aid to the Jewish community and 32% (\$1.268 million) to those outside of the Jewish community. Though federation giving in the first few weeks following the storm is heavily skewed toward the Jewish community, when compared to long-term giving in response to Hurricane Katrina, it reflects the federation system's moment of greatest commitment to helping those outside of the Jewish community (UJC 2007:8-9).

The federation system's mid- and long-term responses to Hurricane Katrina primarily focused on ensuring the continued viability of the various Jewish communal institutions affected by the storm. Working with other Jewish agencies, the federation system developed a comprehensive stabilization plan that would ensure the future viability of affected Jewish agencies in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Biloxi/Gulfport. The federation system's mid- and long-term efforts to aid those outside of the Jewish community focused on a number of specific projects including a \$400,000 grant to help the elderly in New Orleans, sponsorship for a number of playgrounds in underprivileged neighborhoods in New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and a \$1.6 million mental health services grant for the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Calculating the financial support allocated for long-term recovery efforts, the percentage given to Jews increased to 83% (\$9.6 million) as opposed to 17% (\$2 million) that was distributed outside the Jewish

community. Thus, as we move away from the immediate post-disaster context, we find that Jewish federation giving to non-Jews decreased in proportion to the total funds distributed (UJC 2007:10-11).

The UJC report also lists federation sponsorship of Jewish “voluntourism” to post-Katrina New Orleans as an important component of its post-Katrina efforts to aid those outside the Jewish community. The report describes these activities as follows: “Thousands of volunteers—funded in part by the UJC/Federation system—had the opportunity to do hands-on relief and recovery activities in the Gulf Region...serving as coalition builders and ambassadors for ‘Tikkun Olam’ in the general community” (UJC 2007). That these volunteer efforts were meant to highlight support for those outside of the Jewish community is made explicit when the volunteers are described as “coalition builders and ambassadors for ‘Tikkun Olam’ in the general community.” These efforts highlight the public relations component of Jewish aid to non-Jews. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, hundreds of thousands of volunteers streamed to New Orleans and to the Mississippi Gulf Coast in order to participate in post-disaster recovery efforts. Jewish federation funds enabled Jews to participate in these efforts from within a Jewish communal context. The federation system’s decision to sponsor service tourism programs to New Orleans played a significant role in the city’s emergence as a favored Jewish service-tourism destination in the years following the storm. As I will discuss in chapter four, many Jewish service-tourism trips focused on building intra-Jewish social bonds while providing aid to those outside of the Jewish community; this focus on solidarity can be seen as part of an ongoing Jewish philanthropic response to high levels of assimilation and intermarriage. As I will address in more detail, Jewish voluntourism

trips to post-Katrina New Orleans involved the interweaving of the particularistic goal of encouraging intra-Jewish solidarity with acts of providing aid to individuals and groups outside of the Jewish community.

Within mainstream American Jewish philanthropy, the community's response to the storm was perceived to be a major success. The cover of the 2007 United Jewish Communities' *UJC Hurricane Katrina Fund* report included the following hubristic text: "Hurricane Katrina was a force of Nature. What we have done after is an act of God" (UJC 2007). Additionally, the report's introductory note explicates this sense of wild success with the claim that "UJC's Emergency Committee and staff planned and implemented an emergency response on a scale never before imagined" (UJC 2007). Such a claim must be understood in relation to the relative decline of mainstream Jewish philanthropy from its postwar apex. Beginning in the 1990s, the system of Jewish federations began to decline as a result of an aging and shrinking donor base (Cohen 2012). Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the particularistic Jewish philanthropy status quo was periodically reaffirmed by episodes that emphasized Jewish vulnerability such as wars in Israel and efforts to secure immigrant rights for Russian Jews. By 2005, when Katrina made landfall, it had been several decades since an event or movement had galvanized American Jews in relation to a unifying philanthropic project. We can thus understand recent diversification and fragmentation in the field of American Jewish philanthropy as reflecting, in part, the lack of unifying external events. The federation system's ability to mobilize and secure the future viability of Jewish communities affected by Hurricane Katrina was thus underscored as an example of the continued relevance of a national system of federated Jewish philanthropy devoted

primarily to Jewish concerns.

The connection between the federation system's response to Hurricane Katrina and prior status quo-affirming events was emphasized at a 2010 General Assembly plenary session in which conference organizers drew parallels between the federation system's response to the storm and efforts to liberate Russian Jewry in the 1980s. The program book describes this plenary as follows: "Celebrate the power of the collective as we open the GA and highlight the Federation movement's incredible response to the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the city of New Orleans and our rescue and resettlement of Soviet Jews in Operation Exodus" (2010 GA Program Book:26).

The Emergence of Jewish Social Justice

The federation system's primary concern with addressing Jewish needs in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina indicates the continued relevance of a post-war Jewish philanthropy status quo. This paradigm is increasingly challenged by Jews, and by young Jews in particular, whose life experiences have been dominated by privilege and opportunity. While a number of efforts to establish Jewish progressive organizations occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s, these efforts were either stymied or failed to sustain themselves as long-term initiatives. For instance, *Breira*, an agency formed to advocate a two-state solution in the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, closed under pressure after it was revealed that *Breira* leaders had met with representatives of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Krasner n.d.). Another initiative, the New Jewish Agenda, was established in 1980 and included a broader progressive outlook that was not

specifically focused on the politics of Israel-Palestine. The New Jewish Agenda closed in 1992 and did not in fact become a player in defining a national Jewish agenda.

In the mid-1980s, progressive Jewish leaders established a number of concrete initiatives in order to promote progressivism within the Jewish community. These included *Tikkun* magazine, American Jewish World Service, Jewish Funds for Justice, and the New Israel Fund; these efforts suggest the institutionalization of an alternative and outward-focused approach to the project of Jewish social action. In order to explore this trend from a historical perspective, I turn away from New Orleans and toward an examination of the establishment of *Tikkun* magazine alongside the evolution of the term *tikkun olam* from a marginal idea within American Jewish life to a central precept of American Judaism.

Before examining contemporary invocations of *tikkun olam*, it will be useful to consider how the concept is understood and utilized in traditional Jewish sources. *Tikkun olam* is not found in biblical sources; rather, the term first appears in the Mishna, a second-century legal text in which *tikkun ha-olam* is used to describe the result that comes from the enactment of *takkanot*, a type of rabbinic legal decision. Both *tikkun ha-olam* and *takkanot* share the same root, *t.k.n.*, meaning to fix or repair. The term *takkanot* refers to rabbinic legislation meant to enact basic equality and fairness. In the mishnaic context, *takkanot* almost always deal with divorce law and with rabbinic injunctions meant to secure the economic and social welfare of women after the dissolution of marriage (Rosenthal 2005:217). Despite the fact that, in the Mishna, the concept of *tikkun olam* is used in a limited legal sphere and is particular to Jews, the role that *takkanot* played in securing the welfare of a marginalized population corresponds to the

expansive ways in which *tikkun olam* is used in contemporary discourses. A similar concept is found in medieval rabbinic writings, in which the term *takkanot* refers to new rules enacted for the welfare of society. In the medieval context, *takkanot* are not limited to divorce law and extend to other social issues. In the mishnaic and medieval periods, *takkanot* and *tikkun olam* refer to legislation established by the rabbis and not to laws or rituals that were considered divine in nature. Significant for our discussion is the fact that both ancient and medieval *takkanot* relate exclusively to Jewish society and do not relate to the universalism central to current popular understandings of *tikkun olam* (Rosenthal 2005).

The most famous traditional context in which the phrase *tikkun olam* is found is the *aleinu* prayer. Written in the third century CE and recited since the early fourteenth century after each of the three traditional daily prayers, *aleinu* includes the following passage: “Therefore we put our hope in You, Adonai our God, to soon see the glory of Your strength, to remove all idols from the Earth, and to completely cut off all false gods; *to repair the world*, with Your kingship” (Rosenthal 2005 220). The Hebrew words, *le-taken olam be-malkhut Shaddai*, translated to mean “when the world will be mended and improved under the kingship of the almighty,” represent the most well-known use of the term.

Lastly, in a kabalistic context, *tikkun olam* has a mystical meaning. Beginning with the fourteenth-century of kabalistic thought, the concept of *tikkun* came to refer to the repairing of the celestial world through religious and spiritual actions. In an article historicizing *tikkun olam*, Gilbert Rosenthal writes:

The Zohar views every human act as of cosmic importance so that when humans perform *mitzvot* [commandments], engage in prayer and torah study, and observe the festivals of the calendar year, they help unite the *sefirot*, the ten emanations of the Divine, and restore the world to its pristine state, ending all divisions so that all existence is united with God. (Rosenthal 2005, 223)

As is the case in many kabalistic texts, this passage focuses on the idea that the world is not as it seems but has a spiritual reality that is directly influenced (in this case, repaired) by human action. Thus, one can follow two major trajectories for the concept of *tikkun*, both of which inform contemporary invocations of the term. The first such trajectory involves social legislation meant to improve society, while the second emphasizes the impact that human activity can have for repairing the cosmic, theological reality of the world. Both of these ideas provide necessary but insufficient background for understanding how *tikkun olam* is invoked as a social and theological idea in contemporary Jewish communities. These traditional contexts are often referenced in contemporary discussions and applications of the term, but, as I will argue, they do not limit how the term is used and defined in a contemporary discourse that allowed post-Katrina New Orleans to be described as “The New Mecca of Tikkun Olam” (Lipman 2008).

Indeed, Rosenthal observes that none of the term’s traditional histories can account for *tikkun olam*’s contemporary importance, which he summarizes as follows:

Tikkun ha-olam has taken on a new life with many new nuances and applications. The Internet is replete with references to the subject in its various permutations. It is the theme of a plethora of organizations. It is employed by a wide array of politicians—Jewish and otherwise. Writers and journalists allude to it in secular journals and newspapers. Catholic and Protestant theologians and scholars cite it in their theological pronouncements. A new mitzvah has been added to the complex of Jewish commandments in several Jewish movements. It has become

the synonym for social action, and social justice groups everywhere consider their program as within the purview of *tikkun ha-olam*. (Rosenthal 2005:239)

Since the beginning of the 1980s, *tikkun olam* has transcended the particular historical contexts from which it emerged and has become a meta-*mitzvah*, or super-commandment; the phrase can be used to refer to any actions or activities that promote social welfare. This transformation parallels the emergence and growth of Jewish social justice initiatives devoted to aiding non-Jews from within a Jewish communal context. I thus focus on the 1986 establishment of *Tikkun*, a magazine that popularized the usage of the term *tikkun olam*, in order to address a critical historical moment when Jewish progressive voices achieved institutional coherence.

In the summer prior to the publication of *Tikkun*'s inaugural issue, the magazine ran a series of advertisements that announced its arrival as well as its political agenda. "The neo-conservatives don't speak for the Jews... Finally, a liberal alternative to Commentary magazine," declared a May 1986 *New York Times* advertisement. The ad reminded Jews and non-Jews alike that "Jews remain[ed] committed to the great liberal and progressive social movements of our time—for peace, nuclear disarmament, equality for women, anti-apartheid, and for human rights and social justice" (*New York Times* 1986); the magazine would provide a forum for articulating these views. In addition to presenting itself as the anti-*Commentary*, the ad articulated *Tikkun*'s credentials by naming several prominent members of its editorial board:

With intellectual leadership from people like Elie Wiesel and A.B. Yehoshua, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Robert Alter and Rabbi Alexander Schindler, and writers like Christopher Lasch, Anne Roiphe, Robert Pinsky, Michael Walzer and Yehuda Amichai—TIKKUN MAGAZINE is creating one of the most alive and

intellectually exciting communities in the U.S. Join our community. (*New York Times* 1986)

The ad attempted to balance opposition to *Commentary* with the assertion that *Tikkun* represented an alternative yet authentic Jewish perspective. Highlighting its prominent editorial board, which included Holocaust memory itself as symbolized by Elie Wiesel, the ad attempted to situate a left-wing political perspective within the bounds of mainstream, postwar Jewish norms. This strategy, with its joint emphasis on opposition to *Commentary* and identification with prominent, well-respected American Jews, was only partially successful, as the community that the ad entreated readers to join was not fully formed and would soon be partially disbanded (Berger 1986).

The opposition that the ad established between *Commentary* and *Tikkun* set the stage for an inaugural issue that generated press coverage describing the emergence of a figurative sibling rivalry. A headline from *The New York Times* reported, “New Liberal Jewish Magazine Aims Fire at Commentary and Stirs Internal Protests” (Berger 1986). The headline referred to the resignation of Elie Wiesel and Robert Alter from the national advisory board. The article quoted Wiesel as saying, “I didn’t like the aggressive tone they have taken against Commentary... I don’t think magazines should be created against other magazines” (Berger 1986). Although *Tikkun* enjoyed some early success within the Jewish community, today many Jews see editor Michael Lerner as representing a fringe political position. Wiesel’s defection foreshadowed the magazine’s ultimate marginalization within the American Jewish community; attention gained through opposition ultimately came at the cost of legitimacy.

Tikkun's founding editorial statement reflects the political, intellectual, and religious agenda that the magazine claims to address and advocate. The magazine's title, *Tikkun*, is used as an extended metaphor for the repair that is needed not only in American politics but also within Jewish culture (Lerner 1986:3). The statement begins with a critique of the Jewish neoconservative intellectuals whose writing fills the pages of *Commentary* magazine. Lerner writes:

With boring predictability, Norman Podhoretz leads the monthly charge of Jewish intellectuals clamoring for respectability by endorsing every move the Reagan Administration can dream up... While most Jews have not followed these leaders to the Right, there is a public perception that Jews today are less committed to the Prophetic vision and less willing to do the kind of creative and radical thinking that had previously been the hallmark of Jewish culture. (Lerner 1986:3)

According to Lerner, *Tikkun* magazine was established in order to “provide a voice” for Jews interested in pursuing progressive and liberal politics within a Jewish framework (Lerner 1986:3). While, prior to the 1980s, American Jews were active in a variety of progressive social movements, the establishment of *Tikkun* is an early example of Jewish progressive pushback against a Jewish communal mainstream perceived and/or described as overly conservative. Jewish progressivism has continued to define itself in these oppositional, hybrid particular/universal terms.

In a move toward cultivating a specifically Jewish progressivism, *Tikkun*'s founding editorial statement is not only critical of the political Right but also “very critical of the Left” (Lerner 1986:5). Lerner continues:

The Left has almost always tried to force Jews into a false universalism—denying the particularity of our historical experience, the validity of our religious insights, the importance of our national survival. Jews have been forced to choose between a loyalty to their own people and a loyalty to universal ideals. (Lerner 1986:5)

Lerner goes even further and asserts that political liberalism and radicalism can emerge from a greater commitment to Jewish life and practice. To that end, *Tikkun* emphasizes not only a commitment to liberal politics but also a spiritual and religious revival and an embrace of tradition in opposition to the materialism that Lerner asserts is rampant in much of the American Jewish community. Lerner writes, “Tikkun olam—the healing, repairing, and transforming of the world, is not only about politics, it is also about our spiritual and emotional lives, and our relationship to God” (Lerner 1986:6). Thus, the establishment of *Tikkun* reflects the desire to combine progressive political positions with assertive, ethnoreligious Jewish identification.

Despite its explicitly Jewish spirituality, Lerner asserts that *Tikkun* is for religious Jews, secular Jews, and non-Jews. Lerner explicates the nature of the particular/universal dynamic he imagines in the following passage: “Although TIKKUN speaks from the standpoint of the Jewish tradition, we hope to create an intellectual arena within which the liberal and progressive camps in American society can discuss the most important intellectual, cultural, and political questions” (Lerner 1986:3-4). In this way, Jewish progressives can be Jewish activists and not merely activists who are Jews. Furthermore, Lerner argues that bringing a Jewish perspective to leftist activism might stem the tide of assimilation. The religion that many Jews leave, Lerner writes, “is not authentic Judaism, but rather the watered-down versions developed by generations of Jews who sought to sanitize it and make it fit into American reality” (Lerner 1986:9). Lerner’s mention of interfaith work and of stemming the tide of assimilation reflects the idea that *Tikkun*—

and, I would like to argue, *tikkun olam*—plays a symbolic role as both bridge and barrier at the boundary between Jews and non-Jews and between parochialism and ecumenism.

Lerner concludes his opening editorial statement with a longer consideration of two particular issues, women’s liberation and a critical support of Israel that emerges from the belief that Israel has “the potential to play an important messianic role in history” (Lerner 1986:11). In other words, according to Lerner, Israel has a special significance for Jews that demands that it live up to the highest ethical standards. Jewish progressives have the responsibility to criticize the state if it fails to live up to its ethical and spiritual potential. As I explain later, critique of the modern State of Israel was, perhaps, the primary reason that *Tikkun* magazine was ultimately relegated to the margins of the American Jewish public sphere.

Lerner justifies the decision to establish a Jewish magazine with a progressive political agenda as a generationally specific form of cultural production. Earlier generations of Jews, Lerner argues, did not criticize American government policy as a measure of gratitude toward their host country. Lerner posits that this *modus operandi* is no longer valid. For his generation, “America is a home not a host” (Lerner 1986:8). This pithy phrase says a great deal about the generational dynamic at play among American Jews in the 1980s. The older generation of Jews, those born before WWII, came of age at a time of anti-Semitic prejudice expressed through economic and social restriction (Silberman 1985:22). The children of this older generation, those born after World War II, experienced an American society that was no longer restrictive. Quotas no longer governed college admittance and there were no professions that Jews were barred from entering (Silberman 1985:23). In Karen Brodtkin’s view, this younger generation

enjoyed the full benefits of white privilege (Brodkin 1999). By the 1980s, the generation of American Jews born after World War II were reaching their thirties and forties and assuming leadership roles in the American Jewish community.

Michael Lerner was emblematic of a new type of Jewish leader. Born in 1945, Lerner came of age in an America that was arguably a “freer, more open society than that of any Diaspora community in which Jews have ever lived before” (Silberman 1985:23). Beginning in the 1980s, progressive activists who, in the past, might have worked for non-Jewish institutions were met with opportunities to work on behalf of liberal and progressive causes from within particularly Jewish contexts while drawing on Jewish tradition as justification for their actions (Schwartz 2008).

This shift correlates to the rise in prominence of the term *tikkun olam*. Both the early vision of *Tikkun* magazine and the perhaps related development of the concept of *tikkun olam* to include social action and social justice activism emerged from a secure community invested in reformulating Judaism and Jewish culture. This reformulation prioritized the expression of an American identity that integrated Judaism and progressivism.

Moving beyond a generational argument, distinguishing between Jews whose activism is social justice-oriented and Jews who have a more inwardly focused approach to activism often involves understanding perceptions of safety and security. In general, Jewish activists who understand their efforts in a universalistic framework perceive the Jewish community as being in a position of strength and privilege. By contrast, Jews who understand their activism as particularistic continue to perceive Jews as marginalized and vulnerable; recall the federation system’s description of “Jewish

needs' that nobody else would meet"(UJC 2007:4). Jews who focus on areas where the Jewish community can be said to be vulnerable (e.g. security issues in the Middle East, Jewish poverty, and high rates of assimilation and intermarriage) or who claim that the American Jewish community's current high status is merely a temporary state tend to favor a more inwardly-focused approach to Jewish philanthropy. Conversely, Jewish social justice activists tend to perceive a politically powerful and socioeconomically successful Jewish community. Furthermore, as they look around the world, Jewish social justice activists see a strong (and possibly oppressive) Israeli state and few places where Jews suffer dramatically. In other words, Jewish social justice efforts emerged in a generation whose social position in the United States felt relatively secure.¹¹

The rise of *Tikkun* magazine suggests that American Jews, now comfortable in their position in American society, could focus their social agenda beyond "defense" and toward a general concern with social and economic justice. This perspective is also reflected, in a more practical sense, in the emergence (1985-1988) of a cohort of Jewish social justice organizations with the goal of aiding non-Jews from within a Jewish communal context. These organizations include the American Jewish World Service, Mazon, Jewish Funds for Justice, and the New Israel Fund. The confluence of these organizations suggests that *Tikkun* was part of a larger movement toward engaging non-Jewish political and social issues from within a Jewish context. Today, these organizations all claim to be engaged in *tikkun olam* and are core members of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, a loose confederation of Jewish organizations devoted to

¹¹This analysis emerges from a *Moment* magazine symposium (January 2012) called "What Does it Mean to Be Pro-Israel Today?" Positions critical of Israeli government policy tended to come from those who viewed Israel and Jews more generally as being in positions of power; those in support of Israeli government policy tended to view the State of Israel through the lens of Jewish vulnerability.

social justice activism. Jewish social justice responses to Hurricane Katrina can be characterized as emerging from this specific sociopolitical milieu. Such efforts often draw on a history of social activism and of oppression to create Jewish formulations of social movements; the connections between perceptions of socioeconomic and political security and Jewish social justice activism are made explicit in the many discussions I witnessed on the topic of class and racial privilege while conducting ethnographic research in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Hurricane Katrina, Jewish Universalism, and Social Justice Discourse

As opposed to Jewish particularistic responses to Hurricane Katrina, which were organized and documented by a central agency, Jewish social justice approaches to post-Katrina Jewish philanthropy and activism played out both in relation to institutional efforts and as a set of ideologies activated, discussed, and debated by a number of organizations and activists. This is to say that, beyond a greater focus on helping non-Jews, discourse played a crucial differentiating role in distinguishing between Jewish parochial and Jewish social justice responses to Hurricane Katrina. In other words, whether a donation, service trip, or grant reflected a Jewish social justice ideology depended, to a great extent, on the meanings that givers, volunteers, and donors ascribed to their actions and activities.

Figure 4: Major service and social justice initiatives in post-Katrina New Orleans

Organization	Description	Years Active	Number of Participants
AVODAH: the Jewish Service Corps	Yearlong service program for Jews ages 21-26. Corps members work for anti-poverty not-for-profits and live communally.	2008-present	Ten per year in New Orleans
National Hillel	Large-scale post-disaster service trips.	2006-2008	3,000 in total
Jewish Funds for Justice (renamed Bend the Arc)	Small group, social justice-themed service trips.	2009-2012	8-25 per trip, 12 trips to New Orleans in 2012
PURSUE	Programming for alumni of AJWS and AVODAH programs. Organized Justice and Jewish thought reading group.	Active nationally from 2006-2012. Reading group occurred in 2010.	There were 16 participants in the reading group.
Moishe House New Orleans	Residential Jewish engagement initiative	2008-present	4-5 house residents, hundreds of program participants
United Jewish Communities (renamed Jewish Federations of North America)	Organized national Jewish response to Hurricane Katrina	2005-2007 (years fund was most active)	n/a
Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans	Local Jewish community charity federation	1913-present	n/a

A few days before I arrived in New Orleans, a member of the New Orleans Jewish community familiar with my research suggested that I join a reading group on the topic of Justice and Jewish Thought. The group met for two months in the fall of 2010 in order to discuss a variety of topics including feminism, gender and sexuality, economic justice, race, anti-Semitism, Zionism, and diasporism. The weekly meetings took place

in the homes of group members and included a potluck dinner. Readings and the general structure for the program were organized by Pursue, a national Jewish social justice organization that supported a website for the program and offered reading group leaders in a number of cities with a small stipend in exchange for their help organizing the reading groups. The grassroots aesthetic created by small house-based meetings and potluck dinners was, in fact, supported by a national Jewish social justice organization. We might even describe this reading group as being a form of top-down grassroots activism.

The Jewish social justice activists involved in the reading group were focused on helping those outside of the Jewish community and assumed that Jewish needs were less pressing and already being taken care of by mainstream Jewish philanthropy. As opposed to a mainstream philanthropic paradigm in which efforts to aid those outside of the Jewish community was often activated in response to disasters, these Jewish social justice activists were focused on understanding and combating systems of injustice and worked primarily on behalf of those outside of the Jewish community. Perceiving themselves to be members of the economic and political elite, these activists often understood themselves to be in some sense complicit in perpetuating the systems of injustice that led to social inequality. Privilege and the reproduction of inequality were primary topics of discussion in the reading group.

This reading group occurred within a broader Jewish youth activist community. Many of the young Jews who participated in this community first arrived to the city as participants in AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps, an agency that expanded to New Orleans in 2008 in order to establish a long-term Jewish social justice response to the

storm. The service corps reflects a temporally open-ended sense of Jewish obligation to those outside of the Jewish community in contrast to the bounded and situational disaster responses the federation system had enacted. This open-ended sense of Jewish ethical obligation is reflected in the forms and aims of the service corps. Despite the fact that it was established in response to Hurricane Katrina, the service corps was designed to continue indefinitely, long after immediate post-Katrina aid and recovery work ceased. Furthermore, part of the program's mission is to influence program participants to embrace a lifelong commitment to progressive activism.

As part of AVODAH, corps members are placed at local not-for-profit agencies. Placements during the year 2011-2012 program year included a rebuilding agency, a youth arts initiatives, The New Orleans Fair Housing Center, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a charter school, the Local chapter of the ACLU, a community-based health clinic, and a Vietnamese-American youth empowerment not-for-profit. As a result, corps members' experiences at their placements varied greatly. A shared curriculum and site visits during which corps members learned about one another's placements helped to create a shared experience and aimed to foster long-term commitment to social justice activism.

AVODAH, like several other Jewish social justice initiatives, encourages this commitment by framing Jewish social responsibility in relation to class privilege. This type of discourse challenges the mythology of Horatio Alger-type narratives in which wealth and class status are achieved through individual efforts. Instead, Jewish social justice organizations tend to understand wealth and status as accessible to some and not to others; access is based on systemic social structures. By way of an example of this

definitional discourse, I would like to focus on one particular educational program that I observed as part of my research on the Jewish service corps. Three months into the 2011-2012 AVODAH program year, an outside speaker was asked to facilitate a discussion on the topic of class privilege. While most programs occurred at the AVODAH house, this particular workshop took place on the *bimah*, or stage, of the main sanctuary of the Touro synagogue. The location—the most sacred site in New Orleans’ most prominent Jewish congregation—emphasized the connection between Judaism and privilege, whether or not this emphasis was intentional.

The facilitator first asked the program participants to reflect on their own class status. In response to this prompt, program participants described themselves as ranging from working class to upper class, though the distribution was heavily skewed toward middle and upper class families. Almost half the group described themselves as middle class and almost half described themselves as upper middle or upper class. Only one program participant described her family as working class; however, this participant seemed to be on an upwardly mobile trajectory as a result of having attending a prestigious private university on scholarship.

Following this discussion of participants’ own class statuses, the facilitator, a self-described “radical activist,” lined up ten chairs. These chairs were meant to represent the total amount of wealth that exists in the United States. The facilitator informed the group that the top ten percent of the people in the United States possess seventy-three percent of the wealth and then asked one of the program participants to embody this income disparity by stretching across seven chairs. The remaining nine corps members were then asked to squeeze onto the remaining chairs, a task they accomplished by sitting on top of

one another. The message was clear: as figurative members of the bottom ninety percent, they were being literally squeezed. By physically squeezing privileged Jewish bodies into a small space, the facilitator called attention to the problematic social structures that manufacture and reproduce inequality. While containing little or no explicitly Jewish content, I suggest that this program represents a paradigmatic example of Jewish social justice discourse. The facilitator implicitly defined Jewish identity in terms of privilege and then asserted that Jewish privilege should lead to progressive political activism.

In addition to the establishment of AVODAH and the youth activist community that formed in post-Katrina New Orleans, the thousands of Jews who came to help with post-storm voluntourism trips must also be considered. In some situations, service trips to New Orleans can be understood primarily as opportunities to encourage young Jews to participate in a Jewish activity. Jewish synagogue and campus professionals eager to encourage young Jews to participate in their programs sometimes leveraged a service trip to New Orleans in order to entice students to participate in their ongoing local programs. Thus, a post-Katrina trip to New Orleans can in some cases be understood as an effort to support and encourage Jewish religious and cultural continuity. The leaders of one trip I encountered told me that their yearly service trip to New Orleans motivated participation in their synagogue's high school education program. In line with the goal of ensuring student satisfaction, the trip leaders made every effort to make the trip enjoyable and the service component of the trip was often truncated to ensure that the leisure components of the trip were not sacrificed. Though this trip was exceptional in the extent to which service and cultural learning were deemphasized, most of the trips I studied saw service

tourism to New Orleans as a type of “win-win”—good for aid receivers and good for the Jewish community.

While early post-storm trips usually involved gutting homes, most of the service projects I observed tended to involve volunteers in projects such as painting, gardening, yard work, and neighborhood beautification. On this particular trip, participants worked with the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development and aided homeowners with a number of painting projects. Students on this trip also spent an afternoon working at Our School at Blair Grocery, an urban farming and experiential education program established in 2008 at the site of a destroyed corner grocery store in the Lower Ninth Ward (Wilson 2011).

Conversely, some service trip leaders, especially those leading trips with an organization called Jewish Funds for Justice (described in chapter five) devalued direct service and focused instead on education regarding broader issues of social inequality. A number of trip facilitators that I encountered in New Orleans viewed service tourism primarily as an opportunity to teach students about progressive political positions. New Orleans, in a sense, became an experiential classroom for teaching Jews about social injustice and inequality. In defense of this approach, some Jewish social justice organizations asserted that the value of the unskilled, short-term labor provided by young Jews on a service trip was significantly less than the cost of transporting and feeding them for the week; therefore, Jewish social justice agencies justified bringing volunteers to New Orleans as an educational program that might help solidify a commitment to Jewish universalism. Trip leaders on social justice oriented, short-term service trips often measured their success discursively as opposed to in relation to the value of service labor

accomplished. When I asked one trip leader, Julie, to evaluate a trip that she had led for Jewish Funds for Justice, she reflected that “some of our conversation was good, especially our discussion of race and how to make social change” (interview, March 27, 2011). For Julie, the value of the service trip was connected primarily to the discursive elements of the trip, which had the potential to define the trip as an expression of Jewish social justice activism.

As this chapter has shown, both particularistic and universalistic Jewish organizational responses to Hurricane Katrina involved the enacting of sociocultural positions regarding how, why, and for how long Jews should assist non-Jews in need. In addition to these conflicting and overlapping theories and praxes, both particularist and universalistic organizations and individuals have taken post-Katrina New Orleans as a site and occasion for long-term investment in the Jewish community and in the broader project of defining Jewish social responsibility. While there is overlap between such investments, particularistic organizations and individuals have tended to focus on growing the Jewish community and increasing Jewish identification while universalist organizations and individuals have focused on growing a social justice-oriented Jewish community that seeks to rectify systemic injustice from the socioeconomically privileged position of American Jewish communal life. These foci are distinguished by ideology, politics, and rhetoric, and sometimes involve the same acts of aid and philanthropy (e.g. service trips).

I conclude this chapter by considering what it might mean to think of Jewish philanthropy as a political field within which debates regarding the meaning of Jewish social action are posited and debated. Building on the idea that the Jewish social justice

activism I witnessed was defined through discourse, I return to the 2010 General Assembly conference and to the analysis of a number of events at which the meanings of post-Katrina Jewish philanthropy were vigorously debated.

Politicizing Jewish Philanthropy

While Jewish particularistic and universalistic responses to disaster and injustice have overlapped in New Orleans, in a broader American Jewish frame these two positions are often perceived as being antagonistic to one another. Situated at a major site of competitive and collaborative approaches to Jewish aid, the 2010 General Assembly represented an attempt to unify particularistic and universalistic Jewish aid efforts. The structure of the conference enacted a synthesis between these different positions through the inclusion of panels devoted to Jewish service and through a conference-wide service project. However, the conference's attempt to bring particularism and universalism together was only partially successful, and in fact resulted in moments of rupture and protest. In addition to clarifying and reinforcing distinctions between particularistic and universalistic approaches to Jewish social action, such moments of conflict undermine a postwar paradigm that emphasizes philanthropy's capacity to unify Jews across political and religious divisions.

The most extreme and memorable moment of rupture to occur at the conference involved the disruption and protest of the Israeli prime minister's plenary address. I will reserve my analysis of that protest for a later chapter devoted to intra-Jewish debates about Zionism and anti-Zionism. Here, I will focus instead on a moment of rupture within a particular conference panel, and on an instance of subversive critique that

occurred during one of the plenary sessions. The panel in question was titled “Do Jews Help Non-Jews? Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself,” and advocated the idea that helping Jews represents a primary obligation while helping non-Jews represents a secondary and perhaps optional ethical activity. The conference program included the following description of the panel:

When disaster strikes, we know the Jewish community will generously support the work of JFNA, JDC and many other organizations as they bring aid to Jews in need. After all, if we won't help ourselves, who will? But did you know these Jewish organizations are there to transform the lives of the larger community as well? Donors might be surprised about the extent to which Jewish organizational responses stretch far beyond the Jewish community in response to overseas and domestic disasters. (GA Program 2012:20)

Based on this description, it seems that panel organizers imagined an audience that might be surprised to hear that Jewish philanthropic organizations work outside of the Jewish community. The panel took the postwar Jewish philanthropy status quo as its starting point for a discussion of how Jews might help non-Jews. As the panel description indicates, from the perspective of the panel organizers, post-disaster contexts represent appropriate moments to extend Jewish philanthropic responses beyond the Jewish community. During the session, panelists asserted that Jewish humanitarianism should be enacted in exceptional circumstances, for example, in response to catastrophes such as the tsunami in Southeast Asia (2004), Hurricane Katrina (2005), and the Haiti earthquake (2010). At one point during the panel, the panel organizer justified Jewish involvement in post-disaster work in strategic terms, insisting that Jews should act as “good neighbors” and that Jewish involvement in post-disaster work also “helps to improve the profile of the American Jewish community.”

The assumption that Jewish philanthropy is defined primarily by support for issues of Jewish concern was disrupted when a representative from a Jewish social justice organization actively challenged this premise. The panel moderator, who had also coordinated the federation response to Hurricane Katrina, was visibly frustrated that this Jewish philanthropy status quo was being challenged and deflected the question and the idea that Jewish social justice organizations represented a legitimate expression of Jewish philanthropy. The panel organizer tried, through her antagonistic response, to locate such efforts outside the bounds of mainstream Jewish philanthropy.

In contrast, the idea that Jewish philanthropy should incorporate a universalistic ethic was advanced in a series of panels devoted to the topic of service. These panels acknowledged and celebrated Jewish communal involvement in broader humanitarian projects from a variety of ideological positions and discussed the recent growth of Jewish social justice organizations as well as the growth of Jewish service tourism. Speaking on one such panel, Rabbi Jennie Rosenn discussed the ways in which Jewish identity often needs to compete with other identities and commitments.¹² Rosenn asserted that Jewish social justice solved a problem—one did not have to choose between Jewish and universalistic identities, but could simply combine them and enact one's perceived universalistic obligations in a Jewish context. Whereas in the first panel, the assertion of a primary, universal ethical obligation was understood by some as a challenge to Jewish philanthropy, in the second panel, Jewish social justice ideology was proposed as a solution to the perceived conflict between progressive and particularistic identities.

¹² At the time, Rabbi Jennie Rosenn served as Director of Jewish Life and Values Program at the Nathan Cummings Foundation. Financial support from the Cummings Foundation has played a central, catalyzing role in the establishment of a matrix of agencies dedicated to Jewish social justice initiatives. She is also married to David Rosenn, the founding director of AVODAH.

Tensions between a federation and a social justice approach to Jewish post-Katrina relief work were most directly expressed at the General Assembly's opening plenary, which featured TV producer David Simon. Thinking that the plenary had ended after Vice President Joe Biden's address, many audience members started to leave the hall, creating a rather confusing dynamic.¹³ The fact that the lights in the hall began flickering on and off and would continue to do so throughout David Simon's remarks added to the confusion; it is unclear whether the flickering lights were due to a technical malfunction or represented an explicit attempt to draw attention away from Simon's ensuing critique of American Jewish philanthropy. Simon had been chosen to address the plenary because of his Jewish origin and because he created and directed *Treme*, a television drama that examines post-Katrina New Orleans. Simon's remarks centered on a rebuke of Jewish community priorities in the post-Katrina era; he began this critique by complaining that Jewish groups had stopped inviting him to speak because he insisted on describing the plight of poor inner-city Baltimore residents as a slow-motion holocaust. The comparison between Nazi efforts to destroy European Jewry and the drugs and violence plaguing Baltimore's ghettos struck a raw nerve in a community defined by a postwar Jewish philanthropy paradigm. Simon continued with a critique of post-Katrina Jewish giving. In particular, he asserted that providing Jews with subsidies to relocate to New Orleans was ethically problematic when there were 100,000 poor, Black New Orleanians who could not return to the city. The Jewish community, Simon argued, should have been working to help these exiles return rather than spending resources to bring Jews who had never lived in the city to settle in New Orleans. It was problematic, Simon asserted, for the Jewish community to use its financial resources in a way that

¹³ I address Biden's address in more detail in chapter six.

prioritized its own community needs when there were more immediate and pressing needs that had to be addressed.

The confusion and disruption surrounding Simon's remarks, and the subversive content of the remarks themselves, undermined the sense of unity, pride, and shared purpose that conference organizers had hoped to achieve via this opening plenary session. As this example illustrates, working to include progressive Jewish voices in a traditionally particularistic conference ultimately led to ideological and political tensions and even to acts of argument and protest. Beyond representing various challenges to the goal or ideal of a unified Jewish philanthropic sphere, David Simon's remarks spoke to the various ways in which both universalistic and particularistic Jewish philanthropic efforts have worked to make New Orleans their own. On one end of the spectrum, we find the Jewish particularistic efforts Simon criticized, efforts that prioritized Jewish needs in their immediate post-disaster responses and that sustained efforts to protect, then to rebuild, and then finally to grow the New Orleans Jewish community. On the other end of the spectrum, we find the appropriation of post-Katrina New Orleans as performed by Simon when he took the podium at the Jewish philanthropy conference to speak to Jews from within a Jewish communal context about the primacy and urgency of participating in progressive, universalistic social movements.

Collectively, the historical and ethnographic material collected here illustrates the ways in which Jewish philanthropy defines an American Jewish collective while also serving as a political field—both actual and figurative—within which ideas regarding Jewish social responsibility are posited and debated. In the chapters that follow, I trace the interactions of activists, agencies, and donors in relation to a dense network of Jewish

philanthropic organizations. These interactions, both collaborative and combative, take Jewish philanthropic contexts as central locations for the formulation and contestation of individual and collective American Jewish identity and community.

CHAPTER TWO

Rebuilding Justice: Jewish Philanthropy and the Politics of Representation

Introduction

World War II and the Nazi assault on European Jewry created new challenges for American Jews and for American Jewish philanthropy. Around the country, Jewish communities mobilized in support of the allied war effort and in order to condemn the unspeakable crimes that were unfolding against European Jewry. Debates within the Jewish community about how best to represent community interests at this moment of crisis led to the formation of community councils empowered to speak on behalf of Jewish communities in the public sphere.

On December 18, 1941, a committee of three rabbis and four lay-leaders convened in the offices of the New Orleans Jewish Federation in order to consider the formation of a body that would represent the New Orleans Jewish community. Advocating for such a community council, Uri Miller, the rabbi of the Orthodox Congregation Beth Israel, mentioned two examples from the New Orleans Jewish community's responses to the war in Europe that, he argued, demonstrated an urgent need for a representative body authorized to speak on behalf of New Orleans' Jews. In the meeting, Miller described a debate that emerged in response to a Jewish Federation contribution to a campaign raising funds for the "purchase of an Ambulance for Great Britain" questioned the gift's designation as "a Jewish contribution." Those in opposition

to the gift's designation as "a Jewish contribution" wanted to avoid differentiating between Jews and non-Jews when participating in broader wartime efforts. A community council, argued R. Miller, could mediate and resolve such debates and "express the community attitude" (Jewish Federation 1914-1994:box 111, folder 13).

R. Miller also described a boycott of German-made goods that had been proposed several years earlier. Without a council authorized to speak on behalf of the Jewish community, R. Miller asserted that "there was always the danger that some irresponsible individual or group of individuals might speak in what purported to be the name of the Jewish community," potentially undermining the boycott's efficacy (Jewish Federation 1914-1994:box 111, folder 13). Extrapolating from these examples, we can surmise that community council envisioned by R. Miller would achieve both inclusive and exclusive objectives. In the first example, R. Miller asserted that the council might incorporate divergent positions regarding how best to present Jewish community actions; in the second, he argued that a community council might neutralize wayward minority voices that might otherwise undermine the community consensus.

I think it important to note that Rabbi Miller was an effective leader within the Orthodox Jewish community in New Orleans in the 1930s, spearheading his congregation's growth. Miller left his post in New Orleans in the early 1940s and moved to a congregation in Baltimore, where he also served as one of the early presidents of the Rabbinical Council of America, the main professional association for Modern Orthodox rabbis in the United States (Gurock 2009). Jeffrey Gurock, a historian of American Orthodoxy, notes that Miller is an understudied figure whose influence on American Orthodoxy has not been sufficiently explored. While support for community councils

emerged from many sectors in the Jewish community, it is not surprising that strong support came from a leader in the Orthodox community and strong opposition, which I describe next, emerged from the Reform laity.

S. Walter Stern, a member of a prominent, wealthy New Orleans family, expressed opposition to the council's formation on ideological grounds, arguing that Jewish philanthropic organizations should not have a representative function. Stern held that Jewish philanthropic organizations should not claim to speak on behalf of the Jewish community. Meeting notes describe Stern's strong dissent:

Mr. Stern however, stated that he was opposed to the Community Council, because he felt that no organization no matter how representative could speak in the name of the Jewish people of New Orleans. He felt that if a controversial issue finally came to a vote in such a body the minority or many members thereof would not want to be bound by the majority opinion. He felt that if the matter did come to the community the people that were in favor of the given line of action could call a meeting of those interested and have it determined what the attitude of that particular group should be, leaving other groups in the community free to adopt whatever other opinion appealed to them. (Jewish Federation 1914-1994:box 111, folder 13)

We can understand Stern's argument as an insistence that Jewish philanthropic organizations should focus on their particular social, educational, and religious missions and should avoid taking on what might be construed as a "political" or representative function. Stern further argued that while the idea was to achieve unity, the council would likely disillusion those whose opinions were overruled by the council's majority.

I pause here to offer a brief biographical note. S. Walter Stern's father, Maurice Stern, emigrated from Germany in 1871 and came to lead a large cotton trading firm based in New Orleans (Richardson 1997:328). Embracing a philanthropic ethic, Maurice Stern and his children all came to play prominent roles in developing the civic, cultural,

and welfare institutions of the city. For example, many members of the family served on the board of Dillard University, a historically black college. Notably, S. Walter's brother, Edgar, married Edith Rosenwald Stern, the daughter of the famed philanthropist Julius Rosenwald and his wife, Augusta Nusbaum Rosenwald.¹⁴ Jumping forward a few generations, Ben, the first director of AVODAH New Orleans and one of my central fieldwork guides, is a direct descendent of S. Walter Stern.

Arguments in favor of the formation carried the day and the committee passed a resolution recommending the establishment of a community council. This development, alongside the founding of community councils throughout the United States, concretized the notion that Jewish philanthropic organizations include a representative function and can claim to speak on behalf of Jewish communities. In fact, in the seventy-five years since this meeting occurred, the idea that Jewish philanthropic organizations, and especially the Jewish federation system, represent American Jewry has been widely accepted both within and outside the American Jewish community. These acts of representation are not grounded in explicit religious or theological positions but enact what might be described as Jewish public policy based on a sense of what positions and policies might best serve Jewish community interests (Elazar 1995). I call our attention to this development in the history of the New Orleans Jewish community, and to Stern's opposition in particular, because it suggests a number of questions about the field of American Jewish philanthropy with contemporary relevance. What are the possible consequences of Jewish philanthropy assuming a representative and political role for

¹⁴ Jewish Women's Archive website, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/stern-edith-rosenwald>, accessed January 5, 2015.

American Jews? And what happens when there are those who oppose the actions and policy decisions of Jewish philanthropic organizations?

Building on these questions, this chapter considers the intersection of race politics and the politics of representation. While positions put forth on behalf of the New Orleans Jewish community by its community council (now Jewish community relations council) and its affiliate, the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, do not typically lead to intra-community strife, this chapter analyzes one particular instance when an initiative enacted by the New Orleans Jewish Federation on behalf of the Jewish community led to a contentious debate about what constituted ethical Jewish post-Katrina social action. I focus in particular on a debate that emerged in response to a partnership between the St. Bernard Project and the Jewish Community Federation of Greater New Orleans. As in the World War II-era debate about whether to form a community council, the post-Katrina era involved questions regarding how the Jewish community might represent itself at a time of crisis with very specific implications for the Jewish community and for a larger struggle that transcended specific Jewish concerns. As with the question regarding whether gifts given as part of an effort to donate an ambulance to Great Britain should be designated as Jewish, this post-Katrina debate primarily revolved around the politics of representation both within and outside of the Jewish community. In the pages that follow, I offer an analysis of the debate itself and consider the ways in which a debate about post-Katrina recovery was reframed in specifically Jewish terms. Following the lead of the activists who challenged the Federation partnership, I then ask what it might mean for Jewish humanitarian action to be present itself as either “political” or “apolitical” in nature. As part of my analysis of the question of politics and humanitarian

aid, I suggest that activists' exposure to anthropology and other critical social sciences influenced their understanding of what might constitute ethically informed and culturally sensitive expressions of humanitarian assistance. I conclude the chapter by thinking about what defines Jewish community as well as the always-political process of Jewish community formation.

Visualizing Jewish Aid

On August 11, 2009, three weeks before the fourth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Michael Weil, the executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, sent an email announcing a Federation partnership with the St. Bernard Project, a rebuilding agency that was established in the years following Hurricane Katrina. Weil was hired in 2006, when the New Orleans Jewish community was struggling to get back on its feet after losing a third of its population, including many families with young children. Weil is a career Jewish professional known for effective fundraising and strategic planning. Prior to coming to New Orleans to aid the community in its recovery efforts, Weil spent most of his career in Jerusalem as a government consultant in support of a variety of urban planning and civic projects.

Weil's email explained that a primary motivation for establishing the partnership was to present the Jewish community as making a *visible* contribution to the broader humanitarian project of post-Katrina rebuilding and recovery. Weil wrote that despite having "sent thousands of volunteers and millions of dollars to help rebuild the Gulf Coast," the Jewish community's response was impossible "to measure" and "visualize." By directing Jewish relief efforts to a particular rebuilding agency, a partnership between

the Federation and the St. Bernard Project would enable the Jewish community to make a noticeable contribution to post-Katrina rebuilding and would “allow any Jewish individual or organization, regardless of affiliation who wishes to help rebuild the Gulf Coast, to have a central Jewish volunteer location where our joint efforts can be measured” (Federation email, August 11, 2009). In language reminiscent of the World War II-era meeting that recommended the formation of a community council, Weil’s email reflected a desire to represent efforts sponsored by American Jews in support of the broader project of post-Katrina recovery as a “Jewish contribution.”

This email and the partnership suggest the following questions. What might account for this Jewish community concern with visibility? Why did the Jewish community wait until the storm’s fourth anniversary to consolidate their rebuilding efforts? These questions are especially pertinent when we consider that a number of Christian denominational networks including Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Catholic Charities, and Lutheran Disaster Response played an early and central role in coordinating post-Katrina aid and recovery efforts (Erdely 2011:6; Adams 2013).

Bolstered by national and international Jewish support, by 2009, the New Orleans Jewish community was enjoying a renaissance marked by a flurry of activity, a collaborative spirit, and new leadership. The spirit of collaboration was most evident in the relocation of Congregation Beth Israel, an Orthodox synagogue whose building was destroyed by the storm, to a building belonging to Congregation Gates of Prayer, a Reform congregation.¹⁵ The sense of revitalization was also reflected in the arrival of a cohort of young, charismatic rabbis across the various denominations who were drawn to

¹⁵ While the various liberal denominations (Reform, Renewal, Reconstructionist, and Conservative) often coordinate with one another, interdenominational collaboration between liberal and Orthodox congregations is increasingly rare.

the challenges and opportunities of post-Katrina rebuilding efforts. Relatively secure, mostly recovered, and infused with new leadership, the New Orleans Jewish community was in a good position to reorient itself outwards toward the broader project of post-Katrina rebuilding and recovery.

Weil's email also reflected an anxiety regarding whether the Jewish community—broadly defined—had contributed sufficiently to the project of post-Katrina recovery and rebuilding. This anxiety would be acutely felt at a moment when the Jewish community was transitioning from post-Katrina recovery to post-Katrina vitality. Weil's email and the partnership it announced addressed this concern by establishing an institutional framework within which the Jewish community could symbolically and tangibly contribute to the broader project of post-Katrina recovery. A stronger formulation of this idea was expressed by Ruth Messinger, who suggested to me during an interview that many members of the Jewish community who had contributed to the Federation's Katrina fund were under the impression that they were donating to the broader project of post-Katrina recovery efforts when, in fact, the funds were mostly directed toward Jewish aid recipients (interview, December 31, 2013). The partnership thus served as a corrective measure meant to assuage members of the Jewish community who wanted the community to focus on the broader project of post-Katrina recovery. The establishment of the Federation-St. Bernard Project partnership can thus be understood as a moment of transition from a particularistic to a universalistic perspective on the project of post-storm rebuilding. When they chose the St. Bernard Project, a widely praised rebuilding agency, the Federation and its leadership were surprised to find themselves challenged by a group of Jewish progressive activists.

Challenging the Federation

Upon receiving Michael Weil's email, a number of youth activists also became concerned with the issue of visibility but from a very different perspective. The activists were concerned that, as a result of this partnership, the Jewish community might become implicated in a series of racist housing policies that St. Bernard Parish had enacted since the storm. Moving beyond informal discussion, a number of activists penned a letter voicing their concerns about the partnership. The letter, which was ultimately signed by thirty-four young, Jewish New Orleanians, ignited an antagonistic exchange with the Federation and the establishment of the NOLA Havurah, a short-lived progressive Jewish group that defined itself in opposition to the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans.

St. Bernard is a low-lying parish located directly to the East of New Orleans that was hit hard by the storm.¹⁶ The roughly 70,000 residents who lived in the St. Bernard parish in 2005 when Katrina struck were all impacted when virtually every building in the parish was either damaged or destroyed. The magnitude of the damage in the parish led Liz McCartney and Zack Rosenberg, post-Katrina transplants from Washington, D.C., to found a rebuilding agency and to focus their initial efforts exclusively in the parish. The agency that McCartney and Rosenberg established "became one of the highest-profile initiatives in the region, with millions of dollars in corporate and individual donations and thousands of volunteers" (Flaherty 2010:130).

While the St. Bernard Project was achieving national fame for its efficiency rebuilding homes damaged or destroyed by the storm, the parish after which it was named attracted negative attention for its racist housing policies. In particular, the parish

¹⁶ On account of its Catholic past, Louisiana uses the term parish to describe what is in other states called a county. The City of New Orleans and Orleans Parish cover the same geographical area.

passed a “blood relative” ordinance that made it illegal for homeowners to rent to anyone who was not a blood relative, effectively restricting African Americans from moving to a parish that was eighty-five percent white before the storm (Flaherty 2010:129). Even after federal courts struck down the ordinance, the parish was held in contempt of court on numerous occasions for continuing to pursue racially discriminatory policies (Alexander-Block 2013).

The St. Bernard Project’s increasing prominence led to a flurry of activist voices calling on the agency to challenge the parish’s policies. Although McCartney and Rosenberg did not originally intend to align themselves with the parish’s policies, when confronted they insisted that they were not an advocacy group and were unwilling to critique the parish. On September 10, 2009, local activists posted an open letter on the blog of the Louisiana Justice Institute challenging the parish’s discriminatory policies. The letter was signed by many progressive agencies involved in post-Katrina rebuilding as well as by many individual activists. A day after the broader activist community posted this letter to the Louisiana Justice Institute blog, a group of Jewish activists calling themselves the NOLA Havurah sent a letter to the New Orleans Federation challenging the partnership that had been announced a month earlier. As I discussed in the introduction, the term “Havurah” evokes grassroots alternatives to institutional Judaism. It is important to note that the Jewish activists oriented their critique toward a Jewish philanthropic agency and not toward the Parish itself.

While the Federation’s letter emphasized a desire to establish a visible and measurable response to Hurricane Katrina, the young activists were primarily concerned with how this relationship might be understood by the African American community:

We worry about the ramifications this partnership could have on our Jewish community and our relationships with communities of color. For example, if the Federation does not actively and publicly oppose St. Bernard's racist policies, will the public assume that the Federation (and by extension the Jewish community) supports them? (activist letter, September 11, 2009)

As members of the Jewish community, the young Jews felt obligated to challenge an agency that claimed to speak on their behalf. Mirroring the efforts of the broader activist community, the young Jews were loath to become even implicitly associated with the structures of inequality they perceived and challenged. I note here that this youth activist challenge to the Federation fulfills Stern's prediction regarding the consequences of empowering Jewish philanthropic organizations to enact Jewish public policy.

In their letter, the young activists explained their concerns regarding the partnership and their sense that it did not emphasize or advance "equity" in the rebuilding process:

We are troubled by S[aint] B[ernard] P[rojects]'s refusal to make any public comment on St. Bernard Parish's racially discriminatory housing policies, or to inform volunteers about these policies, despite requests from a growing number of Jews and non-Jews in New Orleans and across the nation... Our Jewish values and history remind us that silence in the face of injustice is tantamount to complicity. (activist letter, September 11, 2009)

The non-sectarian letter that emerged from the broader activist community makes a similar point regarding the implications of silence: "With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that St. Bernard Parish officials interpreted silence as consent, which has now emboldened them to pursue other means to deny the Fair Housing Act" (The Louisiana Justice Institute, 2009). By reframing the struggle against St. Bernard Parish in relation

to Jewish history, the activists began to situate this local issue within national, intra-Jewish debates about the nature of contemporary Jewish social responsibility.

Discussions of this episode would periodically arise in casual conversation. At the end of a Sunday trip to festival hosted by A Studio in the Woods, an art-based retreat and learning center, a group of young activists gathered in the Irish Channel for a potluck dinner celebrating Sam's birthday. Sam was an alumnus of the first AVODAH cohort and remained at his original placement, the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development, for three additional years after the conclusion of the program year. Over pizza, Noa, one of Sam's housemates and an AVODAH alumna from the second program year, asked me if I had met Michael Weil. This question led Sam, a central member of the NOLA Havurah, to share his perspective on the episode and his sense of frustration at how the debate ultimately took place. Sam emphasized that the youth activists did not oppose the partnership per se but wanted to encourage the Federation to take a public stance against St. Bernard Parish's racist policies.

While St. Bernard Parish was not particularly concerned with activist opinions from the parish next door, the Jewish federation was quite sensitive to critique from local Jewish constituents. Even though only eight of the thirty-four signatories were former program participants and the activists described themselves as an independent group called the NOLA Havurah, Weil insisted that they were representing and were represented by AVODAH, the Jewish service corps that had just started its second program year in New Orleans. Weil called both the local and national director of AVODAH to complain about the youth activist challenge, claiming that the program was radicalizing its participants. By contacting AVODAH, Weil situated the debate within an

institutional context and insisted that the organization was in some sense responsible for controlling and channeling Jewish activism in New Orleans. Weil's decision to contact AVODAH reframed this local debate in relation to broader trends in Jewish philanthropy defined by the emergence and growth of Jewish social justice organizations. Though Weil did not oppose social justice activism per se, his actions reflect the sense that Jewish social justice efforts in general, and youth activism in New Orleans in particular, should not involve explicit critique of the mainstream Jewish community. We might also think of Weil's response and of his emphasis on institutional affiliation as a refraction of the notion that Jewish philanthropic organizations serve a representative role within American Jewish life.

In response to the youth activist action, the Federation ultimately posted a statement to its website expressing opposition to housing discrimination in general. However, the Federation did not single out the St. Bernard Parish for its racist housing policies or critique the St. Bernard Project for its quiet complicity, as the activists demanded. The statement posted to the Federation website included the following text:

The Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans is committed to help post Hurricane Katrina regional rebuilding efforts. An integral part of this mission is opposition to any and all housing policies that are discriminatory in action or intent. Specifically, the Jewish Federation opposes housing discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and/or disability.¹⁷

Sarah, one of the initial letter writers, reported that she understood this statement to be "vague and not meaningful" (interview, September 11, 2011). She further reported that those involved in the original protest letter ultimately decided that the Federation was

¹⁷ From the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans website, www.jewishnola.com, accessed July 6, 2012.

irrelevant to them and that they had wasted their energy by trying to engage the Federation in serious debate. Although Sarah's disassociation from the Federation was particularly intense when compared to some of the other activists, there was a general sense that responses to efforts to engage the Federation did not yield any measurable results and ended in frustration.

The debate between the young activists and the Federation also revolved around competing notions regarding the meaning of *tikkun olam*. In his original email announcement, Weil wrote, "we intend to visibly demonstrate how Jews come together to care for others in need, which is the embodiment of *tikkun olam*." Weil's usage of the term reveals an understanding focused on Jewish giving to non-Jews. Defined in this way, *tikkun olam* is an expansive term that refers to any Jewish community effort to aid non-Jews. The implied meaning conveyed by Weil's use of the term does not differentiate between social action, defined by efforts that address immediate and often individual needs, and social justice, defined as systemic social change.

Responding to Weil, the activists' letter suggested a conflicting definition of the term *tikkun olam*. Drawing on an article written by Jane Kanerek, a faculty member at a progressive Rabbinical school (Hebrew College), the activists distinguished between acts of *chesed*, a traditional Jewish term sometimes defined as righteousness, and *tikkun olam*. Acts of *chesed*, they argued, involved aid to individuals, whereas fulfilling the idea of *tikkun olam* demanded a focus on social justice, on working toward systemic change and against inequality and racism. The activists' letter included the following passage:

Caring for others in need is indeed a *mitzvah* [commandment], but is it truly the embodiment of *tikkun olam*? The St. Bernard Project works at the level of individual homeowners. It has a big impact because it is well organized and is

able to affect the lives of many individuals in need, but as an organization it has not taken a stance on systemic issues that determine where and how individuals are able to live. According to Rabbi Jane Kanarek, acts that benefit individuals but do not transform society are better classified as acts of *chesed* (loving-kindness), rather than *tikkun olam*. (activist letter, September 11, 2009)

Despite having used the term in his original email, Weil criticized what he perceived to be a left-wing appropriation of the term by sending the activists an article entitled “How Not to Repair the World.” In the article, Hillel Halkin, a prominent Jewish intellectual, challenges the association of Judaism (and *tikkun olam*, in particular) with progressive political positions:

Health care, labor unions, public-school education, feminism, abortion rights, gay marriage, globalization, U.S. foreign policy, Darfur: on everything Judaism has a position—and, wondrously, this position just happens to coincide with that of the American liberal Left... Judaism has value to such Jews to the extent that it is useful, and it is useful to the extent that it can be made to conform to whatever beliefs and opinions they would have even if Judaism had never existed. (Halkin 2008)

On the surface it may seem that Weil reframed the Federation partnership with the St. Bernard Project—an initiative that claimed to enact a universalistic effort whereby the Jewish community might help non-Jewish others—along a rigid and binary left/right, liberal/conservative political divide. However, I suggest that a more subtle argument was taking place and that Weil in fact sent this article to challenge what he perceived to be the misplaced politicization of what ideally should be an act of apolitical humanitarianism.

While the Federation and its leaders were criticized for the partnership with the St. Bernard Project and for their subsequent refusal to take a public stand against the Parish’s racist policies, we should note that the Federation of Greater New Orleans engages in other work that seeks to cultivate strong ties between the Jewish and African

American communities. For instance, in an interview, Weil described his primary goals as head of the New Orleans Federation as increasing the Jewish population of New Orleans and enhancing Black-Jewish relations. To achieve this second objective, Weil proudly described “Sisters Chaverot,” a Black-Jewish dialogue group for women that was established in 2010 (interview February 20, 2012). While Weil’s emphasis on Black-Jewish dialogue may seem surprising considering his negative response to the youth activist challenge to the Federation/St. Bernard Project partnership, this inconsistency highlights the complexities involved in balancing particularistic and universalistic priorities. Debates about the Federation/St. Bernard Project partnership became heated, not because participants necessarily disagreed about the value of improving Black-Jewish relations or of anti-racism, but rather because the issue reflected a broad, charged disagreement about what it means for Jews, Jewish communities, and Jewish institutions to be political.

The Politics of Jewish Aid

Anthropological critiques of humanitarian aid regimes suggest an alternative explanation of these events. Over the past quarter century, development and humanitarian aid have become defined by what Stirrat and Henkel describe as a “new orthodoxy” that celebrates “the role of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) as the primary agent in its vision of development” (Stirrat and Henkel 1997:67). The ideologies that support the NGO-ization of development and humanitarian aid posit that, once removed from explicitly political entities (i.e. governments), aid regimes would enact apolitical and more efficient forms of humanitarian assistance (Mosse 2006).

Anthropologists have critiqued this depoliticization as masking and obscuring the inherently political contexts in which aid is given and received (Mosse 2006).

In a review essay, “Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices,” William Fisher notes:

The development industry’s view of NGOs as efficient new instruments of development largely ignores, downplays, or attempts to coopt the political role of NGOs. Through depoliticization, NGOs are in danger of becoming the new attachments to the “antipolitics” machine of development. (Fisher 1997:445-446)

Similarly, writing about Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Liisa Malkki (1996) has argued that aid efforts often reflect an understanding of refugees and displaced individuals as dehistoricized subjects whose reason has been compromised by trauma (Malkki 1996: 384). According to Malkki, aid givers often perceive refugees as beings whose bodies tell better stories than any utterance they might articulate. Refugees thus possess a minimal, raw humanity that triggers the responses of humanitarian organizations (Malkki 1996). By contrast, Malkki argues that effective aid regimes must account for specific political and historical contexts and perceive refugees as agentive subjects in order to provide aid and assistance more effectively.

In light of these anthropological interventions, we can reformulate the debate between the young activists and the federation as being about the role of politics in humanitarian aid discourse and practice. Based on dominant perspectives on humanitarian aid that emphasize an apolitical definition of aid receivers, we can interpret the Federation’s position to be one that reflects an understanding of humanitarian aid as existing fundamentally outside of the political realm. During an interview conducted a number of years after this incident, Weil explained that the Federation is not a social

action group and that they were not prepared to oppose St. Bernard Parish. It is the policy of the Federation, Weil explained, not to take a political stand on issues (interview, February 20, 2012). Notably, this is also the position taken by the St. Bernard Project in response to their critics; the Project asserts that they are not an advocacy organization, but simply an agency helping people get back into their homes (Flaherty 2010:131). These claims to political neutrality take for granted a humanitarianism that transcends the political realm. By emphasizing issues of race and systemic injustice, the young activists countered this apolitical stance by insisting that just post-Katrina rebuilding had to occur within a necessarily political framework.

Another element that Stirrat and Henkel (1997) describe as humanitarian aid's "new orthodoxy" involves the application of market principles, a defining characteristic reminiscent of early twentieth-century philanthropic consolidation. As nation-states have increasingly privatized humanitarian assistance, aid is provided through private contractors who bid in a competitive market (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Critiquing market-based aid regimes, Alexander Cooley and James Ron (2002) argue that applying market principles to humanitarian aid projects can create incentives that sometimes lead to ineffective and ethically questionable aid practices. Vincanne Adams' (2013) monograph *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* argues that such a critique is broadly applicable to government-sponsored, post-Katrina aid that enriched private corporations while failing to provide effectively for storm victims. Fueled by what Adams describes as an "affect economy," faith-based and other agencies dependent on volunteer labor, such as the St. Bernard Project, provided more effective, direct aid to those seeking to rebuild after the storm. Adams' argument

corresponds to the activist view that praised the work not-for-profit rebuilding agencies were doing while insisting that structural injustices be foregrounded or, at least, accounted for.

In line with this development orthodoxy, the Federation's choice of the St. Bernard Project emphasized market-based metrics focused on efficiency in the provision of aid. Weil's initial email highlighted this aspect of the St. Bernard Project's reputation: "The St. Bernard Project has already rebuilt over 220 houses since it started working in 2006. They are doing it on a mere \$15,000 per house and a build time of 8-12 weeks" (Federation email, August 11, 2009). In seeking out the St. Bernard Project, the Federation wanted a partner that would maximize their return on the funds and labor they wanted to invest. Analyzing the Federation's choice of the Saint Bernard Project in the context of ensuing debates, we see how a supposedly apolitical emphasis on making the Jewish contribution to post-storm recovery "visible" involved partnering with an agency with strong tangible outcomes (220 houses) while ignoring the less visible sociopolitical contexts within which this work was taking place. By contrast, the young activists insisted that the Federation envision the symbolic and political implications when deciding how to reach out beyond the Jewish community.

Jewish Activists and the Critical Social Sciences

Reading this intra-Jewish debate in terms of anthropological and other critical social scientific discourses on humanitarian aid represents a deeper connection than that between anthropological theory and ethnographic data; in fact, a number of the young activists I encountered in New Orleans were profoundly influenced by anthropological

methods, theories, and ethical concerns. The critical perspectives they studied in college informed these activists' approaches to post-Katrina aid and activism. Training in anthropology and related fields is evident in activist critiques of the Federation/St. Bernard Project partnership as representing a problematically apolitical and culturally incompetent form of humanitarian aid. Some of the activists had been exposed to anthropological critiques of humanitarian and development aid that problematically imposes external regimes of value but fails to prioritize local, culturally competent formulations of needs and of success (Escobar 1995; Escobar 2008; Mosse 2005). These same activists were particularly adept at articulating their criticisms of apolitical formulations of Jewish community aid in response to Katrina. I thus turn to a meta-critical analysis of the ways in which activists incorporated anthropological training into their approach to post-Katrina aid and activism. In particular, I connect the influence of undergraduate education to the activist ethos I observed in New Orleans. In so doing, I draw on Hilary Cunningham's research on the U.S. sanctuary movement and specifically her suggestion that anthropological categories—in her analysis, categories related to globalization—were “in the air” and thus influenced the ideologies and practices of those she studied (Cunningham 1999:583).

Challenging normative positions within the Jewish community that define any act of aid to those affected by Katrina as a virtuous act, a *mitzvah* (good deed) or *tikkun olam*, a number of the young activists I studied were concerned with the possibility that their efforts in post-Katrina New Orleans might do more harm than good.¹⁸ For those

¹⁸ Commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter, Stuart Kirsch made the astute observation that *tikkun olam* might represent a type of ethical tokenism for American Jews analogous to the role played by “corporate social responsibility” campaigns in the corporate world.

who studied anthropology, these concerns emerged directly from critical anthropological perspectives on aid and development.

Activists who took these concerns most seriously adopted a number of approaches to mitigate the potential negative effects of their efforts. One possible way to address this concern was to remain in New Orleans for enough time so that one might gain sufficient experience and cultural knowledge to do more good than harm. For example, as an undergraduate, one activist, Abby, wrote an honors thesis about the Abayudaya, a Jewish group in Uganda, that integrated ethnographic research and critical perspectives on globalization and development. In her role in New Orleans, Abby took an approach to activism that incorporated anthropological understandings of epistemology and ethics as well as a focus on the value of experience and time in order to perceive herself as possibly gaining the cultural competence necessary to do more good than harm. Abby told me:

After this year, I would like to stay in NOLA. I don't want this to simply be a pit stop where I take more than I give because at this point I feel as if I am getting a lot more than I give...I am learning a tremendous amount. I am also nervous because there is a risk involved that I will be doing more harm than good.
(interview, March 13, 2011)

The notion that a well-intentioned aid worker might unintentionally do more harm than good reflects critical anthropological views on humanitarian and development projects that do not privilege the perspective of aid receivers. Abby suggested that spending a long time with a community while learning and gaining experience might ultimately enable her to represent that community and its interests. In this activist context, the goal

of “doing good” replaces ethnographic representation as the ultimate objective of learned cultural knowledge and competence.

Another AVODAH alumna, Samantha, who was interested in digital storytelling, told me that she understood her activist work in relation to an intellectual debate between two of her undergraduate academic advisors. One advisor, who taught in the writing program at the college that Samantha attended, told Samantha that the goal of journalism is to figure out how to help people tell their own stories. In this formulation, the storyteller is both a journalist and an advocate. By contrast, an academic advisor from the journalism department insisted that the journalist owns the story. The journalist can thus tell the story as they see fit even if that goes against the ways in which the community would like to be represented. Samantha suggested a spectrum representing how journalists/story compilers relate to their work. At one end of the spectrum, Samantha described an approach that views journalists as owners. According to this view, journalists do not have a responsibility to those they write about. In this formulation, a journalist has no further obligation to those she or he writes about after conducting research interviews. At the other end of the spectrum, Samantha described a cultural arts approach that seeks to tell stories with people. The highest fulfillment of this approach is to enable other people to tell their own stories. Samantha did not align herself with the journalistic/extractive approach and did not take this advisor’s advice; instead, she allowed storytellers to subsequently edit their narratives, thus embracing a community arts rather than a journalistic approach to storytelling. Even though Samantha did not experience these debates specifically within the disciplinary context of cultural anthropology, her understanding of the ethical component of her work and her

pursuit of a more collaborative method reflects recent critical approaches to the politics of representation.

The ideas of collaboration and of creating representations that are in line with how groups might wish to represent themselves have become central to discussions of ethnographic research and writing. In particular, the notion that ethnographic writing should reflect a more collaborative project was articulated during the postcolonial crisis in anthropology (Fabian 1983; Alcoff 1991). For instance, Johannes Fabian observes that ethnographic research is an essentially relational, “coeval” activity and suggests that anthropological writing should reflect this dynamic. Similarly, Terence Turner (1991) rejects notions of objectivity in favor of an explicitly collaborative and activist approach to the project of creating anthropological representations. Turner writes:

The colonial situation that had made my original detached posture of methodological objectivity seem “natural” had been transformed by my original objects of study into a quintessentially modern struggle to control the cultural terms of collective identity and the means to represent and reproduce it. In the process, we had become coparticipants in a project of resisting, representing and rethinking, and both their “culture” and my “theory” had become, in some measure, our joint product. (Turner 1991:312)

Samantha applied her perspective while working at a student empowerment nonprofit where she started a digital media committee. In so doing, her goal was to enable students to use media to tell their own stories. Questions about representation and responsibility in anthropology and related fields have thus shaped Samantha’s activism as she integrates social justice and digital storytelling.

I would also like to mention one additional activist strategy that emerged from undergraduate training in anthropology. Jess, an activist who came to New Orleans to

participate in AVODAH, told me that she was often uncomfortable as an outsider in New Orleans. As an AVODAH corps member, Jess worked for a rebuilding organization that she criticized for the patronizing attitude she observed among many of her coworkers toward those they were meant to help. Jess specifically mentioned her undergraduate education in anthropology as a prime reason for her suspicion regarding institutional approaches that belittled or denigrated the marginalized individuals that her agency served. Furthermore, Jess was doubtful that an agency that relied heavily on short-term volunteer labor, often from outside the region, could provide culturally sensitive humanitarian aid work.

After leaving New Orleans, Jess found a job working with Hebrew Free Loan, an agency that was first established to help resettle Jewish Eastern European immigrants. Reflecting on her current job, Jess told me: “I’ve never felt this ‘comfortable’ (sort of, relatively) and not self-reflexive... because my positionality as a Jew working for other Jews it’s less complicated to me, on one level” (internet correspondence, March 14, 2013). Building on Jess’ invocation of anthropological theory to describe her discomfort working in New Orleans, we might interpret her comfort working for a Jewish organization in terms of anthropological responses to the crisis in anthropology that suggest that scholars study their own groups or even themselves. For example, we might hear echoes of Barbara Myerhoff’s (1978) decision to study aging Jews in Venice Beach, California when she originally set out to study aging Chicanos in Jess’ decision to leave New Orleans and to find employment with a Jewish agency. While Myerhoff’s reflexive turn toward the study of Jews was a response to the postcolonial identity politics of the Chicano community she proposed to study, Jess’ preference for working within the

Jewish community was informed by her exposure to anthropological critiques that problematized what it might mean to encounter cultures other than her own.

These examples illustrate the ways in which anthropology and other critical approaches that consider the politics of representation have influenced young activists in New Orleans. Because these discursive fields often contribute to activist engagements with mainstream Jewish institutions, anthropological theory and critique inform intra-Jewish debates. While I will not go so far as to draw a direct correlation between anthropological training and the activist challenge to the Federation/St. Bernard Project partnership, this meta-critical analysis suggests that we take competing understandings of aid and its politics into account when unpacking moments of protest and rupture among young activists in New Orleans. In a broader frame, this analysis suggests that we attend to the ways in which anthropological theory and critique might have informed and defined the nongovernmental political sphere.

Forming the “Jewish Channel”

As predicted in Stern’s critique of the community council and as demonstrated in the unsatisfying protest actions against the Federation/St. Bernard Project partnership, integrating a representative function into the field of American Jewish philanthropy can lead to disunity when there are those who do not feel represented by official community positions and actions. For young Jewish activists in New Orleans, a sense that mainstream philanthropic organizations might not represent them accurately led to alternative formulations of Jewish community. For example, the youth activist challenge to the Federation/St. Bernard Project partnership and the ensuing controversy led to the

establishment of the NOLA Havurah, the first of several attempts to formalize and centralize a Jewish social justice community. Other attempts included the formation of a Jewish LGBT advocacy group, an alternative prayer group, a justice and Jewish thought reading group, and a number of additional efforts to establish Jewish social justice organizing and advocacy initiatives. I note that most of these efforts were relatively short-lived attempts to concretize a vibrant youth activist community and reflected a particular moment in the history of Jewish New Orleans at which young activists played a central role in defining the stakes of intra-Jewish debates.

Alongside these formal attempts to centralize the social justice community, I witnessed the growth of a Jewish activist enclave fondly dubbed “the Jewish Channel.” I conclude with a discussion of the Jewish Channel in order to illustrate the processes of Jewish social justice community formation in opposition to the mainstream Jewish community and also to think through the ways in which Jewish social justice activists literally and physically positioned themselves in and in relation to New Orleans and its history.

The Irish Channel, a neighborhood that runs alongside the Mississippi River in uptown New Orleans, is named for the immigrants who first settled there in the early nineteenth century (Campanella 2006). The neighborhood’s pothole-marred streets are lined with modest single and double shotgun homes, a building style typical of older New Orleans developments that were originally (and that often remain) populated by working-class communities. The Irish Channel’s northern boundary with the Garden District is Magazine Street, a major New Orleans thoroughfare known for its boutique shops and restaurants. Located on high ground, with relatively affordable rents and easy access to

Magazine Street, the Irish Channel became popular with young transplants and activists who arrived to the city in the years following the storm. Despite several shifts in population over the centuries, the neighborhood's Irish identity is reaffirmed each year on St. Patrick's Day when the city's Irish residents, though no longer concentrated in the area, parade through the neighborhood while tossing basic soup ingredients—cabbages, potatoes, and carrots—at often inebriated spectators who eagerly await these offerings.

The Jewish Channel coalesced when members of the second AVODAH cohort joined a group of alumni from the program's first year already living in the neighborhood. Their numbers were augmented when the New Orleans Moishe House, a foundation-subsidized, residential Jewish center, relocated from Broadmoor, a low-lying neighborhood heavily impacted by the storm, to the Channel. This core group of young Jews—about ten to twenty at any one time—living in the Irish Channel represented the geographical center of a small community of progressive Jewish youth activists. This group would regularly gather for Sabbath meals, discussion groups, and movie screenings at which they would discuss Judaism, social justice, and the connections between the two. Though also fully engaged in the many frivolities that define New Orleans culture, this community was quite serious about its commitment to social justice activism and discourse. An ethos of intensity and urgency was manifest in their daily and ongoing discussions about New Orleans, social justice, and Judaism. These conversations often took place over daily, family-style meals, larger potluck events, and barter/craft parties. By living in close proximity to one another, by defining themselves and their neighborhood in relation to their Jewish identity, and by emphasizing their progressive

political commitments, these activists perceived themselves as establishing a Jewish social justice community.

This small and yet vivacious cluster of young activist Jews developed a reputation among Jews living in other neighborhoods who would regularly travel to The Jewish Channel in order to participate in reading groups, social events, and Sabbath dinners. Activists from elsewhere in the United States periodically arrived to New Orleans to participate in this Jewish youth activist community for a few days or a few months at a time. AVODAH alumni who had left the city returned to visit and even to live semi-permanently after leaving to pursue other opportunities. For a few years roughly corresponding to the time when I conducted my research, New Orleans, and the Jewish Channel in particular, came to symbolize a location where one could realize a Jewish social justice communal identity.

This act of geographic appropriation reflected the sense that these young activists established a Jewish community that was at once integrated with and, at the same time, separate from and sometimes opposed to the longstanding Jewish institutions and congregations in New Orleans. This sense of identification and dissonance extended beyond the local Jewish community as this group of young Jews struggled to define their relationship to a dense network of local, national, and international Jewish institutions that claimed to represent them and provided them with both opportunities and constraints (e.g. the Federation, AVODAH, Moishe House, and so forth).

Although an outsider would never confuse the Irish Channel for a Jewish ethnic enclave, to the young Jews who lived in the neighborhood, the area had become “Jewish space.” Here, I draw on Diana Pinto’s definition of Jewish space as “an open cultural and

even political agora where Jews intermingle with others qua Jews, and not just as citizens. It is... present anywhere Jews and non-Jews interact on Jewish themes or where a Jewish voice can make itself felt” (Pinto 2002: 251). This definition of Jewish space and its emphasis on Jewish engagement with non-Jews highlights a sense of Jewish identity focused on an ethical engagement with non-Jews. In other words, the Jewish geography these young activists conceptualized helped to concretize a shared activist identity defined by acts of service and social justice for non-Jewish others.

The “Jewish Channel” was a short-lived phenomenon. While it coalesced as the area where many of the young activists lived a few months before I arrived in October 2010, it quickly became the gentrifying neighborhood to avoid. In August 2011, at the end of the 2010-2011 AVODAH program year, two of the corps members moved from the AVODAH residence to the Jewish Channel and became integrated into that social world, but most members of that year’s cohort moved into a home in the predominantly African American Seventh Ward. The decision to live in the Seventh Ward was often framed ideologically. Those who moved to the Seventh Ward expressed a desire to leave the mostly white Uptown neighborhoods surrounding the AVODAH house; these activists also expressed an interest in moving closer to the communities they served. This act of solidarity was complicated by a concern that moving to the Seventh Ward might also contribute to gentrification.

During an interview I conducted a few weeks after the end of the 2010-2011 AVODAH program year, Joanna, an AVODAH alumna who lived in the Irish Channel, told me that she would have preferred for those who had just moved to the Seventh Ward to live closer to the Irish Channel. While the distance between the Seventh Ward and the

Irish Channel is only about four miles, Joanna understood the decision to live in the Seventh Ward as a rejection of the informal community building efforts occurring in the Irish Channel (interview, August 25, 2011). Interestingly, Joanna did not pursue a career in social justice advocacy after AVODAH but instead went on to pursue a career in mainstream Jewish institutions. The dynamics within the AVODAH alumni community index the ways in which differences between universalism and particularism emerge relationally and often reproduce themselves within both formal and informal Jewish social justice contexts.

In *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews*, Jonathan Woocher suggests that modern Jewish history must be understood as an ongoing process of reformulation. Woocher writes, “its products—the diverse forms of Jewishness manifest today—constitute tenuously successful responses to the dual challenge of Jewish self-definition in the modern world” (Woocher 1986:1). By concluding this chapter with a description of the Jewish Channel, one in a series of efforts to establish a Jewish social justice community defined by religious, ethnic/cultural, and political investments, I highlight one example of the ongoing processes of reimagining what it means to be Jewish and to live in a Jewish community. While the small-scale community formation efforts exemplified by the Jewish Channel and broader national efforts to establish a Jewish social justice movement represent a recent development, I suggest that efforts to reformulate Jewish life are always also shaped by the decisions and actions of earlier generations. In the formation of the Jewish Channel, we can thus see refractions of the World War II-era decision to formalize the Jewish Federation’s representative function as

well as of Stern's concerns about the possible consequences when strong disagreements regarding the Jewish public arise.

CHAPTER THREE

Reciprocating Justice: Political Dissidence and Jewish Privilege

Introduction

Why Jewish social justice? What accounts for the emergence, growth, and influence of Jewish social justice organizations, theologies, and activism? In this chapter, I argue that Jewish progressive youth activism emerges from and is defined by the tension between the experience of middle- and upper-class security and privilege and the perception of the Jewish establishment as conservative and overly focused on historical tropes of oppression and marginalization. Although most Jews lean to the left politically, young Jews, and especially young Jewish radicals, criticize the Jewish establishment for its political conservatism (always a relative term) and for its particularistic concern with Jewish needs. In contrast to Jewish communal narratives that emphasize marginalization, young Jewish progressives often perceive themselves and the American Jewish community in relation to Jewish power that is defined by the community's political, economic, and social successes.

The chapter begins with a workshop in which young Jewish activists in New Orleans discussed the field of Jewish philanthropy in order to situate themselves in relation to this institutional matrix. The bulk of the chapter focuses on a number of personal narratives that describe the ways in which young activists define themselves politically and socially in relation to Jewish institutional structures and frameworks.

These complex narratives weave together experiences of affiliation, disaffiliation, comfort, and dissonance as they reveal a number of different approaches to the project of Jewish social justice activism. I introduce the idea of Jewish privilege as a category crucial to the understanding of contemporary Jewish youth activism, and draw on anthropological theories of gift and exchange in order to suggest that an awareness of privilege leads young Jews to understand their activism in terms of reciprocity, as return gifts for the benefits they receive as privileged members of society.

Lila Corwin Berman (2007) begins to theorize this dynamic in an article that considers ambivalence toward power and middle-class status among Jews who moved to the suburbs in the post-World War II era. Her article concludes with a comment on the fraught political allegiances of Jewish baby boomers, the first generation of American Jews born into middle-class comfort:

Their children, baby boomers, were reared with a sense of economic and cultural security but also with access to a vocabulary of ambivalence. With their parents, they lived the tension of middle-class arrival and, sometimes, turned that tension into revolution when they protested the power structures of American and Jewish life.

Ambivalence about middle-classness represented a new chapter in a long story of Jews' ambivalence toward power. Most specifically, Jews worried about the price of claiming power—and in some senses, superiority—in a non-Jewish system. (Corwin Berman 2007:433)

The tensions of middle-class arrival are encoded in Philip Roth's (1959) *Goodbye Columbus*. Neil Klugman, Roth's protagonist, is pushed and pulled between the immigrant neighborhood where he grew up and the suburban, assimilated affluence of his love interest, Brenda Patimkin. Roth's characters represent the generation considered in

Corwin Berman's analysis and reflect a moment in which the physical and existential realities of working-class existence remained accessible.

Jumping forward a generation, I consider the children of Jewish baby boomers, a group that is now increasingly distant from the "tension of middle-class arrival." Young Jews coming of age today have little direct access to Jewish working-class places and tropes and they increasingly conflate Jewishness with affluence and privilege.

Progressive activism among young Jews is thus best understood in relation to privilege and, more specifically, in relation to "Jewish privilege," a term I use to discuss the opportunities given to young Jews in order to encourage Jewish identification.

Progressive activists often use and discuss the term "privilege" in order to conceptualize class ambivalence in relation to issues of gender and race. Privilege, in this framework, describes unearned social benefits and explains why it is that some members of society are more likely to succeed than others. Alongside white and male privilege, "Jewish privilege" can be used to describe the unearned social benefits that young Jews often perceive to be a defining element of contemporary American Jewish life. Thus, Jewish middle-class ambivalence is further dramatized when young Jews perceive themselves as receiving concrete material benefits as a result of their membership in the Jewish community. In particular, I argue that efforts to bolster levels of Jewish identification in response to national Jewish population surveys released in 1990 and 2000 that reported high levels of assimilation and intermarriage have produced a generation of Jews whose experience of Jewish life is defined by opportunities presented to them as a result of their having been born Jewish.¹⁹ Thus, Jewish privilege is defined not only by the

¹⁹ In 2013, the Pew Research Center released another Jewish population survey that once again reported increasingly high levels of assimilation and intermarriage.

socioeconomic success of the Jewish community but also by attempts to direct Jewish philanthropy toward the project of “Jewish continuity,” of maintaining and reproducing American Jews and American Jewish institutions.

In New Orleans, I observed activists to be outspoken about and aware of issues of gender expression and normativity. In part because AVODAH tended to attract predominantly female participants, the dynamic Jewish activist community in New Orleans was disproportionately female as well; it is important to note that the activists I discuss in relation to experiences of Jewish privilege all happen to be women. While male members of the Jewish social justice community also expressed awareness of Jewish privilege, the most compelling narratives of situating and resituating oneself in relation to Jewish privilege were shared by female activists. Thus, this anthropological analysis of the ways in which social justice activism can emerge from an experience of Jewish privilege is also a story about being a young, Jewish person—and perhaps, in particular, a young, Jewish woman—in America.

The Jewish Establishment

In a workshop entitled “Who Speaks for Me?” that was presented to the 2010-11 cohort of AVODAH, a senior Jewish social justice professional described the American Jewish mainstream in relation to the following political criteria. First, the presenter asserted that one could look at whether an organization is focused internally on the Jewish community or externally on those outside of the Jewish community. Most mainstream Jewish organizations are concerned with supporting Jewish communal life even when engaging those outside of the Jewish community. In contrast, Jewish social

justice organizations and activists tend to see social justice objectives as ends in themselves. Second, the presenter proposed that workshop participants consider the politics of Jewish communal organizations in relation to the American political spectrum and suggested that, although most American Jewish organizations are slightly left of center, there are those that have a right- or left-wing agenda. Jewish social justice activists and organizations tend to situate themselves farther to the left than mainstream Jewish organizations.

Lastly, the presenter suggested that the Jewish institutional landscape could be understood in relation to support for the State of Israel. In particular, the presenter mentioned the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella agency whose website asserts its role as “the proven and effective voice of organized American Jewry.”²⁰ The various Jewish religious denominations are members of the Conference of Presidents, as are the major organizations that make up the mainstream American Jewish community. The Conference of Presidents upholds the “Israel paradigm” wherein membership in the American Jewish community requires support for the State of Israel. It is thus commonly argued that supporting Israeli government policies is a prerequisite for being part of the American Jewish mainstream. While Jewish social justice organizations tend to ignore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict altogether in order to avoid antagonizing the American Jewish mainstream, young Jewish social justice activists often discuss their feelings of alienation from mainstream Jewish institutions in relation to their more critical approach to the State of Israel and its policies.

²⁰ Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations website, <http://www.conferenceofpresidents.org/about>, accessed October 28, 2013.

In order to situate the AVODAH corps members within this institutional matrix, the presenter drew a Venn diagram with two overlapping circles [Fig. 4]. Being located within either one of the circles represents membership in the American Jewish mainstream. The right circle reflects positions or organizations that deal with Israel. The left circle includes mainstream Jewish organizations that deal with everything else. The presenter suggested that organizations can be more politically progressive, and still be considered part of the American Jewish mainstream, if they avoid discussion of Israel. Thus, organizations such as Jewish Funds for Justice (now Bend the Arc) and AVODAH can get away with being more progressive so long as they avoid discussion of Israel.

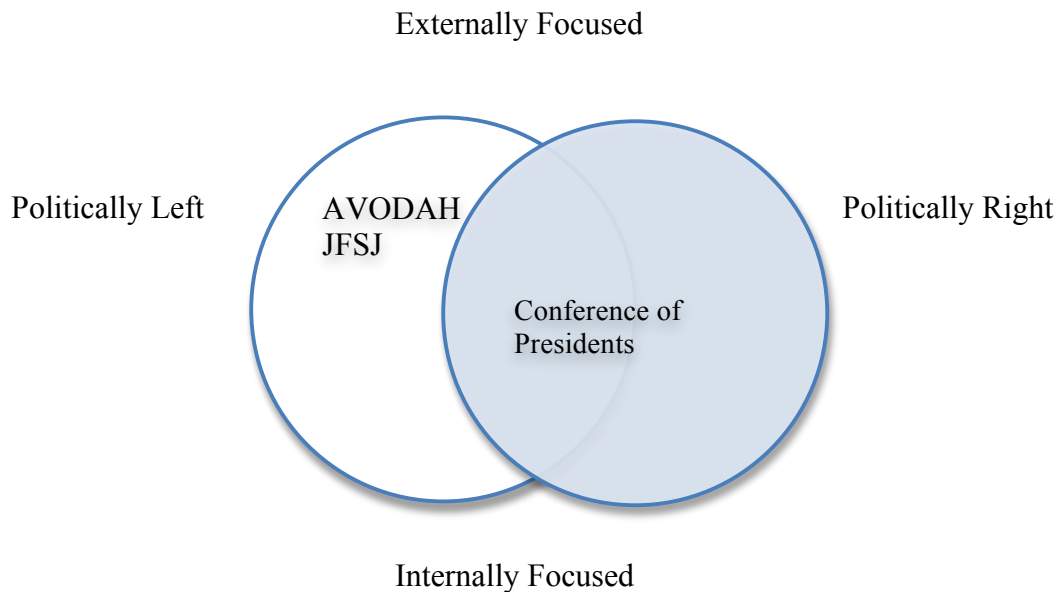


Figure 5: The presenter’s map of the Jewish organizational world

The inclusion of this workshop as part of the yearly AVODAH curriculum underscores the value that the organization’s leadership places on teaching young Jews about their position within the American Jewish establishment. The implicit argument here is that Jewish social justice efforts should work to challenge the politics of the American Jewish

mainstream. And though the Jewish social justice activists highlighted in the remainder of this essay do, in fact, think of themselves in these terms, as part of a progressive alternative to an overly conservative American Jewish establishment, the young Jews who took part in this particular presentation did not perceive themselves, at that moment, to be either implicated or represented by the organizations included in the diagram. The post-workshop evaluations indicated that the majority of the corps members who participated in the workshop did not find the program particularly interesting, useful, or relevant. Although they participated in a number of concrete Jewish communities, including the small community of Jewish service corps members, workshop participants did not see themselves, at that moment, as part of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) visually represented by the Venn diagram. However, as I discuss below, Jewish activists, including many alumni of this service corps, often define their identity in relation to the American Jewish establishment. In the sections that follow, I consider the narratives of youth activists in relation to this institutional matrix and in relation to New Orleans, a location that functions as an imaginative site for the working out of identity and status anxieties.²¹

A Narrative Approach to Jewish Social Justice Activism

Jewish identity formation often involves both literal and figurative acts of moral and geographical positioning. In this section, I explore the idea of moral and geographical positioning through a series of three narratives that illustrate the complex and often ethically charged moments when young Jews situate themselves in relation to

²¹ This formulation comes out of an exchange with Judith Weisenfeld at the Princeton Religion in the Americas Workshop.

Jewish organizations. The social justice activists I studied adapted a variety of approaches regarding the integration of their Jewish and social justice identities. Samantha's narrative illustrates the ways in which some activists embraced Jewish social justice organizations and communities composed primarily of people who shared their progressive political positions. Alternatively, Shoshie's narratives highlights the ways in which Jewish activists encourage mainstream Jewish organizations and communities to be more invested in social justice and to change the balance of commitments in favor of a more universalistic ethic. Though I have suggested two rather neat categories, Maya's narrative portrays how navigating Jewish and progressive political identities often involves a complex admixture of the two. In addition to the Jewish social justice activists discussed in this essay, I also encountered activists who ultimately rejected the idea of integrating Judaism and social justice in favor of a Judaism that was not infused with social justice or social justice activism that was not integrated with their Jewish identity.

Some young Jewish activists avoid mainstream Jewish contexts in favor of more exclusive Jewish social justice contexts that reflect their political ideologies. For example, Samantha, the activist who majored in media and journalism prior to moving to New Orleans in order to take part in AVODAH, reported that her decision to move to New Orleans represented an attempt to reenter "Jewish life." As a child, Samantha participated in Jewish communal life in a medium-sized northeastern city where she lived with her family. Her family was a member of a local Conservative synagogue and Samantha attended Jewish summer camp, was involved in Israel advocacy, and participated in some Jewish youth group activities. Though Samantha did not consider

her family to be highly “religious,” these activities reflected a strong cultural commitment to Jewish identity and community.

Preserving memories of the Holocaust played an important role in Samantha’s early Jewish identity, as her mother was active in efforts to document the narratives of local Holocaust survivors. Inspired by her mother’s work, Samantha attended March of the Living, a two-step Jewish teen travel program that began with a weeklong tour of Jewish heritage sites in Poland. This segment of the program culminates in a dramatic three-kilometer silent march from Birkenau to Auschwitz on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day. The program then continues with a weeklong tour of Israel that coincides with Israeli Independence Day. This journey embodies Israeli nationalist tropes that connect the establishment of the state of Israel with the destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust. The program was established in 1988, at a time when the American Jewish community had become increasingly focused on Holocaust remembrance and commemoration. Since that time, March of the Living has become one of many immersive Jewish travel experiences focused on providing intensive, all-encompassing Jewish frameworks for young Jews.

It was as a participant on March of the Living that Samantha first recalled distancing herself from the Jewish community. Samantha reported that March of the Living “was a very negative experience for me... The March of the Living forbade students from purchasing anything in Poland... Essentially we went to the most brutal camps and then to Israel. This experience was the first time that I stepped out of the Jewish community” (interview, April 21, 2011). Samantha understood the itinerary and the trip regulations to reflect an “us versus them” mentality that implicitly framed all non-

Jewish Poles negatively, as dangerous “others.” In fact, current trip rules stipulate that participants are not allowed to purchase any food in Poland (but are permitted to purchase other goods) to ensure that trip participants adhere to Jewish dietary requirements and that all food for the program is brought from Israel. Even if the trip regulations were less restrictive than Samantha suggested in her interview, it is certainly possible that some trip participants and staff expressed a categorical, anti-Polish attitude.²²

In addition to taking offense at the trip’s rhetoric and regulations, Samantha found herself alienated from the other trip participants. Samantha perceived these participants to be hypocritical in their insistence that Samantha accord with certain religious norms while acting in ways that Samantha found disrespectful:

I was told that the trip was going to be egalitarian but it wasn’t egalitarian. I was yelled at [by another student] for wearing my nametag that had a prayer on it in the bathroom. At the same time, there were kids flirting with one another in the bathroom that was proximate to the gas chamber. (interview, April 21, 2011)

Standing in a concentration camp while participating in a program that highlighted the camp’s role as a symbol of Jewish memory, history, and oppression, Samantha repositioned herself in relation to the Jewish community. Ironically, it was in this symbolically charged location, to which she was brought in the hope that it might inspire a more deeply felt connection to Jewish collective identity and to Jewish history, that Samantha sensed herself—for the first time—to be outside of the Jewish ethnonational collective.

²² Erica Leher’s (2013) *Jewish Poland Revisited* provides an account of Jewish heritage travel to Poland that considers the complex ways in which non-Jewish Poles have engaged and appropriated Poland’s Jewish history in the post-Soviet era.

Frustrated with the blend of particularistic and nationalist messages that were encoded into the March of the Living program, Samantha viewed the program as emblematic of a type of crass particularism focused on “why Jews are the best” (interview, April 21, 2011). Sensing that many mainstream Jewish experiences reflected this same attitude, Samantha distanced herself from Jewish communal life and was not active in a Jewish community while in college: “Because of March of the Living, I got turned off, I wasn’t involved in college” (interview, July 16, 2013). Despite describing herself as not being particularly active in Jewish communal life, Samantha told me that she continued to observe the Jewish holidays. By the end of college, she found herself interested in engaging institutional formulations of Jewish community:

During college, I was explaining Judaism a lot but wasn’t growing as a Jew and I wasn’t learning about Judaism. I wanted to not be the person explaining. Many of the other students who observed Jewish holidays were from New England and would go home. Observing holidays became a solitary and totally separate experience. (interview, July 16, 2013)

After graduation, Samantha moved to New Orleans in order to join AVODAH. Post-Katrina New Orleans provided Samantha with an opportunity to locate herself “inside” a Jewish community that also shared her universalistic political orientation. In the years following Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans became a location where young Jews could actively engage their Jewish identity among a community of like-minded others who were very serious about their progressive political commitments.

At the conclusion of the service corps year, Samantha moved into the New Orleans Moishe House, a “Jewish Channel” residence that is sponsored by a national nonprofit. The organization provides residents with a housing subsidy and programming

budget on the condition that these residents organize and host programs for their Jewish peers. Samantha decided to join the New Orleans Moishe House along with another service corps alumna because of the subsidized rent and in the hope that she could continue living in a Jewish intentional community committed to social justice activism.

Each individual Moishe House (such as the New Orleans house) ultimately reflects the political and social orientations of the residents. Some larger American cities have a number of different Moishe Houses that cater to different Jewish constituencies. For instance, there are three Moishe Houses in Chicago, one focused on service, a second that caters to Russian-speaking Jews, and a third that hosts more general social programming and activities.²³ Though some Moishe Houses have an explicitly progressive political orientation, most are likely to be more oriented toward social gatherings that are not political in nature.

The sponsoring organization encouraged Samantha to attend a national retreat that brought together Moishe House residents from around the country. At the retreat, Samantha once again found herself at odds with what she perceived as a mainstream Jewish framework. In particular, Samantha mentioned two aspects of the retreat that she found alienating. The first, and most significant, was that Samantha perceived some participants to be unaware of the socioeconomic disparities that exist in the United States. For instance, Samantha mentioned her discomfort with one male retreat participant who claimed that there was no problem with access to healthy food in the United States. As a professional activist working with a youth empowerment nonprofit that includes a focus on food access, Samantha found this position especially troubling. In registering this

²³ Moishe House website, www.moishehouse.org, accessed October 15th, 2013.

critique, Samantha expressed her disinterest in Jewish communities where members did not share her critical awareness of the social inequalities that exist in American society.

In her critique of the Moishe House retreat, Samantha also noted that the gathering became a “hookup” scene, a hyper-sexualized space where participants sought out short-term sexual relationships with other participants. In contrast to the national trend of disproportionate female participation in Jewish programming, Samantha observed Moishe House residents to be predominantly male. Samantha also reported her frustration with men on the retreat who boasted about how much they enjoyed “hooking up” with the people who came to their house for programs. As with March of the Living, Samantha criticized mainstream Jewish contexts for their politics and for the frivolous, anti-feminist, and perhaps disrespectful sexuality that she observed.

Back in New Orleans, Samantha was able to surround herself with likeminded others who were invested in cultivating a Jewish social justice identity. Samantha was primarily seeking Jewish community contexts where progressive political positions were shared. Though Moishe House represents a relatively recent Jewish communal innovation, for Samantha, the culture of the retreat represented a mainstream Jewish cultural framework that she found troubling. Her narrative reflects the experiences of Jewish activists who seek exclusive Jewish social justice frameworks. Though reliant on Jewish institutional support, activists such as Samantha are not particularly interested in Jewish communal contexts that do not reflect their political ideologies. Samantha thus situated herself both within and outside of the Jewish community.

A contrasting narrative is focused on bringing social justice ideologies and projects into those very framework and contexts that Samantha sought to avoid. Shoshie

identifies as a religious Jew and is committed to the observance of Jewish law. Shoshie's faith orientation stands in contrast to most of the people I interviewed in New Orleans who defined their Jewish identity in cultural or ethnic terms. This commitment reflects her upbringing in a Jewish home in which religious observance and political progressivism were both highly valued. Although Shoshie grew up attending an Orthodox synagogue where women did not actively participate in the service and where men and women were separated by a *mechitza* partition, she now advocates Jewish traditionalism that integrates egalitarian principles so that women can participate equally in Jewish ritual and practice.

Despite her many positive associations with Jewish life, Shoshie is often critical of the politics of mainstream Jewish organizations. She values the distinct Jewish social justice organizations and communities that have been established over the past twenty-five years but also views these efforts as being marginal within the Jewish community. Shoshie's ultimate vision for the Jewish community includes the integration of social justice ideals as part of the ethos of mainstream Jewish communal contexts. Shoshie expressed this position in a draft blog post she prepared for *AVODAH: Jewish Voices Pursuing Justice*, a blog hosted by AVODAH that provides participants and alumni with a forum to reflect on their experiences in the program. Composed (though never published) in late August 2011, nearly a year after she completed AVODAH, the post represents an extended reflection on the possibilities as well as the potential pitfalls associated with integrating Judaism and social justice:

As an AVODAH alum, I have had the privilege of being a member of a community devoted to values that I hold dear as an individual. I would hope that many of us, who may have been disillusioned with Jewish institutions in the past

(maybe because we did not feel that certain identities or politics regarding Israel were welcomed there), found comfort in a Jewish collective that externalized that to which we are committed internally... One way of ensuring that justice is a part of what we [do] as Jewish collectives, is building our own communities that prioritize this intersection; for example, living in Moishe Houses engaged in campaigns for food justice or adequate housing, starting Jewish social-justice oriented book clubs, or initiating progressive prayer spaces that welcome everyone as they are. Yet while these temporal communities are necessary havens for those of us frustrated and silenced by established Jewish institutions, they are not the most sustainable alternative... What if we actually worked from within, challenged the establishment—synagogues, federations, schools? Maybe they do not live out some of the values we hold dear, they may even actively strike down that which we build up. Yet I wonder if it might be possible, worthwhile, to figure out how to encourage their engagement in discussions of inequality and possibly even action. What if we did not immediately write off Jewish communities as hierarchical, conservative and uncommitted to our passions? What if we tried not only to build from scratch on the outskirts of the Jewish landscape, but also to work and challenge within resource-rich organizations? What would it look like to use our communal power produced by our shared AVODAH experience to impact the larger Jewish collective, to close the gap between our progressive hopes and institutional realities? (email correspondence, August 23, 2011)

I have quoted this blog post at length because it addresses a number of critical issues for understanding Jewish social justice activism. First, the post assumes a readership of individuals who feel politically alienated from the Jewish communal mainstream.

Shoshie's political progressivism, especially her dovish and critical approach to the politics of Israel-Palestine, were often hidden and "internalized" in mainstream Jewish contexts. Jewish social justice frameworks thus allow activists like Shoshie to "externalize that to which we are committed internally." Jewish social justice organizations, discussions circles, and prayer groups constitute safe and perhaps sacred spaces for the voicing of political opposition and resistance to the Jewish mainstream.

Shoshie defines Jewish social justice activism not only as a context for the expression of progressive political positions but also, and perhaps primarily, as a collective effort to reorient mainstream Jewish life. Thus, in this blog post, Shoshie

encourages her colleagues to think about how they might integrate themselves and their activist positions into more mainstream Jewish contexts. Shoshie perceives herself to be in some sense within and responsible for the American Jewish establishment. It is this deeply cultural sense of membership in the Jewish collective that leads Shoshie to imagine Jewish social justice activism as defined primarily in relation to Jewish institutions, even if efforts to integrate the two might not succeed.

I have focused on Shoshie and Samantha in order to illustrate two models for Jewish social justice activism. In the first model, progressive Jewish organizations and communities represent ends in themselves, providing progressive Jews with frameworks in which the perceived tensions between progressive political ideologies and Jewish identity are resolved. The explicitly progressive and Jewish ethos of organizations such as AVODAH thus provides institutional frameworks for the expression of progressive Jewish identities. The second model imagines separate Jewish social justice communities and organizations as staging grounds for changing the politics of the American Jewish establishment. The next ethnographic example illustrates the ways in which progressive political and Jewish identities manifest in complex ways that do not conform to any easily defined ideological position. As important as ideology might be, young Jews, like all young people, must navigate a variety of opportunities and constraints as they chart out their lives.

When Maya first visited post-Katrina New Orleans in 2007 as part of a short-term service trip that was sponsored by a mainstream Jewish organization, she found herself in a familiar situation. Maya felt marginalized because of her political and ethical positions. Troubled by the fact that the stories of upper middle-class Jews were highlighted when

the plight of the poor Black New Orleanians they were helping were so much more dire, Maya felt herself to be at odds with the ways in which Hurricane Katrina was presented in a mainstream Jewish institutional context. In an interview, Maya described her sense of alienation:

While at the synagogue, there was a discussion of Katrina and its aftermath. I thought it was hypocritical for privileged Jews to be talking about Katrina. I didn't want to be a dick and tried to be respectful. The Katrina stories that the privileged Jews told were much less intense than the stories of those whose homes the group was working to rebuild. I asked a question about privilege. The question was not answered. (interview, April 21, 2011)

Even on a service trip to New Orleans, a context that might seem to reflect a progressive politics, Maya felt herself to be at odds with the political implications of highlighting Jewish Katrina narratives. For Maya, participation in Jewish communal programs tended to involve a sense of dissonance, a sense of being an alienated insider. In particular, Maya mentioned her feelings of alienation at the Jewish high school she attended in Toronto, Canada, where she was raised. As a result, Maya imagined an affiliation with Jewish life that was always in tension with deeply felt progressive—and perhaps radical—political positions.

And yet, Maya continued to pursue opportunities within the Jewish community. After completing a master's degree in the spring of 2008, Maya was selected for two Jewish community-sponsored service fellowships. The first was an international fellowship through which she would work with the Jewish community in Moldova and the second was AVODAH. Maya ultimately chose to work in New Orleans helping non-Jews because, even in Eastern Europe, Maya perceived the Jewish community to be better off than the surrounding non-Jewish community. Maya told me that she went

online and researched the infrastructure that was available to the community: “The Jews in Moldova/Bellarus had more than non-Jews and didn’t need my help. They had loads of money and energy” (interview, April 21, 2011).²⁴ Initially hesitant about joining AVODAH, Maya reported that being a service corps member was the first time in her life that she did not feel like an outsider in the Jewish community (interview, April 21, 2011). In New Orleans, Maya had finally found a Jewish community that reflected her own political sensibilities and in which participation did not require opposition and dissonance.

Despite her general sense of alienation within most Jewish communities, Maya ultimately decided to pursue a position of leadership within the Jewish community as a liberal rabbi. When we spoke prior to her beginning rabbinical school, Maya imagined a career in the American rabbinate, somewhat paradoxically, as a way to influence those outside of the Jewish community. Her decision to join the rabbinate reflected Maya’s self-perception as a consummate insider-outsider, a tension that defined her active and yet often antagonistic participation in Jewish life: “I wanted to become a rabbi at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in order to become a prison chaplain... Jews don’t listen to Rabbis. Non-Jews respect rabbinical voice. It provides one with a degree of authority, with a moral authority” (interview, April 21, 2011). By joining the rabbinate, Maya is displaying a very high level of commitment to Jewish life and practice. And yet, at the same time, Maya imagines herself using the rabbinate to achieve social justice objectives outside of the Jewish community.

²⁴ This claim reflects Maya’s understanding of her previous life decision and may or may not correspond to quantitative socioeconomic data.

Maya imagines a career in the rabbinate strategically, that is, as a way to leverage Jewish privilege to achieve universalistic goals. The notion that affiliation with the Jewish community can be utilized strategically to achieve social justice objectives helps to explain the growth of Jewish social justice organizations and activists. One impetus for the establishment of Jewish social justice initiatives is strategic in nature. Social justice activists from Jewish backgrounds seek to capitalize on the relatively high economic, social, and political position of American Jewry to achieve their organizing objectives. Maya's decision to pursue the rabbinate reflects her perception of the prestige of Jewish clergy outside of the Jewish community, which is perhaps greater than the prestige of clergy within the Jewish community. Maya's acute sense of Jewish power can be contrasted with the lack of awareness that most American Jews have of the increasing political clout of the American Jewish community. J.J. Goldberg (1996), a journalist and frequent commentator on contemporary Jewish life and culture, notes that most American Jews remain oblivious to the influence and power of the American Jewish community and continue to view American Jews as a vulnerable minority:

Politicians and diplomats point to the Jewish community as a model of success and assurance. American Jews—by a large and growing majority—consider themselves to be members of an isolated, vulnerable minority... So glaring is the contrast between how Jews are seen and how they see themselves, that Jewish social scientists speak almost casually of the “perception gap” between reality and Jewish sensibilities (Goldberg 1996:6).

In contrast to Goldberg's general appraisal of Jewish self-perception, young American Jewish social justice activists such as Samantha, Shoshie, and Maya see themselves as inhabiting a highly advantageous social, economic, and political position in American

society. This awareness is central to the ways in which young Jews understand themselves as privileged white and Jewish activists. While some activists differentiate between the implications of white privilege and their Jewishness, an identity marker they associate with a history of oppression, other activists have now integrated a sense of Jewish and white privilege.

Reciprocating Jewish Privilege

In the midst of a discussion of Jewish youth activism, a senior administrator working for a Jewish social justice organization told me that she had grown weary of the ongoing and frequent discussions of privilege that occurred among young activist Jews. She even exclaimed hyperbolically, “If I hear the word privilege one more time, I might shoot myself” (interview, December 16, 2011). This statement reflects the centrality of the idea of “privilege” to the ideology of young activists—both Jewish and non-Jewish—who come from wealthy backgrounds.

Activists, sociologists, and scholars in other disciplines have defined and theorized the concept of privilege. Working in the field of counselor education, Linda Black and David Stone (2005) define privilege as a “special advantage” that is unearned, connected to “a preferred status or rank,” and “exercised...to the exclusion or detriment of others” (Black and Stone 2005:244). Furthermore, those who benefit from privilege tend to be unaware of unearned benefits, believing that they deserve and have earned their high status positions. Peggy McIntosh (2004), an anti-racism activist and women’s studies scholar, famously compared white privilege to “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks”

(McIntosh 2004: 188). Cultivating an awareness of privilege and fostering ongoing discussions of what this privilege might entail represent normative and perhaps ritualistic practices in white activist circles. These practices work to unsettle the assumption that American society is a meritocracy.²⁵ A crucial element of these discussions is the idea that those who benefit from social privilege are *ipso facto* implicated in the perpetuation of social inequality.

The senior administrator's position—that young Jews were somewhat “obsessed” with the notion of privilege—reflects the key generational transition discussed in chapter two. Even the parents of the activists I studied had more direct experiences with Jewish vulnerability than their children; these experiences included living through the Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 and witnessing mass efforts to liberate Russian Jewry. Furthermore, the young activists I studied tended to view the State of Israel differently than their parents. While their parents tended to see the State of Israel in relation to Jewish vulnerability and the Holocaust, young Jews have grown up with a State of Israel that is a military power and that is often perceived as acting problematically and aggressively towards Israeli Arabs and Palestinians living in the occupied territories. Young activists born in the 1980s and early 1990s have been taught about Jewish oppression, but this history does not correspond to their lived experience of socioeconomic success. Despite learning about Jewish social exclusion, the Holocaust, and the early vulnerability of the State of Israel, the young activists I studied defined themselves in relation to privilege—not only “white privilege” but also “Jewish privilege.”

²⁵ For example, see activist Joseph Barndt's (2007) anti-racism training manual *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America*.

Discussions of privilege were common and recurring for the young Jewish activists I studied in New Orleans. These discussions occurred both in formal contexts such as educational programs and in everyday discourse, where conversations on the topic were frequent and ongoing. Participants in AVODAH often mentioned a series of workshops on the topic of privilege that were given by Rachel Luft, a sociology professor at the University of New Orleans. Luft's workshops were commonly described as the most valued part of a yearlong AVODAH curriculum that considered the intersection of Judaism and social justice. These workshops were valued, in particular, because they focused on "intersectionality," that is, on the ways in which various identities intersect with one another. Intersectionality refers, for example, to individuals who might identify "as women of color" (Crenshaw 1991:1243) and whose experiences are not fully accounted for by either feminist or antiracist discourses. The idea of "intersectionality" helped the mostly female corps members sort through their identities as white, Jewish women.

Samantha described how, early in her time as a corps member, she and her cohort-mates attended a poetry performance put on by a group that referred to themselves as queer people of color. Samantha reported that she and the other corps members who attended felt very much out of place. One poem implied that this was not a space for white people. Another poem suggested that being sexually assaulted as a white person was not as bad as it was for people of color. Reflecting back on the reading, Samantha noted feeling like "we shouldn't be upset, be we were" (interview, July 16, 2013). Luft helped the corps members cultivate a critical lens for understanding such experiences. Samantha recalled an instructive analogy in which Luft suggested that the corps members

consider the safe space Judaism provides for particularistic identity cultivation as a way of understanding the importance such spaces might have for other groups.

Introducing corps members to the idea, advanced by Karen Brodtkin (1998), that Jews have become white and now have a privileged identity, Luft provided a framework within which to make sense of the “fact” that being Jewish in the United States means belonging to a group that comes from a history of oppression and marginalization but is now in a position of privilege. One of the challenges for young Jewish activists is to negotiate the dual implications of an identity marker that both is privileged and involves a history of oppression; Luft encouraged the young activists to become aware of how they were both part of the dominant group and part of a historically marginalized group.

Though Luft insisted that Jews could no longer think of themselves as being marginalized and oppressed, she argued that Jews could draw on their history of oppression in order to act in solidarity with those who are currently oppressed. Thus, the history of Jewish oppression can be a resource for the cultivation of Jewish activist communities (interview, July 16, 2013). The corps members found these workshops useful because the presenter helped the young activists integrate their gender, class, and ethnoreligious identities. In contrast, young activists found mainstream Jewish organizations and their focus on Jewish vulnerability to be incongruous with their own experience as privileged, white Americans.

Though privilege is most often discussed in relation to race and gender—as white and male privilege—some have suggested that other factors such as socioeconomic status, age, physical and mental difference, and religious affiliation should also be considered (Black and Stone 2005; McIntosh 2004). Black and Stone argue that, in the

United States, religion-based privilege is most likely to be Christian privilege. However, many of the young Jews I studied perceived “Jewish” to be a privileged identity marker that gave them access to unearned advantages gained as a result of their being part of the Jewish community (Black and Stone 2005). In what follows, I will introduce ethnographic data on discourses whereby young Jews begin to formulate and theorize the idea of Jewish privilege. That is to say that young Jews often find their “invisible knapsacks” filled with extra “provisions” and “tools” included as a result of their Jewish identity.

The view that a commitment to social justice activism can be inspired by a sense of “Jewish privilege” was made explicit in an email sent to me by Julie, a Jewish social justice activist who led a number of Jewish service learning trips to New Orleans. The email was sent following an interview in which we discussed her commitment to Jewish social justice activism:

The kind of Judaism I practice (and grew up with) is one that jigsaws nicely, instead of feeling like I am part of an oppressed people, I feel many times [Judaism] is part of my privilege. After all, even though I can be very critical of Jewish texts and find a lot of the material dated and problematic, my resume is filled with incredible opportunities I’ve received from the Jewish community: AVODAH (which led to my current job), Moishe House, there’s a bunch of other jobs I’ve gotten via Jews, scholarships, networking, it’s an instant community I’ve turned to many times in my travels. Not to mention how culturally comfortable I feel around Jews, the sense of strength and connection I feel from tradition... the meditative space I get from prayer in Hebrew, etcetera etcetera. It’s a lovely thing to be... For a while I’ve felt a growing sense of my privilege (Jewish and other kinds) and with that consciousness a sense of responsibility to leverage that privilege in order to dismantle inequality. (email correspondence, March, 29, 2011)

I have quoted this exchange at length because Julie’s email explicates a number of points that are central to my argument. First, Julie emphasizes that she experiences Judaism as

being part of her privilege; the association of Jewishness and upper middle-class comfort is in tension with communal tropes of Jewish oppression and marginality. Furthermore, Julie emphasizes the various opportunities she has enjoyed as a result of her membership in the Jewish community, stating, “my resume is filled with incredible opportunities I’ve received from the Jewish community.” Julie expresses her sense of Jewish privilege not only in relation to economic and career opportunities but also in relation to less tangible social and personal benefits she described in relation to the sense of comfort, strength, and connection she feels around Jews. After defining the category of Jewish privilege, Julie describes how her awareness of “privilege (Jewish and other kinds)” carries a set of responsibilities focused on leveraging “that privilege in order to dismantle inequality.” Julie is thus motivated by her Jewish identity to pursue social justice objectives and is also actively attempting to figure out “how to contribute to the Jewish community in a way that I can feel reflects my values.” Julie’s explanation represents the ways in which an awareness of Jewish privilege can motivate a specifically Jewish social justice activism.

The idea that Jewish identity is a privileged category must be understood in relation to the “continuity crisis” that has driven Jewish communal public policy since the early 1990s. The sense that the American Jewish community suffers from a continuity crisis emerged in response to a 1990 National Jewish Population Study that reported an intermarriage rate of over 50% for the years 1985-1990 (NJPS 1990:14). Many Jewish leaders and philanthropists interpreted this study to mean that the Jewish community would not be able to sustain the institutions it had cultivated throughout the twentieth century. The sense that American Judaism was in crisis was not a universal position at

the time. For instance, Steven M. Cohen, a prominent sociologist within the American Jewish community, challenged these results by arguing that the 1990 intermarriage rate was closer to 41 percent and that the core membership of the Jewish community was reproducing at a self-sustaining rate and would remain vibrant (Cohen 1994). More recently, however, Cohen has reversed this position and now understands the American Jewish community as being in a state of decline (Wertheimer and Cohen 2014).

Responding to this “crisis,” communal institutions and, in particular, independent Jewish philanthropists refocused their efforts on promoting higher levels of Jewish identification. In the ensuing decades, there has been massive investment in programming for young Jews in the hope that they will marry Jews, have Jewish children, and support Jewish institutions. The most prominent of these efforts is Birthright Israel, a program that provides young Jews with a free ten-day trip to Israel in order to encourage stronger Jewish identities among Diaspora Jews. Since its creation, Birthright Israel has spent nearly a billion dollars in order to bring more than 340,000 young Jews to Israel. Of these, more than 215,000 have been Jews from the United States.²⁶ More broadly, Jewish institutional frameworks provide young Jews with social, travel, and vocational opportunities, often asking for very little in immediate tangible returns. The Jewish activists I studied understood these opportunities as providing unfair advantages that might further implicate them in the unjust systems that perpetuate inequality in the United States, in Israel, and around the world. For example, while I was writing this section, my Facebook newsfeed showed that an activist had shared a blog post from the

²⁶ www.birthrightisrael.com, accessed August 14, 2013. Shaul Kelner’s (2010) monograph *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism* provides an insightful analysis of Israel Birthright and situates the program in relation to other instances of diaspora homeland tourism.

website *Black Girl Dangerous* entitled “4 Ways to Push Back Against Your Privilege.”²⁷ Responding to the second suggestion, “Just Don’t Go,” the activist captioned the link, “maybe Jewish folks shouldn’t be going on birthright, even if we are now eligible?” She went on to explain, “full disclosure: I went on birthright in 2007, before I had much political awareness. But I wouldn’t go again now.” Beyond reflecting this activist’s position on subsidized Jewish travel to Israel, this example demonstrates the extent to which some activists have naturalized a sense of Jewish alongside white privilege.

For many of the young activists I studied, these opportunities dominated their experience as young American Jews. For instance, the service corps that provided Samantha, Shoshie, Maya, and Julie with housing, a job in a non-profit agency, and weekly educational seminars after college received significant funding from individuals and foundations seeking to enhance levels of Jewish identification. In fact, the founding director of the organization told me that concerns about Jewish continuity made securing start-up funding in the mid-1990s relatively easy (interview, April 17, 2013). Furthermore, these opportunities are often strung together so that individuals can jump from one Jewish program to the next. After leaving New Orleans, Shoshie decided to pursue a second Jewish service program, this time in Boston, reflecting: “Why work to find my own job when organizations are willing to find one for me?” (interview, June 27, 2011). As opposed to earlier generations of Jews who were expected to support Jewish agencies financially, contemporary young Jews are presented with a series of social, professional, and religious opportunities. Such opportunities are given to young Jews, often for free, in the hope that such gifts might encourage them to commit themselves to

²⁷ www.blackgirldangerous.org/2014/02/4-ways-push-back-privilege, accessed February 24, 2014.

participating in and continuing Jewish life. Another example of these opportunities is an initiative that operated between 2008-2014 that provided Birthright alumni with financial subsidies to host up to six Sabbath dinner parties for their friends. I would like to suggest a somewhat paradoxical and unexpected consequence. These examples of what might constitute Jewish privilege are different from other socioeconomically based forms of privilege because they are available to young Jews of any class background. Sensing that these gifts provide them with unmerited privilege, some young Jews, such as Julie, frame their commitment to social justice activism as a response to the social and professional opportunities for which they are eligible solely because they happen to be Jewish.

The activists I studied seem to struggle with how to understand their Jewish identity in relation to what anthropologists might describe as the distinction between ascribed and achieved identities. Older Jews would likely understand their Jewish identity to be ascribed, that is, to be something that they are born into, while they work to achieve middle-class status. For young Jewish activists, economic, political, and social success have become integrated into their ascribed sense of what it means to be Jewish. Thus, some Jewish activists understand contemporary American Jewish identity as a form of ascribed social privilege; activist work provides a chance to reciprocate the gifts given as a result of this privilege. In other words, young Jews might aspire to the achieved identities of “progressive” and “activist” in response to the ascribed identities of “Jewish” and “privileged.”

With this in mind, we can theorize one of the more curious and oft-repeated expressions that I heard when speaking with middle- and upper-class Jews who had come to New Orleans to engage in short- and long-term volunteer and activist projects, namely,

that they had come to “give back.” Pushing beyond the cliché, the language of reciprocal obligation—a language familiar to anthropologists—may seem strange considering the lack of previous social relations between givers who came from elsewhere and local New Orleanian aid receivers. Building on my discussion of Jewish privilege, the remainder of the essay will apply anthropological theories of gift and exchange to the project of post-Katrina Jewish service and activism.

Describing volunteer service and activism in relation to “giving back,” that is, in terms of reciprocity, was common for individuals who came to conduct several days of volunteer work as well as for those who sustained long-term activist commitments. Even though the language of “giving back” was pervasive, the particular attitudes that individuals had toward service and activism often depended on the extent to which they saw themselves as benefiting from privilege—white, male, and Jewish. Those who had an acute awareness of privilege and who understood their middle- and upper-class comfort as reflecting social gifts tended to understand themselves to be in greater debt to society. By contrast, individuals who did not think of their actions in relation to privilege were more likely to see themselves as helping out of a sense of altruism. These ideological positions are important for understanding the ways in which volunteers and activists engaged with aid recipients.

Before moving to a number of ethnographic examples that illustrate these distinctions, I will outline some relevant themes from the anthropological study of gift and exchange. Anthropological considerations of the gift originated with Marcel Mauss’ classic, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Mauss’ primary concern was to understand how “total social phenomena” or the “enormous

complex of facts” that make up the social life of so called “primitive societies” operate without the coercive force of government (Mauss 1990 [1925]:3). Mauss considers the giving, receiving, and reciprocating of gifts in order to focus his study. Mauss’ study introduces two primary concerns: “What rule of legality and self-interest, in societies of a backward or archaic type, compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?” (Mauss 1990[1925]:3).

Mauss considers reciprocity through gift exchange as a basic social institution that works to preserve and uphold society through the existence of obligations not only to give gifts but also to receive and reciprocate those gifts (Mauss 1990[1925]:13). In order to explain why these reciprocal obligations exist, Mauss reflects on the Maori concept of the *hau*, “the spirit of the thing given” that necessitates a return gift (Mauss 1990[1925]:11). The items that circulate are not the inert objects of capitalist exchange but are “invested with life, often possessing individuality” (Mauss 1990[1925]:13). In other words, where society is structured by reciprocal gift giving, people perceive things to have an innate quality that demands their circulation. Thus, a fundamentally different, and somewhat spiritual, understanding of material objects drives the exchange of gifts; this, in turn, helps to solidify social relations and ultimately to structure society. Using terminology borrowed from Western political theory, Marshall Sahlins describes the gift as “the primitive analogue of the social contract” (Sahlins 1972:169). This theoretical framework can help us think about the humanitarian and political ideologies that inform post-Katrina service and activism.

For example, notions of reciprocity on short-term service trips were often very different from those expressed by committed activists such as Samantha, Shoshie, and Maya. For example, on the third day of one short-term trip, the participants were divided into three groups in order to help residents of a socioeconomically disadvantaged, historically black community on the Mississippi Gulf Coast with yard work. I was assigned to a group that was raking leaves at the home of a disabled, elderly woman. Soon after we began our task, the homeowner's son, a middle-aged man named Melvin, walked up to the house, placed a folding chair near the front door, and began observing us. The drink container he held was wrapped in a plastic bag, suggesting that its contents were alcoholic.

On several occasions, Melvin rose from his chair, grabbed a rake away from a volunteer, commented, "these white kids don't know how to rake," and proceeded to show the students how it should be done. Like the student participants, I became flustered when Melvin took my rake and attempted to instruct me. (I should note that Melvin did a better job than I was doing.) This incident became a significant event in the trip narrative that was understood differently by various trip participants and leaders.

One student in particular became very upset as a result of how Melvin interacted with her. This student was certain that she had been the victim of racism. Later in the evening, when the group discussed the incident as part of a facilitated "reflection session," this student said that she had lost her motivation to help and had become uninterested in doing a good job. Several other students also listed their interaction with Melvin as their "thorn" for the day, insisting that he had acted in a racist manner. Through his implicit act of ingratitude, the students understood Melvin to have rejected

their gift; they had thus become disinterested in continuing to help clean up the yard. This perceived lack of gratitude undermined the moral equation that informed student understandings of what it meant to participate in post-Katrina humanitarianism. Gratitude, or at least the absence of ingratitude, was a necessary component for the service work to be considered a success. The acts of exchange emphasized here essentially function on the individual level and do not include notions of social structure and social privilege.

As opposed to the professional aid work performed by New Orleans-based activists, I was much more likely to observe aid being given on short-term trips, during which service work usually happened outdoors and was focused on low-skill labor. Individual aid recipients on these short-term trips were often absent and were sometimes only partially visible, preferring to have somewhat limited contact with traveling volunteers. The traveling aid givers were often critical of homeowners who stayed indoors and who were not interested in engaging with those working on their homes. In contrast to Melvin's behavior, which represented one negative extreme for short-term aid givers, some voluntourists perceived aid givers who actively engaged with them and, in particular, those who gave them return gifts as ideal aid recipients.

Working with an organization called Beacon of Hope, one group spent the first few mornings of a trip gutting a home in Gentilly, a middle-class, mixed race neighborhood near Lake Pontchartrain. The homeowner, Mr. Hernandez, was a garrulous white man in his fifties or sixties. He told the group that he married late because he had spent a decade studying for the priesthood and that his youngest daughter was still in college. Mr. Hernandez was a constant presence at the worksite, supervising

and directing the student volunteers. At the end of the first day, Mr. Hernandez asked the trip facilitators if he could host the group for lunch at the rented home down the block where he lived with his wife. The rather elaborate lunch that was prepared the next day was the first in a series of gifts that included yet another lunch, jambalaya mix, Mardi Gras beads, a CD for each student with photographs from the week, and several rounds of drinks that Mr. Hernandez bought when he met the group on Bourbon Street. Taken together, these gifts represent a rather significant expenditure that undercut the value of the volunteer work. The students greatly appreciated Mr. Hernandez and many reported that meeting him was a highlight of the trip. Later in the week, the group worked at another home and the homeowner chose to remain indoors. Some of the volunteers critiqued this behavior.

The extent to which different groups of volunteers praised Mr. Hernandez and critiqued Melvin emphasizes the ways in which many short-term volunteers understood their efforts as forms of individual exchange. Yoni, the Jewish Funds for Justice trip leader for the group that encountered Mr. Hernandez, told me that, when he led international service trips with American Jewish World Service, the agency had instituted a strict no gift policy. While I am unsure exactly what motivated American Jewish World Service's policy, the effect is to imply that service travel is not an act of personal exchange and that local efforts must be understood within a larger political context. Although it was Jewish Funds for Justice's desire to present service in Post-Katrina New Orleans in relation to structures of inequality, the gifts that flowed from Mr. Hernandez to the group undermined this political framework and were upheld as ideal by the students who understood themselves as engaged in a local, individual act of exchange.

I note that there is also likely an underlying racial component to the ways in which the students understood this particular trip. After spending the morning and early afternoon working on Mr. Hernandez's house, the group took a tour of the Lower Ninth Ward, a socioeconomically depressed African American neighborhood decimated by Hurricane Katrina. Later that evening, during a reflection session, one of the students commented that they were confused by the presence of luxury automobiles in the neighborhood, hinting at culture of poverty arguments that blame poverty on personal choice. In contrast, there was no discussion of the fact that Mr. Hernandez had likely spent the amount of a monthly car payment for the barrage of gifts he gave the student volunteers in exchange for three mornings of unskilled labor. Additionally, during the evening reflection session, the group leaders asked the student volunteers about their expectations prior to meeting Mr. Hernandez. No trip participants were willing to admit that they had imagined a Hispanic homeowner, although, in conversation with the Hillel professional who had travelled with them, trip participants clearly indicated that they had not expected Mr. Hernandez to be white.

As opposed to short-term service tourists, activists who came to New Orleans for a longer amount of time and who emphasized the idea of "privilege" and "white guilt" as motivating factors tended to have a different approach to the idea that they deserved gratitude from those they served. Due to the nature of short-term service and its focus on low-skill mechanical labor, I was able to observe this aid directly in a way that was not always possible in long-term, professional service contexts. I therefore depended on interviews and scripted site-visits to understand the work that AVODAH corps members and other long-term activists were doing.

Abby, a Jewish service corps member with a background in anthropology, told me that she was not bothered by the fact that her clients would yell at her. Abby worked for the Southern Poverty Law Center, a legal advocacy organization, and her job involved working as an advocate on behalf of children with disabilities. Abby described her position as follows:

My job is to support kids and parents in the school system who have special needs or who have received wrongful suspensions... I [am] often getting yelled at by parents who yell at me because they can't yell at the school district. I don't mind this. (interview, March 13, 2011)

Abby understood these acts of aggression in relation to an unjust system that places minorities and students with disabilities at a disadvantage. According to Abby, this aggression was really directed toward that system and she was simply a safe outlet for those frustrations. Abby's sense of injustice and her sense of her own privilege informed her increased tolerance for what could have been perceived as ingratitude. I understand this acceptance in relation to the ideology of privilege, that is, in relation to Abby's sense of herself as a person who benefits from unearned societal gifts. Without a well-developed sense of privilege, the volunteers Melvin insulted expected direct and immediate return gifts, even if only in the form of implicit or explicit gratitude. By contrast, Abby did not perceive herself as deserving return gifts because she already perceived herself to be engaged in acts of reciprocity.

On a number of occasions, Post-Katrina transplants to New Orleans such as Abby discussed the ethics of living in New Orleans and their tenure in the city in relation to notions of reciprocity. As I mentioned earlier, toward the end of her year of service as an AVODAH corps member, Abby told me, "after this year, I would like to stay in NOLA.

I don't want this to simply be a pit stop where I take more than I give because at this point I feel as if I am getting a lot more than I give" (Interview, March 13, 2011). Abby felt compelled to stay in New Orleans long enough to create a balance between giving and taking; this decision also reflects her sense of what it might mean to overcome the burdens of privilege.

The question remains how a concept of Jewish privilege, as opposed to a more generic sense of white privilege, might play out in these activist contexts. One outcome of "Jewish privilege" is that young Jews have come to perceive their obligation toward society in relation to gifts that come to them as members of the Jewish community. For the Jewish activists I studied, giving back materially to the wealthy philanthropists and organizations that are the source of their "Jewish privilege" makes little sense in light of their progressive political positions. That said, by identifying their activism as Jewish, they are in some sense engaging in acts of reciprocity toward those who have provided them with various opportunities in order to encourage heightened levels of Jewish identification. Furthermore, though focused on giving to non-Jews, the activists I studied tended to establish social solidarities most intensely with other Jewish activists. The dynamic of giving to non-Jews and socializing with Jews resonates with studies focused on the ways in which giving tends to enhance social solidarities among co-religionists, such as Elizabeth Tonkin's (2009) study of Northern Irish supporters of Christian missions and Simon Coleman's (2004) study of charismatic Protestant Christians.

Reciprocity can thus be perceived in two separate spheres. On the one hand, Jewish social justice activists give time, labor, and money in support of social justice objectives. In so doing, they indirectly "give back" to a society that has afforded them

significant privilege. Additionally, these Jewish activists give back to those who provide them with the benefits of Jewish privilege by labeling their activism as Jewish and by socializing with Jews. When Jewish social justice activists socialize with other Jews and identify their activism as “Jewish,” the spirit of Jewish institutional gifts to young Jews, their *hau*, shows itself to be a factor in the ways in which these gifts are reciprocated. The spirit of the gift, in this case, demands Jewish identification as well as participation in Jewish communal and institutional life. As this chapter has illustrated, this spirit of the gift, turned outwards toward society and inwards toward social and class anxieties, can manifest in unexpected ways.

Building on Tonkin and Coleman’s focus on the creation of intra-church solidarity as a product of gifts given through religious institutions, my analysis suggests the relevance of Maussian theory for understanding progressive activism that emerges from socioeconomically privileged groups. Anthropological theories of the gift illuminate the dynamics of exchange that lead individuals who perceive themselves to be members of a privileged community to pursue progressive activism. In my study of Jewish activists in New Orleans, I found that progressive political identities—in many cases, a sense of owing something to society—emerged, not from actual exchange, but rather from the sense of belonging to a group with access to real and imagined societal gifts. In contrast, in the case of short-term service trips, the sense of giving individual gifts rather than repaying privilege sometimes undermined the political framing that Jewish Funds for Justice trip leaders had hoped to introduce. In the case of Jewish service in New Orleans, imagined or symbolic gifts that cannot possibly be reciprocated are more politically potent than instances of direct exchange.

CHAPTER FOUR

In the Service of Jewish Identity

Introduction

In the years following Hurricane Katrina, “service” and “service learning” emerged as trends in American Jewish discourse and practice. This chapter considers this phenomenon in relation to ethnographic research I conducted on a series of service-learning trips to New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast in 2011 and 2012. In contrast to scholarly approaches focused on evaluating the impact of service initiatives for aid recipients and aid givers, my primary concern in this chapter is to understand the interactions among a variety of differently situated agencies, donors, and volunteers who collaborated to produce Jewish service trips to the Gulf Coast as part of a larger effort to define a “Jewish service” movement.²⁸ Such efforts to cultivate a Jewish service movement sought to synthesize universalistic and particularistic positions by creating Jewish service experiences in which young Jews provided services, usually to non-Jews, while participating in workshops and social experiences meant to cultivate and deepen

²⁸ There is a large body of research on service, service learning, and service-tourism. Much of this research is undertaken by practitioners looking to determine best practices for these educational projects. See, for example, Keith Morton’s (1995) essay, “The Irony of Service: Charity, Project, and Social Change in Service Learning.” Daniel Goldstein’s recent monograph (2012) *Outlawed: Between Security and Rights in a Bolivian City* includes a chapter-length investigation of service learning pedagogy.

levels of Jewish identification.²⁹ At the same time, the growth of Jewish service illustrates American Jewish engagement with neoliberalism and with the broader response to Hurricane Katrina. I focus in particular on the rise of a donor class of individuals who use their immense wealth to drive social policy. Paying particular attention to the efforts of a number major family foundations that distribute hundreds of millions of dollars annually, I examine ambitious efforts to redefine American Judaism in relation to notions of service. In the years following Katrina, these foundation-driven efforts sought to build on the vigorous Jewish community response to the storm as well as to capitalize on—and possibly appropriate—the recent growth of Jewish social justice efforts. For example, the family foundation headed by Lynn Schusterman, a multibillionaire and major Jewish philanthropist dedicated to Jewish identity projects, played a leading role in efforts to cultivate a Jewish service movement. As a participant in Warren Buffet’s Giving Pledge, an initiative that encourages billionaires to use their wealth for the common good, Schusterman’s efforts provide insight into one element of growing income inequality in contemporary American society—namely, the emergence of a class of wealthy donors with a significant, though not unlimited, ability to shape social policies and agendas.³⁰

The chapter begins by introducing “episodic Jewish culture,” a concept my colleague Josh Friedman and I use to describe the ways in which American Jews increasingly participate in discrete, produced expressions of Jewish life, often at a distance from family and home community. Instances of “episodic Jewish culture” enact a neoliberal reformulation that repackages and segments Jewish life and culture into

²⁹ Elizabeth Tonkin (2009) provides an analysis of the ways in which service to others can lead to the solidification of intra-group social bonds.

³⁰ The Giving Pledge website, www.givingpledge.org, accessed May 30, 2014.

entities that can be both produced and consumed. The first part of the chapter defines the episodic in relation to trends in American Jewish philanthropy and Jewish life, on the one hand, and in relation to trends in geopolitical cultural formations such as the dramatic growth in the nongovernmental sector and the recent rise of a donor class, on the other. Ultimately, I argue that episodic Jewish culture represents a structural framework within which young Jews experience and experiment with Jewish identity through serialized interactions with Jewish institutions. Service learning trips that emerged as a result of foundation-driven efforts to reformulate Jewish life in relation to service and service learning illustrate the cultural dynamics that produce episodic Jewish culture.

Building on this understanding of service trips as produced episodic experiences, I delve into an analysis of the production and consumption of immersive Jewish service trips to New Orleans. My analysis of trip production is focused on the ways in which Jewish funders established an institutional infrastructure to direct the growth of Jewish service initiatives. I then examine the implications that this philanthropic project might have for young Jews traveling to New Orleans on immersive Jewish service-learning programs supported and funded, in part, by these larger charitable initiatives. Trip participation, I argue, should be understood within the institutional structures established by wealthy philanthropists to standardize and increase the number of Jews involved in service activities. Within these structures, trips to New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast that occurred six and seven years after Katrina first made landfall often emerged as viable alternative trip destinations when preferred service trips proved unworkable. The ability of donor-sponsored initiatives to redirect student travel illustrates the ways in which large-scale Jewish philanthropy shapes the lives of young Jews, who in this case

serve as the primary objects of philanthropic projects focused on promoting Jewish service and Jewish identity.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of student fundraising for service trips to New Orleans, initiatives that not only enabled students to consume service trips but also resulted in the cultivation of student volunteers as philanthropic agents able to engage, influence, and resist the Jewish philanthropic structures and projects of which they were often primary targets.

Episodic Jewish Culture

In late February 2011, I began ethnographic research on six service-learning trips to the areas affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Joining the first trip, I met nine students and a Hillel professional mid-morning in the French quarter, where the group was enjoying a few hours in typical tourist fashion—eating beignets, buying trinkets, and watching the French Quarter crowds. In the midst of Mardi Gras season, New Orleans’ characteristic quirkiness was on full display. In the early afternoon, the students boarded a bus for the ninety-mile drive to Biloxi, Mississippi, where they were met by two trip leaders hired by Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ), a Jewish social justice organization that, at the time, ran service-learning trips to New Orleans and a number of other U.S. cities.³¹

Upon our arrival to the Methodist camp located on the highway that runs along the Gulf Coast, where Jewish Funds for Justice had secured budget-rate lodgings, we

³¹ In 2012, *Jewish Funds for Justice* was renamed *Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice*, referencing a famous quote by Martin Luther King, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” By resituating the word “Jewish” after a colon, the agency deemphasized its Jewish character. Tellingly, this shift coincided with the agency’s decision to close its service department, a development I address later in the chapter.

were given a few minutes to place our belongings in the dormitories before regrouping for introductions and a series of trust games on the beach. The episode—a weeklong service-learning trip—was about to begin.

On the beach, the facilitators led participants in a number of standard group-building exercises (e.g. trust falls) focused on establishing trust and a sense of community. Later that evening, after dinner in the camp’s dining hall, the group gathered once again for a round of more serious introductions to the week. Through a variety of activities, students were encouraged to view the trip as a time of potential personal growth. For instance, trip leaders distributed poster-sized sheets of paper and then asked participants to create an image that represented their journey to this particular moment. This activity, which demarcated and perhaps sacralised the trip in time and space, was followed by a letter writing activity during which participants were asked to begin composing a letter to themselves that they would complete at the end of the trip and that would subsequently be sent to them six months after the trip’s conclusion. Finally, participants reviewed a document they called “The Ten Commandments,” a list of shared guidelines that the group had created before traveling from their campus to the Gulf Coast. These “commandments” tended to reflect interpersonal behavior but did not address the ideology, theology, or sociopolitics involved in the weeklong project.³² The creation of a set of commandments and the group-building activities worked to distinguish this particular group from their on-campus communities and from the broader Jewish world. The ritualistic opening to the trip—which we might understand in the

³² At the time, I did not note the specific “commandments” the students had agreed upon. In response to a follow-up email, the student trip leader who had created the document told me that she could not find the list on her computer and that she could not recall the particular items included as part of the trip rules (internet communication, December 13, 2013).

theoretical terms of pilgrimage, liminality, and *communitas*—encouraged personal and social intensification and intimacy (Turner 1969).

This opening to the Jewish service-learning program—and its corresponding, concluding ceremony, which would occur a week later—is so typical of experiential education programs that it is easy to ignore. But I argue that this ritual marks and marks off an emergent and increasingly dominant category of contemporary Jewish experience—episodic Jewish culture. How does an experiential Jewish episode work? How can we understand its singularity and its repetitions? What can we make of its overarching structure, on the one hand, and of the nuances of its intra-group dynamics, on the other?

I offer the term episodic to describe the ways in which ethnic neighborhoods and declining denominations are being replaced by privatized, neoliberal formulations of Jewish life. In relation to this framework, I suggest that the episodic has a number of defining characteristics. First, episodic Jewish culture is temporally and spatially discontinuous. That is to say that, like its media or literary counterparts, the Jewish episodic has a well-defined beginning and end; additionally, episodes often occur in locations that are removed from one's home community. The Jewish episodic allows for experiences of ethnoreligious immersion that are not readily available in the social and family contexts in which many American Jews currently live. In the case of service-learning trips to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, in which participants set out to assist non-Jews from within a Jewish communal framework, the primary social experience for trip participants consisted of eating, speaking, and working with and alongside other Jews. AVODAH offers a similar mix of living with Jews while serving non-Jews; during

my fieldwork, service corps members often commented on the intense, immersive nature of this Jewish communal program. When situated among tourist experiences such as Birthright Israel, Jewish study conferences such as Limmud, Yiddish culture immersion programs, summer camps, and even Jewish cultural museums, service-learning trips reveal themselves to be one instance of a broader cultural phenomenon in which Jewish life is curated and produced (by professionals, not-for-profit organizations, and lay leaders), funded (by family foundations, individual donors, and registration fees), and consumed by Jews, and by young Jews in particular, in discrete iterations.³³

“Episodic Jewish Culture” thus provides a useful concept for describing Jewish cultural forms as opposed to Jewish content. I emphasize the idea of form as opposed to content because the episodic represents a framework for Jewish activities, meanings, and theologies that are increasingly malleable and flexible. The sense that episodic Jewish culture is an inherently flexible Jewish form is taken to its most extreme in programs and initiatives that integrate a flexible design. For instance, the international growth of open format Jewish learning conferences (i.e. Limmud) support a structurally flexible definition of what might constitute Jewish knowledge.

The preponderance of episodes—diverse, delimited worlds of Jewish culture—reflects broader developments in American Jewish life. We recall that demographic surveys released in 1990, 2000, and, most recently, in 2013 have reported high rates of intermarriage; these reports contributed to the sense of a “continuity crisis” also reflected in the contraction of the organizations that dominated Jewish communal life for most of

³³ Limmud is a lay-led, open-format Jewish learning retreat. First developed in the United Kingdom, sixty Jewish communities around the world, including New Orleans, have adopted this model and now host annual or semi-annual Limmud programs. Klezcamp is a yearly, weeklong immersive Yiddish culture and music retreat.

the twentieth century, including the system of Jewish community federations, denominational congregations, and a variety of membership organizations such as The American Jewish Congress and Hadassah. By contrast, Steven M. Cohen has written about an emergent counter-trend in Jewish communal life that he terms “nonestablishment” and that encompasses “independent minyanim [prayer fellowships], social justice projects, cultural events... learning initiatives... and Jewish life online” (Cohen 2011). Many of the initiatives Cohen describes as “nonestablishment” also reflect what Friedman and I call the episodic.

These trends reflect not only the current moment in American Jewish history but also various geopolitical trends. The past quarter century has been marked by exponential growth in the nonprofit sector both in the United States and around the world (Keck and Sikkink 1998:10). Social scientists have correlated the dramatic growth of civil society and nonprofit organizations with the decline of the nation-state and with the increasingly important function NGOs, often serving a quasi-governmental role, play around the world (Appadurai 2000). Contributing to scholarship that has described the Jewish philanthropy sector and, in particular, the system of Jewish federations as the American Jewish polity (Elazar 1995; Goldberg 1996), as an expression of American Jewish ethnic identity (Zeitzi 1997), and as an American Jewish public sphere (Cohen, 1980), sociologist Shaul Kelner has recently suggested that the network of Jewish federations “understand themselves as taking on state-like functions for the American Jewish community”(Kelner 2013:30). The growth of these Jewish not-for-profit start-ups can thus be understood in terms of a broader sociopolitical trend that reflects a distrust of government and the increasing influence of not-for-profit organizations. Building on the

position that the Federation system functions as a type of American Jewish state, we can interpret episodic Jewish culture as part of what some have described as the process of NGO-ization, whereby government functions are assumed by nongovernmental agencies and players (Alvarez 1999).

In the post-World War II era, the federation system allowed for the unification of the American Jewish community in a way that transcended denominational divisions (Kelner 2013:35-36). By contrast, episodic Jewish culture reflects the emergence of a series of Jewish “worlds” that lack the cohesiveness and connectivity that a federation paradigm once encouraged. These disparate yet structurally similar contexts represent immersive and holistic experiences; therefore, we now find a range of immersive Jewish realms that claim to encapsulate holistic, authentic expressions of Judaism—the Jewish environmental movement, the Jewish social justice movement, and Yiddish revival programs are examples of this phenomenon. In this way, episodic Jewish culture can be understood to reflect the disintegration of what might be described as the American Jewish community into a series of more or less discontinuous Jewish communities. Alternatively, we can understand episodic Jewish culture to facilitate robust spheres of Jewish life and culture that are often hybridized and that are based on programs and opportunities that are both produced and consumed. Instead of membership dues, episodic Jewish culture is supported by interested funders and by consumers who either pay a subsidized fee or enjoy programs free of charge.

“Nonestablishment” and episodic Jewish initiatives thrive, in part, as a result of another socioeconomic trend, namely, the growth of family foundations and individual donors who are increasingly interested in influencing American Jewish life. A cohort of

powerful philanthropic individuals and family foundations have now come to play an increasingly influential role in determining Jewish public policy expressed primarily in terms of what does and does not get funded. Major initiatives such as Birthright Israel, a program that provides free trips to Israel for Jews ages 18-26, and the PJ Library, an initiative that provides Jewish children with free bedtime books and music, emerged from this segment of the American Jewish community. Additionally, many Jewish not-for-profit start-ups look to these donors for funding and support. Responding to a sense of American Jewish decline, Jewish philanthropic funds, now increasingly controlled by individuals and family foundations, are being applied to projects that explore new ways of increasing Jewish identification; Jewish service-learning trips to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast are representative examples.

The Rise of Jewish Service

Efforts to reformulate Judaism in relation to service to non-Jewish others first originated with Jewish social justice organizations that sought to integrate Jewish education and identity building projects with the cultivation of a progressive Jewish ethic (e.g. American Jewish World Service trips and AVODAH). In an article published in the newsletter of the Michael Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life, Ruth Messinger articulated a progressive Jewish service agenda:

Now more than ever a new paradigm of Jewish service is needed. Jews have historically had a universal mandate to improve the conditions of all the world's people. As the prophet Isaiah proclaims, part of our covenant is the responsibility of Jews to be of service to others ... Many American Jews live at a level of affluence and security unprecedented in our history. Moreover, the world is increasingly interdependent—economically, culturally, and politically. And technology has so reshaped the world that the consequences of our acts will have

global implications. That is why our ability to respond to people in need around the world will significantly influence the shape and features of American Judaism in the twenty-first century. (Messinger 1999:8)

Writing at a time when Jewish social justice organizations were just beginning to play an increasingly influential role in the field of American Jewish philanthropy, Messinger justified a concern with service to others as an expression of a historical universalistic mandate and as a contemporary Jewish response to the secure position of Jews in an increasingly globalized world. In this passage, Messinger seems to be referring to the term “service” in a broad sense to suggest that Judaism needs to be oriented outward, that is, to involve a primary concern for the disempowered and the dispossessed. Service, used in this sense, encapsulates an agenda focused on drawing on Jewish resources (economic, political, and theological) in order to achieve universalistic social justice objectives. Additionally, American Jewish World Service, the agency Messinger heads, began running short- and long-term service-learning trips during which participants would assist grassroots agencies in the Global South while learning about global social justice issues. Major Jewish donor-sponsored efforts to promote Jewish service aimed to reproduce and expand these highly successful trips as part of a vision for a broad-based Jewish service movement.

Jewish social justice agencies such as American Jewish World Service and Jewish Funds for Justice grew dramatically in response to disasters such as the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia and Hurricane Katrina. For instance, as a result of its post-Katrina efforts, Jewish Funds for Justice’s budget grew from just under \$3 million in 2004 to almost \$6 million in 2006. Similarly, American Jewish World Service quadrupled in size as a result of its response to the Southeast Asian tsunami, increasing its annual fundraising from \$6

million in 2003 to over \$25 million in 2005.³⁴ This insight is based on a conversation I had with Jeffrey Solomon, President of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Foundation, a major player in the field of Jewish philanthropy. As a result of AJWS' prior work in Southeast Asia, the agency was listed on the White House website as a good place to donate in response to the tsunami. During an interview, Solomon shared his observation that AJWS effectively leveraged this high profile placement in order to increase the agency's scope and influence (interview, July 23, 2013).

In addition to capitalizing on the emergence and growth of Jewish social justice initiatives, foundation-sponsored efforts to define a Jewish service movement also came out of a broader faith-based volunteer response to the storm. Volunteer efforts and, in particular, efforts sponsored by faith-based agencies played a central role in providing post-Katrina humanitarian aid and assistance. On the second anniversary of the storm, the Corporation for National and Community Service, a U.S. federal agency responsible for cultivating volunteer opportunities, reported that more than one million volunteers arrived to the Gulf Coast in the years 2006 and 2007. The press release described these efforts as an expression of "the incredible outpouring of compassion by our nation's volunteers in the two years since Katrina struck."³⁵ The press release listed two-dozen relief organizations, half of which were faith-based; these included United Jewish Communities, the agency that coordinated a centralized Jewish community response to the storm.

³⁴These numbers come from tax forms available on the Guidestar website, www.guidestar.org, accessed June 1, 2014. I refer to the 2008 Jewish Funds for Justice 990 tax form and the 2007 American Jewish World Service 990 tax form.

³⁵ These numbers were published in a one-page document available via search on the Corporation for National and Community Service Website, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/>, accessed May 30, 2014.

Scholars have framed this outpouring of post-Katrina volunteer support in relation to the failures of government-sponsored aid programs and in relation to neoliberal logics focused on the maximization of profit at the expense of adequately addressing pressing post-disaster social welfare concerns (Adams 2013; Erdely 2011; Klein 2007).³⁶ Medical anthropologist Vincanne Adams (2013) frames his analysis of long-term, post-Katrina recovery in relation to what he describes as the “affect economy” within which altruistic citizen responses to the suffering of others enables and provides “cover” for private government contractors focused on the maximization of profit. Adams writes,

The affect economy we live within today makes use of affective responses to suffering in ways that fuel structural relations of inequality, providing armies of free labor to do the work of recovery while simultaneously producing opportunities for new corporate capitalization on disasters. (Adams 2013:10)

While Adams appreciates the crucial and often life-saving support faith groups provided to Katrina victims, he suggests we retain a healthy dose of skepticism regarding the social ramifications of rearticulating post-disaster aid as an expression of “commitments of faith” at the cost of aid articulated in terms of “citizenship rights” (Adams 2013:136).

Though not as prominent or centrally organized as the efforts of Christian denominations, the Jewish community also participated in this affect economy, providing volunteer labor as part of its response to Hurricane Katrina. Most prominently, United Jewish Communities (now Jewish Federations of North America) sponsored more than three thousand Jewish college students traveling to the region during school breaks in the years following the storm (2007-2009). In addition to these centrally organized efforts,

³⁶ The essays collected in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans* (2011), edited by Cedric Johnson, explore the intersections of post-Katrina recovery and neoliberal governance.

Jewish individuals and synagogues initiated independent service trips, usually working with local non-profits and rebuilding agencies in order to coordinate housing, food, and volunteer tasks.

Though the Jewish community did not establish its own large-scale infrastructure to feed and house post-Katrina volunteers, as some Christian denominations did, a modest institutional infrastructure emerged in order to help interested Jewish groups plan and implement service travel to the region. For instance, the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans hired a staff member devoted to providing logistical support aiding Jewish service groups. Additionally, a social entrepreneur from Chicago established Volunteer Expeditions, a small nonprofit organization that coordinated educational Jewish service tours to New Orleans. Local synagogues and the local Hillel also provided institutional support and assistance to service tours. One synagogue, for example, purchased inflatable mattresses and installed a shower in their building to accommodate service groups.³⁷

As the larger-scale trips that were coordinated by Hillel with financial support from United Jewish Communities wound down, Jewish Funds for Justice began offering smaller scale, Jewish-themed rebuilding trips. In contrast to the larger trips that the federation had previously supported, these efforts had more of an educational focus. These trips emerged as part of the wellspring of interest in the idea of service that arose within the Jewish community in the years following Katrina and through a complicated and often onerous collaboration between a variety of differently situated players including funders, trip participants, on-campus Jewish groups, staff leaders, and the

³⁷ At times, some local Jewish agencies felt burdened by the constant stream of groups, especially those groups that expected local Jewish agencies to provide them with food and lodgings, thereby taxing local resources and staff.

sponsoring agency. Hoping to build on the energy of post-Katrina rebuilding and recovery, a number of the top funders in the Jewish community began to explore possibilities for integrating volunteering and Jewish education. In particular, these foundations wanted to support the development of Jewish service learning, an idea they hoped might integrate universalism in the form of service to non-Jewish “others” with learning focused on Jewish education and Jewish identity cultivation.

Creating a Jewish Service Movement

In 2007, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation, the Jim Joseph Foundation, and the Nathan Cummings Foundation commissioned BTW Consultants Inc., a consulting firm servicing the nonprofit sector, to create a report assessing the field of Jewish service. Published in 2008, “Jewish Service Learning: What Is and What Could Be, a Summary of an Analysis of the Jewish Service Learning Landscape” included a survey of existing Jewish service opportunities as well as a blueprint for an ambitious expansion of Jewish service programs and initiatives. The report framed this expansion not only in relation to the capacity of existing organizations but also in terms of a proposed shift in American Jewish culture, suggesting “a future in which Jewish Service Learning is a cultural norm supported and inspired by high-quality programs that provide meaningful and impactful opportunities to serve” (Irie and Blair 2008:5). More specifically, the report stipulated that the planned service initiative was to focus on Jews aged 18-24 with the goal of increasing the number of program participants from 3,100 during the 2007-2008 academic year to 40,000 participants, or 10% of the American Jewish population in this age cohort. While the report did not specify a timeframe for

this growth, it imagined existing programs tripling in size as well as the establishment of new service opportunities.

The report explicated the different priorities that each foundation brought to the project, explaining that the Schusterman Foundation's interest, perhaps inspired by the Brithright Israel model, was in "scaling quality opportunities to engage Jewish young adults in meaningful service experiences." In other words, the Schusterman Foundation building on the perceived success of the Brithright Israel program, focused on the possibility of finding another initiative that might be implemented on a mass scale. Alternately, the Jim Joseph Foundation's work is focused entirely on Jewish education, so its approach to Jewish service learning revolved around "understanding how Jewish Service Learning functions as a learning strategy for advancing Jewish knowledge and identity of young Jews." Lastly, the report describes how the Nathan Cummings Foundation, a funder that helped build a Jewish social justice field, "came to this work focused on building capacity in the field to ensure quality alongside growth." The Nathan Cummings Foundation wanted to ensure that the educational and service components were actually successful in using Jewish resources for broader humanitarian projects (Irie and Blair 2008:3). The report mentions Hurricane Katrina as a flashpoint for Jewish service programs and for growth in the field of Jewish service.

Efforts to integrate the inward-focused agendas such as those advocated by the Schusterman and Jim Joseph foundations with the Cummings Foundation's more outwardly-oriented concern with social justice was a primary motivating factor for the expansion of service and service learning within the Jewish community in the years following Hurricane Katrina. Moving beyond the realm of coordinating the work of

prominent family foundations, the report outlined a project oriented toward a synthesis of perceived tensions between Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism. These objectives are explicated in the report's introduction:

For many reasons, this is a time to consider the potential that Jewish Service Learning holds for engaging young people in social and community issues and nurturing their Jewish understanding and identity. There are ever present challenges to engaging Jewish young adults—from their search for meaningful connections with Jewish peers to finding lives of purpose. There are ever present challenges to Jewish continuity—from the appeal of assimilation to the youthful disdain for the institutions of elders. There are ever present challenges to social and civil progress—from poverty to natural disasters. The world continues to flatten, placing greater pressure on the boundaries that define communities and the bonds that unite them. These developments lead to ageless questions about how to preserve Jewish culture and identity and what is the obligation of Jews to respond in the face of inequity, crisis and despair. (Irie and Blair 2008:1)

This passage makes clear the intention these funders had for pairing concerns for “Jewish culture and identity” with efforts to address the “obligation of Jews to respond in the face of inequity, crisis and despair.” The funders represented in this report can be understood as hoping to integrate a concern with formulating a specifically Jewish and universalistic response to pressing social issues with particularistic concerns with Jewish continuity. Applying some analytical pressure here, we see that the sentence structure in the passage above creates a three-way equivalence between entities faced by “ever present challenges”: young Jews in search of meaning, older Jews who want that meaning to involve sustained participation in the institutions they have created, and non-Jewish victims of poverty and natural disaster. By placing these objects of concern on the same plane, the report's rhetoric effectively levels—and thus attempts to neutralize—intra-Jewish debates about which of these concerns deserve to be the primary focus of Jewish social action.

Furthermore, the report's focus on a particular age cohort reflects a broader Jewish communal concern with providing Jewish "emerging adults" with compelling experiences during a formative developmental life stage. The concept of "emerging adulthood" was first introduced by Jeffrey Arnett, a sociologist who argues for the need to identify a new developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett 2004). Arnett suggests that emerging adults should not be considered adults because they are generally unmarried, childless, and often remain financially dependent on their parents. At the same time, emerging adults cannot be described as adolescents because they have significant independence, often live away from their families, frequently relocate, and tend to experiment with various types of commitments regarding work and love. Arnett writes:

Perhaps the most central feature of emerging adulthood is that it is the time when young people explore possibilities for their lives in a variety of areas, especially love and work. In the course of exploring possibilities in love and work, emerging adults clarify their identities, that is, they learn more about who they are and what they want out of life. (Arnett 2004:8)

The concept of emerging adulthood is not particularly anthropological insofar as it tends to erase cultural specificity in favor of an overarching definition of social development perhaps and is most applicable to EuroAmerican society. I emphasize Arnett's theory here because it has been influential to policy-makers within the Jewish community and may, in fact, describe the experiences of the young Jews I studied. (For example, one young activist invited me to read and discuss with her Meg Jay's self-help book, *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter—And How to Make the Most of Them Now*.) Researchers and Jewish policy-makers often draw on Arnett's research in order to

justify philanthropic investment in Jewish “emerging adults” that aims to encourage long-term commitments to Jewish community, life, and culture. Consequently, Jewish programs established in response to concerns about the future viability of American Jewish life focus on Jews who have left home but who have not yet made more enduring adult commitments. The foundation-sponsored service report explicitly cites Arnett’s research to argue that a focus on emerging adults is key to maximizing the impact service programs might have for cultivating higher levels of commitment to Jewish identity. By applying Arnett’s assessment of trends in personal development as prescriptive, funder-sponsored initiatives that target “emerging adults” may further concretize the sense that a period of experimentation between ages 18 and 24 is part of American—and, perhaps, American Jewish—culture.

Ultimately, the service report advocated the establishment of an agency that might serve a role analogous to that played by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency that runs the Americorps program.³⁸ In theory, this proposed agency would help to coordinate the expansion of service in the American Jewish community, thus implementing and cementing “service” as a defining element of Jewish life. To this end, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation provided \$18 million in seed funding to establish Repair the World (an English translation of the phrase *tikkun olam*), an organization that would help to shepherd the establishment of a Jewish service movement (Greer 2009). Repair the World immediately began implementing the service agenda outlined in the service report, providing funding for Jewish service program providers, initiating research on what

³⁸ The analogy between Repair the World and the Corporation for National and Community Service was further solidified in 2013 when David Eisner, former CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, was selected as CEO of Repair the World.

might constitute “best practices,” supporting the growth of existing programs, and encouraging other organizations to embrace large-scale evaluations of their programs and staff. The service trips to New Orleans that I studied were heavily subsidized by funds from Repair the World.

The service report struck a confident tone about the value of Jewish service learning as well as the ability of philanthropic investment to create the conditions for a major cultural shift in American Jewish life:

With all of these powerful impacts, the question this research raises is not whether Jewish Service Learning can provide a critical path to Jewish civic engagement, or cultivate a sense of Jewish identity or engage young people in solving critical social problems or generate lifelong relationships that bond and build a sense of community. Evidence strongly suggests and history shows that Jewish Service Learning, if executed well with clear intention, can accomplish these objectives.

The question then, is whether the Jewish community will fully seize the opportunity to develop the potential that Jewish Service Learning holds. The work ahead is the work of building deep, strong and broad based support for an idea whose time has truly come. (Irie and Blair 2008:5)

The report reflected complete confidence in the project of Jewish service learning. In fact, discussions of possible risks throughout the report focused exclusively on external factors that might undermine what the report and, by extension, the funders asserted was an unquestionably good idea.

The confidence expressed in the service report corresponds to a moment of significant growth in the number, size, and scope of private foundations. According to the Foundation Center, an agency that gathers data and supports the work of private foundations, in 2001, there were 61,817 foundations that distributed \$30.5 billion with assets totaling \$477 billion. Six years later, around the time when the report was

commissioned, there were 75,187 foundations that distributed \$44.5 billion with assets totaling \$682 Billion.³⁹ This dramatic growth was a byproduct of the significant skewing of wealth toward the very wealthy that occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s and that was exacerbated as a result of Bush-era tax cuts (Saez 2013). This growth has also resulted in the sense that the very wealthy have an obligation and have the capacity to “save the world.” Books such as *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World* (Bishop and Green 2008) and initiatives such as Warren Buffet’s Giving Pledge reflect these attitudes.

A favorable interpretation might frame efforts to establish a Jewish service movement as sincere attempts from donors who care deeply about Jewish life and culture and who are dedicated to using their wealth in order to address pressing national and global social issues. A more pessimistic interpretation might view these efforts as attempts to neutralize the more radical political critiques advanced by Jewish social justice organizations. This point reflects the perspective of essays collected in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, a volume published by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (2007) that names and critiques the “non-profit industrial complex.” At first, Jewish social justice agencies and leaders perceived the interest of Jewish family foundations in cultivating a field of Jewish service as an opportunity to advance their own agendas. For instance, in 2009, then-CEO of Jewish Funds for Justice Simon Greer published an opinion piece in the *Jewish Daily Forward* titled “‘Continuity Crisis’ to Activist Opportunity.” Greer highlighted a number of efforts to advance a Jewish social justice agenda including the support that the Lynn and Charles Schusterman Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation had dedicated to Repair the World. Greer interpreted this

³⁹ The Foundation Center website, www.foundationcenter.org, accessed May 30, 2014.

support as an indication that the field of Jewish philanthropy was reorienting its efforts away from “Jewish continuity” projects and toward a primary concern with “Jewish social action.” Greer ended the article with a bold assertion that a focus on helping those outside the Jewish community would solve the issues of Jewish continuity:

I believe that if the Jewish community had taken all the resources — financial and otherwise — that we put into continuity programming after the 1990 NJPS and instead invested them in addressing even one of the challenges most pressing to those most in need, we would have no problem attracting Jews to our institutions. (Greer 2009)

Despite the hopes Jewish social justice activists such as Greer had for these philanthropic investments, the tensions that ultimately undermined the grantor/grantee relationship between Repair the World, the agency established based on the report’s findings, and a number of Jewish social justice organizations are already apparent in the initial service report. While the report is specific about its ambitions regarding how many Jewish “emerging adults” might be served, goals for the aid that might be provided are stated generically in relation to what the report calls “authentic service.” Thus, while the report imagines systemic cultural change for the Jewish community, aid to others is figured in terms of local “authentic” service “that addresses real needs, from building houses to organic farming, from restoring an environmental habitat to tutoring children” (Irie and Blair 2008:11). This vague approach to Jewish aid to non-Jews contrasts with the more political efforts advocated by Jewish social justice organizations oriented toward addressing the root causes of social inequities. In contrast to notions of service first defined by activists, such as Ruth Messinger, who emphasized systemic social change, the donors advocating the establishment of a mass Jewish service movement articulated a

more limited conception of the term “service,” something akin to community service that would not necessarily imply the moves toward political advocacy or systemic social change usually intrinsic to service learning pedagogy (Morton 1995).

What, then, is the “learning” involved in Jewish service learning? Following normative service-learning pedagogies, Jewish social justice efforts emphasize a curricular trajectory that moves from direct service to political advocacy (Morton 1995). The curricular agenda defined by the service report is, by contrast, skewed toward particularistic goals such as the conveyance of “Jewish teachings and Jewish knowledge” and the cultivation of Jewish identity and Jewish leaders who might pursue “careers in Jewish Communal Organizations” (Irie and Blair 2008:17). Thus, we see that Jewish foundation-driven efforts to redefine Judaism in relation to the notion of “service” appropriate and reshape an earlier, more politically progressive definition of Jewish service in order to advance a philanthropic agenda primarily concerned with cultivating and deepening Jewish identity. This appropriation integrates service (in the form of volunteer work) with normative Jewish philanthropic objectives focused on the preservation of Jewish identity and the cultivation of support for the State of Israel

Efforts to integrate Jewish social justice initiatives with more normative Jewish agendas are, perhaps, best illustrated by a grant given by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman foundation to Pursue: Action for a Just World—an initiative meant to support alumni of AJWS and AVODAH programs—on the condition that the organization offer its constituency the opportunity to participate in an Pursue-sponsored and highly subsidized trip to Israel. This stipulation provoked a backlash among politically progressive, post- or anti-Zionist alumni and staff of the grantee organizations.

In chapter six, I offer an extended analysis of this episode as part of a broader consideration of the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspective of post-Katrina New Orleans. I mention this event here in order to illustrate how foundation-sponsored efforts to integrate Jewish social justice initiatives with normative (that is, particularistic) Jewish philanthropic positions and orientations sometimes compete with Jewish social justice political agendas.

Within these overlapping frames, the growth of Jewish service must be understood as a product of intra-Jewish debates regarding what might constitute Jewish social action. In particular, Jewish service is an attempt to integrate particularistic projects oriented toward the cultivation of Jewish identity and progressive projects oriented towards developing a universalistic Jewish ethic. While the turn toward particularism is motivated, in large part, by concerns about Jewish continuity, those attempting to refocus Jewish social responsibility outwards claim that Judaism needs to adapt to its current position of socioeconomic affluence and to the ethical demands of a flatter, globalized, interconnected world. A conception of service and service learning as a project that integrates helping others with Jewish education seeks to neutralize this intra-Jewish tension and to appeal to young Jews who are often perceived to be already oriented away from Jewish communal life.

At the same time, the formulation of a Jewish service movement reflects broader cultural dynamics such as affective responses to disasters (e.g. The Southeast Asia tsunami and Hurricane Katrina) and the rising influence of a donor class. While the super-wealthy play an increasingly outsized role in both the non-profit and governmental spheres, their position in contemporary American Jewish culture is particularly notable.

The Israeli version of Forbes magazine reported that, while 0.2% of the world's population is Jewish, 11% of the world's billionaires are Jewish (April 2013). The possible influence of these donors is increased when we consider Jewish collective identities as the product of philanthropic networks and projects. This influence, as I argue, is particularly intensive for Jewish "emerging adults" who are often the prime focus of philanthropic projects.

Producing and Consuming Jewish Service Trips to New Orleans

By the time I arrived to New Orleans to conduct ethnographic research on Jewish philanthropic responses to Hurricane Katrina, the initiatives outlined by the foundation-sponsored service report were being implemented by Repair the World, the agency founded to cultivate a field of Jewish service learning. For example, Repair the World was a lead funder for Jewish Funds for Justice's service department, which was established in the years following Katrina in order to organize service trips for Hillels and other Jewish organizations, both to New Orleans and to a number of other cities across the United States.

Working with Jewish Funds for Justice, I selected a (relatively) socioeconomically diverse set of trips to study. Two of the trips were from public universities and two were from private institutions. In addition to these four Jewish Funds for Justice trips, I also studied a Hillel-sponsored, interfaith Muslim Jewish service trip to New Orleans. The schools ranged from a top elite university to a regional public university. I use the pseudonyms Public U., Elite Public U., Private U., and Ivy League U. to identify the various Jewish Funds for Justice trips; the interfaith trip originated from

an elite public university. Though each trip included students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, those attending the private institutions tended to come from wealthier backgrounds than those attending the public institutions. Notably, this class difference was evident in the fact that students on the Public U. trip were most likely to hold jobs both during the academic year and over school breaks while in college.

Repair the World's efforts to build a Jewish service movement required a close partnership with National Hillel and the network of local Hillels located on college campuses across the country. The yearlong process of planning a JFSJ trip was orchestrated in coordination with the National Hillel office. When I visited the various campuses in order to conduct follow-up interviews in the spring of 2012, Hillel staff were busy planning trips for the following year. Nearly a year before a trip might occur, Hillel staff submit applications to National Hillel listing their top choices and alternatives from a menu of trip options to a variety of domestic and international locations. The trip options for the 2012-2013 academic year included three options for trips in the United States, two trips to Israel, and three trip options for travel to other international destinations. While the majority of trips involved aiding non-Jews, the trips to Israel and one of the international trips involved volunteering with Jewish communities.

The centralized process of bidding for trips from a menu of options developed as a result of Jewish philanthropic efforts to build a Jewish service movement based on "best" and standardized practices. A 2011 Repair the World Report, "Building a Field: 2010-11 Year End Report on Immersive Jewish Service-Learning Programs," emphasized the importance of a centralized funding agency and the establishment of a set of shared "standards" for ensuring the quality of Jewish service learning programs. The

report used the Hebrew term “*heksher*,” or rabbinic seal of approval, a term often used to designate a food item’s kosher status, to describe Repair the World’s self-imposed role as “imprimatur of quality” for the field of Jewish service learning (Aisen and Manning 2011). In fact, the original service report emphasized centralization as key to achieving significant growth for Jewish service learning: “While secular service and service-learning have developed over decades, these fields were propelled forward at different points in time with significant and visible leadership, financial investment and the establishment of central infrastructure organizations”(Irie and Blair 2008:23). Partnering with Hillel, Repair the World depended on this well-established Jewish network as part of its efforts to centralize and standardize the field of Jewish service learning.

Within this structure, New Orleans often emerged as a viable alternative destination when other service itineraries proved unworkable. Thus, from the perspective of on-campus trip consumers, the Jewish service bureaucracy that Repair the World and its funders asserted was key to quality control was experienced as a sometimes frustrating mechanism for directing and redirecting student service travel. For instance, Danielle, a Hillel staff member at Public U., requested a multi-campus trip organized by City Year as her first choice because of the modest programming fee (\$200/student) and because she wanted her students to have the opportunity to spend time with other Jews, as Public U. has a relatively small Jewish population. After hearing that Public U. was not selected for the City Year trip, Danielle, having already brought students to the Gulf Coast on a number of post-Katrina rebuilding trips, settled on New Orleans as a suitable alternative. Similarly, students at Private U. originally aspired to travel to Rwanda but were deterred by the high trip costs and the \$5,000 fundraising requirement for the trip. Working with

National Hillel, the students and staff at Private U. ultimately settled on New Orleans as a suitable and logistically tenable alternative.

I should note that the research design for my project developed along similar lines. In an effort to find a destination that in some way represented a creative mix of Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism, early drafts of my prospectus suggested research at the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village, a Jewish philanthropy-sponsored residential community for orphans of the Rwandan genocide modeled on a youth village established in Israel for Holocaust victims. Like the students at Private U., whose original idea was to travel to this same youth village, I too ended up in New Orleans. Perhaps our shared trajectories reflect the complex position post-Katrina New Orleans inhabits in the American Jewish imagination. We can think of New Orleans as a hybrid domestic-foreign location that figures symbolically as American and as international (and perhaps as an international development site). With a longstanding Jewish community and as a majority African American city, New Orleans semiotically functions as the accessible exotic.

During a post-trip interview, Isaac, one of the student leaders on the Ivy League U. trip, described the haphazard process that led to a service trip to New Orleans. For three years prior to the New Orleans trip, Hillel at Ivy League U. coordinated cultural exchange trips to meet Jewish students in Eastern Europe. The trips were dependent on the support of a local family foundation and came to an end when the grant funds were expended. Searching for an affordable backup, Ivy League U.'s Israel Fellow attempted to organize a service trip to Israel.⁴⁰ Despite the fact that service trips to Israel are highly

⁴⁰ The Israel Fellows Program places charismatic, post-army Israelis at Hillels around the country. Fellows are responsible for on-campus programs such as pro-Israel advocacy and recruitment for

subsidized, the trip failed to garner sufficient student interest to be a viable option. One of the Hillel staff members suggested a service trip, explaining that, while working at a different Hillel, she had participated on a service trip to South America that was “the best experience, ever, that anyone could ever ask for.” Isaac thought that such a trip would be valuable and “one thing led to another and it just snowballed” (interview, May 17, 2012). By presenting trips to New Orleans as second- and sometimes third-choice destinations, my intention is to illustrate the ways in which the bureaucratic structures developed as part of foundation-sponsored initiatives direct and redirect the literal and figurative itineraries of Jewish emerging adults. While this ability to channel and redirect is a familiar feature of social institutions, the rise of a donor class provides a cadre of philanthropically inclined, wealthy individuals with the disproportionate and perhaps oligarchic ability to drive social—and in this case Jewish social—policy.

Becoming Philanthropic Agents

Unlike some other initiatives conceived and funded by extremely wealthy Jewish philanthropists (e.g. PJ Library and Birthright Israel) that are provided free of charge, students traveling on Jewish service learning programs were asked to pay a programming fee and were usually required to cover travel expenses. As I described earlier, Hillel staff would work to select service trips from a menu of options provided by National Hillel; cost was often a determining factor in the selection process. In 2012, students attending Jewish Funds for Justice trips were asked to pay a \$400 programming fee, contribute a

the Birthright Israel program. The Israel Fellows Program emerged through a partnership between Hillel International and the Jewish Agency for Israel, a major Jewish nonprofit responsible for coordinating immigration to Israel and for aiding the subsequent integration of immigrants into Israeli society. From the Hillel website, <http://www.hillel.org/jewish/hillel-israel/jewish-agency-israel-fellows>, accessed July 4, 2014.

\$100 fundraising quota, and cover their own travel expenses. Students—individually and collectively—would often attempt to fundraise in order to offset these trip costs. In this section, I explore the ways in which different attitudes toward trip fundraising have a profound influence on the ways in which participants understand and experience service tourism to New Orleans. In particular, I examine the ways in which student volunteers present themselves as aid recipients to family, friends, and institutions in the hope of gaining financial support in order to participate in service trips. As I will show, the self-perception of young Jews as aid recipients can sometimes lead to tensions, misunderstandings, and miscommunications both before and during service travel. Ultimately, I argue that through such efforts students present themselves as philanthropic agents interpreting, influencing, resisting, and sometimes co-opting the larger philanthropic project of Jewish service learning.

The extent to which students perceived themselves as needing to fundraise for the trip was dependent on a number of factors including parental support, student access to independent funds, willingness to spend independent funds, and the availability of other sources of support. On the various trips I studied and in post-trip interviews, I observed a variety of approaches to the project of trip fundraising. These differences not only were practical in nature but also reflected different understandings of service travel as well as class differences. Students at Elite Public U., for instance, organized a yearly Valentine's Day rose sale in support of Hillel spring break trips. The sale of small-scale items such as roses or baked goods is a rather typical fundraising activity. While the altruistic objective might encourage consumers to purchase the goods, purchasers need not commit, in any sort of serious way, to the project being supported through the fundraising

activity. In fact, the charitable element of such sales is, to a certain extent, obscured by the application of antisocial, market-based logics (Gregory 1982). Thus, those soliciting funds do not need to elaborate on the cause they are seeking to support and givers do not need to be convinced by the claims made by those seeking aid. It is likely for this reason that market-based fundraising activities (e.g. bake sales, rose sales, etc.) are often preferred when individuals and groups raise funds in support of causes—such as travel expenses—that are, to some degree, self-serving. At the same time, the roses and home-baked goods sold as part of these fundraising efforts are easily recognizable as objects related to intimacy. I draw our attention to these items as objects that inhabit and perhaps exploit the interstitial space between commodities for sale and objects that circulate and solidify the social realm.

The tendency among scholars who extend theories of the gift to capitalist societies is to focus on domestic spaces as social realms where Mauss' gift-giving principles are still in operation (Appadurai 1986; Carrier 1995; Kopytoff 1986; Miller 1988, 1998, 2001; Rochberg-Halton 1986). A central preoccupation for scholars attempting to understand how gift exchange functions in capitalist societies is the process whereby impersonal commodities are transformed into the types of objects described by Mauss, into objects that are “invested with life, often possessing individuality” (Mauss 1990:13). “Appropriation” is the generic term anthropologists use to describe the conversion of commodities into possessions. Possessions are “objects that bear a personal identity” and can be considered using anthropological theories of the gift. Commodities, on the other hand, are “objects that are alienated, that bear no such identity” (Carrier 1990:693). By enacting intimacy and distance, fundraising sales help students cover their own travel and

trip expenses without directly asking for assistance while at the same time subtly referencing familiar social and kinship bonds in order to draw in the support of customers, friends, and family members. This example, in some sense, softens the binary between gifts and commodities and illustrates how their seemingly contradictory logics are interwoven with one another in order to make commodities more like gifts and gifts more like commodities.⁴¹

On some campuses, additional funding for service travel came from local donors and nonprofit agencies interested in supporting Jewish service travel in general as opposed to any one particular trip. For example, the Hillel at Private U. had secured a multi-year grant dedicated to alternative spring break trips from a donor looking to advance Jewish continuity.⁴² Stephanie, the Hillel staff person at Private U. responsible for this trip, explained that grant funds were used to cover the program fee for the traveling students. Stephanie described how students who requested financial assistance from Jewish Funds for Justice received an additional subsidy to cover their travel expenses. While the donor remained anonymous and gave indirectly, the Hillel staff member responsible for the trip functioned as the direct giver of aid. Stephanie often used the first person pronoun, appropriating the act of giving as her own.

During a post-trip interview, Stephanie expressed her frustration with what she perceived to be students' self-presentation as "needy":

⁴¹ See Robert Foster's "Commodities, Brands, Love, and Kula" for an analysis of the ways in which branding creates value through softening the distinction between gifts and commodities (Foster 2008).

⁴² In *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty*, Jessica Cattelino draws on the concept of the fungibility of money defined by "its substitutability and exchangeability for itself" to explain how the Seminoles convert casino revenue into forms of cultural value (Cattelino 2008:2). Here too, we see efforts to covert financial wealth into cultural value, i.e. Jewish identity.

And people really fight about the cost no matter what it is. Even if I said that it was a hundred dollars, there would still, I feel like, be the same reaction. 'Cause it doesn't matter what it is, it's just an amount. And they have this kind of [attitude], "I'm a college student, I have no money, I can't do that." If I said it was one hundred dollars, they would be paying a hundred dollars for groceries for the week, for staying wherever they're staying, wherever they're living, paying their rent. But that is not even a calculation in their head. Money equals "really hard, don't want to give it up, it's what I need for my drinking money" [said in a mocking voice] or something. (interview, April 24, 2012)

I found this dynamic somewhat surprising considering the prominent role of service on the campus of Private U. In fact, a number of participants from Private U. told me that they chose to travel to New Orleans with Hillel because they were not able to secure a spot on one of the many trips sponsored by the university's community service center. Without putting too much analytical pressure here, it might be useful to ask whether students experienced in Jewish privilege may have felt more entitled to funds coming from an organization and donor invested in their personal life decisions.

Paradoxically, I often found that private university students from more affluent backgrounds were more likely to present themselves as not having access to funds to support service travel. This sense of not having money may reflect their continued financial dependence on parents and thus the need to have parental support to pay for the trip. For instance, Jessica, a student at Ivy League U, was very concerned with fundraising because, though she came from an affluent family, her parents were not particularly supportive of her interest in the not-for-profit sector and wanted her to prepare for a more lucrative career in the for-profit sector. Jessica's father had worked diligently to achieve financial success and wanted the same for his children. Jessica expressed this expectation as her father's frequently repeated adage, "you can be

anything you want as long as you go to law school” (interview, May 16th, 2012). Jessica explained that her father was concerned with self-sufficiency and her ultimate ability to support herself. When it came to Jessica’s interest in engaging in service programs during school breaks, she reported her frustration with her father’s focus on resume padding and expressed that she was motivated by a desire to help others. And yet, responding to her father’s focus on self-sufficiency, Jessica was very concerned with being able to fundraise enough money to cover trip expenses.

Jessica’s concern with fundraising played a role in the ways in which she experienced and interpreted service travel to New Orleans. The following anecdote from the Ivy League U. trip illustrates how Jessica’s concern with fundraising influenced her understanding of the trip. After working for a few days gutting a blighted home in Gentilly—a relatively low-lying, middle-class, mixed race neighborhood hit hard by the storm—John, the director of the agency responsible for coordinating the service component of the trip, visited the site in order to distribute t-shirts and to speak with the volunteers. Over lunch, which the students ate sitting on the ground beside a dumpster filled with debris from the blighted home, John described his five-year ascent from Americorps volunteer to Executive Director of Rebuilding Together New Orleans.⁴³ After speaking about his professional journey and about his agency, John invited the group to ask him questions. John answered a question about his main responsibilities as Executive Director by explaining that his work mostly involved fundraising and staff management. Following up on this response, Jessica asked for suggestions regarding how to raise funds. John suggested, “tell your story—share your narrative. People want

⁴³ Post-Katrina New Orleans provided charismatic activists and social entrepreneurs, often post-storm transplants, with opportunities to assume leadership positions that they would likely not have achieved within the same time frame in other contexts.

to hear your story and will want to help.” A post-trip interview revealed that Jessica’s question was motivated by ongoing group efforts to raise funds to cover the expenses for their current trip to New Orleans. The group had pooled their fundraising efforts and had planned to distribute the funds equally. Thus, in this particular interaction, learning about Katrina and its aftermaths was refocused toward the project of raising funds for mostly affluent students studying at Ivy League U.

This concern with fundraising was not limited to Jessica but was a general concern for the trip. Isaac, one of the student leaders on the Ivy League U. trip, told me, “from the beginning, it was on my mind how much a factor fundraising would be.” Before they started organizing the trip, Isaac reported that Brooke, the Hillel staff person, highlighted the challenges of fundraising. As a result, a concern with fundraising became a central lens through which the student volunteers from Ivy League U. viewed the project of organizing a service trip to New Orleans.

Alexis, a trip participant from Public U., had a different approach to trip fundraising; she informed me that she had essentially liquidated her bank account in order to participate in the trip. Working to put herself through college, Alexis perceived herself as willing to make what she considered to be a significant personal sacrifice in order to participate in the trip. For Alexis, this sense of sacrifice became an interpretive lens for explaining tensions that existed between Jewish Funds for Justice trip leaders and the student volunteers from Public U. On the Public U. trip, a number of trip participants, mostly a group of fraternity brothers, clashed with the Jewish Funds for Justice leaders. These students resented the educational component of the trip, a series of facilitated workshops with names such as “Why is our society like this?” and “Ways to make

change” that framed volunteer activities in relation to social justice and political activism.⁴⁴ As the week wore on, the dissenting students grew bolder in their attempts to undermine trip programming. For instance, during a workshop that was held in the courtyard of the youth hostel where the group was staying, a drunken man stood nearby and began making loud sounds, disrupting the session. I later learned that the man was acting at the behest of some of the trip participants who had told him about their dislike for the trip leaders.

During a closing activity in which trip participants were asked to pair up with one another and then to compliment one another, Alexis told me that, unlike the trip leaders, I did not condescend to the group. She explained her sense that the leaders thought that they were better than the students. Later on, while trip participants enjoyed a final evening partying on Bourbon Street, I asked Alexis to elaborate further on the comments she had made during the appreciation activity. In response, Alexis told me that the trip leaders didn’t appreciate that the student participants cared and wanted to help people. She understood the students as perceiving the trip leaders as unappreciative of the students’ dedication to helping others. Comparing herself to other students who spent their breaks working, lounging at home, or traveling to a more stereotypical party break destination, she was frustrated by the suggestion, implied by the curriculum, that privileged white American Jewish service volunteers were somehow complicit and responsible for the structures of inequality that exist in American society. Having sacrificed discretionary income from her job and without access to further family

⁴⁴ These titles come from the “Participant Guide” Jewish Funds for Justice provided to the student volunteers. Trip leaders used these booklets to facilitate trip workshops.

assistance, Alexis resented this educational framework and interpreted trip members' frustration as a response to these assumptions.

This example highlights a basic tension between viewing trip participants as objects and viewing trip participants as agents. While the various institutions involved understand the student volunteers as philanthropic recipients in support of their larger agendas (e.g. Jewish continuity or progressive political education), I suggest here that Alexis asserted herself as a philanthropic agent, as an individual who had made sacrifices in order to participate in a humanitarian project. While Alexis perceived Katrina victims to be the primary recipients of aid during the Jewish service trip, the trip leaders represented Jewish philanthropic networks invested in the cultivation of Jewish identity, on the one hand, and progressive Jewish activists, on the other. While funders were often confident in their ability to enact a particular reality, I argue that student attitudes toward fundraising that emerged from their non-episodic life had profound consequences for defining the meanings of Jewish service episodes.

Building on this analysis, I turn to an ethnographic scene in which understanding the doubled identity of trip participants as objects and agents can help elucidate a seemingly ridiculous disagreement about a makeshift bench. On the third day of a weeklong service-learning trip, I joined student volunteers from Ivy League U. at the Rebuilding Together warehouse, where they were preparing salvaged construction materials for reuse. The warehouse, located near St. Claude Street on the boundary of the Marigny, Bywater, and Upper Ninth Ward neighborhoods, serves as the rebuilding agency's field headquarters. The area, located to the East of the French Quarter, is part of the St. Claude corridor, an area that has experienced significant gentrification in the

years following Katrina.⁴⁵ The warehouse is also home to the Preservation Salvage Store, a business venture that raises funds through the sale of salvaged and vintage construction materials. The student volunteers were working in an open-air courtyard flanked by large industrial steel frame shelving units similar to those one might encounter in the lumber section of a home improvement store. Cecily, an Americorps volunteer and the site supervisor, instructed us regarding how to strip nails from wall and ceiling board using hammers and crowbars so that these materials could be reused. In this case, the boards would be reinstalled in the same home from which they were first salvaged. Throughout the morning, the sounds of chatter alongside the creaking of nails leaving wooden boards punctuated the calm spring air.

By the time we broke for lunch, the task of preparing the wall and ceiling board was mostly complete. As a result, after the break, there were not enough tasks to occupy all of the student volunteers. Noticing this lack, Cecily gathered spare materials and constructed a makeshift bench, which she then presented to the students as an opportunity to decorate—to “leave their mark.” A group of three or four students, eager to remain busy, accepted the offer and began painting the bench. It soon became apparent that they had reached an impasse and were heatedly debating how to represent themselves in text on the bench. While some students wanted to represent themselves as coming from Hillel, others insisted that they paint a text that indicated that they were members of the Jewish Student Association (JSA), an official university student group that had formed in opposition to Hillel in order to provide students more control and oversight over Jewish

⁴⁵ In an article posted on nola.com, Richard Campanella—a geographer whose work is focused on the city of New Orleans—designated the area around the warehouse as “very cool” and at the center of post-Katrina gentrification trends. http://www.nola.com/homegarden/index.ssf/2014/03/putting_cool_on_the_map.html, accessed May 29, 2014.

life on campus. I later learned that the relationship between Hillel and the Jewish Student Association is somewhat complicated; JSA and Hillel often coordinate with one another and, despite forming in opposition, JSA functions as Hillel's de facto student board.

The immediate debate revolved around issues of funding. Isaac, who was not only a student leader on the trip but also the president of the Jewish Student Association, insisted that only the Jewish Student Association be named as the on-campus trip sponsor because JSA had provided a \$500 cash grant and had donated materials for a fundraising bake sale. Isaac further noted that Hillel had provided no financial or material support for the trip. Another student, Hannah, countered that National Hillel and its local on-campus subsidiary served as the trip's official sponsor agency and had, in fact, provided significant support for the trip. Upset that Hillel's name might not be integrated into the design, Hannah informed Brooke, the Hillel staff person traveling with the group, about the disagreement. Joining the debate, Brooke asserted that Hillel had, in fact, dedicated significant resources to the trip in the form of dedicated staff time and gratis programming space in the Hillel building. Furthermore, Brooke commented that she had turned down a number of other programming opportunities in order to help coordinate the trip.

At this point, Isaac and Brooke left the immediate area in order to discuss the matter privately. After what was later reported to be an intense yet productive conversation, the two returned and announced that the students would include the following text, "Hillel and JSA [image of heart] NOLA." Ironically, when the workday ended, the students ultimately included no text as part of their decoration. Realizing that they had written the word "Hillel" in too large a font and with the workday quickly

coming to an end, the students painted over the text they had already written and the day ended with the bench painted in green, blue, light blue and orange stripes with an off-white heart at its center. A photo, included below, reveals the word Hillel barely visible beneath a second coat of green paint.



Figure 6: Bench decorated by service trip volunteers

This seemingly absurd debate reveals a basic tension underscoring Jewish service learning travel to New Orleans. On the one hand, Jewish service trips are humanitarian projects oriented toward aiding non-Jewish Katrina victims. The proposed bench decoration, “Hillel and JSA [image of heart] NOLA” iterates this basic premise. On the other hand, Jewish service travel emerges from a concern about “Jewish continuity” and is oriented toward providing young Jews with meaningful and enjoyable experiences. As

I have argued throughout this chapter, the development of Jewish service was meant to combine Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism in a way that might integrate Jewish emerging adults into institutional Jewish life. The bench inscription debate illustrates the ways in which young Jews push back against an understanding of themselves as passive philanthropic objects. This debate highlights the ways in which young Jews assert a role as philanthropic agents with the ability to challenge, resist and co-opt the philanthropic structures that guided them to service travel in New Orleans in the first place. While the students would not necessarily be familiar with the broader institutional and philanthropic actors seeking to advance a Jewish service agenda, this anecdote reveals efforts to assert their own agency in relation to national Jewish philanthropic structures. We can thus understand the debate about whether to write JSA or Hillel on the bench as a debate about who was in control. In New Orleans and on campus, are Jewish students objects or agents? By insisting that they represent themselves as members of the Jewish Student Association, the Ivy League U. students arguing against including “Hillel” in the inscription presented themselves as philanthropic agents responsible for bringing themselves to New Orleans. While such acts of resistance were not a constant presence on Jewish service trips to New Orleans, these incidents highlight the ways in which young Jews challenged the philanthropic structures that directed and redirected them to New Orleans. While major funders can use their resources to create episodic Jewish experiences, the meanings ascribed to those experiences are beyond the control of funder agendas.

Dismantling Jewish Service Learning

The idea that Jewish identity might be reformulated in relation to service to non-Jewish others was first advocated by Jewish social justice organizations such as AVODAH and American Jewish World Service. Building on these successful early models and on the enthusiasm many Jews brought to the project of post-Katrina rebuilding, a number of major Jewish funders attempted to appropriate this idea through the integration of community service and Jewish identity cultivation. When I first began my research, these efforts had achieved a number of initial successes. Repair the World had been established and quickly became a central player in the field of American Jewish philanthropy. With significant financial support from The Charles and Lynn Schusterman and Jim Joseph Foundations, Repair the World was the largest single donor to AVODAH and provided significant funding to Jewish Funds for Justice and to Hillel in support of short-term service trips. Furthermore, these efforts to integrate Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism were showcased at the 2010 General Assembly conference, where Repair the World had organized a day of service and was central to efforts to integrate Jewish social justice organizations into a conference that was historically limited to more mainstream Jewish philanthropic players.

However, by the time my research was coming to an end, efforts to integrate Jewish identity projects with Jewish social justice efforts were starting to unravel. While I was in the process of interviewing an on-campus Hillel professional who had staffed one of the service-learning trips that I had studied, the interviewee received an email announcing that Bend the Arc (the agency previously named Jewish Funds for Justice) was closing its service department, effective immediately. As the largest provider of

domestic Jewish service-learning trips, the closure of Bend the Arc's service department represented a significant development in my ongoing study of Jewish philanthropic activity in post-Katrina New Orleans. The official reason given for this closure was that the service department was operating at a financial loss. Conversations with Bend the Arc officials confirmed my sense that this decision also served to disentangle Bend the Arc from work that was institutionally complex and that forced the organization to operate at the nexus of particularistic and universalistic notions of Jewish philanthropy.

One point of contention was the pressure from donors and Repair the World to "scale up" service programs. Organizations such as Bend the Arc and American Jewish World Service resented pressures to scale up when expansion might come at the expense of quality. Ultimately, these agencies responded to the pressure to both scale up and apply a set of standards externally imposed by Repair the World by ending short-term trips, asserting that a collaboration focused on Jewish identity ultimately came at the expense of their core, universalistic missions. Repair the World ultimately changed its focus from establishing and centralizing the field of Jewish service to running its own programs and initiatives, sometimes in competition with the programs that Repair the World used to support. For example, Repair the World established its own yearlong service corps, which, in many ways, resembles AVODAH. Furthermore, instead of working through established organizations such as Bend the Arc (formally JFSJ), Repair the World now offers grants directly to on-campus groups to help fund service-focused break trips.

The larger stakes here revolved around a sense of a normative Jewish community politics. This is to say that integration into the field of mainstream American Jewish

philanthropy required the toning down of political critiques of wealth inequality and of the state of Israel. While Repair the World continues to advocate for the concept of Jewish service, the hope that this might translate into a more unified field of Jewish philanthropy failed to materialize. Returning to the idea of episodic Jewish culture, I note that in contrast to brick-and-mortar institutions such as the synagogues, schools, and federations that dominated American Jewish life in the second half of the twentieth century, there is, perhaps, a more ephemeral quality to instantiations of episodic Jewish culture. The disintegration of Jewish service as a project that might unify Jewish progressives and more normative, inward-focused segments of Jewish philanthropy thus highlights the limits of foundation-sponsored initiatives for defining Jewish life and culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

Structure, Practice, and Agency in a Jewish Service Corps

Introduction

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps designates the buildings where corps members live communally in each of the cities where they run programs as “the bayit,” a Hebrew word meaning home. This designation emphasizes the home’s Jewish character and highlights the centrality that communal living plays in a program oriented toward the creation of a normative structure within which Jewish social justice identities and communities can be formulated, nurtured, and sustained. Drawing on the work of Sherry Ortner and Pierre Bourdieu, my concern with AVODAH and its emergent normativity is motivated by a desire to understand the intersections of structure and agency and the ways in which Jewish philanthropy provides young Jews with both opportunities and constraints. I invoke, in particular, the formulation of practice theory described in Sherry Ortner’s (1984) seminal article, “Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties.” In this article, Ortner emphasizes intention and people’s conscious ability to change societal structures while remaining products of these structures. Following Ortner’s later update of this articulation (1996), I use the term “structure” in a multi-leveled sense to identify macro-level structuring frameworks such as capitalism and nationalism alongside more local and less holistic structuring frameworks such as those created by Jewish philanthropic institutions.

In this chapter, I consider the establishment of AVODAH in the late 1990s as well as the agency's expansion to post-Katrina New Orleans. I frame these efforts in relation to the growth of independent philanthropy, a phenomenon I understand to be a byproduct of growing inequality and the accumulation of wealth at the very top socioeconomic levels of American society. I argue that in order to understand the establishment of AVODAH as a national organization and its expansion to New Orleans, we must consider macro-level structures—namely, the influence of economic booms and busts on the establishment of Jewish philanthropic start-ups. Growth in the field of independent philanthropy capable of easily directing funds toward new projects has spurred a growth industry of Jewish not-for-profit start-up agencies; AVODAH is a characteristic example of this type of initiative.

Looking at AVODAH and “the bayit” as emergent structures allows me to think about issues of cultural shift and the contexts and processes whereby new ethnoreligious norms are established. In particular, I focus on the interfaith borrowing central to AVODAH's formation. In establishing AVODAH, Rabbi David Rosenn, the program's founder, used the Lutheran Volunteer Corps as a model. This chapter thus explores the ways in which a Christian organizational model was transformed into a Jewish initiative oriented toward establishing a normative connection between Judaism and social justice.

Despite its recent establishment, AVODAH functions as a particularly intensive Jewish experience, a structure against which corps members formulate their own projects and ambitions. While some of these individual projects and trajectories are in line with AVODAH's stated goals, there are instances in which participants understand themselves

to be in tension with the positions and practices determined by the AVODAH program. For example, despite the extensive curriculum that attempts to integrate Judaism and Justice, program participants often do not perceive themselves as belonging to a Jewish social justice movement.

I conclude the chapter with a consideration of unintended consequences. In her explication of practice theory, which focuses on the ability of agentive efforts to transform social structures, Ortner suggests that the sociocultural shifts that are sometimes achieved are not always those sought by social actors (Ortner 1984: 157). This observation brings into relief two unintended consequences of AVODAH's formation. The first is that AVODAH cohorts are predominantly and sometimes exclusively female. While not the original intention, the resulting communities are often experienced as feminine and feminist, and perhaps as manifestations of a specifically female form of Jewish social activism. A second unintended consequence is that by formulating AVODAH as a program geared toward the alleviation of poverty in the United States, mid-level staff and program participants have interpreted AVODAH as a program that explicitly and intentionally avoids any discussion of the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Consequently, some non- or anti-Zionist staff and participants understood the program as a Jewish safe space where they might participate in Jewish life without becoming implicated in support for the state of Israel. This tension ultimately led to a public confrontation when a major funder to AVODAH stipulated that the agency sponsor a trip to Israel for alumni as part of the grant requirements. I address the former unintended consequence in this chapter and the latter in the next chapter,

which deals with intra-Jewish debates regarding the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Activists and Philanthropists

First established in New York City in 1998, AVODAH subsequently expanded to include service houses in Washington, D.C. (2002), Chicago (2005), and New Orleans (2008). AVODAH corps members live communally, work in a variety of anti-poverty agencies, and participate in an intensive curriculum geared toward skill building and toward solidifying the connections between Judaism and social justice activism. Additionally, in 2014, AVODAH opened a non-residential fellowship for young professionals working in Jewish social justice organizations in New York City. Placing these events within a practice theory framework, we can understand AVODAH's founder as a rather effective social actor who was able to implement an agenda for social change. Rosenn's success, however, was dependent on his ability to capitalize on the growth of independent Jewish philanthropy.

I met Rabbi David Rosenn, a charismatic and determined social activist, at the offices of the New Israel Fund, an agency devoted to promoting civil rights and social justice in Israeli society. Before moving to the New Israel Fund, Rosenn spent thirteen years as the founding director of AVODAH. During our interview, Rosenn described the events that led to the establishment of AVODAH, beginning with his professional experiences in the years following his college graduation in 1989. I will return to this founding narrative later in the chapter; for now, my focus remains on the economic conditions that enabled AVODAH's successful launch. Rosenn told me that he understood his ability to establish AVODAH, a relatively early example of a Jewish not-

for-profit start-up, as a function of foundation support and on fortuitous timing in the cycles of economic boom and bust. According to Rosenn, AVODAH's ability to achieve financial stability was primarily dependent on timing as much as anything else. Coming after the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey that reported high rates of intermarriage that "just scared the hell out of everybody" in the organized Jewish community, Jewish funders were eager to find new models for cultivating Jewish identity among young Jews (interview, April 17, 2013). Additionally, Rosenn noted that the stock market was booming at the time and speculated that AVODAH may not have survived if it had been established several years later—it likely would not have made it through the post-9/11 recession, when donor resources plummeted.

Increasingly, innovations in American Jewish life emerge through a partnership between individual social entrepreneurs (broadly defined) and philanthropists looking to maximize their impact. The term "social entrepreneur" has become increasingly popular among social change agents. While the term sometimes refers to those who seek market-based solutions to social problems, I use the term here to focus our attention on the increasing role individuals such as David Rosenn, in partnership with independent philanthropists, now play in determining which agencies and trends emerge in contemporary American Jewish life. Olivier Zunz (2012) observes that collaboration between wealthy patrons and social reformers characterized philanthropic projects in the early 20th century, an era similarly defined by the accumulation of massive fortunes, some of which were donated in support of large-scale social change projects. While AVODAH cannot be considered a large-scale project, its establishment illustrates how, once again, the increasing influence of independent philanthropy provides a social

mechanism that enables the innovations of social entrepreneurs. We can think of this trend as similar, in some sense, to tech start-ups funded by venture capitalists looking to profit from the “next big thing.” In fact, since AVODAH was founded, a number of Jewish funding organizations have emerged that focus on providing financial and institutional support to Jewish social entrepreneurs and start-up agencies (e.g. PresenTense, Joshua Venture Group, and Bikkurim: Advancing New Jewish Ideas). This is to say that AVODAH’s success was an early example of a Jewish cultural shift that emerged as a result of the reorientation of American Jewish philanthropy to become increasingly dependent on individual funders and family foundations that often invest in not-for-profit start-ups and Jewish social entrepreneurs. While the decline of the federation system is often describes in generational terms, as a result of younger Jews no longer interested in supporting a centralized Jewish federation system, the analysis provided here complicates the narrative of generational decline and suggests that collaboration between independent philanthropists (who tend to be older) and social entrepreneurs (who tend to be younger) has weakened the organized Jewish community’s—and, in particular, the system of Jewish community federation’s—ability to determine American Jewish public policy.

Collaboration between a young activist and a funder was also central to the expansion of AVODAH to New Orleans in the years following Hurricane Katrina. Ben, the first director of AVODAH New Orleans, arrived to the city in January 2007 as part of the a steady stream of volunteers and activists who flocked to the Gulf Coast in the years following the storm. Despite starting a career in corporate law, Ben spent his early thirties exploring his Jewish identity, first at a progressive seminary in Israel and then as

an apprentice farmer at a Jewish ecological retreat center. Unsure of what to do next, Ben found himself in New Orleans among the flood of post-Katrina volunteers. Ben recalled thinking during his drive down to the New Orleans about how he wished there were a central address in New Orleans where young Jews could gather and celebrate Jewish life together. This idea remained with Ben as he learned about New Orleans and began to integrate himself into youth activist communities, especially those with a focus on sustainability and food justice.

While Ben arrived as part of the post-Katrina influx of volunteers, he had extensive ties to the city. In fact, as I mentioned in chapter three, S. Walter Stern was Ben's great grandfather. Although Ben grew up in Detroit, he took pride in this connection to one of New Orleans' most prominent and most significant philanthropic families.

Soon after arriving in New Orleans, Ben was recruited by the Jewish ecological retreat center where he had participated in a farming fellowship to represent the agency at a Jewish Funders Network conference in Atlanta. While attending the 2007 Jewish Funders Network conference, Ben met Barbara (Gervis) Lubran, the director of a relatively small family foundation (the Estelle Friedman Gervis Charitable Foundation). While the several hundred thousand dollars this foundation distributes annually is relatively modest when compared to other foundations in the Jewish Funders Network, Lubran told me that she used these funds and her access to the Jewish Funders social networks to leverage her giving to maximum effect (interview, January 31, 2012).

The Jewish Funders Network is an agency that provides support and networking opportunities to funders who give at least twenty-five thousand dollars annually and

whose philanthropy is guided by their Jewish identity. First established in 1990 with 17 funders, the network hosted an initial conference in 1991 with fifty-nine attendees. The agency has grown exponentially since that time; a 2012 conference included more than 400 participants.⁴⁶ The emergence and growth of the Jewish Funders Network serves as a barometer for the increasing importance of independent philanthropy in the Jewish community. In contrast to mass philanthropic structures such as United Way or the network of Jewish federations, which have historically been defined by a centralized system in which professionals determine how best to distribute funds, the current trend is for wealthy individuals to seek greater control over the philanthropic funds they donate. In *The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan*, Charles Bronfman, a prominent American Jewish philanthropist (and co-founder of Birthright Israel), and Jeffrey Solomon, the president of Bronfman's family foundation, describe the emergence of what they term the "new philanthropy":

In the new philanthropy, the donors' giving is like their doing: it is individual, forward looking, leveraged for effect, and bent on changing the world. The old philanthropy has certainly not disappeared. The United Way, the great emblem of the old philanthropy, is still the largest charity in the United States. (The second largest is the Salvation Army.) But the new philanthropy has an influence that goes far beyond its monetary value, for it signifies the transformation of society from a standard of noblesse oblige to one of entrepreneurial problem solving, and ultimately, of success. (Bronfman and Solomon 2009: 25)

The Jewish Funders Network supports the efforts of "new philanthropists" as they attempt to achieve this "success" through the application of their entrepreneurial skills to a variety of self-directed social agendas.

⁴⁶ The Jewish Funders Network website, <http://www.jfunders.org/>, accessed July 5, 2014.

After learning of their shared interest in New Orleans, where Lubran also has family ties and lives for part of each year, Ben shared his vision for a Jewish center in New Orleans and, in particular, his idea for expanding AVODAH to New Orleans. Excited by this idea and bolstered by the stock market gains of the mid-2000s, Lubran approached David Rosenn, AVODAH'S director, suggested the idea, and offered to provide a \$100,000 two-year start-up grant in support of the project. Lubran also suggested that Ben serve as the founding director of AVODAH New Orleans, which is what ultimately occurred. While she subsequently lessened her level of support, in part due to the economic downturn in 2008, which significantly reduced her foundation's resources, Lubran successfully leveraged an initial gift in order to secure the expansion of AVODAH, a program designed to continue indefinitely, to New Orleans.

Like its national counterpart, AVODAH New Orleans emerged as a result of the collaboration of an activist with a particular vision for Jewish life and a funder with the financial means to help realize that vision. These examples illustrate how economic growth, especially when skewed toward the very wealthy, provides opportunities for the successful implementation of social change projects. Thus, we see that the establishment of AVODAH, a program that encourages its participants to combat systems of inequality, and its subsequent expansion to New Orleans were enabled by economic growth that disproportionately flows to the very wealthy who then redistribute their funds through independent philanthropy. While critics of big philanthropy often note the ways in which philanthropy serves to reproduce existing social structures and does not tend to promote radical social change (INCITE 2009), the combination of significant capital and an

interest in promoting Jewish identification has led some philanthropists to support organizations that, in turn, advocate systemic and perhaps radical change.

Interfaith Connections

Rosenn's decision to establish a Jewish service corps emerged from his post-college experiences and, in particular, his exposure to Christian institutional formulations of social activism. In his first year after college, Rosenn worked for the New Israel Fund, the US-based agency where he now serves as a leading executive. Rosenn then spent two years working in Washington, D.C., first for a Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization, and then for the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, a political and advocacy agency representing the Reform movement. As an employee of the Religious Action Center, Rosenn was asked to accompany a teen group to Luther Place Memorial Church. Rosenn described how his encounter with this mainline protestant congregation, which he at first found perplexing, ultimately led him to pursue the rabbinate and to establish AVODAH. A brief account of the church's post-civil rights era history is necessary for understanding this moment of inspiration.

In the 1960s and 1970s, most of Luther Place Memorial Church's white congregants left for the D.C. suburbs as part of the white flight that occurred in response to the turbulence of the civil rights era. Despite moving to the suburbs, congregants did not want to abandon their historical structure that was built as a "memorial to peace and reconciliation following the Civil War" and continued to travel to what subsequently become a socioeconomically depressed neighborhood.⁴⁷ The juxtaposition between the

⁴⁷ The Luther Place Memorial Church website, <http://www.lutherplace.org/about-us/our-history>, accessed July 7, 2014.

affluent white congregants and the neighborhood's mostly impoverished and predominantly African American population ultimately led to a sense that the church had a responsibility to help those living in the neighborhood.⁴⁸

The church subsequently embraced an ambitious agenda in support of their neighbors, purchasing all of the property in the city block adjacent to the church in order to build affordable housing units, to establish a medical clinic, and to support a halfway house for recovering substance abusers. Impressed by these efforts, Rosenn came to understand why it was that the Religious Action Center had sent the group to visit this congregation, commenting that “no synagogue that I had ever heard of had ever done anything remotely as ambitious as that. It was incredible” (interview April 17, 2013). One aspect of Luther Place Memorial Church's social justice initiatives that Rosenn found particularly compelling was the Lutheran Volunteer Corps (LVC), a program that the congregation founded as part of these efforts and that had subsequently expanded to other cities. LVC corps members live communally and work in a variety of not-for-profit agencies including the church-run medical clinic Rosenn encountered during his visit to the church.

⁴⁸ In *Urban Exodus*, political scientist Gerald Gamm (1999) argues that Catholic notions of parish as opposed to Jewish notions of congregation explain in part why Jewish communities left Boston for the suburbs while Catholics, or at least their churches, remained in the city. While the Lutheran church is not organized around notions of parish, in this case, congregants' connection to a particular structure led the community to maintain their church's location despite the fact that most congregants had moved to the suburbs. Furthermore, following Gareth Stedman Jones's (1971) analysis of the emergence of pauperism in Victorian England, one could argue that proximity between the wealthy and the poor leads to a more socially embedded sense of social responsibility for both givers and receivers of charity. It seems that by remaining in the original location, Luther Place Memorial Church cultivated a more comprehensive sense of social responsibility to their impoverished neighbors than they likely would have had the congregation itself relocated.

Upon returning to the Religious Action Center office, Rosenn inquired about the Jewish version of the Lutheran Volunteer Corps, assuming that, of the thousands of Jewish organizations in the United States, there would surely be one doing similar work. Learning that no such agency existed, Rosenn began formulating a career plan to start what would later become AVODAH. Reflecting back on this experience, Rosenn told me that his desire to start a Jewish service corps ultimately solidified his interest in pursuing the rabbinate, and in particular a rabbinic career that integrated Judaism and social justice.

The Lutherans were encouraging. Rosenn paraphrased their attitude: “They said that would be great. We stole it from the Jesuits and you should take it from us” (Interview, April 17, 2013). To that end, the summer prior to rabbinical school, Rosenn volunteered with LVC and was given permission to “Xerox every document” related to the program to help him adapt it for the Jewish community. At the conclusion of rabbinical school five years later (spring 1997), Rosenn avoided the usual rabbinic hiring process that matches rabbis with congregations and began working in earnest to start AVODAH. The first AVODAH cohort started a year later.

I would like to briefly consider the implications of the interfaith borrowing that resulted in the formation of AVODAH. The narrative described above indicates that the connection between progressive Jewish efforts and progressive Christian efforts are not coincidental or vague in nature; they represent explicit attempts to emulate certain types of Christian social action. Both the Religious Action Center, representing Reform Judaism, and David Rosenn were inspired by the scope of the Lutheran church projects. Rosenn was so taken by the Lutheran Volunteer Corps that he literally copied the

program. While Rosenn openly described the process of interfaith borrowing, AVODAH'S current website (2014), in contrast to the Lutheran Volunteer Corps website that emphasizes its institutional precursors, makes no mention of the Lutheran Volunteer Corps. While AVODAH emerged from liberal Christian precursors, it presents itself as a normative Jewish program. What might "Jewish" mean in this context?

During the interview that I have cited at length in this chapter, I asked Rosenn to explain the Jewish mandate for progressive activism. Code-switching to modern Hebrew, Rosenn responded, "*muvaḥ me'eilav*—I don't know, it seemed obvious to me." (Interview, April 17, 2014) *Muvaḥ me'eilav*, a Hebrew phrase that means self-evident, was the only Hebrew Rosenn used throughout the interview. And yet, moments later, Rosenn described how he had cultivated his own sense of the connection between Judaism and social justice:

Over time, I worked out for myself some ways of thinking about the connections between Jewish life and social justice work and to me they were personally very meaningful and very powerful. But it was somewhat frustrating not to see that institutionalized very much in the Jewish community. (interview, April 17, 2013)

This sense that the connections between Judaism and social justice were at once self-evident and emergent played a central role in the official script of the AVODAH curriculum. One of the primary goals of the program was to create a community within which the connections between Judaism and justice were accepted as self-evident and normative. AVODAH provides an institutional structure that reinforces and codifies these understandings of Jewish life and culture.

Despite the institutional similarities between AVODAH and the Lutheran Volunteer Corps, Rosenn suggested a number of significant distinctions between the two

programs. In particular, he noted attitudes towards poverty as a significant difference between the two programs. Lutheran Volunteer Corps members are provided with a “poverty wage” stipend in order to cover basic living expenses; by contrast, Rosenn told me that AVODAH participants are provided with a slightly larger stipend meant to enable them to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle. Rosenn suggested that, in a Christian context, this low wage is invested with a spiritual significance that is lacking within a Jewish framework. Ilana Silber’s (2002) analysis of the interplay between giving to god (sacrifice), giving to religious institutions (sacerdotal giving), and charitable giving to the poor provides a productive framework for further understanding this distinction. Silber suggests that, in Judaism, echoes of sacrifice are not found in relation to charitable giving. By contrast, sacrifice and charitable giving are strongly associated with one another in the Christian tradition. Thus, the near-poverty wage that the Jewish service corps adopted from its Lutheran counterpart makes more religious sense in a Christian context where it has meaning as a spiritual practice that enacts an emulation of Christ. This idea makes less religious sense in a Jewish context where charity and sacrifice are not interconnected practices and poverty is not perceived to have a spiritual value (Silber 2002). Following this distinction, it is not surprising that the Lutheran Volunteer Corps advertises “simple living” as one of their core values, an emphasis that is not found in Jewish service corps promotional materials.

Further elaborating on this idea, Rosenn reflected on the ideological differences that motivated AVODAH to provide corps members with relatively comfortable living conditions:

Christians, they value poverty, in some way it's like a cultural value, it's positive. That's just not true in the Jewish community. It's not true culturally, it's not true religiously. You can find some strains of asceticism in the tradition but basically it's not valued and so we did not feel like asking everyone to live entirely on rice and beans for an entire year would be successful so we had to adapt a little bit and the kind of stipend that was offered to AVODAH corps members and our determination to do all the paper work that was required for the Americorps education award and all of that was trying to make sure that we set up a situation where okay, if you're not going to make money during this year, at least you won't go into debt and you won't have to live like you somehow have to frame living in poverty as a positive thing because that is not the message we wanted to send because the whole point of this is that poverty is not a good thing. We should help people get out of poverty so let's not necessarily have people struggling throughout the year. (interview April 17, 2013)

Although Rosenn insisted that poverty is not a Jewish value, as I described in my analysis of Jewish privilege in chapter three, young Jews struggle with the implications of their access to wealth and opportunities that are not available to those they serve. While there was no institutional and spiritually inflected focus on simple living as part of the AVODAH program, there was a great deal of class-based anxiety and a self-reflexive awareness of privilege—white and Jewish—experienced and discussed by the corps members I studied.

Creating Jewish Social Justice Norms

Observing the emergence, growth, and influence of Jewish social justice organizations allows us to reflect on the processes whereby emergent forms of Jewish life become normative. In this section, I consider rabbinical trajectories, immersive spaces, philanthropic agency, and historical associations in order to unpack processes of norm creation in relation to AVODAH.

Reflecting on his initial efforts to pursue a social justice rabbinate, Rosenn described how the admission committee that interviewed him as part of his application to the Jewish Theological Seminary during the 1991-1992 academic year did not quite know what to make of his social justice-oriented career aspirations. Rosenn's focus on integrating Judaism and justice as a rabbi was unusual at a time when secular Jewish activists and religious Jews tended to operate in distinct cultural and institutional spheres. Rabbi/activists are no longer the rare species they were when Rosenn first entered rabbinical school; Rosenn portrayed a typical conversation he now has with aspiring rabbis who say to him: "I know you went to rabbinical school and you have this social justice rabbinate and this is what I want to do." Rosenn explained, "I know that there are sprinkled all throughout the rabbinical schools of the United States dozens of people who say that is why they are in rabbinical school" (interview April 17, 2013). Nearly two decades after Rosenn's decision to pursue a social justice rabbinate, a significant subset of recently ordained rabbis and rabbinical students participate in Jewish social justice or Jewish environmental programs. In fact, a number of the young activists I encountered in New Orleans ultimately pursued the type of social justice rabbinate described by Rosenn. This career trajectory has become increasingly normative in part because of Rosenn and the agency he founded. A study of AVODAH alumni published in 2012 included responses from 306 of the 435 individuals who had completed the AVODAH program in all four locations since the program began in 1998. The survey reported that nine percent of alumni were involved in Jewish communal work and four percent had pursued a career in the rabbinate or were in rabbinical school (AVODAH 2013:7). The percentage of those entering the rabbinate from the first four years of AVODAH New Orleans was

higher than the national average for AVODAH alumni, with four out of thirty-nine corps members (nearly ten percent) in rabbinical school. While a full exploration of the influence of Jewish social justice agencies on the contemporary rabbinate is beyond the scope of this particular project, I note that the production of rabbinic leaders heavily influenced by Jewish social justice organizations is transforming the contemporary American rabbinate and American Judaism.

As part of efforts to create normative Jewish contexts within which the association of Judaism and social justice are *muvaḥavim*, or self-evident, Rosenn emphasized the importance of the communal living aspect of the program. Rosenn explained that when he served as the agency's director, he insisted on communal living, despite the high costs associated with this component of the program. His commitment to communal living was motivated by a desire to provide program participants with a holistic space, a structuring framework, within which residents were compelled to live out a Jewish social justice ideology:

I don't think that you can do this without a very robust cultural educational reproduction system. This is why, for me, whenever the board of AVODAH would ask, do we have to have these houses they are such a pain in the ass, they are so expensive... to me, I'm sorry, that is the bottom line about AVODAH. I'm not interested in being a job placement service for young Jews who want to get started in social justice careers. I am very interested in creating a community of young people who feel like I know what I mean when I say Jewish social justice, I'm not the only one who knows what it is. (interview April 17, 2013)

Rosenn's use of the dense phrase "a very robust cultural educational reproduction system" indicates that AVODAH is perhaps primarily oriented toward the establishment of a structure that instills and perpetuates identities that integrate Judaism and social justice. Indeed, for many corps members, with the exception of those coming from

Orthodox backgrounds and those who attended Jewish summer camps, AVODAH involved their most intensive experience with Jewish communal life.

Participation in AVODAH also helps to integrate young Jews in an American Judaism defined philanthropically and encourages their development as philanthropic agents. To that end, the summer before AVODAH, program participants are required to raise at least \$1,500 for the AVODAH program. In addition to raising funds for AVODAH, this requirement achieves a number of additional objectives. AVODAH's website indicates that such efforts are meant to help participants gain fundraising skills, asserting, "knowing how to fundraise is invaluable for people who want to create change." Additionally, asking participants to fundraise the summer before they start the program "offers a chance to increase awareness about AVODAH among corps members' friends and family who might not otherwise know about the program."⁴⁹ In contrast to critics who view contemporary philanthropy as an extension of alienated capitalist exchange (Gregory 1982), AVODAH capitalizes on a fundraising requirement in order to ensure that corps members situate themselves communally in relation to their social networks before they begin the program. These efforts reinforce the notion that integration into American Jewish philanthropic network is a central component of what it means to be an American Jew. Thus, AVODAH implicitly requires program participants enter not only as individuals but also as American Jewish philanthropic agents. Thus, while AVODAH is often understood by program participants to be an alternative to mainstream Jewish philanthropy, the program also seeks to instill a sense of connection to normative, philanthropic formulations of Jewish identity.

⁴⁹ AVODAH website, www.avodah.net, accessed 4 July 2014.

The cultivation of philanthropic agents was also the theme of a workshop focused on philanthropy as a method of social change facilitated by Barbara Lubran during the 2011-2012 AVODAH program year. As part of this workshop, Lubran emphasized that she never gave anonymously, insisting that it was important for others to see her contribution as an endorsement of a particular program or project. This, in fact, was a theme that emerged from a series of interviews that I conducted with individuals with the ability to provide significant financial contributions. At least within the Jewish community, funders often reach out to their social networks in order to solicit support for the issues and projects about which they are passionate. The sociality of these fundraising efforts reflects a notion of American Jewish personhood dependent on being a philanthropic agent integrated into networks of giving and of asking for donations in support of Jewish institutions.

The idea that normative membership in the American Jewish community is defined philanthropically appears as a parenthetical point in an article dedicated to explaining the political clout of right wing Israel advocacy groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). The article, which was written by prominent Jewish pundit Peter Beinart and published in the English online version of the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, states that “an AIPAC activist in a small Jewish community told me years ago, ‘The Jews here who care about being Jewish attend three events a year: their synagogue dinner, the Federation dinner and the AIPAC dinner’” (Beinart 2014). Beinart’s suggestion that attending three fundraising dinners might represent a baseline for situating oneself within the American Jewish community reaffirms the notion that

joining and contributing to American Jewish philanthropy is central for inclusion as an American Jew.

There are, of course, competing definitions of American Jewish individual and collective identity. There are religious, biological (or genealogical), and national definitions for what constitutes a Jewish person. I suggest that Jewish philanthropic networks not only define the American Jewish collective but also play a definitional role in establishing what it means to be an American Jew. In other words, one definition of an American Jew is an individual who participates in some way in the creation and reproduction of American Jewish philanthropy. It is within and in relation to philanthropic structures that we can perceive the dynamism of contemporary Jewish life, a dynamism that is much more likely to occur in the realm of start-up ventures supported by independent philanthropy than in the denominational networks or in the large, centralized agencies that dominated Jewish life for most of the twentieth century.

I note that while AVODAH represents a Jewish community structure established to direct the lives of young Jews in a particular way, program participants are not necessarily fully aware of this structure. In interviews, I would often ask corps members if they would rather receive support via food stamps from the national government or from the Jewish community. Of the ten 2011-2012 corps members, only one noted the fact that corps members were, at the time, supported by Jewish philanthropy. This is to say that funds collected from Jewish donors provided them with housing, food, and a framework for professional advancement. These responses are especially surprising considering the AVODAH regulation that prohibits corps members from accepting food stamps, a practice that is common among AmeriCorps volunteers, especially those who

do not have additional outside financial support. In other words, while participants clearly understood that AVODAH had a particular agenda, corps members were not always fully aware of the implications of placing themselves within this institutional structure.

Another significant distinction between AVODAH and both the Lutheran Volunteer Corps and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps is that AVODAH incorporates an intensive and extensive curriculum that involves studying the connections between Judaism and social justice. The program brings in a number of guest speakers throughout the year and runs skill-building workshops focused on helping corps members become social change agents. I understand these curricular efforts as a characteristic element of Jewish social justice initiatives. This is to say that in addition to capitalizing on Jewish economic, political, and social resources to address humanitarian issues, Jewish social justice initiatives are also educational projects aimed at convincing Jews that pursuing social justice objectives as Jews and from within a Jewish communal context is an authentic and normative expression of Judaism and Jewish culture. While there is a rich history of activist Jews, Jewish social justice efforts are different insofar as they promote an identity at once assertively Jewish and unabashedly progressive.

Jewish social justice organizations must not only convince prospective supporters of the value of their humanitarian missions and of the efficacy with which they achieve their stated objectives, but also demonstrate that pursuing social justice objectives—even when not correlated to specific Jewish interests—is a legitimate expression of Judaism and of Jewish philanthropy. To this end, Jewish social justice organizations and leaders use a number of strategies to emphasize the connections between Judaism and social

justice (or universalism) including: textual analysis, reading and rereading traditional Jewish texts to reflect a universalistic agenda; the appropriation of historical activists who happen to be of Jewish descent as role models; and most simply—and most fundamentally—by labeling efforts that once were thought to be outside the boundaries of Jewish communal and institutional life as “Jewish.”

Since AVODAH was first founded in 1998, the curriculum has become standardized to include a series of units meant to cultivate a commitment to a specifically Jewish social justice ethos. The lessons and speakers included in the curriculum tend to focus on social justice issues relating to the city in which corps members are living. In effect, this means that while curricular goals are shared across the various cities, the specific content of the curriculum varies by city. The curriculum begins with orientation, in which corps members learn about one another and about social justice issues in their city. The second unit introduces corps members to Jewish texts in support of a Jewish social justice ethic while also dealing with the challenges of communal living. A third unit introduces corps members to various methods of social change; as part of this unit, the corps members are encouraged to deepen their analysis of power dynamics (especially pertaining to race and class) and to consider the implications of pursuing social change from within a Jewish community context. The final unit is oriented toward the future and is focused on sustaining the activist commitments that may have been established or strengthened as a result of AVODAH. (I include an overview of the curriculum as it stood during the 2011-2012 program year.)

Figure 7: AVODAH curriculum overviews, 2011-2012

AVODAH Curriculum Overview 2011-12

The AVODAH curriculum takes Corps members through a progression of units that will provide them with the analytical skills and information to be lifelong agents of change, rooted in Jewish values. Alongside, and interwoven with, the flow of the year are the significant Jewish and secular holidays. The major holidays appear below in parenthesis alongside the unit in which they usually occur.

Guiding Questions

Corps members will be guided by five central questions that will be revisited throughout the year. These questions are meant to spur Corps members development as lifelong agents for social change whose work for justice is rooted in and nourished by Jewish values.

What is the role of a Jewish movement for social justice?

What is my role now and throughout my life in building a more just world?

How is community-building a part of working towards a more just world?

How does my Jewish identity inform and sustain my avodah (a Hebrew word which encompasses spiritual, communal and work-related "service")?

What strategies are communities impacted by poverty using to combat the causes and effects of poverty?

Unit 1: Orientation (August 28 - September 4) (Labor Day)

This unit will provide the basic information Corps members need to begin their year in their houses, jobs, local Jewish community and AVODAH community. Corps members will begin exploration of what it means to be a Jewish change agent and will also start to address Jewish pluralism through activities such as negotiating kashrut practice in the home and planning their first communal Shabbat. Corps members and supervisors will prepare for the beginning of work together, and Corps members will meet with a range of activists and leaders to get a grounding in the local anti-poverty community.

Unit 2: Foundations of Our Community (Early Fall) (High Holidays and other Chaggim)

This unit will provide more in-depth information and training to support Corps members in their adjustment to their AVODAH year as a community, Jewishly and professionally. Sessions include an overview of foundational Jewish texts related to poverty and an overview of the history of Jewish activism. The High Holidays offer an opportunity to cultivate a practice of reflection and the Corps members will continue the process of building pluralistic Jewish community. Corps members will examine issues of diversity in their own community, and as they encounter them in the city and at work. This unit is followed by a conflict resolution retreat later in the fall.

Unit 3: Awareness, Analysis and Action (Late Fall - Late Spring) (Chanukah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim, Pesach, Yom HaShoah, Yom Ha'Atzmaut)

This unit will provide sessions geared towards increasing Corps members' awareness of local issues, deepen their analysis of power dynamics (especially pertaining to race and class), and explore different strategies for moving from thought to action in creating social change. These strategies for change include topics such as community organizing, philanthropy, political advocacy, and others. Corps members will locate themselves within the broader Jewish community and explore how and why one might choose to pursue justice from a Jewish perspective. This unit includes a day-long workshop on visioning for a just world.

Unit 4: Closure and Sustaining Oneself in the Work (Late Spring - Early August) (Tisha B'Av)

This unit will facilitate Corps members' process of bringing their year to a close and support them in exploring how they can create a sustainable lifestyle as an agent of social change. They will reflect on the individual and communal experiences they had during the year and look ahead to how they might engage as Jewish change agents in the future. In parting, they will be

Two months into the program year, I attended a workshop facilitated by Sophie, the local program director who took over once Ben left the organization. Sophie grew up in Washington, D.C. and stayed in New Orleans after completing a master's degree in public health at Tulane University, working first for the city of New Orleans before

taking the job as director of AVODAH. Sophie attributed her interest in Jewish communal life to her experience in a Jewish summer camp sponsored by Habonim Dror, a Jewish, socialist, Zionist youth organization.

The main objective of the workshop, entitled “Jews, Justice, and Activism: Rooting Ourselves Historically,” was to solidify corps members’ sense of the Jewish social justice community by connecting corps members to historical figures who played significant roles in a variety of social movements. In order to achieve this objective, Sophie, following the suggestion of the AVODAH curriculum, prepared a number of biography cards, small sheets of paper with pictures and short biographical descriptions of individuals of Jewish ancestry who might be considered social justice leaders. The biography cards described the work that the individual had accomplished and were meant to enable the corps members to consider “the history of American Jewish involvement in social justice struggles, as another basis for helping us to understand that connection.”⁵⁰

After presenting these historical figures and leading a discussion about what it might mean to think about activist work in New Orleans in relation to the history of Jewish activism, Sophie transitioned to a more meta-level discussion of the connections between Judaism and social justice. As part of this second component of the workshop, Sophie posted a number of discussion questions on the wall:

1. Has any of the learning we’ve done so far given you new insight into the connections that exist between Judaism and social justice?
2. Do you see Jewish tradition/Judaism and social justice to be connected? Why or why not?
3. If you see them as being connected, how does it affect your work for social justice?

⁵⁰ The AVODAH curriculum guide.

4. If you don't see them as connected, what motivated you to do a program, that "does" and that talks about social justice through a Jewish lens?

While the workshop title and its use of the second person pronoun, "ourselves," assumes a community of activists, the questions suggested by the curriculum and listed above index the reality that many are not convinced that Judaism and social justice are necessarily connected to one another. In fact, during interviews that I conducted throughout the year, many program participants did not understand their interest in social activism as emerging from Judaism.⁵¹

One ethnographically rich moment in the conversation came when a number of the corps members indicated that they did not consider themselves to be activists. This revelation occurred when one corps member told the group that she did not perceive herself to be an activist; she was followed by three or four other corps members who agreed and distanced themselves from the idea that they were activists. Sophie seemed surprised by the chorus of non-activists and asserted that this was another discussion altogether. The AVODAH curriculum took as axiomatic that participants were both Jewish and activists and needed an institutional framework within which to integrate these two identities. By challenging these axioms, corps members undermined the pedagogical frameworks within which the AVODAH curriculum sought to create a self-

⁵¹ After reviewing this chapter, Suzanne Feinspan, the acting director of national AVODAH, described how the curriculum has since changed to include a primary focus on skill building and leadership training while deemphasizing the connections between Judaism and social justice. In an email exchange, she wrote: "Overall in your discussions of the AVODAH curriculum, some of the things that you relate that were true when you did your research have been shifted over the past few years. For example, while the focus used to generally be on the intersection of Judaism and social justice, we've really re-focused now to ensure that all of what we're doing is in the service of developing the leadership skills of participants" (personal communication, December 30, 2014).

evident, normative reality. By challenging the claim that they were activists as opposed to, say, emerging adults with nascent interests in social justice, corps members demonstrated their own agency as well as the limitations of Jewish identity projects. Returning to practice theory, we see the interactions among various layers of structure and agency—David Rosenn’s founding vision and access to capital, the New Orleans bayit and its pedagogue, and, finally, corps members with varying degrees of self-awareness regarding their position in relation to these frameworks.

Following this event, I began asking corps members during our formal interviews and during more informal conversations whether they considered themselves to be activists. In response to this query, Emily, a corps member who grew up in a wealthy family in the Midwest, told me that she did consider herself to be an activist but expressed some anxiety about embracing this designation: “Yes, but I don’t mean to sound pompous. Because it says that you can have a role. I do want to be humble but I [also] want to take action” (interview, November 2, 2011). Emily attributed her commitment to social activism to her mother, who played a leadership role in a number of Jewish community-based philanthropic organizations.

Emily’s concern about humility reflects an insight gleaned from research on service learning pedagogy. Donna M. Bickford and Nedra Reynolds (2002) observe that activism is often associated with heroic actions that are challenging and perhaps impossible to achieve:

Many of our students appear to recognize activism only as participation in huge events planned by global or national organizations: marches, rallies, and the like. They imagine activists as heroes, courageous and dedicated in ways that seem impossible to emulate. They do not recognize grassroots efforts as activism, and

they do not see themselves as potential actors in either local or larger arenas. (Bickford and Nedra 2002:238)⁵²

That approximately half of the corps members that year eschewed the term “activist” may reflect the sense that they did not necessarily perceive themselves as having the agency adequate to make structural social change.⁵³ While this insight suggests a different interpretation of the disagreement discussed above, both readings emphasize a tension between corps members dual roles as philanthropic objects (receiving housing, education, a stipend, and a job placement) and philanthropic agents. The AVODAH curriculum works to turn philanthropic objects into philanthropic agents while assuming its philanthropic objects to be agents—that is, activists—already. By eschewing the curriculum’s claim of a shared activism, the corps members asserted themselves as the passive philanthropic objects they also were.

Philanthropic Contexts

This next example again illustrates the ways in which AVODAH corps members perceived the field of Jewish philanthropy. While conducting research on a weekend retreat that marked the end of the AVODAH program year and as I was preparing to go to sleep in the small rustic cabin that I was sharing with six service corps members, my

⁵² See Peter Benson and Stuart Kirsch’s (2010) article “Capitalism and the Politics of Resignation” for an analysis of the ways in which corporate practices promote a sense of inevitability regarding current realities as well as resignation about social actors’ ability to enact change.

⁵³ I should note that these workshops do, in some cases, have a profound affect on corps members. At the end of the workshop on historical figures who might be considered Jewish activists, corps members are asked “to do some research... on a Jewish social justice leader that you are inspired by.” Noa, an AVODAH alumna from the second New Orleans cohort, described her research on Leslie Feinberg, a queer writer and activist, as a pivotal experience that ultimately led her to found a queer Jewish activist group in New Orleans (interview August 8, 2011).

mind wandered to the interview that I was to conduct the next morning with the president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Foundation, the efforts of which were central to the establishment of Birthright Israel. I shared these thoughts with the corps members and asked them if they had any suggestions regarding the questions that I should include as part of my interview.

Speaking with his typical brashness, Danny, the lone male corps member, suggested that I come down hard on the philanthropy professional and ask why they include questions about in-marriage in the post-trip survey, insisting that it is racist for people to care about who he marries. Danny's suggestion reflects a complex, and perhaps even paradoxical, position. At the conclusion of a yearlong episode funded by donors, many of whom invest in AVODAH in the hope that participants might increase their levels of Jewish identification, Danny's challenge reflects a tension between opportunity and imposition. On the one hand, Danny has drawn on Jewish communal resources to travel to Israel on Birthright, to visit an international development program with AJWS, and to spend a year living and working in New Orleans. And yet despite taking advantage of these opportunities, Danny resented the implicit demands that he perceived these opportunities to encode. Reflecting a similar frustration, another corps member, Michelle, confessed that thinking about Jewish philanthropy made "her feel like a demographic," a view that reflected her perception that the prime objective of Jewish philanthropy is to encourage Jewish biological reproduction. I found this observation somewhat perplexing considering that the corps members had just concluded a yearlong Jewish philanthropy-sponsored program focused on creating Jewish social change agents.

The next day I asked Jeffrey Solomon a more sensitively worded version of the question that the corps members posed:

I often hear young people say that they perceive Jewish philanthropy as being mostly about getting them to marry Jews. They sometimes find this perceived agenda alienating... Why are Jewish institutions trying to tell me who to love etc.? How would you respond to this claim?

As part of his response, Solomon asserted that, while there are those who think that Birthright is all about in-marriage, Jewish identity cultivation and not in-marriage is the program's primary goal. In fact, Solomon opined that the Jewish community would be wiser to focus on welcoming intermarried spouses. That said, Solomon told me that research showing that attending Birthright reduces rates of intermarriage is central for fundraising from "ROJs," or "Rich Old Jews" who care about combating intermarriage. Solomon continued by asserting that too many Jewish organizations are governed by "rich white guys" who do not understand that contemporary Jews have multiple identities and that being Jewish is one component and not the sum of their identity (interview, July 23, 2012).

This exchange illustrates the ways in which young Jews, Jewish philanthropists, and funders imagine themselves and one another. The AVODAH corps members highlighted in this discussion did not fully internalize the fact that they had chosen to situate themselves within a Jewish philanthropic structure and imagined Jewish philanthropy as an entity that was external to them and that was interested primarily in their most personal romantic decisions. The Jewish philanthropy professional explained that Birthright Israel's ambiguous message regarding endogamy emerged from a need to

fundraise from wealthy Jews. All this is to say that the stated objectives of Jewish philanthropic projects, whether they be aimed at the creation of communities devoted to Jewish social justice activism or communities based on ethnic notions of Jewish identity are limited and shaped by participants and funders, among other social actors.

The Bayit, Gender and Feminism

In her foundational article on practice, Ortner identifies a key paradox regarding the nature of cultural transformation:

The irony, although some may not feel it as such, is this: that although actors' intentions are accorded central place in the model, yet major social change does not for the most part come about as an *intended* consequence of action. Change is largely a by-product, an *unintended* consequence of action, however rational action may have been. (Ortner 1984:157)

While program participants may not necessarily claim an identity as activists, the AVODAH experience is defined by a hyper-political awareness. Over the course of the program year, the communal living experience combined with the curriculum often resulted in intensification whereby domestic debates became integrated into ideological discussions. The domestic sphere became a locus of sociality and a place where values and ideologies were posited and debated. Furthermore, it was through this domestic element of the program that the consequences of the extreme gender imbalance were most intensely felt. While it was not David Rosenn's intention to create a program that was predominantly female, this has often been the case in all cities and in most years. The consequence of this is that AVODAH cohorts often become notable for their assertive feminism.

This point was explicated in a blog post entitled “Brushing with Feminist Toothpaste” written for AVODAH’s *National Blog: Jewish Voices Pursuing Justice*. In the blog post, Casey Tova Markenson discusses the feminist community she enjoyed as an AVODAH corps member in New York City. Markenson elaborates and explains that this community included friends that “I talk to about the sexism I experience” and that this community “opens me to being critical and angry about patriarchy in Judaism” (Markenson 2014). Markenson’s post notes the significance of the domestic sphere, of a community cultivated in intimate spaces, for example, while brushing teeth, as an exceptional element of her experience as an AVODAH corps member and as the location for the cultivation of feminist solidarities. That is to say that the communal element of AVODAH houses is powerful for creating normative identities but that these identities are not necessarily those intended by program organizers.

While she identifies and valorizes the Jewish feminist community she enjoyed as a corps member, Markenson’s post includes a critique of AVODAH’s official curriculum for its relative lack of focus on issues of sexism and feminism. Markenson claims that conversations about gender occurred in informal and often domestic spaces as “a response to the lack of space [program time] that was available during AVODAH to have deep, frank discussions about gender” (Markenson 2014). Building on her personal experience, Markenson argues that conversations about sexism should be “more present in the AVODAH curriculum and in Jewish education.” In addition to an unintended consequence of Rosenn’s agency, which produced predominantly feminine, Jewish domestic spaces, Markenson here asserts her own project of integrating explicit discourses on feminism into the AVODAH program.

AVODAH's lack of focus on gender and feminism on an institutional level is also evident in the 2012 study the agency conducted of its alumni. While AVODAH's overwhelmingly female participant base strikes me as a defining feature of the program, the report mentions gender only once and without any analysis, informing the reader that 84% of the survey respondents "identified their gender as female" (AVODAH 2013:4). While the report investigates a range of other topics in depth, gender is listed merely as a demographic.

In general, I found that AVODAH house dynamics were dominated by the women in the program when there were no, one, or two male participants in a given cohort. However, this was not the case when there were even a small number of additional male participants. For instance, I spent a number of days visiting corps members in Washington, D.C., the only city with several male corps members in 2011-2012. It quickly became apparent that even though there were only six men out of a group of twenty-four, the culture and gender dynamics were significantly different than in the other three cities where there were no or few male participants. The shift in the culture that came with a few additional male participants was made apparent during a four-way Skype conference call between the various AVODAH cohorts. Each group shared something about their experiences as program participants. For instance, the New York corps members, who all happened to be women, spoke about the mice that infiltrated their house. As part of their presentation, the D.C. corps members half-jokingly focused on the experience of being a male AVODAH corps member, thereby distinguishing their cohort from the others. While the D.C. corps members were in the midst of their presentation, one of the New Orleans corps members observed, "New York

is pissed.” Behind this comment was the sense that AVODAH’s female or feminist component was being in some sense challenged.

The contrast between Washington, D.C. and the other AVODAH houses emphasizes the fact that the program often becomes an assertive feminist space—a space for challenging patriarchy—that can be difficult for the men on the program. For instance, Beck, a 2010-2011 New Orleans corps member who later went on to enter the Orthodox rabbinate, told me about his struggles with a house culture defined by an assertive and sometimes exclusive feminism. At one point in the year, Beck expressed his frustration with a planned discussion on the topic of patriarchy. Beck, perhaps attempting to assert patriarchy, was frustrated that there were not going to be any men included as part of the planning process and insisted that “if no guy is on the planning committee, I am not going to show. I don’t trust that it won’t be a time to beat down on guys.” As one might imagine, Beck’s position did not go over very well and some of the house members did not talk to Beck the next day. After this moment of tension, Beck told me that he “heard that someone in the house said, I wish there were no guys in the house. This leads to a feeling of being unwanted which is very difficult” (interview May 22, 2011). This is not to say that being a male in AVODAH was always difficult. In the four AVODAH New Orleans cohorts (both current corps members and alumni) that I encountered in New Orleans, there were thirty-five women and four men. Of the four men, two found their minority role difficult. The other two men flourished in this context; one went on to pursue a social justice rabbinate and the other quickly initiated a life partnership with a female cohort-mate. While AVODAH’s intention is to create communities in support of Jewish social justice activism, AVODAH often plays out as an

experience in which participants struggle to understand and to cultivate a specifically female form of Jewish social activism.

Another male participant, Danny (2011-2012 cohort), offered one possible explanation for the gender imbalance of AVODAH New Orleans. At the conclusion of many interviews, I would often ask interviewees to suggest a question that they would ask themselves if they were conducting the interview and that I had failed to ask. At the end of our initial interview and in response to this question, Danny, the lone male corps member in his cohort, offered the following response: “I like that you didn’t ask about my being the only man but I think this would be my question” (interview October 3, 2011). Responding to his own query, Danny suggested and then immediately rejected the possibility that women might be more likely to choose a program focused on community building: “Some say, women look to build community more than men. This is a psychology theory and I don’t put much stock in that” (interview October 3, 2011). Danny went on to suggest that the work AVODAH corps members did with small grassroots not-for-profit agencies was not sufficiently “professional” to attract more male participants. Danny reflected that “there is a bit more pressure for men to be on their own, to earn more money, and to be more serious” (interview, October 3, 2011). Danny identified a correlation between “seriousness” and “professional,” a term he associated with white-color positions. Danny then differentiated himself from the rest of his cohort along gendered lines, presenting his placement at a law center as the most professional option available through the program. In this example, we find a male corps member asserting a male identity in contrast and response to a program he perceives to be, at least in some sense, gendered female.

In fleshing out this unintended consequence—the creation of Jewish feminist space—of the structures and curriculum of AVODAH, I have paid special attention to those male participants located at the boundaries of AVODAH’s gender-neutral social justice and feminine/feminist ethae. In contrast I turn to a scene from a New Orleans Ladies Arm Wrestling competition in which female corps members perform a critique of Jewish patriarchy. This closing vignette illuminates the ways in which the AVODAH experience became an opportunity for the cultivation of feminist Jewish identity.

I arrived at the Howling Wolf, a music club in the Central Business District as the first two wrestlers were ascending the stage. The thick, exuberant crowd gathered for an arm wrestling competition sponsored by NOLAW, New Orleans Ladies Arm Wrestling, swayed to the blaring music. The Jewish youth activist community was well represented among the wrestlers that evening. Three of the eight wrestlers were Jewish and proceeds from the evening would support the Birthmark Doula Collective, an initiative co-founded by an AVODAH alumna. Between bouts, there were a variety of musical, dancing, and other acts, mostly by female artists and performers.

Each wrestler was introduced with a “bio” and a song and was accompanied onto the stage by an entourage of women dressed to convey the theme chosen by the wrestler. For several weeks prior to the event, corps members, alumni, and other young Jewish activists spoke frequently and excitedly about the upcoming competition. In order to participate, wrestlers had submitted an application that included a description of their theme and costume as well as their introductory text. As part of this process, Michelle sent me a draft of the bio she was preparing for the event, which integrated a feminist critique of Jewish patriarchy as part of a Jewish-themed parody costume:

Brought up on the Torah-toting streets of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, the Circumciser harbored dreams of getting the same nose job as Natalie Portman and becoming a sexy lady rabbi until she realized her future would have more to do with strategic reproduction than leading her own congregation. When she learned that all that chanting and black hat wearing was reserved for the same nice Jewish boys that she demolished in dreidel every Hanukkah, the Circumciser learned to cope by focusing her Hebrew chops and dainty challah-braiding fingers on the family jewels of the young generation. From Tel Aviv to Boca Raton this Barbara Streisand turned Adam Sandler has been crafting kosher pisser for schmucks across the bagel eating nations and now she's come to NEW ORLEANS. So guard your foreskin it's THE CIRCUMCISER!!!!!!

At the event, Michelle and her entourage danced onto the stage while this text was read over the sound system and Gwen Stefani's "Rich Girl," a pop remake of the iconic *Fiddler on the Roof* song "If I Were a Rich Man," played in the background. Trailed by five or six of her housemates wearing ankle-length skirts and *babushkas*, Michelle danced her way onto the stage while using a pair of scissors to cut a hotdog into pieces, which she then tossed at the cheering audience.

The Circumciser's opponent, the "Slamrock," ascended the stage wearing a sleeveless t-shirt, suspenders, dark pants, and a newsboy cap, along with her similarly clad entourage. The Slamrock downed a can of Guinness before easily defeating the Circumciser. While the event organizers recognized the entertainment value of pairing two ethnic-themed wrestlers, the costumes were in fact quite different from one another. While the Slamrock's costume was a seemingly straightforward expression of ethnic pride, the Circumciser's persona represented a feminist parody that addressed the ambiguous role of Jewish women both within Jewish communities and as part of American society. While Michelle does not herself come from an Orthodox background, she took the stereotypically heteronormative Jewish world of Crown Heights as the

backdrop for a creation myth based on ever-increasing levels of Jewish feminism—her character shifts from a desire to look like Natalie Portman (i.e. to be a universally attractive Jewish woman) to the desire to become a female rabbi before finally parodying the role of *mohel* as a feminist emasculator of the Jewish patriarchy. As Michelle’s character develops over the course of the text, so do her stated views on Jewish men—she wants to be desired by them, then equal to them, then, finally, powerful over them. AVODAH’s emergence as a primary site for the development of Jewish feminism and of powerful Jewish women represents the merger of institutional structures and the agents that participate in and change them. It is in the synthesis of institutional frameworks, intra-group bonds, and interactions with the hosting city that AVODAH corps members in New Orleans and elsewhere assert and work to define Jewish, feminist, social-justice identities.

Conclusion

I close this chapter with an extended autoethnographic vignette that highlights the ways in which I was integrated into AVODAH’s efforts to create a normative Jewish social justice community as well as the ways in which AVODAH-created spaces influenced the trajectory of this research project. While the workshop I described earlier emphasized historical figures, another program, “Why a Jewish Social Justice Community?” emphasized local Jews who could be viewed as integrating Judaism and social justice. The stated objective of the program was to provide a context within which corps members might learn about how individual activists understand the connections between their work and their Jewish identity. I was asked to participate in the program as

a panelist. The other panelists included a police monitor helping to provide oversight for the New Orleans police department, a principal at a local charter school, and a community member responsible for a synagogue-based social action committee. In an email Sophie sent to the panelists prior to the program, she related that the program was meant to encourage corps members to think of themselves in relation to a broader community of individuals who connect Judaism and social justice activism. Her email included the following text:

Why this conversation? Well, while one of the central AVODAH principles is the active connection between Corps members' Jewish identity and their work as agents for social change, it is consistently a connection that Corps members report leaving the program with only a vague sense of (both in terms of their own connections and the ones out in the Jewish social justice community). Specifically, I've heard these Corps members voice several times their concerns that AVODAH represents the bulk of the Jewish Social Justice Community in New Orleans, something that I know very well to be untrue.

My inclusion on this panel reflects not only my insider status but also the fact that the program director wanted to highlight my research project in order to encourage the corps members to think of themselves as part of a group—or even a movement—of Jews seeking to integrate Judaism and justice.⁵⁴

I took this opportunity to think through my dual identity as a community member and as a researcher. In order to address this ambiguity, while living in New Orleans, I sometimes introduced myself as having two identities—“Moish,” the community member, and “Moshe Kornfeld,” the anthropologist. At the AVODAH event in question, I began my remarks as follows:

⁵⁴ As I noted earlier, the AVODAH curriculum is now focused on leadership training and skill building.

I wasn't sure if Moish or Moshe Kornfeld was invited to this event. Moshe Kornfeld is a Ph.D. student in anthropology and Jewish studies conducting dissertation research on the emergence, growth, and influence of the Jewish social justice movement within the context of American Jewish philanthropy with a particular focus on post-Katrina New Orleans. In his academic role, Moshe Kornfeld is an observer of Jewish life whose ambition is to make authoritative claims about contemporary American Jewish life that are liked by other academicians like himself. Moish, on the other hand, is an interested community member who is trying to figure out how to live a meaningful and ethical life as a Jew and as a civically oriented-American, Israeli (yes, I'm Israeli too), and perhaps as a global citizen.

This formulation quickly spread to others in the Jewish activist community and the distinction between "Moish" and "Moshe" became a tool for negotiating my dual role as fieldworker and friend. Corps members could indicate their interest in having an event or interaction be "off the record" by clarifying that they were speaking with "Moish" and not to "Moshe." More than a simple fieldwork strategy, these twin designations allowed me to explain to the youth activist community my own conflicted role and that I was in some sense always both "Moish" and "Moshe Kornfeld."

I emphasize here the ambiguities of my role as a participant observer in order to think about the ways in which the structures of American Jewish philanthropy play a structuring role for me as an anthropologist of contemporary American Jewish life. For instance, wealthy donors interested in supporting scholarship on contemporary Jewry have provided significant funding for this project, thus shaping the viability of this research. In a more subtle sense, the progressive Jewish organization that is the focus of this chapter has also guided me. My own academic and personal trajectories are interwoven with the communities and networks of AVODAH alumni. On a trip to Washington, D.C. during my first year of graduate school, I visited my sister who was then an AVODAH corps member. During this visit, I slept in the Bayit living room and

met many of the corps members and their visitors. While making beer bread in the basement kitchen that was specially designated as kosher, I met another visitor who split her time between the United States and Nepal; our discussion helped solidify my desire to organize a pre-dissertation research trip to Nepal and Northern India in order to study Israeli backpackers traveling in the region. While on this research trip, I encountered two Israeli humanitarian NGOs. The first was Tevel B'Tzedek (the world in justice) and the second was Israeli Friends of the Tibetan People. These encounters enabled me to imagine research on Jewish humanitarianism. Upon returning to Ann Arbor, I began to study Jewish understandings of social responsibility.

In contrast to anthropological epistemologies based on cultural encounter with relatively distant others, this research emerges from my own experience and is propelled by the shifts and turns of contemporary Jewish life and culture. I suggest that my ability to produce ethnographic texts, an act typically notable for its agency, is influenced profoundly by the economic and institutional structures of contemporary American Jewish life and culture. That is to say that in some sense the normative space established within an AVODAH-sponsored bayit led to my formulating a project that in turn took Jewish social justice initiatives as its topic of inquiry.

CHAPTER SIX

National and Anti-National Intimacies: Zionism, Diaspora, and the American Jewish *Mishpokhe*

Introduction

For three weeks in the summer of 2014, Jews around the world were preoccupied with the fate of three Jewish boys who had been abducted in the West Bank. While it was later revealed that the Israeli government had known all along that the boys were killed soon after their abduction, the Israeli public and Jewish communities across the globe rallied around this cause and the hashtag #bringbackourboys.⁵⁵ Appropriating “#bringbackourgirls,” a slogan coined in solidarity with nearly 300 Nigerian girls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram, a Muslim extremist group, the previous spring, the campaign allowed Jewish publics to imagine themselves—via synecdoche—as vulnerable and powerless subjects. Some members of the Jewish community categorized the solidarity that emerged in response to this crisis as an ideal of Jewish unity refracted through the lens of vulnerability, of childhood innocence lost at the hands of eternal enemies.

⁵⁵After the boys’ bodies were found, the recording of the full emergency call made by one of the boys was released. The recording, along with bullet casings and DNA found in the car used in the abduction, indicated that government officials were certain that the boys were killed soon after their abduction. The following articles reported that the Israeli government obscured their knowledge of the boys’ deaths: “LISTEN: Recording of Kidnapped Teen’s Distress Call to Police Released” (Jerusalem Post); “How Politics and Lies Triggered an Unintended War in Gaza” (The Jewish Daily Forward); and “Recording of Teen’s Emergency Call Released: ‘They’ve Kidnapped Me’” (The Times of Israel).

These moments of imagined, collective innocence ended abruptly. After hearing the news that the boys were found dead, a group of right-wing Israelis lynched a Palestinian boy, burning him alive. Soon tensions escalated into a war in Gaza that showcased Israel's disproportionate military might and that resulted in the deaths of two thousand Hamas fighters and Palestinian civilians. The juxtaposition of abducted boys and military might illustrates a basic tension of contemporary Jewish life defined by a history of oppression and vulnerability as well as by current strength and power.

The anxiety that might emerge from the juxtaposition of Jewish vulnerability and Jewish strength is perhaps most intensely felt in relation to the modern State of Israel, a powerful country—at once democratic and oppressive—that was established as a refuge for Holocaust survivors and as an antidote to historical Jewish powerlessness. Israeli nationalist narratives draw on this history of Jewish oppression in order to justify recent Jewish power. Visiting heads of state are always taken to lay a wreath at Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial, in affirmation of the nationalist tropes of modern Israel emerging from the ashes of the destruction of European Jewry. While, for many American Jews, support for the State of Israel functions as a type of Jewish “civic religion,” for others, especially young Jews who came of age after the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel is often understood in terms of its power and strength (Aviv and Shneer 2005:12). The notion that support of Israel represents a type of “civic religion” is often discussed in relation to “the Israel paradigm” in which inclusion in the American Jewish mainstream depends on support for the State of Israel. In response to this paradigm, some individuals and agencies in the Jewish community practice a “politics of

avoidance” in which they steer clear of all discussion (and especially critique) of the State of Israel in order to maintain their standing within the American Jewish mainstream.

For many American Jews, Israel’s military is a source of ethnic pride, a symbol of Jewish survival in the face of adversity. The common practice of wearing Israeli military t-shirts, often purchased as souvenirs on trips to Israel, exemplifies this sense of satisfaction. However, for a growing minority, Israel is defined not only by power but also by its abuse of power in its ongoing occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Over the past decade, a small yet vocal youth movement has emerged that challenges the hegemonic American Jewish community norm demanding support for the State of Israel. Young Jews involved in the movement range from strident anti-Zionists to those who support the State of Israel in theory but challenge its occupation of Palestinian territories; in practice, the movement’s center of gravity is anti-Zionist.⁵⁶

One of the primary foci of the 2013 Pew Research Center study of U.S. Jews, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, was the attitudes American Jews have toward Israel. The study found that most Jews feel a sense of attachment to Israel although this connection drops for younger Jews:

Attachment to Israel is considerably more prevalent among American Jews 50 and older than among Jews under age 50, although majorities across all age groups say they are at least somewhat emotionally attached to the Jewish state. Roughly eight-in-ten American Jews 65 and older (79%) say they are attached to Israel, as do 75% of those ages 50-64. By comparison, 60% of those ages 18-29 and 61% of those ages 30-49 say they feel very or somewhat attached to the Jewish state. (Pew 2013:83)

The fact that the level of connection to Israel has stabilized and has not dropped for those ages 18-29 when compared to Jews ages 30-49 can be correlated to the rise of the

⁵⁶ I am grateful to Liora Halperin for this formulation.

Birthright Israel program. The study reported that 48% of Jews ages 18-29 had participated in Birthright while only 24% of those ages 30-39 had participated in the program. Jews older than 40 were above the age of eligibility when the program was first established in 1999 (Pew 2013:85). These statistics, however, do not account for an increasingly vocal subset of young American Jews who challenge the mainstream American Jewish community for its support of Israeli government policies. I speculate that these young Jews are highly connected to Israel and to American Jewish institutions and that it is this sense of connection that motivates their protests against Jewish institutions.

In this chapter, I focus on the interactions of young Jewish anti-Zionists with a variety of American Jewish philanthropic organizations. I focus in particular on a number of protest actions that Jewish anti-Zionists organized to challenge the American Jewish mainstream. While there is vigorous political debate within Israel, left-wing positions critical of the Israeli government have a hard time achieving legitimacy within the contemporary American Jewish community. I argue that while these contestations are often understood in existential and exclusive terms, the protests I witnessed often occurred within intimate family and institutional contexts, that is, within the American Jewish *mishpokhe*. I use the Hebrew/Yiddish term *mishpokhe*, or family, to emphasize that, while often understood as large-scale political debates, these debates also and perhaps often play out within intimate spaces—within families and within small, tight-knit institutions.

I draw on recent debates in the social sciences about the meaning of the term diaspora in order to consider the intersections of the American Jewish mainstream,

Jewish social justice agencies, and American Jewish anti-Zionists. First, I consider the idea that diaspora identities extend kinship relationships to solidify transnational communities. While this usage of kinship is often dependent on acts of imagination that metaphorically extend family bonds to a dispersed social group, my analysis of intra-Jewish debates examines how instances of protest are complicated by intimate family, social, and institutional connections. Second, I draw on Aviv and Shneer’s (2005) notion of post-diaspora Judaism to argue that both the American Jewish mainstream and American Jewish anti-Zionists share a diasporic understanding of Jewish identity whereas Jewish social justice initiatives can best be described as post-diasporic. Framing these debates in relation to notions of diaspora provides yet another tool for understanding alliances, disagreements, and misunderstandings within contemporary American Jewish philanthropy.

Figure 8: Organizations and their relative positions toward the State of Israel

Organization	Description	Position toward Israel
Jewish Federations of North America	Umbrella organization for American Jewish philanthropy	Zionist, diasporic
Schusterman Family Foundation	Private family foundation that supports many Jewish organizations	Zionist, diasporic
American Jewish World Service (AJWS)	International development organization	a-Zionist, post-diasporic
AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps	US-based service corps	a-Zionist, post-diasporic
Pursue (now defunct)	Initiative for alumni of AVODAH and AJWS programs	a-Zionist, post-diasporic
Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP)	Organization critical of Israel and supportive of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS)	anti-Zionist, diasporic
Young, Jewish, and Proud	Youth arm of JVP	anti-Zionist, diasporic

The Jewish Diasporic *Mishpokhe*

As I describe in chapter one, the establishment of *Tikkun* magazine in 1986 played a central role in popularizing the idea of *tikkun olam* within the American Jewish community. Though now often overlooked, the magazine and its editor, Michael Lerner, sought to solidify a new Jewish left that was both unabashedly Jewish and progressive. While many Jewish social justice organizations (except those such as the New Israel Fund that deal explicitly with Israel) tend to avoid discussion of Israel, Michael Lerner and the magazine he founded with his then-wife Nan Fink openly criticized Israeli governmental actions during the first intifada in the late 1980s. In *Stranger in the Midst: A Memoir of Spiritual Discovery*, Nan Fink describes Jewish community responses to *Tikkun*'s outspoken position against Israeli government actions in the occupied territories.

Fink compares two early, controversial, *Tikkun*-supported initiatives. The first was a demonstration organized to coincide with a 1987 papal visit to San Francisco calling attention to the "Vatican's refusal to recognize the State of Israel, and its refusal to cut off support of the Nazi-connected Kurt Waldheim, then president of Austria" (Fink 1997:154). Following a press conference announcing the protest, the answering machine at the *Tikkun* office was soon filled with angry messages and even death threats. As a recent convert to Judaism, Fink describes this as her first encounter with anti-Semitism. This episode became even more unsettling when she later learned that some of her own family members harbored anti-Semitic sentiments. The threats made in response to challenging Vatican foreign policy subsided after a few weeks. Reflecting on this angry backlash, Fink writes, "Still, I wondered how Jews would act under the same circumstances. If we at *Tikkun* touched a Jewish nerve like the Christian one we pricked

with the pope issue, would the expression of rage against us include threats of violence? I didn't think so, but I couldn't be sure" (Fink 1997:158-9).

In the spring of 1988, *Tikkun* published an editorial (written by Michael Lerner) entitled "The Occupation: Immoral and Stupid." As part of their challenge to the American Jewish establishment's hegemonic support of Israeli government policy, Lerner and Fink organized a direct mail campaign and sent out "350,000 copies of this editorial, flooding the American Jewish world with an alternative opinion... In each direct-mail packet we placed a request to subscribe to the magazine, a return envelope, and the controversial editorial" (Fink 1997:159). The response from the Jewish community was intense. As with the action coinciding with the papal visit, the *Tikkun* office was inundated with angry mail and some even "affixed their return envelope to packages containing bricks, or newspapers, or cans of food, anything to run up the expense" (Fink 1997:160). Again, the magazine's critics flooded the office phone lines with spiteful messages but, in this case, the messages did not descend into threats of violence. The nature of the discourse was different. "We were involved in a horrendous family argument, hurtful in its own right with all the yelling and screaming, but it was different from Christians, at least in this instance" (Fink 1997:160).

Like the anti-occupation and anti-Israel protest actions to be discussed in this chapter, Fink describes an intense and yet *intimate* struggle between the American Jewish mainstream and those willing to criticize the state of Israel and its policies. My analysis of these disruptions builds on the notion, suggested by Fink, that such challenges should be understood as a figurative "family argument." This idea is reified when we consider the ways in which these debates play out within family and institutional frameworks.

In *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, Paul Gilroy (1993) criticizes the idea that kinship might serve as a shortcut for the establishment of racial solidarity. Metaphors of brotherhood, Gilroy argues, are problematic because they represent a form of essentialism and because they uphold a patriarchal approach to Black cultural identity. Gilroy writes that “the trope of the family and bio-political kinship... point to the emergence of a distinctive and emphatically post-national essentialism” (Gilroy 1993:194). The association of black cultural identity with kinship and its focus on traditional family roles ultimately serves to undermine “the gains of black feminisms” (Gilroy 1993:194).

Tropes of kinship are also salient within Jewish community formulations of diaspora identity. For instance, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin’s (1993) rehabilitation of genealogy—often tainted by its association with race—as a construction of group identity argues for the value of “claims of physical kinship” for establishing collective solidarity (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:702). The Boyarins insist that such formulations are not racist, observing that one “can indeed adopt Jewish identity by taking on Jewish practices and through symbolic rebirth (and for men, physical marking) as a member of the Jewish People” (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 705). American Jews use a variety of strategies for localizing tropes of kinship, such as identifying second- and third-level connections with other Jews. This activity, sometimes described as Jewish geography, concretizes the imagined relationships that solidify diasporic identities. Thus, close social, family, and institutional relationships signify a greater collective in which members are connected with relatively small degrees of separation. While my analysis examines instances of

intra-Jewish protest within intimate family and institutional contexts, American Jewish communal ties are often imagined to be just a few sentences of conversation away.

The Politics of Avoidance

The backlash against *Tikkun*'s controversial editorial ultimately led to the magazine's marginalization within the American Jewish community; it also likely played a role in cultivating an Israel paradigm within which Jewish social justice agencies avoid discussions of the State of Israel and of Palestine. While for some organizations and individuals avoidance is implicit, other agencies, such as American Jewish World Service, avoid any discussion of Israel as a matter of policy. For instance, during the summer of 2014, American Jewish World Service's Facebook page did not include any posts about the abduction of the three boys or the war that ensued. By avoiding discussions of Israel-Palestine, social justice organizations avoid being marginalized within the mainstream Jewish community. Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter four, not addressing topics related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enables social justice organizations to stake political positions further to the left than those normally held by Jewish community organizations.

Alongside these institutional policies, we can identify an interpersonal politics of avoidance. More than simply the mannerly avoidance of potentially contentious political discourse, the politics of avoidance is sometimes perceived as a necessary stance for maintaining one's good standing as a Jewish community professional or even simply a community member. I turn again to Nan Fink's experience with *Tikkun* magazine. Even

while the magazine she helped run was engaging in an intensive public challenge to Israeli government policy, Fink describes a personal retreat:

As the weeks passed and the criticism of the magazine continued, I tried to put my disillusionment behind me about what I was witnessing in the Jewish community. But I was expecting too much.

The tension within me needed to be aired in honest speech. At home I increasingly felt under pressure to show that I was a loyal Jew. Even though Michael and I were compatriots in the struggle to bring peace to the Mideast, we had difficulty with the subject of personal loyalty. When I revealed my negative feelings and my confusion about the Jewish community, it too often led to misunderstanding. Thus I began to withdraw into silence, a mistake because it added to the distance that was beginning to grow between us. (Fink 1997:161)

While orchestrating a public challenge to mainstream Jewish positions regarding Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza during the first Intifada, the claims of personal and ethnonational disloyalty played a disruptive role for this newly married couple. These disruptions led Fink to retreat into herself, that is, into a personal politics of avoidance. Avoiding discussion of Israel-Palestine for those who might be critical of the Israeli government is not only about conflict avoidance but also about avoiding claims of disloyalty. Critics of Israel are often deemed anti-Israel or self-hating Jews. This dynamic and its effects frequently recur within a variety of Jewish community contexts.

The politics of avoidance reinforces the Israel paradigm showcased by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella group that represents Jewish community interests. The Conference focuses much of its advocacy work on maintaining U.S. government support for the state of Israel. By including agencies such as Americans for Peace Now and the Union for Reform Judaism, which tend to be more dovish when it comes to Israeli politics, as well as agencies such

as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Zionist Organization of America, which tend toward a more hawkish position even to the point of criticizing Israeli policy from the right, the Conference embodies the notion that the American Jewish community is unified by its focus on the State of Israel. The Conference thus serves as an arbiter of what critique is acceptable when it comes to the State of Israel.

Despite the “big tent” approach historically taken by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, there has been a great deal of recent debate about the bounds of legitimate positions regarding Israel within the American Jewish community. In April 2014, JStreet, a progressive Zionist organization, was not allowed to join the umbrella agency. While the majority of American Jews supported JStreet’s inclusion, as evidenced by the official support of the largest denominational movements, JStreet could not garner sufficient support from smaller, more hawkish groups to join the Conference.

The agency initially sought admittance to the Conference of Presidents in order to assert their legitimacy within the American Jewish community. In a statement released in response to the JStreet vote, the agency asserted, “We applied to the Conference of Presidents because we value Jewish community and the concept of a broad tent of pro-Israel organizations that truly represents our community’s diversity and dynamism.”⁵⁷ Joining the Conference of Presidents represented a strategic move that would make it harder for JStreet’s critics to label its positions as “anti-Israel.”

Debates about the bounds of legitimate positions regarding Israel are also currently playing out within college campus Jewish communities. Hillel International has

⁵⁷ From the JStreet website, http://jstreet.org/blog/post/j-street-disappointed-by-conference-of-presidents-exclusion_1, accessed November 3, 2014.

a policy that prohibits speakers and organizations deemed anti-Israel to speak at campus Hillels. The desire of students to engage with positions unacceptable to Hillel's national leadership led to the establishment of an Open Hillel movement dedicated to cultivating on-campus Jewish agencies that might incorporate political opposition to the Israeli government and its policies. The issue is often connected to donors who fund on-campus Jewish life and who are not interested in supporting efforts in opposition to Israeli government policies. These developments indicate that the Israel paradigm and the dynamics that led to the politics of avoidance have become increasingly tenuous and are currently being challenged vigorously by young Jews.

These informal and institutional efforts to police the boundaries of what might constitute acceptable positions within the Jewish community represent a type of diaspora work that privileges normative positions and attempts to silence certain types of dissent. In exploring intra-diasporic debates and positions, I follow Tina Campt's approach that refocuses the study of diaspora on difference and distinction within a hierarchical diasporic structure. Framing her study of Black Germans within the African Diaspora, Campt writes that there is a "tendency within the discourse of diaspora to assume a kind of equality between Black communities within the diaspora in ways that bracket, ignore, or erase the very different ways in which specific Black communities are situated within the geopolitical relations of power and hegemony" (Campt 2004:178). Following Campt, I suggest that the idea that the American Jewish community is unified in its support for the State of Israel obscures political differences within the American Jewish community. Mainstream Jewish philanthropy's ability to maintain a sense of Jewish unity regarding Israel has diminished as voices critical of Israel and of Zionism have become louder and

more brazen. *Tikkun*'s Zionist critique of the State of Israel, once the catalyst of an intense "family argument," seems quite tame in comparison to harsher and often anti-Zionist critiques that have recently emerged from within the Jewish community. These debates, which I highlight in the next section, complicate what it means for the American Jewish community to assert that it is unified in support of the State of Israel and its policies.

Re-centering Diaspora

Thus far my argument has relied on conventional understandings of how the American Jewish community is organized. For instance, the Israel paradigm represents a dominant framework for inclusion and exclusion in the mainstream American Jewish community. However, in order to make sense of the relationships among the American Jewish mainstream, Jewish social justice initiatives, and Jewish anti-Israel activists, I suggest that we consider how these three groups might relate to the concept of diaspora. Jews are normatively understood as the original diaspora in that they have historically maintained connections with Jews around the world while longing to return to their ancestral home. Building on and sometimes rejecting this original formulation of diaspora, the concept received significant attention and revision by scholars in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Rejecting William Safran's (1991) prescriptive definition of diaspora and its focus on cultural connection to a real "ancestral home," James Clifford suggests that "Jewish (and Greek and Armenian) diasporas can be taken as nonnormative starting points for a discourse that is traveling or hybridizing in new global conditions" (Clifford 1994:306).

For Clifford, “diaspora” and “diasporic” become broad and broadly useful terms to describe the increasing proliferation of hybrid cultural forms. Clifford’s intervention can be understood as part of social-scientific efforts to develop a theoretical apparatus for understanding and writing about a post-Cold War world increasingly framed in terms of movements, mobility, and flows. For scholars such as Clifford, Stuart Hall (1990), and Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal (2000), the main value of diaspora is as a term for describing cultural hybridity. These decentered approaches to diaspora are a product of the early and mid-1990s, when the idea that we were entering a post-national era was popular among social scientists.

Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin’s contribution to decentered diaspora discourse focuses more specifically on the Jewish community. The Boyarins define diaspora in ethical terms, as powerless, non-state parochialism, a cultural form that highlights and favors group identity in the absence of the trappings of state power. Challenging Christian universalism and asserting the right to Jewish difference, the Boyarins argue that “[t]he solution of Zionism—that is, Jewish state hegemony, except insofar as it represented an emergency and temporary rescue operation—seems to us the subversion of Jewish culture and not its culmination” (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:712).

Many Jewish anti-Zionist activists would agree with and may even have been influenced by this appraisal. What needs explication here is the question of why some young Jews have become so focused on the politics of Israel-Palestine while others focus their activism and identity elsewhere, for example, on Jewish-sponsored international development projects, Jewish anti-poverty work, and faith-based political advocacy within the American political sphere. Concern for one’s position within the American

Jewish community can only serve as a partial explanation for what leads some young activists to focus on Israel and others to channel their activism elsewhere. In order to explain this difference, I return to a normative definition of diaspora, one predicated on a concern for or focus on an ancestral home.

Early-1990s diaspora discourse was motivated by the sense that the nation-state was in decline. The prediction that we were entering a post-national era did not materialize; strong states and nationalist fervor have remained primary and powerful macro-level cultural frameworks. Correspondingly, the use of diaspora as an analytical tool focused on hybridity has been deemphasized as the study of states, capital, and nongovernmental agencies have emerged as more pressing concerns within anthropological discourse. The ubiquity of the term “neoliberal” in contemporary anthropology encapsulates this trend, as does the closure of *Diaspora*, an academic journal published from 1991 to 2008. Reflecting on the disciplinary conditions that led to decentered formulations of diaspora as well as other concepts focused on cultural flows, David Graeber writes:

But the rhetoric was usually accompanied by a series of very broad generalizations: that not only money but products, ideas, and people were “flowing” about as never before, national economies could no longer dream of being autonomous; old nationalist ideologies, indeed, national borders, were becoming increasingly irrelevant, and so on... For anyone who was really paying attention, of course, the reality was very different. Borders were not being effaced, but reinforced. Poor populations were still penned into their countries of origin (in which existing social benefits were being rapidly withdrawn). “Globalization” merely referred to the ability of financial capital to skip around as it wished and take advantage of that fact. Most of all, however, the period of “globalization”—or neoliberalism, as it came to be known just about everywhere except America—saw the creation of the first genuinely planetary bureaucratic system in human history. (Graeber 2009:xi)

Given that ethnic nationalism has reasserted itself or, perhaps, never went away, I suggest that a classic definition of diaspora—of cultural identity that emerges from a center—should be reconsidered as an immediately useful, rather than outdated, analytical category. I apply this re-centered understanding of diaspora in order to analyze a series of intra-Jewish protests that I observed as part of my fieldwork in Post-Katrina New Orleans.

Protesting from Within

One of the notable features of the 2010 General Assembly conference, the Jewish Federation network's annual gathering, was the focus on "service" and on bridging mainstream Jewish philanthropy and Jewish social justice initiatives. This particular assembly, held in New Orleans, marked the first time Jewish social justice organizations (that is, organizations focused on helping non-Jews from within a Jewish communal context) were represented at a gathering historically focused on Jewish philanthropy more narrowly defined in terms of Jewish needs. While conference organizers attempted to bridge mainstream Jewish philanthropy with Jewish social justice initiatives, the Jewish Federations of North America took a hard line when it came to support for the State of Israel and the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Of the thirteen conference sessions that dealt directly with Israel, only one gestured toward American Jews who might be critical of Israel. Most panels, such as "Confronting Israel's Delegitimizers: The Jewish Community Responds," imagined critique of Israel as coming from outside the Jewish community. The one panel in which this norm was challenged, "Off the Record: How We Talk About Israel," did so ambiguously and with the acknowledgement that they were at the margins of acceptable discourse within the

framework provided by conference organizers. The description of this panel provided in the conference program book used coded language to describe young Jews critical of the State of Israel and its policies:

A panel of well-known Jewish journalists and Jewish communal leaders will launch a conversation about real and perceived boundaries for discussion of Israel. They will explore how the Jewish community can encourage thoughtful and even-handed coverage of Israel. With viewpoints within the Jewish community—particularly among the younger generation—becoming increasingly diverse, the communal approach to how to talk about Israel has serious ramifications for perceptions of openness and acceptance. (General Assembly Program Book 2010:22)

While panel organizers did not directly challenge “the communal approach” focused on unified support for the State of Israel, they gestured toward how this position was alienating young Jews. As this text demonstrates, panel organizers needed to maintain a sense of ambiguity whereby this panel could be construed as advocating “even-handed coverage of Israel,” a phrase that could just as easily reflect a widely-held desire to counter perceived anti-Israel bias in the media. The euphemistic description of younger Jews critical of Israel as having “increasingly diverse” positions conjures a collective entity that contains acceptable difference. Using the term diversity, a marker of desired difference within American society, subtly repositions stances likely outside of the Jewish mainstream within the bounds of acceptable discourse.

A conversation with a representative from one of the agencies that had proposed this panel to conference organizers clarified that this panel was situated at the very margins of acceptable conference discourse. She told me that Peter Beinart, a progressive Zionist who had written an article observing that many young Jews perceive liberalism and Zionism to be at odds with one another, was not allowed to present as part

of the panel. Beinart's inclusion would have made explicit the idea that some young Jews were challenging Zionism and hegemonic Jewish community support for the State of Israel. Conference planners permitted those organizing the panel to address youth activist critique of Israel indirectly but forbade any overt acknowledgment of anti-Israel positions within the Jewish community, thus preserving the appearance of a diaspora community unified through and by support for its center.

In addition to these behind-the-scenes moves, the 2010 General Assembly included plenary sessions designed both to represent and to enact American Jewish power and to reinforce the perception of an American Jewish community unified in its support for the state of Israel. The typical practice of inviting elected officials to speak at these plenary sessions is meant to reflect the political strength of the American Jewish community, a power that is often oriented toward solidifying and maintaining U.S. support for the State of Israel and its policies. At the first plenary, Vice President Joe Biden addressed the several thousand conference attendees gathered in the New Orleans' Marriot Grand Ballroom. Within this framework, we can understand Biden's speech as seeking to assure the established Jewish community of its place within American society and to restate the administration's commitment to maintaining the special connection the United States has with the State of Israel. Using his typical informal speech, Biden commended the Jewish community for its commitment to charity and to repairing the world:

Look, folks, it's a privilege to be here with a group that is dedicated to such a daunting—a daunting, but worthy goal. You know, the whole notion of you attempting to "repair" the world is a bit beyond anybody's—anybody's brief, but you don't seem to shy away from it... And I've seen the results of your hard work in my home region and, quite frankly, all around the world. I learned a long time

ago that you are the modern incarnation of the ancient Jewish tradition of tzedakah, a combination of charity and righteousness and justice. And I've watched you practice it. A lot of people talk. You guys practice it.⁵⁸

Biden then spent the rest of his address discussing and reaffirming his commitment to the State of Israel, concluding with the following assertion:

I am proud, and I've always been proud, to stand with you. Our nation has been proud to stand with Israel from its founding 60 years ago. And I absolutely guarantee you as long as there's a breath in me, this government, this nation, will stand with Israel. It's in our own naked self-interest beyond it being an absolute moral necessity.

Biden's crowd-pleasing remarks reaffirmed American political commitment to Israel. By emphasizing Jewish commitment in response to Katrina and Jewish charitable acts around the world alongside a reaffirmation of the special relationship between the United States and Israel, the address was designed to reaffirm and legitimate the Jewish community's position in the United States as both civically orientated and justified in their longstanding support for the State of Israel. Biden integrated the ideal of the "American Dream" with Jewish community support for Israel:

Our administration will continue to work tirelessly to fulfill our greatest responsibility to the American people, and that is to protect them from threat that they face and to give them life, give more life to this whole notion that has begun to evaporate in the minds of many American middle class, and that is the American Dream, the dream that promises you will be able to provide a world, a nation better than you were born into for your children.

In this day and age, no government can accomplish such tasks alone. That is why—that is why your work on behalf of those in need is even more important than it ever has been and why your cooperation with Israel, which also enjoys your strong support, enhances both Israel's security as well as ours.

⁵⁸ From the White House website, www.whitehouse.gov, accessed September 12, 2014.

In contrast to claims of divided loyalty historically used to undermine the social standing of Jews, especially in Europe, the American Jewish community's support for the State of Israel is here portrayed to complement and not to challenge full Jewish participation in American civic, social, and political life.

While Biden's address affirmed official conference rhetoric focused on a Jewish community unified in support of the state of Israel, Jewish voices critical of the State of Israel challenged this assertion through a protest action held the next day during a plenary address that included Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Before the mid-morning plenary, a small group of protesters gathered in front of the New Orleans Marriot with signs challenging the State of Israel and its policies. The protesters, dressed in grungy street clothes, stood in marked contrast to the suited philanthropy lay leaders and professionals who were slowly making their way into the secured ballroom. These protesters could easily be dismissed. Both in dress and in their location outside of the hotel, they remained removed from the community symbolized by those gathered in the hotel ballroom. While expressing their opposition to Netanyahu and to the American Jewish mainstream, the protesters located outside the building did not challenge the Jewish federation network's implicit claim that it represented and could speak on behalf of the North American Jewish collective.

In stark contrast to this external protest, partway through Netanyahu's address, an activist stood on her chair, unfurled a banner and began screaming, "Young Jews say the loyalty oath delegitimizes Israel!" The protester continued to chant this proclamation as security personnel led her out of the ballroom. Dismissing the protester, Netanyahu remarked, "I'm going to talk about delegitimizing Israel but they really have the wrong

address.” The crowd roared in approval with a standing ovation and an extended round of applause.

This regained sense of composure was disrupted when Netanyahu’s address was again interrupted in the same manner. Altogether, Netanyahu’s address was disrupted five times by protestors representing an organization called Young, Jewish, and Proud, an affiliate of Jewish Voices for Peace. Each time, the protesters chanted slightly different versions of the same protest mantra:

Young Jews say the settlements delegitimize Israel!

Young Jews say the Occupation delegitimizes Israel!

Young Jews say the siege of Gaza delegitimizes Israel!

Young Jews say silencing dissent delegitimizes Israel!

As the disruptions continued, the crowd became increasingly disturbed, and the last protester was promptly punched and shoved as he attempted to rise on his chair to disrupt Netanyahu’s address. Young, Jewish, and Proud captured their protest on video and, to the dismay of conference organizers, the protest received widespread media attention.

The rhetoric used by the protestors was carefully selected to address two primary concerns of the established Jewish community—“young Jews” and “Israel.” In the protest mantras, it is not dissenting opinions but rather State policy that delegitimizes Israel. These parallel statements thus invert the hegemonic position stipulated by the conference’s attempt to exclude any voices critical of the State of Israel, suggesting that it is Israel’s actions, and not its detractors, that threaten its reputation. Furthermore, the protesters played on Jewish community concerns with “continuity,” that is, with ensuring

the biosocial reproduction of Jewish institutions and populations, by presenting themselves in generational terms, as “young Jews.”

This protest illustrates the ways in which what is often described in American Jewish circles as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can also be understood as an intra-Jewish conflict regarding what it means to support the State of Israel and whether such support is warranted. Such debates lead to a basic tension within the Jewish community regarding the meaning of particularism. By labeling themselves as “young Jews,” as primary subjects of a particularistic project of self-perpetuation, the protesters emphasized the tension between Jewish nationalism and concerns about biosocial Jewish reproduction. The protesters asserted that the Jewish collective defined through Zionism by a national center and its supportive diaspora was not coterminous with competing notions of what might define the Jewish collective. By placing critics of Israel, even if only symbolically, outside of the Jewish community, conference organizers sought to portray an idealized Jewish community unified in and defined by its support for the State of Israel. The protesters not only emerged from the belly of the ballroom but also asserted their critical position as the “young Jews” on whom the particularistic project of Jewish community formation and reproduction depended. By presenting themselves as “young Jews,” the activists warned those gathered that the stakes were not limited to the politics of the national center but also included the future viability of an American Jewish collective.

At the end of the plenary session, conference attendees attempted to make sense of the disruption and of the increasingly aggressive reaction that each of the protesters elicited. In this particular protest, Young, Jewish, and Proud chose slogans that focused on the occupation and on specific Israeli government policies. It is likely that many

conference participants, especially those from Jewish social justice agencies, agreed with the protest slogans. This left some conference participants, especially those with more critical views of the State of Israel, in an awkward position. While they may have agreed with the particular slogans used in the protest, they also understood the potential risks of publically criticizing the State of Israel. Furthermore, while the rhetoric of this particular protest might accommodate the positions of a liberal Zionist, the agency sponsoring the protest, Jewish Voices for Peace (of which Young, Jewish, and Proud is one branch), is typically understood to be anti-Zionist, a stance that Jewish, liberal critics of the State of Israel usually avoid. While Jewish Voices for Peace does not describe itself as anti-Zionist, they present their efforts to be part of the broader Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement that most within the mainstream Jewish community characterize as anti-Zionist and possibly anti-Semitic. Modeled after the economic boycott that is often credited with ending the South African apartheid regime, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (commonly known as BDS) began in 2005 and is often described as a call from Palestinian civil society. Following the analogy with South Africa, support for the boycott movement, a position that is often associated with the notion that Israel is an apartheid state, would indicate that the current Israeli political regime is illegitimate. It is precisely for this reason that those who critique the state of Israel but affirm its legitimacy tend to distance themselves from BDS. I thus define anti-Zionism as a claim that the current Israeli political regime is illegitimate and that international pressure must be used in order to undermine the current Israeli political system.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ This definition is based on the ways in which American Jews tend to use the terms “Zionism” and “anti-Zionism” as synonymous for support or opposition to the legitimacy of the contemporary State of Israel. This definition reflects political Zionism, which ultimately emerged as the dominant Zionist ideology. This definition does not reflect the history of Zionism that is

Jewish Voices for Peace equivocates regarding whether they support boycott, divestment, and sanctions for Israel in general or only for those companies directly connected to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.⁶⁰ That said, the group supports the Palestinian right of return and insists that any resolution must address the crimes of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and not only its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza following the 1967 Six-Day War. While the primarily anti-Zionist leadership of Jewish Voices for Peace chooses not to describe the organization as anti-Zionist, the organization's support for the boycott movement and its support for the Palestinian right of return render "anti-Zionist" a useful comparative term. I should be clear that my intention is not to disagree with the organization's self-description or to claim that there exists one best, true definition of Zionism and/or anti-Zionism, but rather to situate the various players in this intra-Jewish debate along axes of opposition and confluence. Furthermore, I recognize that some JVP supporters label themselves liberal Zionist or non-Zionist, a term that has evolved within progressive Jewish circles to denote what one activist described to me as a sort of "agnostic" position vis-à-vis Zionism. Discussing JVP makes clear the extent to which the labels "Zionist," "anti-Zionist," and "non-Zionist" function as relative terms within the American Jewish community. While these debates are often understood in existential terms, I return to a

replete with variations on what Zionism might represent, including cultural Zionism focused on the revival of Hebrew language and culture and religious Zionism focused on the theological significance of Jewish statist revival. I also note that in the 1960s, there were those in the United States who described themselves as radical Zionists and emphasized the compatibility of Zionism and radical politics.

⁶⁰ The Jewish Voices for Peace website states that while the organization supports BDS actions specifically targeted against the occupation, they "will defend activists around the world who employ the full range of BDS tactics when they are demonized or wrongly accused of anti-Semitism." From the Jewish Voices for Peace website, <http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>, accessed October 20, 2014.

kinship-based formulation of diaspora in order to argue that such understandings are not simply metaphors. Rather, intra-diasporic politics revolve around both figurative and literal family connections. *Mishpokhe* and other bonding strategies such as “Jewish geography” reflect actual family and institutional connections.

A year after the Young, Jewish, and Proud protest, my ethnographic research in New Orleans led me to interview Lisa, a local activist who participated in the action against Netanyahu. I was surprised to learn of the ways in which Lisa was integrated into mainstream American Jewish philanthropy networks. Lisa’s grandfather, aware of her anti-Zionism and antagonism toward the mainstream Jewish community, gave a significant gift to the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans on the condition that Lisa be consulted as part of the distribution process. Wanting to uphold her commitment to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, Lisa insisted that the gift not go to the Federation’s general fund because a percentage of each dollar raised is sent to Israel. Working with Michael Weil, the executive director of the New Orleans Federation, Lisa agreed to have the funds support the New Orleans chapter of AVODAH and several other local grassroots initiatives. As a result of Lisa’s collaboration with her grandfather and the local Federation, a number of Jewish grassroots initiatives—including Ayla, a queer Jewish activist group, Minyan Nahar, a small independent prayer group, and a synagogue-based social action committee—received financial support from the local Federation. As the Jewish philanthropic compromise on which Lisa and Michael Weil could agree, progressive Jewish social justice initiatives represent a type of post-diasporic—that is, non-Israel centered—middle ground compatible with both diasporic Zionism and diasporic anti-Zionism.

Through this process of collaboration, Lisa found herself face to face with the head of an agency committed to an ideology that conflicted with her own. During the interview, Lisa told me that she has a close personal relationship with the Federation, and that as a result of her grandfather's gift she "has to sit down with the 'enemy'" (interview, October 5, 2011). Lisa's grandfather was using his wealth to encourage her to become a player within the realm of Jewish philanthropy despite her opposition to the Israeli government. Lisa agreed to these terms out of respect for her grandfather and commitment to her tight-knit family. Following my interview with Lisa, I understood this story to be an unlikely narrative twist in which the General Assembly protester sits across the table from the local Federation director whose conference she disrupted. At the plenary Lisa sat near Weil and, during our interview, she shared that Weil likely knew that she was bound to make a disruption—"he knew I was up to something" (interview, October 5, 2011). Beyond its ironic value, Lisa's situation illustrates the ways in which the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a struggle that is often understood as an intractable clash between two mutually exclusive "sides," plays out within intimate family and institutional contexts in the Jewish community. Furthermore, this narrative illustrates the complexities of intra-diaspora politics. Jewish philanthropy functions as a site of contestation and as a site of reconciliation.

Representation and Confrontation

The 2010 General Assembly conference was the first major Jewish Federation conference to include a significant delegation from Jewish social justice organizations such as American Jewish World Service, AVODAH, and Jewish Funds for Justice. As

the program director of AVODAH Chicago, Michael Deheeger was part of this delegation. While at the conference, Deheeger witnessed the Jewish Voices for Peace/Young, Jewish, and Proud action that disrupted Netanyahu's plenary address. In an interview, Deheeger described how the crowd's increasingly aggressive response pushed him "over the fence," solidifying his commitment to anti-occupation activism and a strategy focused on boycott, divestment, and sanctions:

I was transfixed by the reaction of the crowd, how quickly it turned into an angry mob. [I realized that] this was the issue that people have to talk about if you want to do social justice work in the Jewish community. This is the elephant in the room. [After the conference,] I sat down with Brant Rosen of the Reconstructionist community in Evanston. Brant is very active with Jewish Voices for Peace. It turned out our synagogue was going to the West Bank three weeks later. I saw that and got really involved. (interview, June 18, 2012)

Even after witnessing this incident, Michael did not perceive a contradiction between his work as a local AVODAH program director and his commitment to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. Working for AVODAH, an organization dedicated to the alleviation of poverty in the United States, provided Michael and others with a context where they could participate in Jewish life while at the same time upholding a commitment to the boycott Israel movement. This sense of compatibility soon changed when Michael learned that Pursue, an initiative sponsored jointly by AVODAH and the American Jewish World Service, was going to sponsor a highly subsidized trip to Israel. AVODAH and AJWS agreed to the trip as a condition for a major grant from the Lynn and Charles Schusterman Foundation, a prominent Jewish family foundation whose efforts were central to creating links between mainstream Jewish philanthropy and Jewish social justice organizations.

Deheeger told me that he first lobbied AVODAH to either cancel the trip or to include experiences, voices, and positions critical of the Israeli occupation. When these efforts failed and he learned that the trip was going to take place as planned, Deheeger resigned and publically criticized the trip in *Mondoweiss*, an anti-Zionist blog, and in *The Forward*, a prominent, left-leaning Jewish newspaper. Following Deheeger's lead, a number of AVODAH corps members and alumni composed an open letter challenging the trip that was ultimately signed by more than one hundred corps members, alumni, and supporters. While the letter may not have been an official Jewish Voices for Peace action, the letter writers were all involved in the organization and were committed to Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions. Written in what some members of the broader AVODAH community criticized as an aggressive tone, the letter included a number of ultimatums:

This is why we demand that AVODAH publicly commit to:

1. Modify the trip itinerary to incorporate significant critical engagement with Israeli policy in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. This must include visits to occupied Palestine and interactions with Palestinians who live there.
2. Never sponsor another Israel trip in this way again.
3. Never accept money from the Schustermans, or any other group, if it necessitates AVODAH or Pursue's engagement in one-sided programming on Israel-Palestine.
4. Begin a community-wide discussion on how AVODAH and Pursue should handle the question of Israel-Palestine as a Jewish organization committed to social justice.

We are awaiting your reply.

As with the slogans chosen by the General Assembly protesters, the letter obscured the fact that it was written by supporters of the boycott movement who were likely anti-Zionist.⁶¹ For these young activists, a philanthropically defined Judaism and axiomatic support for the State of Israel were incompatible.

Trips aimed at solidifying Jewish identity and a connection to the State of Israel have become standard within the American Jewish community in large part because of the efforts of extremely wealthy philanthropists convinced that such trips have proved to be the most effective way to increase levels of Jewish identification (Saxe and Chazan 2008). Therefore, this youth activist challenge must be understood in relation to the Birthright Israel program that provides free trips to Israel to Jews aged 18-26 in the hope that exposure to the contemporary State of Israel will enhance Jewish identity among Jewish emerging adults and solidify American Jewish support for the State of Israel (Kelner 2010). Birthright Israel is one of the most notable features of contemporary American Jewish life and culture; as a result of this program, a free ten-day trip to Israel has become a standard element of Jewish emerging adulthood. I note that the era of Birthright Israel has also corresponded to a period dominated by hawkish governments in Israel. While the 1990s were a time of increasing optimism about the possibilities for normalized Israeli-Palestinian relations, the beginning of the second intifada in 2000

⁶¹ We might complicate an understanding of Birthright-type trips as straightforward propaganda. In his 2010 monograph on Birthright Israel trips, Shaul Kelner describes how trip guides often present complicated political narratives that highlight some of the tensions and challenges of contemporary Israeli society. In one scene, Kelner describes a guide who brought tourists to a site where they could view the separation barrier and led a discussion in which “No single narrative was voiced exclusively. Palestinian perspectives competed with Israeli ones in Ra’anana’s presentation, and both were marked as plausible points of view” (Kelner 2010:58). Kelner notes that, while competing narratives are sometimes presented, these perspectives are not provided directly by Palestinian Arabs themselves but rather involve representation by Jews speaking within “a particular Israeli spatial and social framework” (Kelner 2010:58).

roughly corresponded with the start of Birthright Israel, which began organizing trips in 1999. Efforts to bolster levels of Jewish identification through travel to Israel have occurred at the same time that hawkish governments have dominated Israeli politics and while two Gaza wars and an extended blockade have led a small and growing number of American Jews to question their support for the State of Israel. This analysis thus begs a speculative question: how might Jewish youth culture change if a comprehensive peace were achieved in Israel-Palestine?

By integrating travel to Israel as part of their support for Pursue, the Schusterman Foundation was presumably attempting to assert the compatibility of mainstream Jewish philanthropy based on the Israel Paradigm and Jewish social justice initiatives. In contrast, the perception among young anti-Zionist activists that their politics were also compatible with Jewish social justice efforts ultimately led to protesting actions. In this sense, both Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews attempted to integrate their ideology with the work of Jewish social justice organizations. Deheeger and the letter writers insisted that they, as individuals, and AVODAH, as an agency, had to choose between progressive politics and the American Jewish mainstream's commitment to supporting the Israeli government and its policies. This moment captures Beinart's (2010) argument that young Jews now find liberalism and Zionism to be incompatible.

Deheeger's actions and the open letter generated activity on AVODAH's alumni listserv, were the subject of a number of articles in the Jewish press, and led to informal conversations within the New Orleans Jewish community. Additionally, local corps members and alumni set up a meeting to discuss the letter and the trip. My request to attend this meeting was denied, and I should note that this was one of very few instances

in which I was not included in a youth activist gathering during the course of my research in New Orleans. On account of the sensitivity of this topic, the activists chose to have a closed meeting. This meeting among corps members and alumni might be compared to a family meeting that excluded close friends and neighbors.

At the time of the meeting, some local corps members and alumni had signed the letter while others were waiting to see the itinerary before deciding whether to support or oppose the trip. Although most members of the greater AVODAH community hold relatively left-wing positions when it comes to Israel, there are those who question the basic premises of the State of Israel, others who oppose particular Israel governmental actions but maintain support for the State of Israel in a broader sense, and those who hold more mainstream Zionist opinions. While those in the first category usually support the boycott regime and those in the third category would oppose BDS, those in the middle category struggle with what it might mean to support a country from afar while opposing particular actions and policies. Does supporting a boycott regime necessarily place one outside of the Jewish mainstream? Is it possible to be a supporter of a boycott and a Zionist? There are still other members of the AVODAH community who find themselves ambivalent and/or confused by their exposure to Israel, often mediated by a Birthright trip, as well as to anti-Israel positions both within and outside of the Jewish community.

The Sunday after Deheeger's resignation and a few days after the protest letter was circulated, I spent the afternoon at an upscale home on Bayou St. John near New Orleans' City Park. Two members of the youth activist community were house sitting and had invited friends for a relaxing afternoon sitting on the dock. As afternoon turned

to evening and it became cooler, we moved indoors and the conversation turned to a discussion of the AVODAH Israel trip and the staff and alumni actions challenging the trip. As part of this conversation, one AVODAH alumna, Ariella, asserted that AVODAH should have consulted with the corps members before agreeing to the grant and its stipulation that AVODAH sponsor a trip to Israel. Ariella's comments reflected a sense of ownership, that is, the feeling that AVODAH represented all of the corps members and that it therefore should not have strayed from its focus on anti-poverty work in the United States without first consulting corps members and alumni. While this was not AVODAH founder David Rosenn's intention, the organization's mission oriented toward fighting "against the causes and effects of poverty in the United States" came to be understood by some corps members and staff as an ideological decision and a form of a-Zionism. It was this misunderstanding that ultimately led to a sense of betrayal when the agency announced that it would be organizing a highly subsidized trip to Israel for AVODAH alumni.

Topher, the lone non-Jew present and an alumnus of the New Orleans chapter of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC), turned and whispered to me, "we would never have this type of conversation with JVC. We don't feel the type of ownership that the AVODAH alumni feel for AVODAH." In contrast, AVODAH corps members and alumni felt strongly that they needed to engage in this debate and that the agency should have consulted them before announcing the trip. Even those who hadn't signed the letter understood themselves to be members of a community represented by and responsible to and for AVODAH. This sense of responsibility was inculcated in corps members

through the AVODAH curriculum and speaks to the notion of intimate debate on which this chapter focuses.

As I describe in chapter three as part of a discussion of Jewish privilege, the AVODAH curriculum includes a program entitled “Who Speaks for Me,” a workshop oriented toward encouraging young Jews to think of themselves as implicated in the efforts of Jewish institutions. This idea is often paired within Jewish activist circles with the notion of *tokhecha*, a traditional Jewish precept that encourages Jews to confront one another when they perceive others to be acting in a sinful manner. Within a Jewish social justice framework, activists sometimes reinterpret this idea as a mandate to challenge the institutions that claim to represent them. For instance, in an article publicizing his resignation, Michael Deheeger referenced *tokhecha* in order to assert that his actions should be understood as an expression of Jewish values:

I decided to write about my decision in the spirit of *Tokhecha*, or sacred rebuke, a central value of Torah: “*Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him*” (*Leviticus 19:17*)... My understanding of *Tokhecha* is that it includes the responsibility to help those to whom it is directed make amends. I echo the call put out by AVODAH alums and current Corps members that AVODAH and AJWS commit publicly to “never sponsor an Israel trip in this way again.”

We in the Jewish social justice community have a choice. On the one hand, we can stay silent and try to avoid provoking the ire of powerful donors like the Schusterman Foundation. On the other hand, we can publicly oppose, or at least not cover up, the oppression Israel commits directly in our name.⁶²

The notion of *tokhecha* is here used to justify a critique of one’s own community and institution. As one might imagine, these types of internally generated condemnations are particularly disruptive and threatening to those on the receiving end. By using a religious

⁶² Written as a blog post on “Shalom Rav: A Blog by Rabbi Brant Rosen,” <http://rabbibrant.com/2011/11/10/social-justice-israel-trips-must-not-cover-up-oppression/>, accessed November 30, 2013.

concept from traditional Judaism, the rhetoric also seeks to assert that those being criticized have a religious obligation to reform their behavior. While, in its original context, this idea refers primarily to adherence to traditional Jewish law and practice, activists have appropriated this idea in order to justify pushback against Jewish hegemonic support of the State of Israel and its policies.

For AVODAH, Deheeger's public resignation and the open letter morphed into a full-blown crisis that threatened to undermine the organization, which depended on the support of the Schusterman Foundation and other mainstream donors for its survival. Responding to its critics, Pursue ultimately altered the trip itinerary to include a focus on voices critical of the State of Israel and of the Israeli occupation. Summing up this resolution, the *Forward* reported:

The first half of the eight-day program will explore social justice issues inside Israel proper, including challenges faced by Ethiopians and Israeli Arabs. The latter half of the trip will include meetings with activist groups, including Ir Amin, a left-leaning Israeli advocacy group specializing in the impact of the Occupation on East Jerusalem. The trip will also tour the West Bank city of Hebron with Israeli civil rights group B'Tselem, and will visit Bethlehem with Holy Land Trust, a group promoting nonviolent resistance in Palestine. Participants will also meet with the Shalom Hartman Institute and with Shatil, the New Israel Fund's civil society-building program in Israel. (Nathan-Kazis, 2012)

Many within the broader AVODAH community saw this as a good compromise and as a model for how to organize an ethically responsible trip to Israel. Deheeger himself told me that if AVODAH had initially agreed to this itinerary, he would not have resigned despite his understanding that this was in violation of his boycott principles (interview, June 18, 2012). The idea of *tokhecha*, of sacred rebuke of one's own institutions, reflects again the ways in which intra-Jewish critique of the American Jewish establishment's

support for Israel plays out within intimate contexts. As with the Jewish Voices for Peace action during Netanyahu's address, this action occurred in relation to a close-knit AVODAH community of staff, corps members, and alumni who knew one another well, worked closely in the same offices, or lived with one another at one of AVODAH's communal homes. The intensity of the critique and its efficacy were predicated on this intimacy, on the fact that it represented an internal critique.

As this vignette demonstrates, efforts to integrate Jewish universalistic efforts such as AVODAH and support for the State of Israel, a priority of inwardly focused Jewish philanthropy, can lead to moments of rupture. This funder-driven attempt to integrate Jewish social justice efforts and support for the State of Israel was tenable for those leading AVODAH and American Jewish World Service but was viewed as a violation by mid-level staff at AVODAH and by some in the broader AVODAH community. This particular instance of rupture was particularly marked because the trip disrupted the sense held by some staff, corps members, and alumni that AVODAH provided an opportunity to participate in institutional Jewish life without implicitly supporting Zionism.

Conclusion

As I have argued, the "Israel paradigm" suggests that mainstream Jewish philanthropy is a diasporic formulation of contemporary American Jewish life and culture. While there are various denominational streams within contemporary American Judaism, the one feature that is often viewed as unifying and solidifying an American Jewish collective is support for the State of Israel. This understanding of the Israel

paradigm does not necessarily contradict my argument that American Jewish philanthropy enacts an American Jewish collective. In fact, the Israel paradigm and community-solidifying features of the largest Jewish philanthropy networks are thoroughly interconnected with one another. A percentage of each dollar distributed by local federations (usually 30%) is sent to support Jewish communities in Israel and overseas. These distributions represent one of the primary methods by which American Jews provide financial support to the State of Israel and display their commitment to the homeland. The Israel paradigm has become integrated into Jewish philanthropy in such a way that involvement in mainstream Jewish philanthropy demands a commitment to a homeland and enacts a diasporic definition of what it means to be an American Jew and a member of the American Jewish community. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, vocal activists have focused on challenging this status quo. These challenges, I argue, often occur within intimate contexts.

In closing this chapter, I present an analysis of the interconnections between anti-Zionist challenges to the Israeli government, a-Zionist social justice initiatives, and the Zionist American Jewish mainstream. I suggest that we might understand Jewish social justice efforts to be in some sense post-diasporic. Fear of becoming marginal within the Jewish community only partially accounts for Jewish social justice activists who practice a politics of avoidance. In *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*, Caryn Aviv and David Shneer suggest that contemporary Judaism should be understood as post-diasporic. In challenging the notion that Jews outside of Israel live in a diaspora, Aviv and Shneer call attention to the ways in which Jews are and have long been rooted in the particular places where they happen to live:

Politically, we want to question the centrality of Israel in Jewish geography, culture, and memory. And intellectually, we want to move beyond the term “diaspora” as a mode of explaining postmodern collective identity, since such a conceptualization reinforces notions of centers and peripheries and emphasizes motion and rootlessness, often at the expense of home and rootedness.

Rather than refer to Jews as “in Israel” or “in (the) diaspora,” we refer to new Jews as “global” and break down the inherent dichotomy that the Israel/diaspora metaphor maintains. (Aviv and Shneer 2005:19)

This theoretical position is incorporated into the promotional materials created by Jewish social justice agencies. For instance, American Jewish World Service advocates an ethical perspective they describe as Jewish global citizenship in support of their international development projects. We can understand AJWS’s avoidance of discussion of Israel not only as a strategic move that secures their place within the American Jewish community but also as an expression of a post-diasporic Judaism that is independent of one particular homeland. Thus, when agencies such as American Jewish World Service, Jewish Funds for Justice, and AVODAH avoid discussion of Israel, they also, by implication, assert a sense of Jewish identity and ethical responsibility that is multi-centered. Jewish social justice initiatives thus represent the ethical impulses of post-diaspora Jews who are very much at home in New York City, Chicago, and New Orleans, for example.

In contrast to Jewish social justice initiatives such as AVODAH, Jewish Funds for Justice, and American Jewish World Service, which can be described as post-diasporic insofar as they avoid discussion of the State of Israel for both strategic and ideological reasons, Jewish anti-Zionists reflect a diasporic perspective insofar as they assert that Israel must play a central role in Jewish identity and culture. Based on this idea,

mainstream Jewish philanthropy and Jewish anti-Zionism agree that Jewish ethics, philanthropy, and identity are in some sense based on a geographic center in Israel-Palestine. Building on this idea, I suggest that the American Jewish mainstream and Jewish anti-Zionism are more similar to one another than they are to a post-diasporic Jewish social justice ideology that downgrades the significance of Israel as the Jewish center. In other words, while Jewish social justice agencies can be understood as post-diasporic, the Jewish American Zionist mainstream and Jewish anti-Zionism can be understood as inverted and opposite formulations of diasporic Jewish identities focused on fervent support for or critique of the State of Israel and its policies.

This understanding of diaspora and post-diaspora clarifies some of the alliances and disruptions that I have discussed in this chapter and in the dissertation as a whole. As a result of AVODAH's focus on anti-poverty work in the United States, a reflection of what I am describing as post-diasporic Judaism, the agency was perceived to be compatible with anti-Zionist formulations of Jewish life. While not intended, one consequence of AVODAH's focus on projects in the United States was that corps members and mid-level staff often viewed the agency as a type of safe haven in which they could participate in Jewish life while at the same time adhering to anti-Zionist positions.⁶³

Similarly, the organizers of the 2010 General Assembly conference reached out to Jewish social justice organizations in an attempt to forge connections between mainstream, Zionist American Judaism and post-diasporic formulations of American Judaism. This attempt at connection may also have had unintended consequences. While

⁶³ See chapter six for a further discussion of practice theory and the unintended consequences of activist projects.

Jewish Voices for Peace/Young, Jewish, and Proud would likely have initiated their action during Netanyahu's address even without these efforts to integrate Jewish social justice organizations into the General Assembly, Michael Deheeger and other receptive Jews would not have been there to witness the action. Deheeger's experience at the event led to his commitment to boycott, which is certainly not the goal conference organizers had in mind. Organizers viewed these synergistic efforts positively; however, they did not anticipate the disruptions that would follow when those critical of Israel and used to operating within social justice contexts were exposed to mainstream Jewish contexts. While Deheeger at first perceived his commitment to the boycott movement to be compatible with his position at AVODAH, this shifted when the agency agreed to sponsor a trip to Israel as a grant stipulation. While AVODAH leadership did not perceive its own post-diasporic position to be incompatible with mainstream Jewish philanthropy's diasporic Zionism, once AVODAH agreed to sponsor a trip to Israel, Deheeger no longer perceived himself to be able to work for AVODAH.

I close with the suggestion that efforts to integrate different Jewish ideologies can have both synergistic and disruptive consequences for the American Jewish community. On the one hand, Jewish social justice initiatives in New Orleans and elsewhere merge and thus attempt to resolve tensions between progressive political orientations and a particularistic (and usually Zionist) Jewish ethnoreligious identity. As I have shown, these discursive and institutional encounters are often marked by protest and resistance, especially when it comes to the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in relation to which tensions between tropes of vulnerability and power are felt with particular intensity. In other words, attempts at ideological integration establish discursive fields

and institutional settings in which tensions between parochialism and universalism not only remain intact but also become increasingly visible. When it comes to Zionism and anti-Zionism, moments of rupture, protest, and debate illuminate competing sides in the family argument, revealing a shared sense of home.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I have examined the interplay of Jewish philanthropic organizations, Jewish youth activists, and major Jewish philanthropists. I have portrayed a Jewish community engaged in intensive and ongoing efforts to define and redefine Jewish identity and social responsibility. These efforts unfold in relation to a variety of historical, economic, and political contexts, including concerns about the future viability of Jewish communities and Jewish institutions, the emergence of a donor class of extremely wealthy individuals who distribute their largesse as they see fit, and the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These contexts have provided a framework within which to historicize and analyze Jewish philanthropy's representative or "political" function. Building on two years of ethnographic research conducted primarily in New Orleans, my dissertation has applied anthropological theory in order to analyze the interactions of differently situated players within the American Jewish community, an entity that I argue is constituted—and, perhaps, imagined—in and through its philanthropic organizations, ideologies, and identities.

My study of American Jewish philanthropy builds on the work of political scientist Daniel Elazar and on the work of Jonathan Woocher, a scholar of religion who later became a Jewish community professional. Writing in the mid-1970s, Elazar suggests that Jewish philanthropy functions as a "polity," as a political entity that both

represents and serves an American Jewish constituency (Elazar 1995). Woocher, writing in the mid-1980s, applies Robert Bellah's conception of "civil religion" in order to argue that Jewish philanthropy is best understood as a system of beliefs and practices that emphasize conceptions of "peoplehood" while downplaying the importance of theology, ritual, and conventional religious institutions (e.g. synagogues) (Woocher 1986). Both Elazar and Woocher highlight Jewish philanthropy's unifying role; in their view, Jewish philanthropic agencies, and, in particular, the network of Jewish federations, consolidate an American Jewish collective identity despite the existence of pronounced and profound religious, political, and socioeconomic differences.

Building on these studies, *The Chosen Universalists* reaffirms the centrality of Jewish philanthropy for American Jewish life; however, in contrast to the unifying role Elazar and Woocher observed in the 1970s and 1980s, Jewish philanthropy has emerged as a prime forum for the voicing of contentious intra-Jewish debates. The very same elements that integrated American Jewry in the post-World War II era now amplify intra-Jewish difference. For example, the emergence of American Jewish philanthropy's representative function accounts for the extent to which Jewish youth protest is directed toward Jewish organizations and philanthropists. This is particularly true when it comes to the State of Israel, the subject of debates at once existential and intimate. Integrating the study of institutions and the study of religio-political ideologies, this research engages the emergent subfield of NGO studies as well as recent efforts to analyze and theorize faith-based giving. This project provides a framework and a methodology for the ongoing study of Jewish life and, perhaps, for the study of other ethnoreligious groups

and collectives. This method accounts for the interplay of economy, generational dynamics, shifting religious ideologies, and institutional formations.

Capitalism as a Cultural System

The Chosen Universalists contributes to the ongoing project of analyzing capitalism as a powerful, macro-level cultural system that is shaping and reshaping American religion. Projects that examine religion and economy are foundational to the social sciences (e.g. Weber's association of Protestantism and capital accumulation), and my dissertation applies this classical concern with religion, economy, and exchange to study contemporary Jewish life, on the one hand, and the cultural dynamics of wealth inequality, on the other.

Rejecting a dichotomous understanding of the relationship of gift exchange to capitalist circulation, my dissertation suggests that the sociality of the gift and the utilitarian, asocial function of capitalist commodity exchange are interwoven with one another. The tension—or, perhaps, interplay—between capital investments and identity projects is a primary thematic, theoretical, and methodological investment of this project. For example, the fallout from the Federation/St. Bernard project partnership was the ultimate result of a desire to transform unmarked physical labor and anonymous financial investments into a “Jewish contribution,” a designation that reflects a Jewish identity project. Chapter three's focus on Jewish privilege, chapter four's concern with the cultivation of a Jewish service ethic, and chapter five's analysis of structure, agency, and unintended consequences in a Jewish service corps all consider the intersections of philanthropic investment, sociality, and the assertion of alternate regimes of value.

Members of the donor class often insist that the agencies they fund apply economic and in some sense asocial principles to the project of Jewish identity cultivation. Metrics, profitability, and return on investment are the operative terms in contemporary Jewish philanthropy as they are, no doubt, across the non-profit sector. Throughout the dissertation, I argue that philanthropic investments and their agentive projects, powerful as they might be, inevitably clash with and are modified by the social world, which limits the extent to which funders can shape Jewish religion and culture.

The Political Stakes

Throughout the dissertation, I engage a range of academic projects that have clear political stakes. For example, in Jewish studies, a number of the scholars I highlight in this dissertation advocate for specific visions for Jewish life and culture. Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin's as well as Caryn Aviv and David Shneer's investigations of "disapora" champion assertive, non-Israel-based formulations of Jewish life and culture. Similarly, scholarship on post-Katrina recovery is often framed in relation to an explicit political critique. For example, scholars such as Vincanne Adams and Naomi Klein challenge the neoliberal privatization of post-disaster relief that results in the maximization of profit at the expense of helping Katrina victims.

What, then, are the political stakes of this project? In particular, this dissertation emerges from a concern with the cultural and political consequences of growing income inequality. As I hope I have demonstrated, the movement away from democracy and toward what might be described as oligarchy has a range of readily apparent as well as less obvious ramifications. In the context of my analysis, income disparity and the

accumulation of extreme wealth figure both as general social problems and as cultural forces shaping ethnoreligious individual and collective identity. As a result of growing income inequality, Jewish philanthropic organizations, much like the US government, are increasingly less representative of those they claim to serve and represent. The wealth accumulated by the Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Morgan families during the first gilded age at the turn of the twentieth century continues to play a significant role today, and it seems likely that the fortunes accumulated by patrons such as Lynn Schusterman, Sheldon Adelson, Bill Gates, and the Koch brothers will play an outsized role long beyond their lifetimes. That said, policies that lessen inequality and strengthen the middle class—such as progressive taxation and an increased minimum wage—have the potential to redistribute wealth more justly. Such policies would also continue the ever-ongoing processes whereby religion is shaped and reshaped by economic realities.

Update

I close with an update on the two foci of this project, Jewish philanthropy and New Orleans. I write these final few paragraphs of the dissertation during the first days of 2015, the year that marks the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. In the years since I concluded my research, news coming from New Orleans has been rather muted. New Orleans' unique cultural features—Mardi Gras Indians, second line parades, and Cajun cuisine—continue to engage New Orleanians and to attract hoards of tourists. New Orleans continues to regain population and gentrification has emerged as a significant concern for the city. Additionally, poverty and violence continue to plague New Orleans; the city and the state continue to lead the country in rates of violent crime,

murder, and incarceration. Racism continues to be a major systemic problem in New Orleans and the racial prejudice highlighted by Katrina and its aftermaths continues to afflict American society. However, New Orleans is no longer the epicenter for debates about American race politics, which are now focused on the murder of unarmed black men.

A few weeks ago, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Center agreed to a final settlement with St. Bernard parish, resolving the post-Katrina debate discussed in chapter three. As part of the settlement, the parish agreed to pay \$1.8 million in legal fees. Additionally, as part of an earlier settlement, the parish agreed to “establish an Office of Fair Housing, hire a fair housing coordinator, and engage in a three-year marketing campaign to attract renters and developers of multifamily rental housing to the parish” (Alexander-Bloch 2014). While Katrina’s ghosts haunt contemporary New Orleans and the social inequities brought to the fore by the storm persist, the resolution of the St. Bernard housing saga indicates that the intensity of post-storm political and activist debates has diminished with time.

In contrast to New Orleans—which has been relatively out of the national news—the field of Jewish philanthropy has been troubled by crises and problems including the war in Gaza, the formation of an Open Hillel movement devoted to challenging the pro-Israel policies of National Hillel, and the growth of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. Levels of polarization, mistrust, and misunderstanding have intensified within the field of Jewish philanthropy, as have the stakes involved. Additionally, concerns about Jewish continuity have become heightened as a result of the 2013 Pew study. Intra-Jewish and sometimes generational debates have amplified as the

Israeli government continues a policy of settlement expansion and moves toward legally codifying the second-class status of Israeli Arab citizens. Many see the upcoming (March 2015) elections in Israel as a referendum on the very nature of the State of Israel. Will the next government continue to pursue a policy that emphasizes the State of Israel's Jewish or democratic character?

For the last fifteen years, conservative governments have dominated Israeli national politics, and this political reality has galvanized youth opposition to Jewish philanthropy's seemingly unquestioning support for the State of Israel. The question remains what will happen if and when Israel changes. How might American Jewry in general, and Jewish philanthropy and youth culture in particular, readjust if Israelis elect a more liberal government? How might American Jewish culture ultimately shift in response to a genuine Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement? Will upcoming developments favor diasporic (either Zionist or anti-Zionist) or post-diasporic expressions of American Jewish life and culture?

The analysis in this dissertation draws out antagonistic but also codependent relationships between youth activists and philanthropic structures. The fluid dynamics illustrated herein reflect geopolitical realities, economic shifts, and the agentive projects of actors within macro-level cultural, economic, and political systems. By focusing on Jewish philanthropy, service, and activism in post-Katrina New Orleans, I have traced some of the processes whereby religious groups and ideologies are continually reformulated. Presenting Jewish youth culture in relation to a variety of Jewish not-for-profit agencies and in relation to the increasing influence of wealthy Jewish patrons has illustrated the impact of a donor class eager to use wealth to achieve large-scale social

projects. Jewish New Orleans has provided a rich case study for thinking through the ways in which class dynamics and growing socioeconomic inequality are shaping and reshaping contemporary American religion. More generally, it is my hope that these arguments might contribute to the broader social-scientific project of understanding the new gilded age.

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