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Constructions of Diaspora-Oriented Jewish Identities: A Comparative Case Study of Individuals in New York City and London

By Rachel Laura Goldstein

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the
University of Greenwich
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2010

DECLARATION

I certify that this work has not been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not concurrently being submitted for any degree other than that of Doctor of Philosophy being studied at the University of Greenwich. I also declare that this work is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise identified by references and that I have not plagiarized another's work.

Rachel L. Goldstein

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Rachel L. Goldstein

New York

June, 2010

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Dripping water hollows out a stone (not by force, but by persistence).—Ovid

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In memory of Siobhan Dowd and Tijen Uguris.

ABSTRACT

Although historical sources acknowledge the diversity of Jewish identities, recent research tends to focus heavily on religious and Zionist bases for Jewish identities. To explore the research question, "How do Jews outside the mainstream of religion and Zionism construct and maintain alternative Jewish identities?" a case study was crafted to focus on a small sample of individuals from two left-wing, Diaspora-oriented Jewish groups in New York City and London in 1999 – 2000. The project used participant observation, discourse analysis, and in-depth interviews to research members of these groups at this unique historical moment—a time of higher levels of optimism and security as the Holocaust was further in the past and the second intifada in Israel and 9/11 attacks in the US had yet to occur. Semi-structured interviews allowed for detailed personal histories of alternative Jewish identity formation and expression. Significant findings include the fact that non-mainstream Jews find Jewish meaning in culture, history, tradition, politics, and minority status. Furthermore, alternative Jewish identities are constructed and maintained from the margins, in community, through learning, by action, and through redefining rituals. There remain many obstacles but also opportunities for those seeking non-mainstream Jewish identities in the Diaspora, including the inherent fluidity of identity, marginalisation, lack of knowledge, need for rituals, ambivalence and internalised anti-Semitism, potential burnout for activists, and Zionism and Israel/Palestine debates. This study contributes to the fields of Jewish sociology and identity research in applying qualitative methods and more recent identity theories to Jewish identities typically marginalised by both scholars and mainstream Jewish institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

> No other people has so tormented itself, though also entertained itself, with the problem of identity. To be a Jew has meant, for perhaps 200 years now, to ask the question: What does it mean to be a Jew? (Howe, 1994)

This thesis explores the construction of alternative Jewish identities. Jewish sociology, and research on Jewish communities, has focused heavily on Zionism and religion as the main markers of Jewish identity. While these indices, which the hegemonic discourse of the Jewish establishment claims *should be* the focal points for Jewish identity, are convenient for large-scale quantitative studies of populous communities, this narrow focus omits a rich range of diverse Jewish beliefs, experiences, and identities. Disallowing difference serves some but marginalizes and silences many others. It is also counter-productive to the goal of many scholars and institutions studying Jewish populations and beliefs—that is, to capture the pulse of the community, often with the agenda of striving to reengage Jews whom mainstream institutions view as lapsed. Recent studies have found that 14% of Jews in the US (Hartman and Hartman, 1999) and 30% of Jews in the UK (Institute of Jewish Policy Research, 2000) are unaffiliated with a synagogue. Individuals like these, along with those rejecting or questioning Zionism, are the focus of this study.

In order to test this hypothesis—that mainstream Jewish community research tends to focus on Zionism and religion, neglecting and marginalizing other experiences and identities—the researcher first reviewed the literature and devised a qualitative study. Inspired by Daniel Boyarin's argument about Diasporic Jewish identities, this thesis explores one small segment of marginalized Jews in two cities at one unique historical

moment. Employing the methods of participant observation, discourse analysis, and in-depth interviews, the study examined a population of Jews who identify themselves mostly as non-Zionist and secular. The researcher conducted 23 interviews with members of two left-wing Jewish groups in New York City and London in 1999 – 2000, in order to explore alternative Jewish identity constructions. With Jews comprising about 0.2% of the world population, and 0.5% of the UK and 1.8% of the US total populations[1], and with most of those Jews viewing Jewishness as something accessible only through religion or Zionism, these respondents, a tiny minority within a tiny minority, face an interesting challenge. This sample reveals that widening definitions of identity groups provides a more accurate picture of both the group overall and the individuals' concepts of identity in particular. Analysis of the original data in this study adds to the conventional literature on Jewish identity, thereby encouraging further research and the acceptance of Jews 'on the margins.'

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review. At times it seemed that only a brief history of the world would suffice as the context for a study on contemporary Jewish identities. The review therefore focuses on the most relevant research concerning Jewish sociology, identity theory, and recent studies specifically on Jewish identity. While theorists from various perspectives offer a range of possible definitions for identity, this project embraces a model of identity as fluid, dynamic, and performance/action-centred. Recent identity theory also focuses on 'margins' and 'others' as ways to create the boundaries of one's identity.

[1] All numbers for January 2004 from "Jewish Geography" published by the American Jewish Committee, www.ajc.org. Worldwide, there are 12,989,700 Jews out of 6,314,000,000 total, or 1 out of every 488 people; in the UK there are 299,000 Jews out of 59,400,000 total population; and in the US 5,290,000 Jews out of 291,500,000 total. New York is the second largest core metropolitan Jewish population at 2,051,000 or 15.8% of the world Jewish population. London is the 13th largest with 195,000 or 1.5% of the world's Jews.

Jewish identity is widely discussed in the literature, which usually emphasizes the components of religion (synagogue affiliation) and Zionism. However, much of the reality of contemporary Jewish identity is missed if the focus is on these markers alone. Components not covered in the literature include secular identities (non-synagogue groups, culture- and language-based movements such as Yiddishkayt), non-Zionist or 'Diasporic' identities, political identities (labour movement, The Bund, activists), non-Ashkenazi (European-descent) Jewish ethnicities, non-traditional Jewish upbringings, and redefined rituals and traditions. While some recent studies look beyond the typical markers and use qualitative methods to explore how 'marginal' Jews view their identities, no study has yet specifically examined non-Zionist secular Jews.

Chapter 3 presents the project's methodology and research history. Using qualitative methods, feminist theory, and grounded theory, this study incorporated participant observation, discourse analysis, and open-ended interviews to explore how contemporary Jews who reject religion and/or Zionism construct and maintain their Jewish identities. This chapter also recounts the research process, as well as how the NVivo program was used in the data analysis.

Chapter 4 discusses the organisational culture and missions of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) in New York City and the Jewish Socialists Group (JSG) in London. These groups served as a 'home base' for the study because they attract non-mainstream Jews and provide an alternative model of Jewish identity and history.

Chapter 5, the heart of the study, presents a discussion of results and answers the main research questions as found through the long interviews. The chapter contains an adapted grounded-theory analysis of the interview responses. The first section covers the question, "What does being Jewish mean?" The interviewees typically do not rely on religion or

Zionism to define their Jewish identities. They instead propose that being Jewish means culture, history, tradition, political activism, and minority status. The next section explores the question, "How does one construct and maintain a Jewish identity outside the (Jewish) mainstream?" Five main themes emerged: identity construction from the margins, in community with others, through learning, by action and agency, and through redefining rituals. The final section of Chapter 5 examines "What are the obstacles and opportunities for alternative Jewish identities?" again as emerging from the interviews. The themes found in response include: the inherent fluidity of identity, marginalisation, lack of knowledge, need for rituals, ambivalence and internalised anti-Semitism, potential burnout for activists, and Zionism and Israel/Palestine debates.

Finally, Chapter 6 offers concluding thoughts and suggestions for future work on gaps in Jewish identity research. Focusing on Jews who largely reject religion and Zionism as markers of their identity and investigating how non-mainstream Jews express their identities illustrates the importance of a more inclusive definition of Jewishness, and supports arguments for opening the possibility of more Diaspora-based Jewish identities.

LITERARY REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Testing the view that most existing scholarship on Jewish identity privileges Zionism and religion while neglecting other key markers, this chapter reviews the literature in several related areas. The concept of 'Jewish identity' is discussed widely in sociology and identity theory. Is it a religion, ethnicity, race, nation, or something other? Is it shaped primarily by geography, history, culture, or possibly all or none of these factors? Jewishness, in short, challenges thinkers on identity issues.

This chapter examines several interlinked areas including Jewish sociology in the US and UK, Zionism, Diaspora, and Jewish identity theory. While all of these areas inform perceptions of Jewishness today, there remain gaps that this study aims to fill.

Ranging from the purely theoretical to quantitative and qualitative studies, current scholarship profiles Jewish communities, individuals, and histories in the modern world. Much is missing from the picture of contemporary Jewish identity, however. In recent years many scholars have attempted to amend this lacuna by exploring Jewishness in new and non-traditional ways. These studies will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

2.1 THE SOCIOLOGY OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE US AND UK

Hart's (2000) exploration of the history and evolution of Jewish social science emphasizes that it is a product of context and era.[1] He argues that it makes more sense to read Jewish studies as reflections of their era rather than as objective fact, including the "multiple forces impelling this intellectual activity" (19). For example, he thinks that much early-twentieth-century Jewish social science was used as a Zionist project to show how degenerate Jews were in a mixed context and to validate why they needed an independent homeland. Another critique by Hart (2000) maintains that Jewish social scientists have internalized anti-Semitism. Stratton (2000) also sees development of the field of sociology as a Jewish way to think through assimilation.

Looking toward a contemporary challenge in Jewish social science, Biale et al. (1998) are interested in Jewish identity issues in the context of multiculturalism debates in the US. Jews, they observe, experience multiculturalism with a special ambivalence, occupying the anomalous state of insider/outsider. As Liebman (1973) and others also note, Jews must negotiate the extreme tension between preserving history and adapting to take advantage of equality. For example, Jews are generally accepted in the US yet still focus on victimization and the Holocaust.

Reflecting on the evolution of Jewish social science, Biale et al. (1998) highlight the development of Jewish Studies and Ethnic Studies departments at universities—the former as constituting part of the curricular canon and the latter as promoting particularism. Some modern scholars, they indicate, try to move beyond multiculturalism to an inclusive vision of both universality and particularity. "For too long," they write, "relations between Jews

[1] See also Fishman (in Cohen and Susser, eds., 2007) regarding the obsession with Jewish intermarriage and how it relates to what is happening in the wider cultural context.

and other groups in the emerging multiculture have been marked by discomfort, suspicion, and even overt hostility. It is our hope that this effort to bring multicultural theory into conversation with Jewish experience and Jewish studies will promote real conversation outside of these pages" (11). They thus hope to avoid the trend of comparative victimology that distracts from more important questions. The future, as Biale et al. (1998) envision it, lies in writing a new narrative rather than in tacitly approving competing histories of persecution.

In the field of feminist and gender studies, interestingly, Seidman (1998) notes that theorists Butler, Miller, and Sedgwick are very Jewish in their reluctance to talk about their Jewishness. Rejecting Jewish tradition is a Jewish tradition, apparently. As Liebman (1973) also wryly observes, "Jews prefer to get together with other Jews to promote ostensibly non-Jewish enterprises (which assist Jewish acceptance) and then to pretend the whole matter has nothing to do with being Jewish" (159). Scholars like Sedgwick,[2] for example, are more interested in gay coming-out stories than in parallels for Jewish identity. Taking the example further, Seidman (1998) suggests that the fag hag is to queer culture what the Jew is to progressive multicultural politics. Resisting straightforward identity politics leads to charges of assimilation, self-hatred, and parasitism.

2.1.1 The Unique Case of the US

Liebman (1973) and others also focus on the US as a unique context for Jewish identity formation. Survival and overcoming the two-values tension (that is, wanting to be accepted fully by the majority culture but still remaining uniquely Jewish) lead to redefinition of Jewishness as a 'religion' in terms of Israel's nationhood, which provides major symbolic content for the American Jew, he argues. In general, the 'new world'

[2] Stratton (2000) examines Sedgwick's work in relation to her Jewishness.

opened a new context for Jews managing their identity in a 'free' society. Liebman (1973) is not optimistic:

> What of the future of Jewish liberalism in America? Its future is no more assured than is the continued state of Jewish estrangement. This estrangement depends in turn upon a number of factors: the ability of the Jew to redefine his religion and the nature of his commitment, the Jew's desire for survival, the non-Jew's terms for Jewish acceptance, the extent to which American society reflects its Christian experience, and the extent to which the Jew perceives anti-Semitism from the Left. My own impression is that the future of Jewish liberalism in America is a bleak one. (159)

Liebman (1973) acknowledges political activism as an identity marker, similar to the Jews in this study, noting that "This is a good example of an integrationist approach. The Jewish leftist feels so secure in his American identity that he does not perceive anti-Semitism as a threat to his own welfare" (36). In contrast, however, most of this project's respondents saw anti-Semitism as something just as crucial to tackle as other social-justice issues. Liebman (1973), though, cannot accept social activism as a valid choice for Jewish identity.

Elazer (1995) also sees the US as a unique context for the Jewish community. His focus is on the creation of a polity—the unique network of Jewish organizations in the US, how they came about, their realm of influence, and their strengths and weaknesses. These organizations form a voluntary polity unique to the US Jewish community. Elazer (1995) notes that these institutions' roles and contexts have changed dramatically over the past several decades.

Generally optimistic and contrary to popular wisdom, Elazer (1995) suggests that organizationally American Jewry has made great strides in the past two generations. On the other hand, the gap between the community's organizational life and the majority of Jews' self-identification seems to be growing to unmanageable proportions. The

community is also losing adherents through assimilation. Like several other scholars, Elazer (1995) sees America as unique in world and Jewish history in that it gave Jews the option to be disinterested in their Jewishness. The American Jewish community is thus the first of the modern epoch that is truly emancipated. It is a model of what Jewish life is or is becoming for most Jews—voluntary commitment by those who care to be Jewish. The larger community, Elazer (1995) argues, is held together by the strength of its core rather than by its peripheral boundaries. He concludes:

> Organizationally, the American Jewish community has never been in better condition. American Jewry may well have discovered a pattern for itself that can meet the challenges of communal governance within a free society. Organizational advances, however, will not solve the problem of the individual Jew who must decide whether to be seriously Jewish or, more and more, Jewish at all.
>
> The decisions of the multitude of American Jewish individuals have become part and parcel of America. Their lives are shaped far more by American rhythms than by Jewish ones. They have brought American Jewry to the edge of a religious, cultural, and demographic abyss. This, indeed, was foreseeable twenty years ago, and indeed was foreseen in the first edition of this book. Now, even more than then, we have the institutions needed to preserve a full and rich Jewish life in the United States, but on this question all institutions can do is to try to facilitate positive decisions on behalf of Jewishness on the part of the population they serve. (451)

2.1.2 Europe and the UK

Jewish sociologists focusing on the UK and Europe share similar anxieties about Jewish continuity. Wasserstein (1996) asserts that Jews are vanishing from Europe. There were over 10 million in 1939, he calculates, and in 1994 fewer than 2 million. From this demographic statistic he infers that the 'Jewish question' has not gone away; it has simply re-emerged in a different form since World War II. "The Jews of Western Europe in the post [-] Cold War era," writes Wasserstein (1996), "continued on their path of slow demographic decline and assimilation. The tolerance of the open society rather than ethnic or religious hostility seemed to pose the main threat to collective Jewish survival" (267).

The biggest consequence of Nazi genocide, Wasserstein (1996) contends, is that all Jewish leaders and thinkers are obsessed with survival. “The dissolution of European Jewry is not situated at some point in a hypothetical future,” he observes. “The process is taking place before our eyes and is already far advanced on at least three fronts.” He summarizes:

1. We witness now the last scene of the last act of more than a millennium of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.
2. We witness now the withering away of Judaism as a spiritual presence in the daily lives of most Jews in Europe.
3. We witness now the end of an authentic Jewish culture in Europe. (283)

On a more descriptive and less anxious note, Alderman’s *Modern British Jewry* (1992) offers an overview of Jewish history in the UK from the 1800s through the 1970s. Most significantly, he notes that the number of Jews in the UK during that period was not recorded accurately. Moreover, like several other contemporary scholars, he defines a Jew as anyone who self-identifies or is regarded as Jewish by his or her contemporaries.

Like other social scientists teasing out nuances of the Jewish story and the effects of assimilation, Lambert (2008) presents a study on Jewish identity in Europe. Again, enlightenment and nationalism changed social contexts, so, whereas a Jew used to be able to meld into new communities with Yiddish and other shared traditions, these commonalities were lost when assimilation became the norm. He strives to disclose how Jewish identity is perceived and studied, making it more relevant for the modern era. “Identity is a political act, through which we stake our claim to society, but it is also an emotional utterance, one that reflects our deeply-grounded anxieties” (ixx). Lambert (2008) argues that Jews are grappling with multiculturalism and assimilation in post-Holocaust Europe.

However, his study is also somewhat limiting. He is specifically interested in 'prominent thinkers' in Italy, Britain, and the Netherlands (rabbis, journalists, professors, community leaders, writers). It seems that the respondents' prominence made many of them rather nervous about expressing their ideas, with several wavering on whether or not to be included, requesting anonymity, or changing responses later.[3] Overall, Lambert (2008) covers a wide range of issues from traditions, stereotypes, cultural references, Jewish organizations, and historical Jewish thinkers like Hannah Arendt to explore at least part of the contemporary context for European Jews.

Because the bulk of the sociology of Jewish communities is mostly gleaned from quantitative numbers—those who self-identify as Jews, their marriages and children, those who join a synagogue or attend the Israel Day Parade, and so forth—we lose a sense of underlying motivation. Why does one person join a synagogue while another does not? How does a person feel that intermarriage affects his/her Jewish identity, if at all? What does it mean to raise one's children as 'Jewish'? As some studies and theorists attempt to answer these questions, other themes in Jewish sociology come into play.

2.1.3 Survival Anxiety and Assimilation

One theme in Jewish social science on which numerous scholars have commented is that of the Jewish people's survival. Hart (2000) thus notes that it is no longer a matter of surviving anti-Semitism but of surviving the openness of assimilated societies. Many other theorists make this same point.

[3] To be sure, even some of my less than prominent respondents reacted similarly, and a few I approached declined to be interviewed at all, uncomfortable with the expected conversation.

As Hart (2000) observes, the threat is not anti-Semitism but instead that of "adapting to abundance," which he regards as a mixed blessing. Tolerance and equality lead to more social integration yet also to increasing intermarriage, resulting in a quantitative and qualitative loss for "the Jewish people." He concludes that an anxiety concerning the disappearance of Jews remains in social science. Only time will tell, he suggests, whether the pessimists are right about a decline in Jewish Diaspora communities. In the end, he believes, the debate itself on Jewish survival is important because its periodic renewal may function to sustain Jewish identity and contribute to its survival.

Liebman (1973) is another Jewish social scientist caught up in survival anxiety and exploring what assimilation means for Jews. He openly admits that his scholarship is rooted in love for the Jewish people and a desire to see the Jewish community continue in the modern world. "The American Jew," he writes, "is torn between two sets of values—those of integration and acceptance into American society and those of Jewish group survival. Those values appear to me to be incompatible." He notes, however, that most American Jews do *not* see these values as incompatible. "The . . . behaviour of the American Jew is best understood as his unconscious effort to restructure his environment and reorient his own self-definition and perception of reality so as to reduce the tension between these values" (vii). American Jews thus have adapted and reshaped both their tradition and environment.

Stratton (2000) is also concerned with assimilation, migration, and Diaspora, specifically examining the role and dilemmas of the Jewish social scientist. He focuses on the UK, US, and Australia, not so much through qualitative interviews but rather by means of pop culture, historical figures, personal experience, and historical events. Mirroring Liebman (1973) and others, he argues that "what characterized the context for Jewish identity in modernity was ambivalence and indeterminacy, but an ambivalence that more often than

not appeared to be weighted towards acceptance provided that Jews assimilated, lost themselves and any other identity in the nation-states in which they lived" (10). He maintains that the Jewish example is crucial, disruptive, and inextricable from identity discourse in general.

2.1.4 Histories: Mainstream, Marginal, and "Litany of Victimization"?

The discourse on Jewish history is one example of how secular and non-Zionist experiences are marginalised. Thus, great swathes of the rich diversity of the Jewish experience are minimised in favour of telling a very specific story (victim to redemption). For example, Gilbert's *Israel: A History* (2008) reads like a romantic historical novel—fast, emotional, and compelling—while also overflowing with facts and figures. Focused on the Israel part of Jewish history, it chronicles the Zionist movement from its start through 2007, ending on a hopeful note on the eve of Israel's sixtieth anniversary that the two-state solution can be achieved. Like Laqueur (2003), this author is clearly Zionist and pro-Israel, albeit critical of some things in Israeli history. In addition to mainstream histories such as this, some historians have offered alternative versions of Jewish history, a tradition now lead in Israel by the post-Zionist 'new historians.'

For example, Léon (1950) offers a Marxist history of the Jews, explaining how their social condition was created as a product of historical development. Only a study of the economic role they played, he contends, can elucidate the 'miracle of the Jew' (28). Following Marx, he notes that Jews have persevered not because of religion but because of their social and economic role, and such perseverance is thus not at all miraculous. "Judaism has survived not in spite of history," he writes, "but by virtue of history" (29). Jews were essential in each era and consequently survived. Only modern capitalism created the 'Jewish problem' because capitalism destroyed the social base on which Jews

had maintained themselves for centuries. Léon's (1950) perspective on Jewishness is one that has been marginalised by mainstream history.

Cantor (1995) subsequently offered another alternative view for the lay reader in *The Sacred Chain: A History of the Jews*. Written through the lens of historical sociology, he argues that, although Jewish historiography has come a long way, the true test of its value is its influence on general cultural change and emerging ideology. It should illuminate the past and have implications for reconsidering the future of Israel. Now that scholars of Jewish history have been integrated into universities, why isn't this happening? Funding for most Jewish Studies endowed chairs in the US comes from the private sector, he observes, and the culture of this American Jewish upper middle class "does not expect history to be a critical and a morally and politically challenging subject" (xvii).

> They are used to a model of Jewish history that consists entirely of victimization and celebration—the Jewish past is sentimentally to be celebrated with appropriate mourning for Jewish suffering in the past two millennia at Christian and latterly Nazi hands. Jews are responsible for their own destinies only insofar as they occasionally accomplish great things intellectually and, in the twentieth century, in the case of Israel, politically and militarily. Otherwise there is really nothing problematic to think about in Jewish history: it is a litany of Jewish victimization. (xvii)

Cantor (1995) remarks that, while we now know of gaps in post-biblical Jewish history that we have romanticised, reappraisals are unlikely because we are too invested in the mainstream versions of history created for centuries. For example, he opens a chapter on Jewish diversity by noting two historians from the mid-twentieth century who worked on alternative models of Jewish history. Their still controversial argument is that "retrospectively we may identify Pharisaic-rabbinical-Orthodox Judaism as mainstream, but to regard it as exclusively the important form of Judaism is a one-sided and vulnerable view of Judaism in antiquity" (56).

He maintains that there are two models for viewing Jewish history from 1940 to the end of the twentieth century. One is simple and flattering for Jews and focuses on victimization, which is used by Paul Johnson in his best-selling history of the Jews as well as by most other historians (e.g., Roth, 1936 and 1969; *The Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1971; Cohn-Sherbok, 1994; Kops, 1985; Gilbert, 2008). This involves the idea that the two definitive events of the Jewish experience are the Holocaust and the state of Israel's founding. The paradigm nicely follows the archetypal theme of catastrophe and redemption. Jewish communities in the Diaspora failed to respond to the first (Holocaust) but did so for the second (Israel). This is the assumed model of recent Jewish history, tracing a pattern of moving from failure to success and from powerlessness to empowerment. Mainstream versions of Jewish history focus on this template, typically minimizing portions of the Jewish experience that do not fit into this model[4] (e.g., ethnic diversity, labour protests, resistance movements). *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971), for example, does acknowledge the old challenges facing Jews along with their better status and opportunities today, but it is interesting that the volume lumps anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

Finally, Cantor (1995) agrees that there is some short-term validity to this hegemonic representation of Jewish history, but he points out that the other paradigm is much more complex and problematic. This second model is that Jews were shaped by the environments in which they lived. While some connection to ancestral identity remained, distinctive patterns were emerging that eventually sundered Jews from it. This national-society paradigm, the most important manifestations being in the US, Canada, Israel, and UK, is helpful in understanding Jewish identity formation[5].

[4] Aviv and Shneer (2005) discuss the business of diaspora tourism, and specifically the 'March of the Living' from Poland to Israel which acts as a re-enactment of the victim to redemption narrative.
[5] Aviv and Shneer (2005) continue this point of view, focusing on how location shapes Jewish identity more than other factors.

Kirsch (2001) offers another view of Jewish history. While maintaining an apolitical stance, he covers many of the typically marginalised parts of Jewish history and celebrates the various expressions of Jewish identity, noting that there are as many Judaisms as there are Jews and that we endorse a false notion of purity when we say things like 'I am not very Jewish.' Judaism is a living entity, he argues, not an ossified fossil. Kirsch (2001) goes on to critique mainstream constructs of the Bible as history and its embedded sexism. In addition to covering not just the Ashkenazi experience but also that of Sephardim, Mizrahim (Jews of Arab descent), and Ethiopian and Indian Jews, from whom we learn that it is not necessary to be persecuted to be Jewish, he discusses major historical figures such as Spinoza, Moses, Mendelssohn, Einstein, and Dreyfus from an alternative perspective.

Like Cantor (1995), moreover, Kirsch (2001) reflects on how most US Jews define their identity in terms of victimization—a "rhetorical excess if not an outright paranoid fantasy" of a second Holocaust (2). While not examining the politics of all this, he does expose the Zionist myth that Palestinians did not exist before Israel was founded. Kirsch (2001) sees Judaism as a culture or civilization, not as a race, nation, or religion, so this view shapes his more inclusive perspective on Jewish experiences. Even Cantor's (1995) attempt to introduce a more complex Jewish history cannot possibly cover everything. Bringing some of the most significant and often excluded parts of this history to light, he demonstrates why marginalisations occur and how we might move beyond this practice.

As Cantor (1995) mentions, mainstream Zionist-focused histories overlook Jewish agency. For example, Patraka (1997), while at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., encountered a couple who for three years of World War II had been active in the underground resistance. They noticed sadly that the exhibit ignored their entire experience. Patraka (1997) notes that such stories do not bring in funding but victims do. She quotes a

critic of the museum who berates the Americanization of the Holocaust as a "shrine to Jewish victimization." Clinging to victim status also helps Zionists to justify oppression of the Palestinians. Bauman (2000) agrees, noting that the ironic legacy of the Holocaust is that former victims create new ones who then await their turn to be the aggressors, and everyone then believes they are in the moral right. He notes that "'Hereditary victimhood' is the principal socio-psychological device serving the systematic production and distribution of evil" (238). And since it is imagined, it is open to all Jews. He further laments that "the macabre paradox of being a hereditary victim is to develop a vested interest in the hostility of the world, in fomenting the hostility of the world and keeping the world hostile" (239).

From Diaspora to Zionism, Jewish identities and histories are continually in flux. As the Holocaust-Zionism victim to redemption story remains the dominant discourse, to capture even one specific historical moment from a marginalised perspective enriches our understanding of Jewish history.

2.2 ZIONISM AND POST-ZIONISM

Understanding Zionism, writes Hertzberg (1997), is about a fundamental understanding of Jewish history. Whatever its specific focus, Jewish social science today cannot ignore the impact of Zionism on every aspect of the Jewish world. Zionism started as a fringe movement in the late 1880s advocating that Europe's 'Jewish problem' could be solved by a Jewish homeland. It mirrored modernity's focus on the nation-state. This section will review some basic Zionist views, the post-Zionist response, and the impacts of both on Jewish identity.

2.2.1 Zionism

Laqueur (2003) offers a mainstream overview of the history of Zionism, intermixing a personal perspective as one who lived in Israel during its founding. Zionism, he argues, must be understood in the context of European and Jewish history since the French Revolution and the rise of modern anti-Semitism. Tracing Zionism from the 1880s through 1948 when Israel was established, he debates the merits of Zionism and attempts to be upfront about his opinions. He is not uncritical of Zionist history but certainly more forgiving than post-Zionists, who he believes are rebelling against their upbringing and ignorant of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

The study exemplifies what many in the Jewish community believe—namely, the against-all-odds narrative of Israel as an amazing success story. Laqueur (2003) concedes that Israelis have made many mistakes, as with the Sephardic Jews and even the Arabs in some ways. He also thinks that deferring to the extreme religious right is a mistake and would shock Israel's founders. Overall, however, he maintains that Israel is astonishingly egalitarian and democratic.

Hertzberg's (1997) history of Zionism, based on a plethora of primary sources, falls into the trend of exploring the Jews (or in this case Zionism) as an anomaly that history does not know how to categorize: "Zionism exists, and it has had important consequences, but historical theory does not really know what to do with it" (15). Zionism cannot be explained as a 'normal' nationalism. One difference is that other groups based their struggle for political sovereignty on an already existing land or language, whereas Zionism was trying to gain both. It thus is unique in nationalist history. At the same time, this scholar argues, Zionism is also a challenge for the Jewish historian. For example, early versions of Zionism posited that it should be completely secular, but what would that

mean for eighteen centuries of religious life? History was crucial because it was invoked to justify Zionism and also to create a road map of what was to come. Another challenge was that Zionism was regarded as 'secular messianism,' whereas messianic narratives had always been central to Jewish mythology.

Hertzberg (1997) teases out many issues surrounding Zionism then and now. It was messianic but then not so; it was fringe and then mainstream; it was too Jewish or not Jewish enough. Zionism, he concludes, constituted a break with traditional Jewish thought when the Reform movement and assimilation dominated the Jewish mindset. It was a radical response to the tension between Jewry and the wider society.

Zionism, while it has ebbed and flowed in popularity, has always had its critics from both within and without the movement. Orr (1983), for example, views Zionism as total blasphemy in terms of the Jewish religious tradition. Boyarin (1994) thinks that the tragedy of Zionism is its attempt to remove the threat to Jews by making concrete in the present what was always a utopian ideal. Levine (1986) also believes that Zionism made Diasporic Judaism seem illusionary and powerless: "Zionists, as well as Jewish institutional leaders of other persuasions, equated space with power and confused the control of space with the control of destiny" (6).

Jews used to be able to criticise other institutions and nation-states, but as the dominant majority in Israel are they now mindful of their former criticisms? Levine (1986), like Boyarin (1994) and Sicker (1992), hopes that we can move beyond the Zionist phase of Jewish history. Boyarin (1994) encourages exploration of the interest in nation-states in both memory and dimensionality in order to establish connections with identity. Similarly, in 1997 he argued that the Israel-Palestine conflict is not about land and history but about

space, time, and memory. Many scholars claim that we are now in a post-Zionist era (e.g., Silberstein, 1999) in the sense of looking beyond myths and reconstructing Jewish history.

2.2.2 Post-Zionism

> The essence of the Old History is that Zionism was a beneficent and well-meaning, progressive national movement; that Israel was born pure into an uncharitable, predatory world; that Zionist efforts to achieve compromise and conciliation were rejected by the Arabs; and that Palestine's Arabs, and in their wake the surrounding Arab states, for reasons of innate selfishness, xenophobia, and downright cussedness, refused to accede to the burgeoning Zionist presence and in 1947 launched a war to extirpate the foreign plant. (Morris, 1988: 13)

The generational shift of post-Zionism in Israel emerged in 1988 with an essay in *Tikkun* magazine on the 'New Historians.' Morris (1988) argued that the Old Historians were entrenched in universities, presented a historiography written by politicians and Zionists, and continued to "purvey a propagandistic view of Israel's past" (2). New Historians, by contrast, came from the fields of journalism and academia rather than the Israeli Establishment.

Pappe (2006), critical of most other post-Zionists with whom he usually is pigeonholed, wrote a history of modern Palestine from a humanistic rather than a nationalistic perspective. His study deconstructs the linear narrative of Palestine's modernization. He challenges the presupposition that Zionism represents progress and that completion of the modernist project will solve lingering problems. Mainstream historical narratives, he proposes, are more about elites than 'the people,' thereby supporting a Eurocentric and Zionist view of Israel as an oasis of Western democracy in the Middle East.

For Pappe (2006) the leading actor is subaltern society, which exists outside of politics and elites. Tracking common people from remote Ottoman communities to Oslo in the 1990s,

he shows that they were not just pawns as portrayed by other versions of history. Many were connected to their land for survival rather than for nationalistic reasons. The second new actor is the past in its garb of tradition and religion. Modernists see these factors as regressive, limited to women/peasants/rural people/minorities, with tradition and religion holding us back from achieving the pinnacle of modernity. Pappe (2006), however, disputes this Western notion.

In this reconstruction, he takes into account the same things that Old Historians consider but with more scepticism and a different logic. Seeking to combine the conflicting narratives, he thinks that history should represent *the* subaltern *and* the elite, those who want change and those who do not. With numerous departures he shows how Jewish history is arbitrary depending on the historian and the group s/he wants to highlight.

Given this critique, we can say that Zionism started as a European nationalist initiative and turned into a colonial movement. New Historians started rewriting history from the victims' perspectives, and the mainstream media were blamed for cover-ups. Zionists suddenly were portrayed as inhumane aggressors. The New Historical narrative is about reconsidering the Zionist story of 1948 and the founding of Israel—namely, that Zionism was successful against all odds.

Shlaim's (2000) *The Iron Wall* is yet another New Historian project with a slightly different focus—Israeli policy regarding Arabs. Quoting Ernest Renan, he observes that "'A nation is a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred for their neighbours'" (xiii). Shlaim (2000) sees the role of the historian as that of an evaluator who is always in dialogue with his sources. Thus, he relies on primary sources such as government documents that he complements with interviews and oral histories. He is part

of the post-Zionist movement in excavating and analyzing this policy history with a critical eye.

2.2.3 Other Critiques of Zionist Hegemony

While scholarly debates explore what it means to be in a post-Zionist time more than half a century after Israel's founding, the Jewish mainstream remains staunchly Zionist, relegating post-Zionism to a marginalised option for Jewish identity. According to Orr (1983), Israel has replaced religiosity as the basis for Jewish identity. Secular Jews in Israel (and elsewhere) thus no longer feel guilty about abandoning their religious tradition. This section briefly examines how this situation is shifting as the questioning of Zionism both within Israel and in the Diaspora becomes more common. Until recently it was difficult to find a Jewish person who would criticise Israel, but a tremendous change has occurred.

"In a general sense," writes Silberstein (1999), "post-Zionism is a term applied to a current set of critical positions that problematise Zionist discourse, and the historical narratives and social and cultural representations that it produced" (2). Post-Zionism thus encompasses a variety of positions, and the use of the term is growing, indicating that Zionism is no longer adequate for many Israelis. To mainstream Zionists, post-Zionism is another form of anti-Zionism, threatening their dominance, and they even go so far as to link it with anti-Semitism. Silberstein (1999) nonetheless draws a careful distinction between post-Zionism and anti-Zionism.

Silberstein (1999) argues that all efforts to produce a cultural or collective identity involve acts of power, distinguishing between 'us' and 'them.' Post-Zionism, then, is a clearing space for alternatives to the dominant Zionist ideology and for voices that hitherto have

been silenced (e.g., those of Arabs, Diaspora Jews, Arab Jews, non-Zionist religious groups, women, non-Ashkenazi Jews, etc.). Post-Zionist scholars were raised in a culture defined by war with the Palestinians, and they thus came to see Zionism as the problem. Sceptical of Zionism's historical narrative, they call for alternative discourses.

These debates have huge implications for Jews living outside Israel as well. When Israel was established as a nation, it became a major factor in how Diaspora Jews positioned themselves as Jews. Concepts such as the Jewish people, nation, and homeland came to play a major role in identity construction. Loyalty to Israel and Zionism, rather than religiosity, became a litmus test for American Jews in particular, as Orr (1983) noted. He also discusses the anger he encountered as an Israeli Jew giving talks critical of Israel to a Western audience; Israelis often had to defend their right to criticise Israel to American Jewish audiences when they did not have to do the same at home[6] (Orr: 1983). American Jewish institutions refrained from criticizing them because Israel, in spite of its youth, was suddenly seen as the key to Jewry's survival. Post-Zionist debates will continue, and their full impact on Israel, the Diaspora, and Jewish identity remains to be seen.

2.3 IDENTITY THEORY

Scholars interested in identity issues have tried to decipher exactly what the focal term means (e.g., Riley, 1992; Hall, 1996 and 1997), some even challenging the assumption that 'identity' is a useful concept (Riley, 1992; Grossberg, 1996). Postmodern theorists remind us of the importance of examining our operative discourse critically. They also remind us of a Catch-22 in defining our terms—namely, that every time we limit something, we close off its flexibility for change. This point is especially important in discussions of identity. Authors such as Melucci (1996) and Hall (1996) struggle with

[6] Habib (2004) describes witnessing similar exchanges in her research.

defining identity because they want to keep it an open process. Melucci (1996) notes that this struggle is semantically inseparable from the idea of permanence.

Many authors from both modernist and postmodernist perspectives warn about the dangers of essentialised identities—that is, identities that claim to be pure, fundamental, or historically true (e.g., Rutherford, 1990; Hall, 1997). While they advocate a balance between finding a stable identity and avoiding reification, few present methods for achieving this ideal, though some suggest a way out of the maze (e.g., Riley, 1992; Honig, 1992).

How do we move beyond this bind of identity fluidity and the need for a working definition that can be explored through research? Melucci (1996) suggests thinking in terms of *action*: "The notion of identity always refers to these three features: namely, the continuity of a subject over and beyond variations in time and its adaptations to the environment; the delimitation of this subject with respect to others; the ability to recognise and be recognised" (71). He also notes that we should view collective identity as an analytical tool or concept, not as a real thing.

Hall (1996) suggests a less action-oriented definition while still reaching for something more flexible, open, and non-essentialising. He stresses a "strategic and positional" concept of identity (4). Hall (1996) further notes that identities are constructed through difference and within discursive modalities of power. "Identities," he writes, "are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (6). I would also emphasise the circularity of discourse (from discourse to actors and back).

Klatch (1999) also defined identity in an active sense for her study of US activists in the 1960s. She writes, "When I speak of *identity* here, I am referring to an individual or personal identity that defines a person as a social actor. In answer to the question, 'Who am I?' it conveys a sense of 'the real me.' Individual identity is necessarily a social identity. It is the situated self" (6).

2.3.1 Postmodern Theorists on Identity

Postmodern scholars have encouraged us to see identity as a construction rather than as a hypostatic reality. According to Mercer (1990), identity becomes an issue when it is in crisis, "when something assumed to be fixed, coherent, and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. From this angle, the eagerness to talk about identity is symptomatic of the post-modern predicament of contemporary politics" (43). Scholars from the postmodern tradition have written widely on idealised identities from a discourse-based and sociological perspective (Mercer, 1990; Hall, 1996; Minh-ha, 1997; Bauman, 1996). They have discussed identity as a uniquely postmodern predicament, a social construct created in terms of a relationship involving subject and discourse, positioning and values, space and performance, and subjectivities and localities. Bauman (1996) relates identity mainly to the idea of belonging: "'Identity' is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty" (19).

Laclau (1994), Butler (1999), and Bauman (1991) are a few postmodern theorists who have grappled with identity theory, specifically such issues as performance, intangibles and impermanence, modernity and community, insider/outsider distinctions, meaning, and individual choice. Their ideas are explored further here.

Laclau (1994) argues that political identities have moved from the universal to the particular and that ideologies such as socialism have evolved since the Cold War. The disappearance of universalism reinforces the ambiguity of identity. "This means that, between the ability of a certain order to become a principle of identification and the actual contents of that order, *there is no necessary link*. This . . . has considerable consequences for the understanding of the functioning of political logics" (3; emphasis added).

Like other theorists, Laclau (1994) sees identity as unstable: "A central issue in any contemporary theory of political identities is the ambiguity of the key signifiers stabilizing them and the various hegemonic and counter-hegemonic movements to which they are submitted" (7). No single discourse or system of categories captures the 'real.' Universal discourse has come to an end.

Butler (1999), in partial contrast, explores identity, power, and politics through the lens of gender, but her theories can be extended to other modes of categorization and hierarchy. The impetus for her groundbreaking *Gender Trouble* was the observation that feminist theory tended to pick and choose what was ascribed to gender and what was left as essential and true. Her goal was to open up gender without ascribing anything to it: "The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (xv). She thus is concerned with those living on the sexual margins.

In trying to problematise gender categories, Butler (1999) questions and exposes power relations. Imposing other categories on her questions, we could ask: "Does being [Jewish] constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through

discursively constrained performative acts that produce the [identity] through and within the categories of [ethnicity/religion/peoplehood]?" (xxix).

The aim is to look beyond the breakdown of identity markers to the power relations behind them. That which we think are true origins of some naturally occurring or essential quality are really the *effects* of institutions and power relations. "Instead, we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity?" (Butler, 1999: xxix). This is the key point regarding Jewish identity categorizations.

Bauman (1991) examines postmodernity in relation to Jewish identity. He asserts that the experiment of modernity failed and thereby threw our identities and communities into a flux of uncertainty. Modernity struggled to fit everything and everyone into tidy categories, which was a project doomed to fail. And so we live in ambivalence, though language gives us order, structure, and predictability. However, the more we try to order and control, the more ambivalence there is.

These are but a few of the questions and issues posed by postmodern theorists related to identity. The following section explores how some scholars are applying this contemporary perspective to Jewish identities and how others addressing this study's area of focus—namely, the experience of Jewish identity beyond religion and Zionism—have structured their research.

Silberstein (2000) discusses at length the 'new' identity theory of postmodernists such as Foucault, Butler, and Hall and makes the case for applying it to Jewish identity. Mostly quoting Hall, he argues that identity is a process, a becoming via discourse. Identities are inherently unstable and about whom we might become. Memory plays a crucial role in this

concept. While identity is always changing, there are 'moments of temporary closure' (4). Identity is a position, not an essence. In addition, one's positioning discourse (gender, race, etc.) shifts depending on time and context, and one's identity options are related to power. Silberstein (2000) encourages us to explore "other ways of imagining contemporary Jews" (20).

The aim of this study is also to imagine contemporary Jews in new ways. While Silberstein's (2000) collection begins to do this—writings range from a mother-daughter story comparing and contrasting their Jewish identities to analyses of *Maus* or contemporary photography projects—he does not address identity markers per se.

2.4 MAIN COMPONENTS OF IDENTITY

> The self is no longer firmly pinned to a stable identity; it wavers, staggers, and may crumble. (Melucci, 1996b: 3)

As mentioned above, many theorists discuss boundaries, definitions, and the operationalising of identity. Topics such as daily identity practices, identity as individual and collective subjects, and identity politics and class identity are more specific components found in the literature. These issues inform this research as it relates to action and discourse, the relationship between the individual and the collective, and margins as sites of power.

2.4.1 Daily Identity Practices

Essed's (1991) work on racism illuminates the importance of mundane, daily experience, something often overlooked in traditional sociology that favours a macro perspective. The

notion of ‘everyday’ experience is complex because this is where most disciplines divide institutions and interactions, public and private, ideology and discourse. Essed (1991) argues, however, that no theory of racism is complete without an understanding of how it works on an everyday and individual level. As with racism, no theory of identity can ignore how it is constructed on a daily basis.

Several other scholars stress the importance of everyday experience to their research. Swearingen and Orellana-Rojas (2000), for example, in their study of urban space and identity formation, write that “political and cultural contests between groups over how to define the uses of space help structure identity [-] formation processes” (100). In O’Brien’s (1999) study of white anti-racists, she defines an anti-racist as someone who *actively* works against racism, not just offers lip service to that stance. She illustrates, in other words, how daily practice is a core part of anti-racists’ identity. Finally, Smith and Ericson (1997) illustrate how the committed work of staff in social-movement organisations significantly shapes their identity and experience within the movement.

2.4.2 Margins as Sites of Power

Here, ‘margins’ or ‘marginalised’ means individuals who are excluded from the majority group, either intentionally or not. For example, feminism once claimed to be in the interest of all women, but women of colour felt that their experience was not reflected in the main feminist discourse, prompting the coining of the term ‘womanist.’ Several authors note that margins can be sites of power (Honig, 1992; Bhabha, 1990; Hall, 1997; hooks, 1990; Anzaldúa, 1990). The groups studied here have used their marginalisation—from other leftist groups, the wider Jewish community, or majority groups in general—to advantage. Many of those interviewed identified margins as places of power and potential. However,

as scholars mention, these are sites of very *limited* power. Marginality remains a useful method of instigating change and solidifying group bonding.

Most identity theorists point out that the marginalisation of certain people is a by-product of identity groups. However, these marginal sites are potentially powerful (Anzaldúa, 1990; Honig, 1992; hooks, 1990).

Hall (1997) notes that one response to globalisation is for people to retreat, as it were, to the local. He also acknowledges marginality as a site of power, albeit limited power. In light of contemporary globalisation, however, Hall (1997) anticipates that "identities on the margins" will fall into the old trap of exclusivist local identities. Like most authors on this topic, he leaves us with more questions than answers. "How can we clarify the notion of what these new identities might be?" he asks. "What will these identities be like, these identities constructed through things that are different rather than things that are the same?" (Hall, 1997: 187).

2.4.3 Individual and Collective Identities

People construct their identities through daily practice and within wider discourses; it never occurs in isolation from others with whom they identify or against whom they measure themselves. An interesting point about identity that comes through repeatedly in the literature is that identities are dependent on perceived differences from an 'other.' Hall (1997) observes that "Identity is always . . . a structured representation that achieves its positive only through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself" (174).

Some of the theory that links concepts of identity with collectivities includes ethnicity, nation, and Diaspora. Elaborating on individual versus collective identities is important because part of this research examines the relationship between the groups and the individuals interviewed.

This small area of theory bridges traditional macro approaches to social movements and micro perspectives on the relationship of the subject to a collective identity. The way in which individuals are attracted to and become engaged in the formation of a particular group's identity is critical to understanding how social movements—and individual identities—operate. While most social-movement theory focuses on the macro perspective of group dynamics, this study is more concerned with the individual's relationship to the group (e.g., Klandermans, 1997). Crucial here are the subjective experiences of everyday life and their impact on collective identity and action.

Another key aspect of collective identity is the individual's need to belong to a group. With the "multiplicity of subject positions and potential identities," a sense of "not belonging" can become "endemic" (Rutherford, 1990: 24). Rutherford (1990) and Hall (1996) suggest that current globalisation trends have led to an increased incidence of identity crises. This is another reason why the process of identity formation, both on the individual and collective level, is important. How do the Jews interviewed here, the current project inquires, negotiate the categories offered to them and create their own?

While most social-movement theory is not relevant to this project's research perspective, Klandermans (1997) is one theorist who explores a micro approach in making connections with collective identity. "Social movements," he writes, "are populated by individuals sharing collective goals and a collective identity who engage in disruptive collective action" (2). While the groups in this study clearly share goals and some aspects of identity,

their degree of disruptive collective action is debatable. However, his concerns are important to keep in mind: "First, how collective beliefs are constructed and reconstructed and, second, how discontent is transformed into collective action" (Klandermans, 1997: 4).

According to Melucci (1989), the concept of collective identity is crucial in studies of collective action. How the actors make sense of texts and practices, why they are meaningful to them, and discursive constructs are all part of understanding the human ability to construct meaning and understand action. Thus, research on this level needs to be more epistemologically aware and self-reflexive:

> Explanations based on 'structural determinants' on the one hand and 'values and beliefs' on the other can never answer the questions of how social actors come to form a collectivity and recognise themselves as being part of it; how they maintain themselves over time; how acting together makes sense for the participants in a social movement; or how the meaning of collective action derives from structural preconditions or from the sum of the individual motives. (Melucci, 1996: 69)

It is for those reasons that a micro approach is essential to comprehending the relationships between subjectivities and identities, actors and discourses.

How, then, does Melucci (1996) suggest that we define collective identity? He stipulates the following:

> I call *collective identity* the process of 'constructing' an action system. Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the *orientations* of their action and the *field* of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place. By 'interactive and shared' I mean that these elements are constructed and negotiated through a recurrent process of activation of the relations that bind actors together. (70)

Again we see the significance of action to the definition, just as with individual identities. How these actors construct their actions and meanings will illuminate how they construct their individual and collective identities as well.

2.4.4 Identity Politics and Class Identity

Identity politics is a subset that comprises much of the theoretical literature on identity. It is the relatively recent phenomenon of groups creating a political vision and movement based on how they identify themselves (e.g., gay rights or women's rights). The literature on identity politics falls roughly into three categories: its usefulness to social movements (Melucci, 1996; Riley, 1992; Rutherford, 1990; Davis, 1997); the relationship between identity politics and older class-based movements (Aronowitz, 1992, Laclau and Mouffe, 2001); and the usefulness of identity to politics or anything else for that matter (Grossberg, 1996).

From the debates on identity politics comes a consideration of the role of cultural difference, and not just in identity formation. This conversation revisits a lot of what has already been discussed, but it approaches the subject from a focus on *differences* rather than identities. Obviously we cannot have one without the other. A whole segment of the literature focuses on identity debates from the standpoint of difference (Crosby, 1992; Rutherford, 1990; West, 1990; Eyerman, 1999). I would maintain that most of the distinction here is semantic but that this refocusing of the same ideas offers some useful points of comparison.

Class identity is a form of collective identity. While many scholars assert that identity centred on other things has replaced the significance of class identity for social movements, the groups studied here have remained committed to change along the lines of social class.

Rutherford (1990) explains how the traditional Marxist Left never figured out how to incorporate women, blacks, and gays in conjunction with their overarching concerns. Such Marxists believed that class solidarity was the most important factor and that the rest was something for 'others' to sort out. "There was," writes Rutherford, "no sense that a complex interaction between these experiences [race/gender/class/sexuality] existed" (17).

Aronowitz (1992) has written in depth on the issue of class identity. He concurs that class, as a defining social and ideological category, has retreated politically. However, he is adamant that class still retains a powerful agency, even if has been displaced by other identities. "But these displacements are not unidirectional: class, gender, race, and sexual preference displace each other; which subject-position dominates is purely contextual" (8). He also remarks:

> [B]y the term 'displacement' I do not mean, for example, that gender and race are simply derived from class or occupy its space, in which case one clings to the centrality of class. Instead, I want to argue that we share multiple social identities, but these are not always 'in evidence' in specific political contexts. (ix)

He maintains that all of these various identity categories intersect and build upon each other. "For example," notes Rutherford (1990), "our class subjectivities do not simply co-exist alongside our gender. Rather, our class is gendered, and our gender is classed" (19). The research here shows that class is still a significant part of identity for these respondents.

2.5 JEWISH IDENTITY THEORY: FROM MAINSTREAM TO MARGINAL

> In a variety of ways, then, to be a Jew, especially in this historical juncture, means to lack a single essence, to live with multiple identities. Perhaps the Jews are even emblematic of the postmodern condition as a whole. If identity politics means to base one's political activity on one particular identity, then the Jews' experience of multiple identities suggests that identity politics

> conceived as monolithic or total needs serious rethinking. Many . . . argue instead for a politics that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of identity without abandoning the importance of identity altogether. (Biale, et al., 1998: 9)

For those searching for new ways to conceptualise identities, Jewishness is a unique example. Theorists like Boyarin (1994) see this as a strength: "Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity, because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these, in dialectical tension with one another" (244). Contemporary Jewish identity takes many shapes and forms. Doors continue to open as Zionist ideology is questioned, meaning that Jews now more than ever are able to challenge the hegemony of support for Israel without feeling that doing so compromises their identity as Jews.

Jewish identity is continually contested. For example, Orr (1994) argues against Zionism because it becomes a psychological prop for the non-religious Jew, creating identity crises in the Jewish community. Cantor (1995) claims that a mere 5% of those who have made *aliyah* (when a Jew immigrates to Israel) did so for Zionist reasons: "While Zionism became a kind of civic religion that bound Jews together, it only affected a marginal segment of Jewish consciousness in the Diaspora" (353).

Levine (1986) stresses that Judaism is a religio-ethnic concept. Early Jews saw themselves as a *people*, he posits, not as a religion[7]. This point is critical because it opens up room for more diversity in Jewish identity formation than do religion and Zionism. Levine (1986) also emphasises that "insights into the Jewish condition must be as varied intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally as is the Jewish people itself" (2).

For another slant on the issue, Hannah Arendt is an example of Jewish identity being called into question for not following the mainstream. When criticised for her writing on

[7] Interestingly, Lambert (2008) and Liebman (1973) both debunk their respondents' belief that the Jews constitute a 'people.'

Eichmann as not 'Jewish enough,' Arendt was at a loss because she saw her Jewishness as a given, a fact about her that had nothing to do with her interpretations of things. Honig notes that in her rebuttal to such critics Arendt could have challenged the "portrayal of Jewishness as a homogenous, univocal thing that implies certain incontestable responsibilities and claims certain loyalties" (Honig, 1992: 230-31). Arendt, however, did not recognise that option.

2.6 JEWISH IDENTITY: BEYOND THE PALE

Given the contested nature of identities and the 'new' postmodern definitions of identity as fluid and action-based, it is interesting that the criteria used most often in scholarship to measure Jewish identity are still religiosity, or synagogue affiliation, and Zionism. Despite calls to acknowledge the Jewish people's diversity, much research in the United States and Europe still focuses on them as a religious group, while giving a nod to their putative identification as an ethnicity or culture. For example, a study by Hartman and Hartman (1999) examined Jewish identity but used affiliation with a synagogue as their starting point.

If religion and Zionism are held up as the main components of Jewish identity, what do they exclude? This section covers many secular and non-Zionist facets of Jewish identity marginalised by mainstream conceptualisations, including Jewish labour movements, Yiddishkayt, and ethnic identities.

2.6.1 Jewish Labour Movements

There have been and continue to be movements for Jewishness of a secular nature. Perhaps the most powerful of these was the Jewish Labour Bund founded in Russia in 1897. It was based on socialism and cultural autonomy for minorities, another form of Jewish nationalism, but unlike Zionism it was anti-territorial. That is, the Bundists were part of the Menchavik movement in Russia that called for a loose federation of peoples, of which the Bund would be a part, thereby acknowledging a distinction between state and territory (Levin, 1978; Green, 1998; Liebman, 1979). Although they disagreed on solutions to anti-Semitism, both movements opened the door to creation of a secular Jewish identity, one based on culture or ethnicity rather than religion.

By ignoring such secular identities we miss out on the wealth of other Jewish identity movements throughout history. Sicker (1992) explores secular Jewish nationalisms that preceded Zionism, such as the Hebraists and the Hibbat Zion movement in Eastern Europe and Russia. Silberstein (1999) discusses several groups that tried to displace Zionism with other discourses: the Canaanites, who in the 1950s had much influence in the arts, and Mazpen, a left-wing socialist anti-Zionist group that emerged in the 1960s and made the Palestinians a key issue. He also discusses Ahad Haam as one who opened the way for a secular Jewish identity and privileged it as a choice over divine commandment.

The challenge of conceptualising Jewish identity beyond the religious framework is often ignored, although options have been debated for centuries. Writers such as Ahad Haam saw secular Jewishness as a viable alternative to religious identification (Silberstein, 1994). Green (1998), who writes more broadly on Jewish workers in the Diaspora during the early 1900s, also illustrates the variety of experience in the Jewish community, which found a means of survival beyond the religious context. The interviews will show how

some marginalised Jews today embrace and see themselves as continuing the socialist and labour movement aspects of Jewish history.

2.6.2 Yiddishkayt

Another type of secular identity based on action is found in the Yiddishkayt movement. The past 200 years of secular Jewish culture known as Yiddishkayt allowed one to abandon the religious and yet remain completely Jewish. This came about as part of the desire to lead a 'normal' life, according to Howe (1994). Like others, Jews could not resist the influence of Romanticism. "Every important Jewish movement—Haskalah, Yiddishism, Bundism, Folkism, Zionism—is permeated with the assumptions and tones of Romanticism" (Howe, 1994: 9). However, Yiddishkayt, one of the most creative periods of all Jewish history, argues Howe (1994), is now reaching its end, the victim of modern history.

The problem of self-definition thus becomes more acute for non-religious Jews. Some contemporary strategies for identity formation include clinging to the immigrant experience and/or Yiddish culture, keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive, and aggressively supporting Israel. Like Orr (1983), Howe (1994) agrees that Israel cannot serve as a substitute for Jewishness. He laments that all of these strategies except support for Israel are losing force. For many, including the research respondents in this study, the 'other strategies' have become activism which then becomes a building block for an alternative Jewish identity.

2.6.3 Political Ethnicities

Jewish ethnic diversity also gets sidelined by mainstream conceptions of Jewish identity that focus on European (Ashkenazi) interpretations of religion and Israel. Authors such as Dominguez (see Silberstein and Cohn, 1994), who examines how Israeli Jewish identity is constructed, focus on tension, conflict, struggle, and difference rather than shared meanings, values, and symbols. She problematises, in other words, Jewish 'peoplehood' as a natural given, seeing it instead as a discursive process that must be continually disseminated and maintained. Sephardic Jews (of Spanish descent) are the major 'others' in Israeli society where the Ashkenazi have cultural hegemony. Women can also be seen as an internal 'other,' especially when we consider Jewish identity and Zionism as gendered phenomena (Seidman, 1997; D. Boyarin, 1997; Lentin, 1997). The major external 'other' is the Arab, both within and outside the country.

Discussing this reality can be threatening, Silberstein (1994) notes, because groups do not like to acknowledge their exercise of power. Also, such questioning challenges the 'facts' of collective identity. Much Jewish scholarship still focuses, therefore, on essentialism. Silberstein (1994) asserts that, in order for Jews to create an alternative approach to culture and history and avoid violence and exclusion toward others, they need to acknowledge the dynamic processes that constitute identity. By focusing on how Jews construct others and thus themselves, we understand the discursive practices and power relations that are involved.

In another argument for recognising diversity within the Jewish community, Train's (1998) work on Jewish women of colour illustrates how the Ashkenazi are constructed as central and superior in Israel, the norm against which all others must be measured. Women identified as Sephardic or Indian, for example, are constantly defending their Jewishness

to other Jews, who see only themselves and their traditions as 'authentic.' As Train (1998) argues, "Jewish women's identity must not be seen as exclusive and singular, but must be recognised and conceptualised within the interlocking relationship of race, class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religiosity, colour, and Jewish identity" (1).

2.6.4 Non-Zionist Identities

The concept of non-Zionist identities calls into question many Zionist assumptions. It also allows us to rediscover diversity in Jewish history. The way in which the mainstream Jewish community has focused obsessively on Israel for the past sixty years minimises discussion of the richness of Jewish experience beyond Zionism. "The claim that Zionism is the best standpoint from which to view Jewish history threatens the valorisation of the Diaspora experience" (Cantor, 1995: 116).

Due to Zionism, and short memories, we forget how long the Jewish people survived and grew as a Diaspora. Levine (1986) notes how significant it is that a small aggregate of people survived a 2000-year exile scattered all over the Earth. Everywhere they went they were often the only minority and usually repressed or expelled, but somehow they maintained their community and flourished (see also Rutgers, 1998; Roden, 1996). Zionism, however, claims that the founding of Israel is necessary for Jewish survival. Clearly this leaves out much of the Jewish story. The following section explores non-Zionism further.

2.7 DIASPORA AND BEYOND

Typically the norm for Jewish people throughout history, the creation and normalisation of Zionism cast the Diaspora as a less desirable state of existence. For centuries this term was used only to describe the situation of Jews, Greeks, Armenians, or Romani (Gypsies). It indicates a people who see themselves as connected but scattered around the globe, essentially 'homeless.' Now, due in part to postcolonial theory and identity politics, usage of the term 'Diaspora' has been extended to basically every group of people, usually in terms of nation or ethnicity (Clifford, 1994). Because all nations have 'expatriates' living in other countries, we now have plenty of discussion about the African Diaspora, Korean Diaspora, and so forth—anyone who is living somewhere but supposedly also looking toward a 'homeland' of others in their identity group. For 2,000 years the Jewish Diaspora posited a 'homeland' that was a symbolic memory. The literature debates whether this survival was *because of* or *in spite of* living as a Diasporic people all over the globe (see Boyarin, 1994; Levine, 1986). Nevertheless, after existing this way for so long, Zionism and Israel were naturally very disruptive to how Jews saw themselves as a people and as individuals.

However, as described earlier, since the 1980s Jews in Israel and the Diaspora are more willing, even *more able*, to be critical of Zionist ideology. This is certainly evident in Jewish response to the second Palestinian uprising: Jews took a stronger stance for peace and were more critical of Israeli policy than ever before. Looking back to the 1980s, we can see how Jews in the Diaspora and their views of Israel and Zionism were changing. Brettschneider (1996) focuses on American Jews and shifting views of Israel during this time. She points out that initially it was very difficult for Jews to question Israeli politics. During the 1980s, however, these voices became more strident. This questioning of Zionism or Israeli policy can occur on many levels, be it working out a fair agreement

with the Palestinians, challenging Zionist creation myths, or questioning whether Israel has a right to exist at all. When discussing the results from the interviews in this study, the focus is often on Jews in the Diaspora reacting to things happening in Israel. However, this is a recursive relationship: the Diaspora affects Israel and vice versa. The following section explores Boyarin's (1994) theory to pull away from this limiting dynamic.

2.7.1 Boyarin's Plea for Diasporic Jewish Identity

Boyarin (1994) argues that Diaspora is Jewry's main contribution to the world and that all cultures would benefit from this example. His theory is vital because it builds on the history of Jewish identity and is a post-Zionist model that offers non-territorial nationalist identities for both Jews and all others.

The paradigm is based on an admittedly idealised Diaspora as if Jews had strong identity and relatively persecution-free lives. Zionism, maintains Boyarin (1994), is a *subversion* of Jewish culture, not its culmination, because it substitutes a Western construct for the Jewish tradition of sharing power with others. For example, Jewish communal charity to 'one's own' takes on a totally different meaning when Jews are the state power and minorities suffer. Israeli inequities are inevitable when the practices of a minority group are transferred to a state power. In light of this he writes, "I wish . . . to articulate a notion of Jewish identity that recuperates its genealogical moment—family, history, memory, and practice—while at the same time problematising claims to autochthony and indigeneity as the material base of Jewish identity" (Boyarin, 1994: 251).

Jewishness is unique because one can convert in and join a new genealogical family, but one can never convert out. It is an identity that is religious or not, physical or not, practised or not, but always there. "Therefore," suggests Boyarin (1994), "that which

would be *racism* in the hands of a dominating group is *resistance* in the hands of a subaltern collective. In order, then, to preserve the positive ethical, political value of Jewish genealogy as a mode of identity, *Jews must preserve their subaltern status*" (242; emphasis added), where subaltern somehow does not also mean oppressed and persecuted.

Elaborating, he notes that Diaspora Jews did not oppress others because they had no power, but now with Israel the situation is different. "Diaspora culture and identity can . . . move us beyond this dilemma, for it allows . . . for a complex continuation of Jewish cultural activity and identity at the same time that the same people participate fully in the common cultural life of their surroundings" (Boyarin, 1994: 243). Diasporic cultural identities teach us that cultures are not preserved by being spared of 'mixing' but probably continue only *because of* such mixing, as Levine (1986) and Rutgers (1998) also argued. All cultures and identities are constantly being remade, but Jewish Diaspora highlights this fact.

Boyarin (1994) explains that Jewishness encompasses many intertwined identities simultaneously. For example, Jews in the Middle East are Arab Jews, and Zionists do a disservice when they obscure this point. A Diasporised/disaggregated identity would allow one to be an Egyptian Arab who happens to be Jewish and also allow one to be a Jew who happens to be an Egyptian Arab. He thinks that the same thing is true for gender—i.e., that being a woman is a special thing, and can be celebrated as such, but that does not imply freezing gender identity into a fixed set of boundaries. Being a man or a woman or an Arab or a Jew does not tell the whole story of one's identity. We are only *partially* our labels, and this is Diasporised identity.

Interestingly, Boyarin (1994) wants to retain genealogy as an important marker for identity: "Paradoxically, however, I would also insist that genealogy as a shared historical

memory, most fully (but not exhaustively) represented in the actual, physical identity of child of one's parents, is crucial to the maintenance of cultural identity" (245).

Given that this theory is radical, thoughtful, idealistic, and contradictory, other scholars also interested in Diaspora and Jewish identity have responded in various ways.

2.7.2 Responses to Boyarin

Aviv and Shneer (2005) critique Boyarin's (1994) Diaspora concept, seeming to want to be even more shocking and challenging to conventional beliefs. While he argues for redefining what the Jewish Diaspora means, they argue for abandoning the concept altogether (after all, their book is subtitled *The End of the Jewish Diaspora*). While they agree with him that Diaspora is a dynamic solution, they ultimately reject it. They maintain that we live too globally and that 'home' is always shifting; thus, Diaspora, even in a new conceptualization, does not work. Their other main issues with the Diaspora concept are that it has been overused to the point of meaninglessness, that it connotes a centre and a periphery, and that it is outdated.

Despite their strong rejection of Boyarin's proposal, their differences seem to be more semantic than substantive since he is arguing for a radical redefinition of the term. That is, one could argue that for Jews not living in Israel, identity is already diasporic by virtue of location. What Boyarin (and Aviv and Shneer, and many respondents in this study) are rejecting is the assumption in the mainstream definitions of Diaspora as looking toward, wanting, needing, caring about, focusing on a 'homeland' someplace else. They all would rather see a Diaspora focused on a person or community's current location—the here and now should be the focus, not some privileged other space. The traditional Diaspora/Zionist construction is detrimental to Jewish communities as a whole.

Galchinsky in Biale et al. (1998) reviews the traditional Jewish Diasporas (biblical, prophetic, and rabbinic) in order to contrast them with postcolonialism. Like Aviv and Shneer (2005), he disagrees with Boyarin (1994), believing he is evading the question of Israeli power rather than addressing it. His main point is that American Jews can learn more about themselves by learning about other Diasporas.

Habib (2004) seems to appreciate Boyarin's (1994) theoretical move because it opens the possibility of deterritorialised Jewry. She focuses on Diaspora Jews, too, but on those who construct their identities around Israel and are consumers of "Diaspora tourism" and the like, noting that "[p]eople make sense of their lives in very complicated and often unanticipated ways despite the rigid ideologies to which they are exposed" (10). She argues that much of the existing literature on North American Jews ignores their diverse reactions to official Israeli narratives and the destructive aspects of nationalism. She identifies Diaspora Jews as those who consider Israel a homeland and actively participate as such. Thus, she is Israel- and Diaspora- focused in a way that Boyarin wants to reject.

2.8 SIMILAR STUDIES

Having reviewed the literature on the main concepts affecting contemporary Jewish identities, I now discuss several studies that apply performance-based identity theory *and* explore markers beyond the traditional religious and Zionist categories. Many other scholars have found mainstream trends in Jewish identity research to fall short, providing an incomplete account of what it means to be Jewish today. While they employ qualitative methods and question conventional narratives, adding much to our understanding of contemporary Jewish identities, gaps remain.

"For post-Soviet Jews," note Aviv and Shneer (2005), "intermarriage and anti-Semitism are facts of life, not problems to worry about and solve" (30). This comment highlights their thesis that *place* is the main shaping factor for contemporary Jewish identities, and that our anxieties and most significant experiences are contextual and local. They argue that we can change collective Jewish identity if we embrace the complexity of the Jewish world. They provocatively advocate the end of the Diaspora, emphasizing that relinquishing the concept does not mean the end of the Jewish people. They are interested in how people construct 'home' and root themselves there.

Like theorists who argue that Jewish survival happened because of minority or Diaspora status rather than in spite of it, Aviv and Shneer (2005) see potential in a "subjective and slippery" definition of Jewishness:

> Rather than bemoan the demise of a unified people, we think it is the very slipperiness of Jewish identity that provides so much fertile potential for creativity, innovation, and adaptation in all the places Jews call home. By abandoning the confines of nationalistic and [D]iasporic constraints for a more nuanced, flexible understanding of Jewish identity that embraces difference and differences as core virtues, we as Jews can become better global citizens. (175)

Discussing a range of Jewish communities and institutions around the world, Aviv and Shneer (2005) illustrate thriving Diasporic enclaves that break the mould of limiting mainstream narratives (e.g., Zionism). Their focus on place and their case for dropping the Diaspora concept for Jews completely, however, does not capture this project's main research questions and methods.

Klein's (1996) study on 'lost Jews' is another in the vein of looking beyond mainstream definitions of Jewish identity and using the richness of qualitative research. Focusing on British Jews, she explores the wide range of the Jewish community's periphery. She also notes that the periphery is what is most likely to be lost. Exemplifying the tradition of

Jewish social scientists anxious about the community's survival, she make the case for including and engaging these 'lost Jews' before they become truly lost forever—a different approach than that of Cohen and Eisen (2000) and Cohen and Kahn-Harris (2007) discussed below.

Like Aviv and Shneer (2005), Klein (1996) argues for greater flexibility in defining Jewish identity. On the other hand, she focuses on *halakah* (Jewish religious law) and what these peripheral Jews have to do in order to be 'counted' by the powers that be (i.e., the UK's Jewish establishment). Her proposal is to welcome back and count the individual 'lost Jew' who makes a commitment to the Jewish people, understanding at the same time how problematic these definitions can be.

While the present study is similar to Klein's (1996) as far as focusing on the margins of Jewish community, a difference is that she is concerned with the Jewish establishment's reintegrating this periphery. She encourages 'lost Jews' to return to synagogue and community, whereas this study examines how marginal Jews create and practice within their own identities and communities. Although we are similar in arguing for more inclusive definitions of Jewish identity, we differ in defining 'lost'[8] versus 'marginal' and in viewing synagogue participation as an ideal of Jewish community engagement.

While Klein (1996) studied those 'lost' on the Jewish community's non-engaged periphery, Cohen and Kahn-Harris (2007) in the UK and Cohen and Eisen (2000) in the US are interested in 'moderately engaged Jews,' arguing that they, as opposed to the ultra-Orthodox and non-engaged, have the most potential for shaping the Jewish future and

[8] Klein interviewed Holocaust survivors, descendants of immigrants and prominent Jewish families, the children and grandchildren of intermarriage, those who no longer identified themselves as Jewish, Israeli 'expatriates,' and unmarried marginal Jews. She was especially concerned with patrilineal Jews and their options aside from Halakic conversion for full Jewish recognition, interviewing at least 20 rabbis on this issue.

represent more accurately the range of Jewish engagement. They chose the 'moderately engaged' to avoid the dichotomous portrayal of Jewry in contemporary discourse, to highlight diversity of belief and experience within this group, and to explore relevant identity components.

Cohen and Kahn-Harris (2007) define the moderately engaged as those who are connected to the Jewish community by participating regularly in synagogue, Jewish organizations, or Jewish schools. They admit that this group would be seen as highly engaged in the US. Their study population also has a higher level of ethnic belonging and a lower level of religious piety as compared to the US, mirroring larger experiences in these two cultures. Arguing that this group is pivotal to British Jewry's future, their survival bias is transparent.

Liebman and Cohen (1990, qtd. in Cohen and Kahn-Harris, 2007) introduced the notion of *familism*, signifying the attachment that many Jews feel to the wider Jewish community, and their respondents often attested to this sentiment. Spending holidays at home and time with friends and family was rated as much more important to Jewish identity and connection than Torah study or Jewish law, reinforcing the idea of ethnic belonging and personal relationships as crucial to contemporary Jews.

Ultimately, Cohen and Kahn-Harris (2007) exposed a rich diversity of experience by employing qualitative methods to study British Jews beyond the markers of religion and Zionism. They verified a wide spectrum of Jewish engagement, a strong sense of belonging more ethnic than religious, a preference for children to marry Jews yet an openness to intermarriages, a view of congregations and rabbis as central to Jewish authenticity despite their lack of spiritual commitment, an ambivalent attachment to Israel, and a characterization of themselves as 'dwellers' rather than 'seekers' in terms of Jewish

life (87-88). While these themes mirror some of what is found in the present study, a difference is that the focus here is on the less- or unengaged periphery, diverse as that segment is as well.

Cohen and Eisen's (2000) in-depth study of moderately engaged US Jews also begins to bridge the literature's gap, bringing Jewish identity research into the modern era. As they note, "we know, for example, how often American Jews come to synagogue or visit Israel, but have not yet clarified the sense that Jews make of what transpires in these visits or how these experiences of being in synagogue or in Israel fit into the larger fabric of their personal Jewish meanings" (3). These nuances are critical and need to be explored. They argue that most of the answers to Jewish continuity concerns are largely off the mark. Today's Jews, they believe, see Jewishness very differently than those even a few decades ago. Like other groups nowadays, Jews turn inward, moving away from organizations and institutions (see also Elazer, 1995). New research should be mindful of such social trends and contexts. Cohen and Eisen (2000), then, are one example of researchers who are openly addressing the anxiety issue, while also attempting to move past outdated ways of defining and measuring Jewish identity.

Cohen and Eisen's (2000) qualitative research led them to three main conclusions. The first is that "the discovery and construction of Jewish meaning in contemporary America . . . occur primarily in the private sphere" (2). Second, the importance of the public sphere, which used to be the centre of Jewish life (organisations), has severely diminished. Finally, the principal authority for contemporary American Jews, in the absence of compelling religious norms and communal loyalties, has become the sovereign self. Each person now makes decisions about observance and involvement again and again over time. Personal meanings are sought for new or inherited observances, and practices are revised or discarded if not found to be meaningful. Ironically, "many of the conventional

indicators of involvement, used for decades by sociologists of American Jewry, still tend to appear as a 'package' in contemporary Jewish lives" (Cohen and Eisen, 2000: 194). This contribution to Jewish identity research is valuable, yet because my focus is different the present study amplifies it.

This section provided an overview of some contemporary studies on Jewish identity. By focusing on a sample of non-religious and/or non-Zionist Jews in two major cities and by examining their alternative Jewish identities through qualitative methods, this research project will contribute to this growing body of knowledge.

2.9 CONCLUSION

> Individual identities are contextually constructed within fields of power and meaning and cannot easily be separated from specific situations, from culturally specific narrative conventions, or from abstractions we label history, politics, and economics. Identity here is not a unified essence but a mobile site of contradiction and disunity, a node where various discourses temporarily intersect in particular ways. (Kondo, qtd. in Silberstein, 1994: 5)

Context and history are all-important in identity research. The literature review indicates that these dimensions have not always been addressed fully, particularly as concerns alternative Jewish identities predicated on other than religious or Zionist bases. Qualitative research that draws on in-depth interviews offers the best mechanism for exploring this study's main questions. The following chapter explains the methodologies chosen and the story behind the investigation.

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed the literature relevant to Jewish-identity sociology and gaps in recent studies exploring similar questions. While several studies employing qualitative methods were interested in Jewish identity beyond Zionism and religion, they have focused on groups of Jews different from those researched here. Their focus has been on 'moderately engaged Jews' (Cohen and Eisen, 2000; Cohen and Kahn-Harris, 2007), 'lost Jews' (Klein, 1996), and Diaspora Jews (Aviv and Shneer, 2005; Habib, 2004; Lambert, 2008). Each of these groups is touched on here but from a different perspective, thus enriching research in this area. This study illuminates some of the gaps remaining in Jewish-identity research, focusing on a small sample in specific locations at a pivotal time in history.

This chapter describes the strengths and weaknesses of the research design, methods, and process, as well as recounting the project's history and challenges. In order to cover the methodology employed in this study, this chapter adopts the 'natural history option' suggested by Silverman (2005), which he argues makes for a more engaging narrative to both write and read by showing the evolution of the author's thinking and experience during the project.

3.1 ROLE OF THE REFLEXIVE

Reflexivity is a key component of the qualitative approach. An overview of the researcher's background and biases improves an understanding of the research and its conclusions. It is thus worthwhile to situate myself in relation to the study as part of the discussion on methodology.

At the commencement of this study in 1998, I was a 24-year-old American newly arrived in London to take advantage of a three-year research bursary at the University of Greenwich with the now-defunct Gender and Ethnic Studies department. I grew up Jewish in the US in a loose Reform community—that is, hardly religious and without much of a cultural emphasis. My main exposure to Judaism while growing up was not through the home but through religious school as a child and Jewish youth group as a teenager, both in the Reform tradition[1]. In addition, my mixed background has greatly influenced my interest in identity and belonging.

My mother grew up in a devout Catholic family in Sri Lanka, part of the dwindling Berger ethnic group (mix of indigenous people and European colonialists), and converted to Judaism to marry my non-religious father, a Jew from Boston, Massachusetts, who was descended from Russian and Polish immigrants (they met as international students in Belgium, where I was born). Compounding our feelings of uniqueness, my brothers and I were raised in a well-to-do suburban neighbourhood in the heart of white Protestant and politically conservative Kansas in the US[2]. In addition to the usual teen angst and awkwardness, I had no identity group with which to discuss my experience. In fact, until about five years ago, my brothers were the only people I knew with a similar background,

[1] The Reform tradition of Judaism in the US is probably most closely paralleled by the Liberal tradition in the UK. It emphasizes gender egalitarianism in worship, social justice, support for Israel, and a 'choice through knowledge' approach to following traditions. In other words, it is the most assimilated of the mainstream Jewish religious traditions in the US.

[2] People from overseas used to immediately think of Dorothy and Oz when Kansas was mentioned. Now the state is known for having attempted to ban the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution in schools in favour of 'intelligent design.'

although I did once meet a woman with an Indian mother and British Jewish father. More recently, one of my Sri Lankan cousins married an Australian Jew, and their little daughter shares a similar ethnic background.[3] The lack of fitting in anywhere—with Jewish friends, the wider white/Protestant/conservative community, even with Sri Lankan relatives—had a tremendous impact on my upbringing and led to my eventual interest in identity, belonging, groups, and culture.

I became interested in the specific topic of alternative Jewish identities in 1996 during a class on race I was taking for my Master's degree in Sociology at the University of Illinois, for which I read Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin's "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity" (1993). It was the first time I heard of Jews challenging Zionism and arguing that a Jewish state was undesirable. While it sounds dramatic now, at the time it was literally earth-shattering to learn of non-Zionist Jews. From this article I discovered that Jewish identity was far more complex and diverse than I had been led to believe by mainstream Jewish institutions. I wanted to learn more about these 'alternative identities' and other aspects of Jewish history and experience that had been marginalized by the mainstream discourse to which I had been exposed. Perhaps, I began to think, there was more than one way to 'belong.'

3.2 THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The model selected to explore the study's research questions is the qualitative approach represented in feminist and grounded theory. Feminist theory emphasizes the importance of reflexivity to provide openness on researcher bias and the philosophy behind the study's creation, process, and analysis. Grounded theory, broadly speaking, encourages the researcher to be open to theorizing from information collected in the field. While quantitative studies are useful to see the 'big picture' in terms of demographic trends and

[3] The *New York Times* did a feature story on M.I.A, the Sri Lankan Tamil via London rap/pop star. Apparently she married an American named Bronfman and had children, so perhaps there is a trend.

numbers, qualitative research helps to illustrate the intricacies and diversity of the human experience.

3.2.1 The Qualitative Approach

According to Blaikie (1993), "two of the most central concepts in the philosophy of science are *ontology* and *epistemology*" (6). Ontology refers to the claims or assumptions that a particular approach to social enquiry makes about the nature of social reality; epistemology refers to the claims or assumptions made about the ways in which it is possible to gain knowledge of this reality. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) conceptualize it, ontology asks 'What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?'; epistemology asks 'What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?'; and methodology asks 'How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?' (13). In contrast to the philosophy of positivism that characterized early social research and that posits belief in an objective reality, the ontology of interpretivism propounds that social reality is the "product of processes by which social actors together negotiate the meanings for actions and situations; it is a complex of socially constructed meanings" (Blaikie, 1993: 96). Social reality thus represents *interpretations* rather than one essential 'thing.' Epistemologically, then, interpretivism observes and reinterprets the everyday meanings of individuals' interactions. On a related note, critical theory is significant in that it maintains that objective observation is impossible; therefore, the researcher must be aware of his/her cognitive interests, which determine the epistemological approach and its claims.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) believe that qualitative research varies within each historical moment. No single paradigm is privileged by qualitative methodology. They state that the "essence [of qualitative research] is twofold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter, and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism" (4). The hermeneutic tradition stresses that understanding exists only within history and culture, and that this understanding "is an

integral part of everyday human existence and is therefore the task of ordinary people, not experts" (Blaikie, 1993: 63).

Gibbs (2002) notes that quantitative analysis seeks to reduce or condense data to summaries and statistics, whereas qualitative methodology seeks to enhance and grasp subjective complexity. He also emphasizes the importance of language, interpretive philosophy, and a holistic approach. Mindfulness of language and context was an appropriate fit for this project. Gibbs explains further that "[t]he interpretative view is that people are constantly interpreting the world they live in. They are always trying to understand the world or to imbue it with meaning. What the qualitative researcher is doing is trying to capture these acts of interpretation and to understand them" (2).

Critiques of the qualitative approach are many. Gibbs (2002) summarizes them as follows: biased transcription and interpretation, overemphasis on positive cases, focus on the exotic or unusual, ignoring negative cases, vague definitions of concepts/codes, and inconsistent application of concepts and unwarranted generalizations. Despite these potential weaknesses, the benefits for certain projects such as this far outweigh possible pitfalls. Transparency throughout the process helps to address most of these issues. Furthermore, since the qualitative approach no longer tries to hold itself to the standards of the 'hard sciences' or quantitative approaches, the researcher and reader can weigh the approach's value on its own merits.[4]

3.2.2 Feminist Post-Structural Methodology

From feminist theory this study adopts the view that both the natural and social worlds are socially constructed and that, depending on the social locations of those interpreting the

[4] Wolcott (1990, quoted in Silverman, 2005) argues that after over a century of qualitative research, there is no longer a "need to provide an exhaustive review of the literature about such standard procedures as participant observation or interviewing" (p 299). While sympathetic, Silverman admits Wolcott is unorthodox in this regard.

world, these constructs can be widely divergent. Feminism is openly political in its desire for social change and aims to be clear about its biases.

The feminist viewpoint on the relationship between methodology and epistemology is central to this approach. Stanley (1990) discusses how the "academic mode of production" affects what research is produced and distributed as knowledge. She notes that "one of the preconditions for 'good research' is that it should account for the conditions of its own production; that is, it has to be 'unalienated knowledge'" (13). Hence ensues this study's emphasis on reflexivity. Stanley also argues that feminism is more than just a perspective (way of seeing) or epistemology (way of knowing); it constitutes nothing less than an ontology (way of being in the world). She maintains that feminism is concerned with research processes and awareness of ontology's fluidity. This study incorporated that dimension by asking interviewees about their perceptions of gender identity and its impact on their experiences.

Harding's (1991) examination of feminist epistemology argues for standpoint theories of methodology. By basing research on the lives of those traditionally considered 'others,' we can greatly enrich our scope of knowledge. Everyone can recognize his/her social position and start from there. Standpoint logic recognizes the multiplicity of knowledge—namely, the idea that all movements intersect and that women cannot be the only generators of feminist knowledge.

Standpoint theory emerges from Harding's belief that women's lives have been "neglected as starting points for scientific research and as the generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims" (1991: 121). She argues that because of this history women are "valuable strangers" with different perspectives. This relates to the 'power of the margins' concept discussed in the previous chapter. The respondents in this study offer insights as

"valuable strangers" in the Jewish community, and qualitative methods allow us greater access to their experiences.

Although feminism is critical of androcentric approaches to producing knowledge, its critique can be extended to the exclusion of other minorities and their marginalised perspectives. Smith (1999) argues that, because Western research traditionally involved a supposedly 'objective' outsider, new paradigms are needed, including those of feminist methodologies. She writes that "[t]he critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity. At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships, and the quality and richness of their data and analysis" (137). Smith also argues for being accountable to one's subjects, a recommendation incorporated in this study.

3.2.3 Critiques

Giddens (1976) criticizes interpretivism as implying that social actors can be aware of their actions and intent. Giddens also maintains that interpretivism ignores the influence of social structures and institutions. I respond to these issues from a feminist perspective. In addition, the project's interviewees were exceptionally reflexive, self-aware, and self-critical. Many of the interviews were so extended, in fact, because of the considerable thought that the interlocutors had devoted to such questions about Jewish identity over the course of their lives. Moreover, they were aware of how institutions and dominant discourses had shaped their life experiences.

3.2.4 Grounded Theory

> Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continual interplay between analysis and data collection. (Strauss and Corbin, 1994: 273)

A frequent companion of qualitative approaches is grounded theory, which attempts to make inductive generalisations about different social situations according to what they have in common (Burawoy, 1991).

Silverman (2005) provides a simplified model of grounded theory:

- An initial attempt to develop categories that illuminate the data;
- An attempt to 'saturate' these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance; and
- An attempt to develop these categories into analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting. (179)

As Gibbs (2002) notes, grounded theory's original goal was to mimic 'hard-nosed' quantitative research. More recently, the approach is interpretive and constructionist. "Grounded theory," writes Gibbs, "has been used extensively across a variety of social science disciplines. Its central focus is on inductively generating novel theoretical ideas or hypotheses from the data as opposed to testing theories specified beforehand" (165).

For the goals of this study—namely, to elucidate the identities of a small sample of Jews in the US and UK in the late 1990s who reject the mainstream markers of Zionism and religion—grounded theory was attractive in that, while the researcher could acknowledge preconceived notions, there was an incentive for inductively determining how these identities were crafted and maintained. As Gibbs (2002) points out, "The analysis of narratives, stories, and biographies allows us to examine the rhetorical devices that social actors use and the way they represent and contextualize their experience and personal knowledge. Narratives involve the personal dimension, and are usually related from the individual's point of view" (174).

Grounded theory has been criticized for an alleged lack of clarity. "At best," observes Silverman (2005), "'grounded theory' offers an approximation of the creative activity of theory building found in good observational work, compared to the dire abstracted

empiricism present in most wooden statistical studies" (180). This comment best summarizes reasons for the methodology's use here.

3.3 METHODS

Having chosen feminist and grounded-theory approaches, I decided to adopt the methods of ethnography and participant observation, discourse analysis, and open-ended interviews. As Silverman (2005) notes, ethnography in field work becomes like a funnel: all approaches are woven together—observational research, data collection, hypothesis construction, and theory building. It gets progressively focused over the course of one's research (178).

3.3.1 Ethnography and Participant-Observation

Burawoy (1991) explains participant-observation as a technique of social science that studies people "in their own everyday lives":

> [T]he advantages of participant-observation are assumed to lie not just in direct observation of how people act, but *also how people understand and experience those acts*. It allows us to juxtapose what people say they are up to against what they actually do. (2; emphasis added)

A main reason for using participant-observation in this project was not simply for interest in people's behaviour but how they explain their circumstances and how that explanation varies from superficial interpretations of their actions.

Regarding the interplay between micro and macro levels of experience, Burawoy (1991) suggests focusing on the extended case, which "examines how the situation is shaped by external forces." He says that this methodology changes the conventions of participant observation:

> We challenge the conventional correspondence between technique and level of analysis and argue that participant observation can examine the macro world through the way the

> latter shapes and in turn is shaped and conditioned by the micro world, the everyday world of face-to-face interaction. (6)

This research, conducted over 18 months of field work, assists in better understanding Jewish identity through a small sample at a specific historical moment and in specific geographical locations.

3.3.2 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is one of the three methods utilized in this study. The conception of discourse falls into two main areas. One is the social-psychology definition of discourse ('conversation analysis') as information to be studied; the other defines discourse as a system of historically bound knowledge—that is, the Foucauldian understanding of discourse. Both concepts are rooted in qualitative, interpretivist approaches.

Conversation analysis is one end of the discourse spectrum. A transcript crafted for conversation analysis goes far beyond merely capturing the words spoken; it notes every interruption, overlap, length of pauses, emphasized phrases, intonation, pitch, pronunciation/accents, and so forth. The rationale for this level of detail is that it allows the researcher to examine what is happening beyond the informational exchange. Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) explain conversation analysis as a tool for exploring ordinary talk: "Conversation analysis is characterized by the view that how talk is produced, and how the meanings of talk are determined, are the practical, social, and interactional accomplishments of members of a culture" (1).

Conversation analysis was not appropriate for this study. While it can be used to analyze long interviews, it focuses on examining the interaction between the interviewer and respondent. Because the research questions here focused on how respondents explain and experience their Jewish identities, the dynamic between the researcher and subject was less significant than the actual text of the transcript.

Potter and Wetherall's *Discourse and Social Psychology* (1987) outlines an approach better suited to this study, one that is closer to Foucault's concept of discourse. Arguing that the discipline of psychology can benefit greatly from this approach, they regard discourse analysis as an effective complement to participant observation and interviews as presented here.

For the social psychologist, they observe, discourse and language order our perceptions. Social texts (conversations, articles, all forms of written and spoken interaction) do not merely mirror but actually construct a version of things. Texts don't just *describe* but *do*; "being active, they have social and political implications" (Potter and Wetherall, 1987: 6).This sort of analysis also allows examination of how the self is constructed in discourse.

At the other end of the spectrum is Foucault, whose concept of discourse is quite different from that of the social scientists discussed above. McHoul and Grace (1993) believe that Foucault's work can be summarized as exploring the relationship between discourse, power, and subject. These interrelated concepts are historically fragile. Discontinuity and lack of progression are also core concepts for this theorist.

Foucault is concerned with what we define as truth and who has the power to produce this truth as discourse, which he frames in terms of bodies of knowledge and disciplinary practices. 'Knowledge' is thus "much more a matter of the social, historical, and political conditions under which, for example, statements come to count as true or false" (McHoul and Grace, 1993: 26). Indeed, a Foucauldian approach is reminiscent of the work of Ilan Pappe and other post-Zionists in dismantling Zionist 'truth' and history. Power produces knowledge, as Zionism exemplifies, according to post-Zionist critics. Respondents in this study, too, questioned mainstream and even some leftist narratives.

Foucault's concept of discourse, then, is completely different from that found in conversation analysis, sociology, and linguistics. A discourse is whatever constrains or

enables writing, speaking, and thinking in a specific historical era. Contemporary discourses are put in historical context and pluralized so that they no longer seem to have unique access to 'truth,' which becomes a function of what *can* be said, written, or thought. Foucault argues that a system needs to been as a *plurality* of systems. Discontinuity also has to be pluralized into discontinuities. The emphasis on plurality follows Harding's (1991) emphasis on the multiplicity of lives within lives, and the emphasis on truth as what is allowed to be said is reminiscent again of the post-Zionist critique of Zionism.

Foucault further demonstrates that the world and our consciousness of it are effects of representations. Discourse itself is not just a form of representation but a material condition or set of conditions that constrains the imagination.

Finally, and perhaps most directly applicable to studies such as this, Parker (1992) discusses "the dynamics that run through the operation of different discourses, the cultural dynamics that affect the way we use discourse and the subjective dynamics which tear at our sense of self as discourses use us" (xiii). He focuses on the role of discourse in the reproduction and transformation of *meaning,* as well as the notion that language mirrors power relations and "structures ideology so that it is difficult to speak both in and against it" (xi).

Parker defines a major strength of discourse analysis as the reflexivity it encourages. Furthermore, this reflexivity needs to be grounded in the political in order to be progressive. Questioning not only statements but also how they are constructed, the language used, and what is mentioned versus what is *not* mentioned gives insight into what we believe and how we choose to transmit it to others. "A good working definition of discourse," consequently, "should be that it is *a system of statements which constructs an object*" (Parker, 1992: 5). Four related points emerge here. First, reflexivity is necessary

but does not "dissolve discourse." Second, we can alter our critical distance, putting discourse in the past. Third, "both reflexivity and discourse analysis are historically and culturally bound" (Parker, 1992: 21). Finally, we need to be aware of the politics of discourse analysis and contradiction.

Incorporating discourse analysis in this study involved reading all of the materials produced by the groups, both for internal and public consumption. This range of resources included emails, websites, newsletters, magazines, pamphlets, brochures, booklets, meeting minutes, and promotional releases. Reading these materials, in addition to hearing how ideas were verbalized in meetings and in one-on-one interviews, helped to illuminate how group members represented themselves and the core messages they wished to convey to the world.

3.3.3 Open-Ended Interviews

> The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing. The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves. (McCracken, 1988: 9)

The final and most significant method used in the study was the long interview. As Fontana and Frey (1994) note, unstructured interviews are "used in an attempt to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry" (366). I employed an ethnographic, open-ended, in-depth, semi-structured, long interview with selected individual respondents from each of the two groups. I interviewed ten members of each group, as well as the two staff members at JFREJ and an individual at JSG who at one point had been a paid staff member. I sought a balance between men and women, between very active and more

peripheral members, between those long involved and those newer to the groups, and between older and younger individuals. Interviewees also ranged widely as concerned their opinions about religion, Zionism, and all things Jewish.

These interviews are the heart of this project. As the research process evolved, the bulk of the analysis came to focus on the interviews. As the main research objective was to illuminate how respondents construct and maintain alternative Jewish identities, an open-ended interview was the best way to discover the intricacies of their experience and how they interpreted those experiences. Toward that end I constructed a set of questions that covered the following: basic background (age, marital status, place of birth, occupation, and education), Jewish background and identity, political activism and identity, and experiences with the group and how it affected their identities, if at all.[5] Sometimes a respondent covered the answers to several questions when I had posed only one, and in such cases I would occasionally skip over asking the questions that had been already addressed. Usually, however, I would ask the questions again anyway to be sure the respondent did not have anything to add that occurred to him/her later. Although the interviews were semi-structured rather than unstructured, it was important to emphasize the open-ended format, allowing interviewees as much time as possible to ponder and explain their answers.

While these were not quite oral histories, there was often a strong element of this, a sort of life-history narrative, in the interviews. This was most likely because interviewees were asked to reflect on their childhood and upbringing, the impact of their parents' beliefs, and how their views on religion and politics were shaped by life experiences over time. The set of questions remained the same, but interviews ranged in duration from one and a half to six hours, depending on how open the respondent was, how much detail they chose to go

[5] A full list of these questions can be found in the Appendix.

into, and frankly how talkative they were. I welcomed tangents because they illustrated how interviewees interpreted a question.

As for problems with this method, I was aware of reflexivity and biases. Also, there are always issues with how the interviewer presents herself and how differences in gender, class, and race will affect the respondent's answers. In order to address this, I was completely open about the project. Interviewees frequently had questions about my background and why I was interested in the topic. I hoped that, by seeing I generally shared their political leanings, they would be candid in their responses.

3.4 CHALLENGES

I went into the field with the wide-eyed naïveté of any first-time researcher. Reading all the research-process books in the world does not prepare one for the reality. The vast majority of people I encountered were happy to answer my questions. In London I did run afoul of one 'gatekeeper' personality, a key leader who clearly felt threatened by my presence (even though I was welcomed) and who did not make my participant-observation days the most pleasant of experiences. However, everyone else in the group was helpful, and plenty of information was gathered in spite of this one personality. As for the New Yorkers, three people whom I approached for interviews declined. There were many other volunteers, all found through newsletter announcements, direct invitations, and personal recommendations. A few people from each group were concerned about the accuracy or clarity of their interviews after the fact, but upon follow-up discussions they seemed pleased with the results.

An unexpected problem occurred during the transcription phase of the project. While I followed the research books' suggestions closely regarding interviews, something they neglected to mention was to check the quality of the tape recorder. That is, one should do a short test interview exactly like a real one in a similar setting and then attempt to

transcribe it. Little did I realize that my new tape recorder was a poor choice. Five of my interviews turned out to be non-transcribable because of background noise or extremely soft-spoken interviewees, and the remaining interviews often had gaps where it was impossible to understand the speakers. Luckily I took notes during the interviews as back-up. Due to the poor quality of the tapes, the transcriptions took more than twice as long as they should have, and the small sample was further reduced.

Additional challenges occurred during the exceptionally lengthy reading, research, and writing process. While gaining access to the groups and conducting interviews went relatively smoothly, other aspects of the academic experience proved more difficult. My research bursary was set up under the supervision of a professor who was well known in my area. As I later learned, however, the connection in focus was tenuous. As a result, I was steered toward readings and references that turned out to be largely irrelevant as the project evolved.[6] Early versions of the literature review, for example, focused on theories of the nation-state and social-movement theory. Certainly, it is common for the focus of a study to shift and narrow over time, yet the substantive support was not there when this evolution occurred. While numerous experiences along the way illustrated that this supervisor was not a good match, I glossed over my doubts and blamed my own inadequacies for the difficulties.

Two things then happened that forced me to address the issue of supervision. First, after I had left the UK and moved back to the US, my supervisor was going to be in New York for a meeting, and I was looking forward to seeing her in person and discussing the project. During this visit, however, she called me at the last moment to say that she would not have time to meet with me after all. There no longer was any way to deny the lack of support or engagement. Then, when the University decided to close her department, my

[6] Independent research on SocioFile, other bibliographies, and various card catalogues also did not always yield the most useful resources, I later learned.

supervisor left for another appointment. At that point I had to choose between finding another supervisor at Greenwich or risk moving to a new university and starting over with an advisor about whom I had serious doubts. Fortunately I was able to find a new Greenwich supervisor and continue work there. My new supervisor, while certainly more attentive and supportive, specialized in a different area altogether and thus was not able to offer specific topical suggestions. Still, the trade-off was worthwhile, and my only regret was that I had not made the switch earlier.

Beyond supervision issues, other challenges were less about the research itself and more about life circumstances such as balancing doctoral work with four overseas moves, evolving university requirements and restrictions, leaves of absence, full-time employment in an unrelated field, parenthood, isolation from a university context, libraries and supervisors, and so forth. While I have no regrets, I would not recommend this particular path to anyone embarking on graduate studies.

3.5 ACCESS, CONSENT, ETHICS

One ethical issue in ethnography is deception. I addressed this by being completely open with the groups about who I was and what I was undertaking. From the time of initial contact with each group, and as I met each individual whether I ended up interviewing him/her or not, I explained my role and my goals. In addition, when meeting with a respondent for an in-depth interview, I reviewed this information again. I explained the research project and its intended use; I emphasized that names and other identifying characteristics would be altered for the sake of confidentiality. Oral consent was received,

confirmed, and recorded at the start of each interview. Only after subjects had a chance to ask clarifying questions and were happy with the arrangement did interviews proceed.[7]

Other, more subtle ethical issues have to do with the power relationship between researcher and subjects. No matter how open to hearing the true voice of respondents and seeing their actions in the group setting 'objectively,' the final interpretation, analysis, focus, and presentation was up to me. By reflecting often on the research process, I became more aware of my biases and better able to challenge myself over the project's course.

Another way I addressed this issue was by allowing respondents to be more involved in the post-interview process, as recommended by Smith (1999) and others. After an interview was transcribed, I sent each individual a copy of the transcript and invited additions or clarifications. While most did not take advantage of this option, some wrote back with a few points of clarification or a note of thanks, though one person wanted to rewrite the interview. This strategy allowed respondents to be more involved in the process.

3.6 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The literature review examined how scholars discuss the fluidity of identities, how identities are constructed in opposition to 'others,' and how Jewish identity is conceptualised in sociological research. With contemporary mainstream Jewish identity centred on the pillars of religion and Zionism, the goal of this project was to learn more about Jews who did *not* identify with those options. How do Jews who questioned or rejected religion and Zionism construct and maintain a Jewish identity? What is it like to

[7] I also told respondents that they were welcome to request the tape be stopped at any time. Only one person made this request during an interview. I was disappointed, however, when this individual's off-the-record comment turned out to be just a random piece of gossip about another group member.

be a minority within a minority, to crave something different than one's mainstream community provides?

The research produced long interviews with 16 individuals[8] who identified themselves as politically left-leaning and Jewish. The interviewees included men and women, younger and older people, a rabbi and atheists, gay and straight people, parents and childless adults, partnered and single individuals, and a range of education levels and occupations. See Table 1 for an overview of each person by pseudonym.

When I asked what his Jewish identity meant to him, Alan said:

> The reason why I think this is such an interesting question right now is because in New York City over the past ten or fifteen years, the liberal, progressive, socialist Jewish community has become more dispersed, and to a lot of people what it means to be Jewish is to be orthodox. If you're not orthodox, you're not truly a Jew; certainly the orthodox think that, but I think a lot of people in the city think that. So that's one piece, and I'm not religious, and then the other thing, of course, is Israel. Since I don't support the policies of Israel, I'm sort of *disenfranchised in both directions.* So, for me . . . I don't know what it means. It's a very hard question, because it's difficult to figure out what my community is. (emphasis added)

This quotation illustrates how Jews who are neither religious nor Zionist feel marginalised from the greater Jewish community. The long-interview format allowed a detailed narrative of respondents' personal histories and views over time. How did they define and understand their experiences and sense of self as Jews?

The interviews were conducted in the fall of 1999 and spring of 2000. This was a unique historical moment when there was considerable hope on both sides about the Israel-Palestine peace process, when the second *intifada* had not yet begun, and when the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the US were still in the future. It was also a time of greater openness to alternative views within the Jewish community than had been the case

[8] In total, 20 interviews were conducted (not including the three staff interviews), ten in London and ten in New York. However, four interviews were lost due to inadequate recording.

previously. If these interviews were to take place today, respondents' understanding of themselves, their Jewishness, and their place in history would probably be altered. Thus, while the interview material is valid and accurate, it is so only for that particular context in time. In fact, respondents did discuss how their Jewish identity had evolved over time, data which forms a key part of the analysis and theory on identity formation.

As we can see from Table 1, there are certain trends in the sample. I was able to interview eight men and eight women, eight New Yorkers and eight Londoners. As for age range, one person was under 30, five were between 30 and 40, four were between 41 and 50, five were between 51 and 64, and one was over 65. Seven respondents were single, and nine were married or had a partner. This group was also very educated group overall. With the exception of one person, everyone had degrees beyond high school or A-levels; three had completed undergraduate degrees; and twelve had completed some postgraduate education. Six identified themselves as heterosexual, two as bisexual, three as gay or lesbian, and five did not clarify. Finally, six had children, and ten had no children.

The lengthy interviews were rich in information, and each person's reflections were nuanced. The focus came to be on three main areas:

- What does being Jewish mean?
- How does one construct and maintain a Jewish identity outside the mainstream?
- What are the obstacles and opportunities for alternative Jewish identities?

NVivo coding isolated themes and patterns among the interview responses. NVivo is a computer software program that analyses qualitative data. It allows the researcher to download all of the transcripts into the program, create sets and subsets of various ideas, and then select which portions of the text belong in each code. Furthermore, NVivo allows

the researcher to search for various intersections of coding to refine the themes emerging from the data (nodes).

According to Silverman (2005), the advantages of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo fall into four categories:

- Speed in handling large volumes of data, freeing the researcher to explore numerous analytic questions.
- Improvement of rigour, including the production of counts of phenomena and searching for deviant cases.
- Facilitation of team research, including the development of consistent coding schemes.
- Help with sampling decisions, be these in the service of representativeness or theory development. (189)

He notes that despite these advantages the program does not do the thinking for the researcher, and that it may not be needed for small segments of data. 'Code,' 'search,' and 'retrieve' are the basic and much used features, but in addition these programs can do much more to help with theory building and using models in reports.

Gibbs (2002) urges scholars to recognize that quantitative and qualitative computer-assisted analyses are very different.

> The real heart of [qualitative] analysis requires an understanding of the meaning of the texts, and that is something that computers are still a long way from being able to do. Essentially the function of qualitative analysis software is more akin to that of a database, though it supports ways of handling text that go well beyond most databases. It enables the researcher to keep good records of their hunches, ideas, searches and analyses and gives access to data so they can be examined and analysed. However, in much the same way as a word processor won't write meaningful text for you, but makes that process of writing and editing a lot easier, using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) can make qualitative analysis easier, more accurate, more reliable, and more transparent. But the program will never do the reading and thinking for you. Moreover, just as in quantitative analysis any statistics produced need to be interpreted, so the parallel is true in qualitative analysis. CAQDAS has a range of tools for producing reports and summaries, but the interpretation of these is down to you, the researcher. (11)

Table 1: Overview of the Respondents

Pseudonym	Sex	City	Age	Marital status	Education	Job	Children	Sexual orientation	Interview Date(s)
Alan	M	NYC	53	married	BA	investment consultant	yes	Heterosexual	7 June 2000
Arthur	M	London	57	single	BA	porter	no		27 Oct and 3 Nov 1999
Craig	M	NYC	32	married	MA	PhD student	no	Heterosexual	8 June 2000
Daniel	M	London	42	single	MA	local government association financial officer	no		19 Oct1999
Emma	F	London (New Zealand)	35	single	PG dip	office temp/massage therapist	no	Bisexual	20 Jan 2000
Esther	F	Nottingham	47	married	PG dip	counsellor at university	no	Heterosexual	20 Dec 1999
Helen	F	NYC	65	partner	PhD	clinical psychologist	yes		5 June 2000
Jonathan	M	London	41	married	MA	teacher	yes	Heterosexual	20 Oct 1999
Leah	F	London	55	single	MA	social work/teacher	yes	Heterosexual	11 Oct 1999
Marc	M	NYC	31	married	MA	director of a community organisation	yes	Heterosexual	18 May 2000
Marcia	F	London (US)	40	single	PG dip	teacher	no		11 Oct 1999
Maya	F	NYC	38	partner	MA	theatre artist/producer	no	Bisexual	7 Mar 2000
Richard	M	London (Scotland)	55	single	some undergrad	not working	no		2 and 18 Nov 1999
Ruth	F	NYC	60	partner	PhD	professor	no	Homosexual	15 June 2000
Sharon	F	NYC	49	partner	MA	rabbi	yes	Homosexual	13 June 2000
Simon	M	NYC	24	single	BA	youth organizer	no	Homosexual	9 May and 12 June 2000

NOTE: All names have been changed, and all other information was true at the time of the interview. I did not explicitly ask about sexual orientation, so it is blank if the person did not discuss it in the interview explicitly. Parentheses after city indicate that the person grew up in a different country.

Initially I was hesitant to use NVivo because other researchers had advised me that it was only worthwhile if one were analysing a large sample size. I also was concerned that learning the program would be too time-consuming. Eventually, however, I decided to use NVivo given the volume of transcripts with which I was working. While it did take time to become comfortable with using the software, the program allowed me to manage a large amount of data that would have been overwhelming in note-card format.

Most of the quotations from the interviews provided in the following chapters derive from intersections, unions, overlaps, or other combinations of two or more codes. A code is a theme or attribute in the data that you wish to define as such. Coding allows the researcher to capture various ideas or trends in the data, highlight them, and save them as a set to be examined later for patterns. For example, since I was interested in the fluidity of identity, one of the most frequently used codes was 'self over time,' which was utilised whenever an interviewee discussed how his/her identity altered during the course of life. Thus, several of these code combinations might be views on gender, class, or religion.

Table 2 presents the study's codes and their meaning in NVivo. The first number indicates "text units" (a full line of text = one unit) coded. The second number designates the total of interviews within which that code was used. For example, 587 lines of text were coded as 'class' in 16 interviews, so it was discussed in every case. When these were narrowed further by intersecting them with each other, NVivo reduced the sample of text significantly and helped to examine more specific ways in which the various categories influenced identities. Codes were selected and narrowed down after several close readings of the transcripts.

Table 2: Overview of the Codes

Name of Code	Occurrences	Definition
Religion	1453 units in 16 interviews	Religion in general or Judaism
Groups	2055 units in 16 interviews	Relating to JSG or JFREJ
Underdog	479 units in 12 interviews	Being in the margins, feeling outsider or "other"
Performance	2003 units in 16 interviews	How identities are performed or lived out
Class	587 units in 16 interviews	Class background, views on class issues
Politics	2546 units in 16 interviews	Political views, activist practices
Israel	759 units in 16 interviews	Views on Israel
Anti-Semitism	270 units in 10 interviews	Experiences with anti-Semitism
Gender	544 units in 15 interviews	Reflections on gender, feminism
Generation shift: Parents	1100 units in 15 interviews	Reflecting on parents' views, differences in generations
Generation shift: Grandparents	198 units in 11 interviews	Same as above, but with grandparents
Generation shift: Children	445 units in 14 interviews	Same, but for children or the next generation
Identity in comparison	16 units in 1 interview	Comparing some aspect of identity with another
Mainstream	794 units in 15 interviews	Comparisons with 'mainstream' Jews or politics
Zionism or Diaspora	675 units in 14 interviews	Views on Zionism and Diaspora, usually in contrast to 'mainstream'
Other individuals	444 units in 15 interviews	When they differed from others' views, practices
Challenges	190 units in 7 interviews	Experiencing explicit challenge to identity
Self over time	2157 units in 16 interviews	Any discussion of personal history, self, identity evolving over time

After coding all of the interviews, I ran various intersections, overlaps, and unions through the NVivo software to illuminate the research questions. Some of these node searches yielded too much or too little text, while others were more useful for analysis. Overall, 47 node searches were run to assist in isolating patterns and themes for analysis.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Using qualitative methodology and grounded theory, this study explored how some Jews create alternative Jewish identities. The qualitative approach was most appropriate for this project because it allowed for detailed exploration of intimate and personal accounts of identity formation, thereby addressing an ongoing gap in Jewish identity research.

The specific methods used to gather data—participant observation, discourse analysis, and long interviews—follow from qualitative methodologies. These methods allowed the researcher to capture a well rounded profile of group members, their historical and spatial contexts, and how all these factors interacted in identity creation and performance. After analysis of the data for patterns pertaining to the main research questions, grounded theory was incorporated in building the second part of the analysis from the findings of the first. That is, the data were mined for the *meanings* that respondents attached to their non-traditional Jewish identities. Then, based on that, the next phase drew upon *how those meanings were then performed or practised* by respondents. This undertaking reflected theories addressed in the literature review due to the focus on daily identity practises, the fluidity of identity over time and space, both individual and collective identity, and the interpretation of actions as a main marker of identity.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS I: GROUPS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

With the aim of illustrating patterns for non-mainstream Jewish identities in the US and UK, the launching pad for this study became two organizations. [1] As both were rooted in anti-establishment, non-Zionist, non-religious philosophies, they served as living examples of individuals coming together to challenge traditional Jewish identities. I immersed myself in full-time field work for over 18 months, including six months in New York City, thereby gaining a deep understanding of these groups and their functioning through participant-observation and discourse analysis. This chapter provides an overview of the two groups as well as an elaboration of certain points of interest. The overview is also a useful backdrop for interviews analysed in the following chapter, since each respondent was asked specifically about his/her history and relationship to the group in question, including how it impacted his/her Jewish identity, if at all.

4.1 JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP (JSG)

JSG has a membership of 90 (about 20-30 who participate regularly), an annual budget of £1863, and no paid staff. The group is based in London, England, but includes all of Great Britain. JSG's mission, as stated in their membership pamphlet, is as follows:

> The JSG is a political organisation campaigning for Jewish rights and the rights of all oppressed minorities in building a

[1] Information is accurate for the year 2000, aside from updated information on the Israel/Palestine position for JFREJ.

> socialist future. . . . Our politics are Socialism, Diasporism, and Secularism [followed by definitions of each].

A more detailed mission statement appears in *Jewish Socialist*, JSG's main publication:

> We stand for the rights of Jews, as Jews, in a socialist future. We fight for a socialist movement, embracing the cultural autonomy of minorities, as essential to the achievement of socialism. We draw on our immigrant experience and anti-racist history in order to challenge oppression today. We support the rights of and mobilize solidarity with all oppressed groups fighting for equality. We recognize the equal validity and integrity of all Jewish communities, and reject the ideology of Zionism, currently dominating world Jewry, which subordinates the needs and interests of Diaspora Jews to those of an Israeli state. We work for a socialist solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict based on equality and self-determination of Israeli and Palestinian Jews and Arabs.

Members frequently commented that the group's main goal was to be a leftist voice in the Jewish community, and a Jewish voice on the left. The group regularly takes public positions on issues in the UK and abroad that connect to its mission, as usually approved at the JSG's annual national conference.

At the time of this study, JSG's main projects included the Jews Against Racism and Fascism subcommittee (JARAF), *Jewish Socialist* magazine(started in 1985, published quarterly, 325 subscribers, additional copies sold at bookshops and by members at demonstrations and events), and the Red Herring Club (secular Jewish children's activities). A former project was the campaign for a commemorative plaque for Szmuel Zygielbojm, a Jewish leader who committed suicide in 1943 to protest the Allies' indifference to the fate of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. JSG fought several years for approval of the plaque and meets at its location for an annual commemoration. The group also organises annual school days on such topics as genocide, rights and rituals, Blair Peach, and the Palestinian right of return. In addition, JSG holds shorter evening or afternoon events, sometimes cosponsored with other groups, involving Passover Seders, a Warsaw ghetto commemoration, Rosh Hashanah and Chanukah celebrations, quiz nights,

and walking tours. Consistent with the group's view of itself in the Bundist tradition, they held a large and well attended Bund centennial celebration in 1997.

The JSG's National Committee (NC) is its governing body, usually comprised of five members democratically elected every other year. They hold monthly meetings.[2]

JSG was officially founded in 1974, but sees its history as going back over a century and includes the Jewish workers' movements in Eastern Europe, anarchists and communists in the Russian Empire, and agitation in all countries of Jewish immigration. The organisation's position on Israel/Palestine supports the creation of two states, both of which should be self-determining. It also advocates that Israel should end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, returning to its 1967 territories. JSG used to have a Middle East subcommittee, but members stopped meeting and started working through Just Peace instead, once that group was founded.

In addition to *Jewish Socialist*, JSG has published booklets on topics such as anti-Semitism in Britain in the 1930s, the history of the Bund, Zionism, and poetry. The magazine covers a wide range of issues, personal writings, arts features, letters to the editor, interviews, reviews, and so forth, all from a Jewish Socialist perspective congruent with the publication's (and the group's) mission. It also contains jabs at the Jewish establishment, such as the "Don't Ask the Rabbi" column with a photo of Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sach's head and spoof questions such as "Dear Rabbi, Can I pick my nose on Shabbos?" A restricted member bulletin is published every four to six weeks. It ranges from just one page listing upcoming events to several pages of member discussion, writings on current events, news clippings from other sources, or reflections on the national meeting.

[2] I was unable to attend NC meetings. Abbreviated minutes from these meetings were published in the members' bulletin.

In assessing the group in 2001 in preparation for its national conference, the NC reported on the JSG's strengths and weaknesses. Strengths included regular meetings of the NC, a full programme of social/cultural activities, day schools organised, joint meetings with other organisations, a website launch, and the ongoing success of *Jewish Socialist*. JSG defined weaknesses as lack of regular attendance at meetings, unresolved position statements, no systematic political education, and the group's ongoing London-centeredness. In addition, there is also a concern about the group's aging membership (those in their 40s represent the 'youth').[3] The group as a whole was ambivalent on membership growth. Some liked keeping things small and predictable, not having to worry about infiltrators and conflicting agendas (apparently an issue in the past); on the other hand, others recognized that a few active members were working too hard to sustain the group and its activities. Attendance at events could range from four people at a discussion on jingoism in someone's living room to hundreds at the *Jewish Socialist* fundraiser's comedy night.

One way in which JSG was mindful of youth was the successful Red Herring Club, started by group members who had become parents and wanted to pass on their Jewish-socialist values. Their aim was "to imbue children with a sense of Jewish history, culture, and ethnicity from a secular perspective and within a broad progressive, internationalist framework." Their objectives were:

1. To introduce Jewish culture in its widest sense. This includes the history and geography of the Jewish world, legends, folk tales, music, food, visual art, languages, clothes, traditions. It also includes some of the ideas of Jewish religious culture in a sympathetic manner from a secular perspective.
2. To attempt to present material in an interesting and fun way, so that the activities of the Red Herring Club are age-appropriate and relevant to the children's lives.
3. To present Jewish culture in a progressive, pluralist, inclusive framework. For example, using the history of Jews all over the world to help foster multiculturalism and anti-racism and ensuring that material does not have gender bias.

[3] Other members mentioned this concern in interviews, and one lamented the lack of gay and lesbian members. I was always the youngest person at events unless children were present.

4. To help children relate to Jewishness in a way which ensures that they recognise that Jews are a unique people among many unique peoples.

JSG seemed to struggle with projects such as this that became wildly successful. There was tension about independence and connection, more so with the *Jewish Socialist* magazine. Both the Red Herring Club and the magazine were run by JSG, and there was much overlap in the people running the group and the projects, prompting at least one member to question the wisdom of having so much of JSG's energy focused on the publication. Although the magazine was staffed by a small group, the entire membership was encouraged to help promote it. The magazine was the most effective outreach to both Jewish and socialist-leaning people in the UK.

The JSG has a decidedly family feel about it. As in any family there are strong conflicts and deep bonds. As my field work was coming to a close, the group was discussing having a committee and fund to cover burial expenses should a member die with no family to pay for such arrangements.

4.2 JEWS FOR RACIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE (JFREJ)

JFREJ has a membership of 900, with over 3,000 on the active mailing list. The organisation's annual budget is $180,000, with a paid staff of two full-time employees and one part-time employee. It is based in New York City.

JFREJ's mission statement is articulated as follows:

> JFREJ was founded in 1990 to address the increase in racial and ethnic tension and economic disparity in New York City. JFREJ's membership—secular and religious, young and old, gay and straight—strengthens a progressive Jewish voice in debates over our city's future and activates the Jewish community as a partner in the struggle for justice.

Similar to JSG, JREFJ's members said that the group's main goal was to be a Jewish voice in the progressive community, and a progressive voice in the Jewish community.

JFREJ's projects at the time included the weekly radio show *Beyond the Pale*, which started in 1995; the annual Marshall Meyer Risk-Taker Awards Event, its annual fundraiser; the Public Education Committee; the Police Brutality Committee; and its Anti-Bias workshops. Like JSG, JFREJ also hosted a Bund centennial celebration.

After the 9/11 attacks in the US, JRFEJ stated that it opposed occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem and supported a negotiated peace for both Israelis and Palestinians. It also declared its opposition to the war in Afghanistan. It emphasized a commitment to fighting for racial and economic justice in New York City based on the concept of *doykayt* ("hereness"), the idea that Jews in coalition with others should focus their struggle on universal equality and justice in the place where they live. Ultimately, JRFEJ members reject the idea that they are required to take a position on Israel/Palestine as a Jewish American organization and that their priorities should be determined by the actions of Jews in another country. They also emphasized the following:

> Beyond declaring an organizational position on select foreign affairs issues, JFREJ will not sign onto additional joint statements on issues that fall outside of our core mission of fighting local racial and economic injustice. We will consider sign-ons only when an urgent request is made from a long-term ally.

JFREJ's co-founders' statement in the tenth-anniversary journal states that, in addition to its goals of fighting racial and economic injustice in New York City, JFREJ was founded to provide an alternative to the agenda-setting conservative Jewish voice, reexamine the centrality of the state of Israel to Jewish identity, and reject apathy and quiescence while demanding attention to the vulnerable and oppressed. Explicitly, then, the group was

established in opposition to the hegemony of the mainstream Jewish establishment and of Zionism as a cornerstone of Jewish identity.

JFREJ board meetings involved a mix of organizational business and intellectual debate. One meeting, for example, focused on a strategy discussion regarding JFREJ's police-brutality work and the 'religious/secular balance in JFREJ.' The group was also doing some hand-wringing about member outreach and involvement. Specific concerns identified were member isolation, lack of clarity about JFREJ's wanting to involve new people, the lack of a structured way for members to exercise initiative, and the absence of a communication network. However, active members did start the organisation's film series and young members' reading group, both of which focus on Jewish history, diversity, and social-justice struggles. This concern about membership was dropped as the more pressing day-to-day work required attention.

4.3 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

While both groups are examples of the Jewish left, the way they operate and the projects on which they focus are quite different. Both are shaped by their unique contexts. JSG maintains a strong socialist identity, as socialism continues to be an active political option in the UK, and its members usually identify themselves as leftist or socialist. JFREJ, on the other hand, identifies itself as leftist and 'progressive,' the socialist ideology being almost erased from American political discourse except on the fringes.[4]

While both groups are interested in redefining traditions and co-opting Jewish religious ritual when appropriate, JFREJ works closely with progressive rabbis and uses religious references frequently, whereas JSG holds firmly to its secular tradition, illustrating the

[4] This was highlighted in US politics during the presidential campaign of 2008 and the health-insurance reform debate of 2009. 'Socialist' was freely used as an epithet by opponents of Barack Obama, and 'socialized medicine' was framed as horrific.

differences in how religion is perceived and experienced in both host countries. Of course, there was disagreement among the JFREJ ranks, as some of the founding and more recent members were staunchly anti-religious and felt frustrated with JFREJ's relatively new tendency to "trot out the rabbis," as one founding member put it.

JSG holds internationalism as a core value, intentionally taking an international view on issues and frequently engaging in global debate whenever possible. JFREJ, on the other hand, focuses on issues in New York City, in part to avoid the inevitably wide range of disagreement among members about the Israel/Palestine issue and also to concentrate on social-justice issues in the local area.

Additional differences in tone, group composition, strategy, and function became clear through field work. While both organisations had 'in groups' and dissent within their ranks, it was managed differently. JSG hashed out internal conflict quite openly in their bulletin, whereas JFREJ's conflict on taking a stand on Israel/Palestine was more restricted to key members through private emails and conversations, and conducted in the manner of American talk-therapy ('Don't hurt anyone's feelings'). In my limited experience with American nonprofits and progressives, individuals will quickly say they feel 'silenced' if it is clear that the group's direction differs from their own. This is a challenging problem for a group that prides itself on being anti-oppression. An interesting conflict that came up for JSG concerned circumcision. Because some parents in the group had grappled with this decision, a resolution against the practice was made at a national conference. This action so upset the lone elderly European Bundist in the group that he stormed out of the meeting. For him the issue was irrelevant to the group's mission, while the 'younger' generation sees it as both a human-rights issue and as a challenge to the Jewish mainstream.

JSG is run by an old guard of mostly straight men. Nearly half of JFREJ's board, in contrast, is comprised of lesbians, the balance being gay men and a few straight men and women. The staff at the time consisted of two lesbians and one straight white man, and there had been much anxiety about his hiring and how it would affect the group's culture (not much, since JFREJ subsequently had two lesbian directors and other transgendered staff). Even though JFREJ was not explicitly working on gay-rights issues at the time, their work and meetings were by default a queer space.

Both groups were impressive for the sheer amount of work they were able to accomplish with limited resources. JSG had a paid staff member at one point, but, while they admit that this allowed them to get more done, its members are wary of how funding makes a group beholden to a funder's wishes. They consequently made a conscious decision to remain volunteer-run and thus be more independent. JFREJ on the other hand, wants to have staff in order to accomplish more. They have always struggled to raise the money needed to retain staff and implement programming.

Where JSG is cautious of new members and possible ideological takeovers, JFREJ almost pounces on new members. New volunteers may even be invited onto the board if there is a personality or diversity fit. The fact that JFREJ felt more young, vibrant, and active than JSG is partly a function of its being based in New York City, a progressive place with the highest concentration of Jews in the world. My time at JFREJ also came during a period of extraordinary activity for the group. Between the police-brutality protests, youth-theatre performances, public demonstrations, anti-bias workshops, and tenth-anniversary plans, even with a staff of 2.5 and an active board it was impressive what they managed to accomplish.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This description of the two groups serves as a backdrop for the interviews. Respondents came to these groups for a variety of reasons, but all were attracted to these communities outside the Jewish mainstream because of their radical and/or social-justice missions and because they represented an alternative to synagogues. These points are explored further in the chapters to follow. Through the eyes of interview respondents we will be able to learn more about the groups themselves, what they mean to their members, and the impact they have had on members' identities as Jews.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS II: INTERVIEWS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the heart of the study, analysis of the data collected from the in-depth interviews. It is divided into three main sections:

1. What does being Jewish mean?
2. How does one construct and maintain a Jewish identity outside the mainstream?
3. What are the obstacles and opportunities for alternative Jewish identities?

Each section builds on the previous one. That is, I first look for the themes in how the respondents described what being Jewish meant to them personally. Having excavated those themes, I next explore how they constructed their Jewish identities outside the mainstream, given what being Jewish meant to them. Finally, having uncovered how respondents saw their Jewish identities and constructed them, I examine the obstacles and opportunities for these Jews and others in the current social context. The implications of this research and analysis will be discussed in a concluding chapter.

5.1 PART 1: JEWISH MEANING ON THE MARGINS

> It's just absolutely completely **integral to who I am**, and it is impossible for me to understand myself without understanding myself as a Jew.—Emma[1]

[1] The use of boldface type in the interview quotations highlights those parts I found most significant or insightful. Italics are used for either the speaker's or my emphasis, as noted accordingly.

One of the questions posed to each respondent was, "What does being Jewish mean to you?" I wanted to hear how respondents felt about being Jewish in their own words and how it played out in their life experience. Of course, much of the rest of the interview also explored this question, albeit in more indirect ways centred on the *performance* of identity. This question is essential as a foundation for the others.

Section 5.1 explores how respondents answered this question but also how they discussed Jewishness in their other answers. Most were in a positive frame of mind regarding their Jewishness. Also, many distinguished between Jewishness (personal, ethnic, cultural, dynamic) and Judaism (religious, dogmatic, narrow). As Simon explained,[2]

> For so long, part of why I didn't actively express my Jewishness was because it was all framed as *Judaism*, being religious. I just thought outside of it, and when I started to read and hear people talk about *Jewishness*, it was a helpful way of articulating for me, Jewishness being about identity and culture and how you move through the world. (emphasis added)

Interviewees were also asked, "How do you express your Jewish identity?" I first show how respondents saw the *meaning* of their Jewishness and then examine more closely how this meaning is actively *performed*.

The main theme that surfaced in response to the question, "At this point in your life, what does being Jewish mean to you?" was that of culture. Most respondents were interested in cultural ways of expressing their Jewishness, differentiating themselves from religious and Zionist expressions. Additional themes include history and tradition, political activism, minority status, anti-Semitism, and religion.

[2] Quotations have been edited to read more smoothly (e.g., removing vocal ticks and repetitions), while still honouring the comments' substance.

5.1.1 Culture

Some respondents spoke about social and cultural markers that they felt were one way of knowing they were Jewish. Being Jewish *means* being different, and much of this comes through experiencing cultural difference from the mainstream world.

> Often people in New Zealand remarked on my gesturing and waving my arms around when I'm speaking and little things like that. We were sort of expected to be still and not indulge in things, to not be emotive. There's a sense of drama associated with Europeans and Jews, and so I suppose a lot of my sense of **my identity is in contrast to the environment that I grew up in**.—Emma

> I went through a period in '97 when I started thinking a lot more about being Jewish and about all the ways in everything I did, like every word I said, the way I used my hands, the way I have upsets about everything, have three different narratives going on about one thing. **The basic way that I understand the world is so Jewish.**—Simon

Beyond mannerisms the analysis illustrates how culture is infused in many interview responses. It is connected to history, tradition, language, food, art, music, politics, holidays, and the unmistakable feeling of difference and otherness that is part of what being Jewish means.

5.1.2 History and Tradition

Most respondents believed that Jewishness means a connection to Jewish history and tradition. This was interpreted in many ways, but the connecting thread was a feeling of honouring ancestors and their beliefs and struggles.

The following quotation from Alan (repeated from Chapter 3) is striking in that the tone is different from that of Simon and Emma. He mentions anti-Semitism explicitly, which may be due to the fact that he is of the immediate post-Holocaust generation. Alan also mentions his feeling disconnected from the modern mainstream options for Jewish connection, namely religion and Zionism. Ruth, also of an older generation, feels strongly

connected historically and tribally, though not without tensions. Emma, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, speaks about the historical connection but does not see her Jewishness in relation to anti-Semitism.

> That's a really tough question. That is a really tough question. I think that my Jewishness now is sort of a **tradition** that I come out of and a **response to anti-Semitism**. The reason why I think this is such an interesting question right now is because in New York City over the past ten or fifteen years, the liberal, progressive, socialist Jewish community has become more dispersed, and to a lot of people what it means to be Jewish is to be orthodox. If you're not orthodox, you're not truly a Jew; certainly the orthodox think that, but I think a lot of people in the city think that. So that's one piece, and I'm not religious, and then the other thing, of course, is Israel. Since I don't support the policies of Israel, I'm sort of *disenfranchised in both directions.* So, for me . . . I don't know what it means. It's a very hard question, because it's difficult to figure out what my community is.—Alan

> First of all, it's a **link to a past**—both my personal past—that is my grandparents and great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents and however on through the generations—and a link to probably the last, probably the only modern tribe, and I feel that connection to this difficult, contentious, frustrating tribe of peoples, through a list of tribal peoples. And so, and I feel a connection to certain **political practices**, you know like the Jewish Bund. I now realise that what you come to call "Jewish continuity" really can't happen in a vacuum, that kids really need what I in a sense didn't have—**they need a real connection**. They need to grow up in a family in which being Jewish is something to feel really comfortable with, and it's part of their day-to-day lives.—Ruth

> I think it helped me really to see myself as **part of a long history and tradition**, and that's been really fundamental in shaping myself. I found it very difficult to understand myself without a sense of the past and of history, and I found that very difficult to kind of glean in my mother's [non-Jewish] family. They're not particularly proud of who they are or where they come from, and they don't have a sense of themselves as part of a particular tradition or having something worthwhile to hand over to their children or to do with life even, whereas I would say there's a very strong sense of all of those things in my father's [Jewish] family. I talked about it when I was in Israel. We had a lot of [relatives] who had survived, and even though there is that

> sense of them having been dislocated from their origins, they still have such a **strong sense of themselves in the stream of history** that I found that really comfortable really. It's just sort of when I came into contact with that, it made me feel as if I belonged, as if I had a right to be here, much more than I had that sense when I was just growing up, and I'm thinking it comes from these values that go back a long way, having had a place and a role in the world and so on.—Emma

Respondents overall felt historical and familial ties to their Jewishness, regardless of generation. This was another key aspect of what being Jewish means for them—a connection to the past, something to help locate them in the complexity of human history.

5.1.3 Politics: Doing the Right Thing

Another theme was that Jewishness meant standing up for the right thing, often through political activism. This was at the heart of Jewishness for most interview respondents, which was not surprising given Jews' historical connection to politically active groups.

Helen, even with her lack of connection to Jewish knowledge and community, makes this connection almost instinctively. Leah and Simon, who are much more involved in Jewish activism, explicitly articulate the link to politics.

> It's very vague; I'm not sure what the connection is. Except, I guess just a sense that I'm **part of the Jewish tradition**, and I don't know where I got this from, but it does mean **helping others**, doing good acts or. . . . I'm not sure how it's referred to in the Jewish tradition.—Helen

> Being Jewish means owning up to it and being proud of it, and identifying myself as a Jew who is not religious, but it's a **cultural** thing. And I think it's important to let the outside world know that Jews can be **socialist**, as well. **That we're not all interested in business**. And also showing that we do have sympathies for the **Palestinians**. But it also means **fighting racism and fascism**. In the last few years, because of the Jewish Socialists' Group, I've been involved in anti-fascist activities, which I hadn't been before.—Leah

> For me it's this sort of basic way of self-awareness, about how everything about me is Jewish, my thinking, my speaking, how I actively pursue it in the world in connection

> with other people, a lot of this through **activism** definitely.—Simon

Additional excerpts discussed later will buttress the assertion that political activism was a meaningful part of Jewishness for most respondents. It was a pivotal criterion of identity performance and connection.

5.1.4 Being a Minority and Managing Anti-Semitism

Because Jewishness is inextricable from otherness, many highlighted that being part of a minority was essential to what it means to be Jewish. As the next section shows, this also is related to a disconnection from Zionism, which aims to make Jewishness a majority identity through a Jewish state. Arthur mentions this theme first in a list of what being Jewish means. He also emphasizes the necessity of options for defining Jewishness beyond religion and Zionism.

> I think being Jewish means, one, **being aware of being in a minority**. And therefore always opposing ideas about homogenous cultures and differences. In fact, I think historically the idea that the problem would be solved by assimilation was proved wrong by Nazism and also of course by what happened in the Soviet Union. Secondly, I always found **Jewish history** interesting. Although I **rejected religion** very early on, I still found it interesting to read the Bible and think about why it is that people came to reach some new ideas thousands of years ago. I think it's also very interesting to rediscover the **history of the Jewish labour movement**, because otherwise there's a part of your heritage that we don't know anything about. **I greatly regret** not **learning Yiddish**, because I think that's a living connection. It's a pity that some of the younger Jewish people today are growing up only either knowing **Zionism or orthodoxy** as forms of Jewish identity. I think it's good to have an idea for Jewish **cosmopolitanism** rather than identifying with any particular country or even language, [so] that you can be interested in differences. . . . I think a lot of people are handicapped by being sort of—they haven't thought of themselves as other than English or French or whatever.—Arthur

When discussing the link to tradition and culture, Alan mentions anti-Semitism immediately. Emma alludes to it below in a more personal way:

> I was saying to you before that my dad felt under threat, and I myself actually believed from the time I was four to the time I was about seven or so, that on any unspecified day they'd come and get us, and it wasn't until I discovered that the concentration camps were actually a thing of the past, and this was the source of my father's worries, that I realised that it wasn't actually true. I'd say the kind of **terror of annihilation** has definitely played quite a role in shaping me emotionally.—Emma[3]

Learning to manage hate and fear was revealed to be a key part of what being Jewish means for these respondents.

On the more positive side of otherness, being a member of a minority can mean feeling as though one has access to a subculture all one's own. Minorities become populations with something to celebrate, and some respondents regarded this self-construction as a key part of what being Jewish means.

> There's been so much stuff about assimilation in terms of American Jews. I think Jewish culture is pretty powerful and not very easily assimilated abroad. Because we have for so long not been able to assimilate fully, there's a mechanism by which we just don't. I think **Jewish culture is so much more compelling** than my middle-class white American mainstream culture, whatever that is, something that isn't as standard as it's put out to be.—Simon

> **England feels slightly cultureless**. And I feel that the people who have culture are the ones not from England but Welsh, Scottish, Irish, black, Asian, Jewish, you know. People from other traditions and other places are the ones with the culture. So I feel like I'm sometimes **privileged to have this culture** and have groups to go to and synagogues and food and festivals and this community that English people just don't have.—Marcia

Thus, part of what being Jewish means involves being in a minority. This experience falls into a spectrum of fear and learning how to manage anti-Semitism, coupled with a feeling of joy about having something unique from the 'cultureless' majority.

[3] This also illustrates Bauman's discussion of inherited victimization in *Modernity and the Holocaust*.

5.1.5 Religion

Although most respondents rejected religion as a way to connect to their Jewishness, a few did see it as a crucial part of what being Jewish means. Sharon, now a rabbi, grew up in a family where religion was celebrated and honoured, and it obviously remains a strong part of her life. Craig, on the other hand, was raised without much religion and as an adult finds it a positive way to get back in touch with Jewish roots.

> Well, [my Jewish identity] has obviously shifted and grown, although it is in some ways **the apple not falling far from the tree.** I had a period of probably close to ten years, mostly in college and after when I wasn't really involved in Judaism at all. And then in my late 20s I started going to synagogue and to a Torah study group—also one of my favourite things—and had the luck to meet a wonderful rabbi. And he saw something in me, and he asked if I would speak at High Holiday services about the Book of Jonah. And something kind of clicked, I guess. It was something about preparing to do that and having to do it, liking to do it, getting a good response for all those things that started to make me think, "Hmmm, I could do this."—Sharon
>
> In my junior year I went to England and studied at Oxford, and there was only one Orthodox synagogue there. And I got very interested in that, and I went and met friends there. And I really started learning about Judaism from there, lots of the prayers and rituals. I had a bar mitzvah at the age of 20 before I went to Oxford. I started going to the local synagogue and had a bar mitzvah. I would say it was **the greatest experience in my life** then.—Craig

Respondents fell along a wide spectrum regarding religion. For some at this point in their lives, religion offered a meaningful connection to Jewishness. Later in this chapter I will discuss how even non-religious respondents were open to new forms of old religious rituals as a way to perform and connect to Jewish identity.

5.1.6 Conclusion

> I have quite a strong **sense of history and connection to Jewish culture** and people. I **don't feel very strongly connected** to the formal Jewish community. I'm on the **margins** now, anyway. But I think I went through a period when I didn't want to be part of anything Jewish. When I

> left home, I didn't want to be part of things for a long time. The way back in was JSG. It was a way of being Jewish that felt comfortable. When I was a child, I was Jewish because I was and all I knew was. And now I feel more Jewish, I suppose, than I have at any time since I was a child.—Esther

Above all, being Jewish means having access to a dynamic and fluid identity over the course of a lifetime. Every single respondent has gone through various phases and ways of connecting with Jewishness, and that will continue to evolve as identity theory describes. The findings in this section illustrate theoretical concepts of identity such as the ever-changing and contextual basis of personal identities. The following section explores the performance of identity formation.

5.2 PART 2: CONSTRUCTING AND MAINTAINING JEWISH IDENTITIES OUTSIDE OF THE MAINSTREAM

If being Jewish *means* living the culture, feeling a link to history and tradition, doing the right thing through politics, being in a minority, and sometimes accessing religion, then how do these Jews, most of whom reject religion and Zionism, create and nurture a Jewish identity outside mainstream Judaism? In other words, what are the tools for agency to bring these meanings to life? As discussed in the literature review, actions and performance are the key ways of elucidating otherwise slippery identities.

By coding for "performance" of identity throughout the interviews, five main themes emerged. Alternative Jewish identities are constructed and maintained in the following ways:

1. *From the Margins*: in contrast to the 'establishment' or mainstream, through 'otherness,' and the experience of marginalisation
2. *In Community*: with the groups and other like-minded individuals
3. *Through Learning*: about history, culture, language, symbols, and their meanings

4. *By Action and Agency*: politics and activism
5. *Through Redefining Rituals*: creating alternatives to the mainstream standbys of religion and Zionism

These five categories provide the answer to the research question, "How do Jews who identify themselves as outside mainstream Jewish communities construct and maintain an alternative Jewish identity?" For each category there appear illustrative quotations from the interviews, with discussion of trends or patterns in the responses and what they help us to understand about identity construction based on current theory.

5.2.1 From the Margins

> I believe things can change. And I believe in the **power of the outsider**, that's very anarchic, like the ways that come from the outside of the Jewish community, and I think JFREJ has a great role in that.—Maya

Respondents view and enact their Jewish identity in clear opposition to what they see as the mainstream. They frequently speak of a desire not to be *that* and to create something different. Respondents celebrate being on the margins or outside the 'establishment' in various ways. They create their Jewish identities anew by viewing religion sceptically, by distinguishing themselves from conservative right-wing Jews, and by fighting the establishment and its mainstream values.

5.2.1.1 Outside Religion

Most respondents had a desire to identify themselves in opposition to the religious aspects of Jewishness. Ruth, for example, explains her revulsion concerning the tradition of Jewish men and study:

> We were looking at certain passages, and the nit-picking quality of it drove me crazy, and it was like such a revelation. Here are these guys, generation after generation, young Jewish men, spending their time on this while their wives and mothers work their fingers to the bone to support their family. It was horrible. I couldn't believe that that's

> what they were doing. It was crazy to me. Which is not to say that there aren't grand questions that get examined.—Ruth

One reason to reject religion was to support the value of gender equality. Another reason was the perception that one could not fight against negative forces in the world while being religious.

> I grew up identifying as an atheist in a way that was more militant than my identification now. When I was growing up, any kind of God, Jewish, Christian, whatever, I was vociferously opposed; it was something that was really important to me. I think from an early age I felt like the **call to believe in God was a call to not rebel**, and I wanted to be able to rebel and speak my opinion.—Simon

For some respondents it was a revelation to find an alternative non-religious Jewish identity while a teenager (in this case, Zionism):

> To most Jewish people that I knew at that time, Jewish identity meant religious things. So, having decided I wasn't religious, it was quite appealing to say, "No, **I'm not a member of the religion; I'm a member of the nationality**."—Arthur

Arthur, like Ruth, found a lot of pretence in religion:

> For one thing, there was nothing particularly inspiring to me in religion. You go to synagogue, people are mumbling prayers which they don't understand. And if you actually stop to read some of them to know what they were about, you're actually falling behind. It was a lot of **hypocrisy associated with religion**. As my mother used to say, "Some people make that they're very religious, but they wouldn't tell a blind man the time."—Arthur

Rejecting religion and religious associations is one significant way that respondents actively create an alternative Jewish identity.

5.2.1.2 Not Politically Conservative

Among these respondents there was a strong perception of the mainstream Jewish community as politically conservative. Ruth explains how she created a group for Jews seeking an alternative. She knew that she and others wanted to be Jewish but not in the established ways:

> Looking at how the **Jewish community was behaving, it totally disgusted me**, and so the solution for much of my earlier life was, "I'm not part of that. What has that got to do with me? They're disgusting. That's not who I am." But the fact is I *am* part of it, and the more responsible way to behave is not to walk away from it and try and become something I'm not anyway, **but rather to confront it**. Because there are millions of Jews like me who are just so fed-up with . . . that other public face of Judaism and feel they don't want to be part of it. I think that we give up a lot in terms of community when you just try to become a white-bread American.—Ruth

Leah also stresses the importance of a "public face of Judaism" that isn't dominated by conservative right-wing Jews:

> I think we need **to raise the profile of socialist Jews because at the moment the world thinks all Jews are rich and Tories!** Or, you know, Republicans or whatever you call them. And the fact that there are socialist Jews is largely ignored. The socialist Jews around the world need to publicise their hostility towards the rest of the religious fanatics and the right-wingers like Bibi Netanyahu, who do nothing but cause trouble.—Leah

Explaining JSG's mission, Marcia, like Ruth, believes that there are more progressive Jews than the establishment would have us believe:

> To continue a **tradition of Jewish socialism** that started at the turn of the century, that Jews have always been associated with, the struggle for social justice and [to] continue that. To make sure to **overtly challenge the visible contract** between the very right-wing voice of Jews in Britain, Board of Deputies, and head of the Orthodox church, Jonathan Sachs. They're stuffy old men and stuffy old women, just really out of touch, really anti-feminist, really anti-technology. They are just shooting themselves in the foot because **more people are attracted to progressivism**.—Marcia

Contrast with perceived political conservativism in mainstream Jewish communities was an important way that Jews crafted alternative identities in the margins.

5.2.1.3 Not the Establishment

Jews also construct an alternative identity from the margins by opposing the mainstream establishment whenever possible. Leah shares a poignant story about an epiphany she had

when she realised a major strength in being an outsider, which has since carried through to her politics and what she seeks from her Jewish identity. Leah's narrative illustrates the idea of margins as a site of empowerment.

> When I did my qualification as a social worker, I started working in the Jewish welfare board. It was through a one-day training that they held that I picked up a quotation. This one-day training was about self-identity, Jewish identity, and they gave you a series of quotes and you had to identify which famous person made these quotations. I didn't realise till they pointed out to us who had made these quotations [that] I couldn't recognise them. The one that I identified with most was supposed to have been said by Sigmund Freud. What he said was, "**I was able to be a revolutionary in my ideas because I never felt part of the establishment like my peers**." His peers were all Oxford-graduated and so on, and they all . . . supported government and the Queen, or the King at that time, and he didn't feel like that because he was Jewish. So he didn't feel part of the establishment whereas the others did. I suddenly recognised that when you're a refugee or an immigrant, or a child of an immigrant family, you feel 'other.' And in that sense you are freed from the chauvinism or loyalty that everybody else feels to king and country, or whatever other force is impelling most people to be nationalistic. He wasn't nationalistic the way he lived in Britain. **That was what I identified with. I felt that because I was 'other' I could engage in a revolutionary cause, whereas most people would never dream of it.** I think that is a kind of liberation in a funny way. It's diversity, and I think that nourished the idea in me that diversity is to be valued in society. And, strangely enough, it was only through working in a Jewish organisation that I got that training.—Leah

Other respondents reported finding JSG and JFREJ a way to be connected to something Jewish while still maintaining their rejection of the establishment:

> Initially what attracted me [to JSG] was the fact that they were involved in the Middle East issue and dialogue. I certainly started to like the idea of belonging to some kind of Jewish framework which wasn't dictated by the establishment. It just seemed to be **something I could join which would be Jewish**. JSG afforded the possibility for a cultural Jewish life, as well as the possibilities of celebrating the festivals.—Richard

Members who have been involved in JSG for a long time recall a period in the 1980s when the group struggled openly with the Jewish establishment and how this conflict served to

strengthen JSG, despite the very real intimidation. The animosity helped the group and its members to define themselves as outsiders.[4]

> There was that period where the group was very strong. I was mentioning some of the problems we'd had with the Jewish establishment**. I suppose that sense of being 'in battle' with somebody . . . really strengthened the group and solidarity within the group**. The group had a very high profile in the community that was being constantly attacked in the Jewish press and Jewish institutions and a bit of personal harassment by some members in the Jewish community. Excluding people from events and getting silent phone calls and being denounced by significant Jewish bodies. Maybe the group suffered from not being under attack! [laughs] It is much easier to hold together when you feel you're in struggle. We were much surer of who we were, what we were, and what we wanted then, when we were reacting and being defensive, than in the situation now where it feels a bit like, I don't know where everybody is. So, it's more difficult. **The Jewish establishment went to very great lengths to try and undermine and destroy the group.**—Jonathan

Respondents thus had various approaches to actualising their Jewish identities by way of opposition to the establishment.

5.2.1.4 Not a Mainstream Identity

Some respondents passionately defended their personal identification as a way of living in the margins. This is one way to perform an anti-establishment identity.

> Through a lot of thinking around ideas and analysing more personal and community situations from JSG, I came **to consider myself an ethnic cultural Jew who is not a Zionist and not religious.** I suppose the short title would be 'ethnic-cultural-anti-Zionist-atheist Jew,' who's very happy with that. **The Jewish community sees that as a crisis, these people on the margins,** but they're happy the way they are.—Jonathan

There thus are many ways that respondents used minority status to aid in the creation of their Jewish identities. Most frequently these involved being outside religion, holding progressive political views, rejecting the 'establishment,' and not associating with

[4] This mirrors, perhaps, the idea much discussed by theorists that the Jews thrived *because* of being an oppressed minority or Diaspora community rather than *in spite* of it.

mainstream identity. Relishing a marginal status in all or some of these ways was a crucial component of alternative identity construction and performance.

5.2.2 In Community

One of the most powerful ways that respondents affirmed their alternative Jewish identities was through community, more specifically through JFREJ and JSG. These groups had a tremendous impact on those who found them a Jewish home. The main themes that arose as respondents discussed the groups' impact on their identities included the following:

- The group comprised the biggest part of the respondents' Jewish identity. It was a place to learn new ideas and options, a place to construct a unique Jewish identity.
- Respondents sometimes expressed shock at even being in a Jewish group, since this had such negative connotations for them based on their previous experience.
- Some expressed joy in finding a group that resonated with them. They enjoyed having a non-religious option and a place to pursue politics as a community. One person said that these groups remind us of what being Jewish really means.
- For 'old-timers' who had been deeply connected to the group for many years, it was challenging to see the it moving in directions with which they disagreed.
- While some found the groups by accident, one woman actively sought them out after some challenging experiences with Christian-based charity groups.

This section focuses on how the groups provide community and resources to strengthen and promote alternative Jewish identities.

5.2.2.1 A Matter of Degree: Finding and Belonging

Respondents found the groups in different ways, and some, like Esther, remember the experience as clearly a decisive one:

> It was probably around 1987, when I found an advert for Jewish Socialist magazine in a local bookshop. **That was**

> **really important to me; that was really wonderful finding that, because I read it in absolute disbelief and loved it.** I really like the way that they think.—Esther

Maya discusses the anxiety in the mainstream Jewish community about 'unaffiliated' Jews, those who do not belong to a synagogue or participate in religious life and are thus deemed lost to assimilation. Her political affiliation fills this gap:

> I don't think I've been unaffiliated ever. Like **I don't have a synagogue, but I always have a political group.**—Maya

> [M]y parents taught . . . me that the collective brings about transformation. They never couched it in those terms, but it was always like 'we can do it together.' And I also like identifying as a Jew in **public because people have stereotypes about who the Jews are. I like to be 'out.'**—Maya

Esther echoes this idea of 'coming out' with the help of the group, and she also mentions that the dynamic often feels like one of family:

> I think in the beginning, it made me come out much more as Jewish. That's still the case to some extent, or it allows me to **come out**. I think to some degree I have a sense of it **being family** as well.—Esther

> At the time when I was just beginning to be a bit more involved in Jewish life, it was a very good way of doing it. I **felt a connection with other members** and wanted to be more Jewish, and it was a good way of being Jewish.—Esther

Emma, while often feeling a bit out of place in the group (like Alan below), also recognizes how the group expanded her understanding of what it means to belong to a wider Jewish community despite her differences with them:

> I don't really think I ever felt entirely a part of JSG even when I was a member of it. I found myself welcome there, and I feel comfortable there, but never quite 100% one of 'them'.—Emma

> I think the JSG . . . helped me to **see that I can sanction a Jewish identity of my own making,** and that that can be both very individual but also as part of a much wider group of people with whom I can join in trying to fashion . . . a flexible Jewish identity which resists . . . Sach's categorisation but [is] nevertheless genuinely part of the broader Jewish community. I don't think before I came into

> contact with groups like the JSG that I had any sense of myself as being **able to participate in that process, whereas now I have a sense that I can, both as an individual . . . and in groups.**—Emma

> I think JFREJ raised for me . . . a connection [to] the Jewish community . . . but also showed me a lot of ways that I was very apart. So, there was more of a contradiction in that for me than some of the people in the organisation. Although **one thing I completely believe is that there's no test: you're born Jewish, you're Jewish.** You can denounce it—I guess you can become a Jews for Jesus or something, or decide to publicly become something else, but basically in this society people ask me where I'm from; they don't think I'm Hungarian because my grandmother was from Hungary. They want to know if I'm Jewish, and I am. So, whatever I think, there's that aspect to it. **You can't really hide it.**—Alan

The lengthy story below by Helen illustrates the need that many felt for seeking out such a group and what it can mean on a deeper level.

> **I think in some odd way my Jewishness is connected to my political activity, but I don't know what that is or what that means.** But I do know the way I decided to contact JFREJ was that I had gone [on] two trips—one was a human-rights delegation to Guatemala with Witness for Peace, and two things were critical that happened on that trip. One of the things they did was—I forget what they called it, contemplation, meditation—every day there was ten minutes set aside, and someone would read something. I went with one Jewish friend, and the rest of the people in fact were Christians of various kinds, I think mostly Catholic. And it was run by a nun and a priest. The nun was a terrific lady, and they were pretty good. Everybody had to present on alternate days some little passage, and then people would think about it and there would be responses. So in any case I—not knowing very much about Judaism but not wanting to quote from the Bible because I'm not comfortable with that—I was not comfortable with their presentations most of the time. Again the nun did something on women, so that I found interesting. So I had been reading this book on non-Jewish rescuers of Jews in World War II, and I talked a little bit about what I learned about that, but then **I also talked about the Jewish tradition of arguing back with God**—if He's doing something unjust you tell Him so. [laughs] And I thought that our going down there as Witnesses for Peace was connected to that. It was amazing. **Nobody in the group could relate to that**. There was just dead silence [laughs], but I felt so bad. Usually there would be silence, and then people would say something about what it made them think about. Now eventually my friend Carol

> bailed me out [laughs] because she's also Jewish. So there was obviously such a gap there it just bothered me.
>
> The other thing that happened on that trip that bothered me was one of the women making some remark about it was okay that we were along—us Jews—on the trip because we weren't only interested in money. [laughs] And this was a woman that in every other way I thought was perfectly nice, and she had spent so much of her life dedicated to helping the poor, so she shared a lot of my values but obviously knew nothing about Jews other than stereotypes.
>
> Then the other trip I went on was with Pastors for Peace. We went to Chiapas, Mexico. There they were much more considerate; I think I may have said something to somebody early on about those other experiences. So, for example, at one point we were having a hard time with the Mexican customs, and so they were going to do a hunger strike. One of the people on the trip was a Catholic priest, and they were going to hold hands, and he was going to say a little prayer—and they asked my permission, whether I would be offended. And, of course not, I participated in that; I had no trouble with that. I think even had they not asked my permission that would not have bothered me. . . . [O]ne day . . . on the bus . . . we stopped to pick up some people who were having a problem, and we helped them out, and one of the guys said something about, "Well, it's the Christian thing to do." And I didn't say anything about it, but I thought about it afterwards, and I said, **"Hey, it's everyone's thing to do."** And I think it was those two experiences that made me start to think, **So where are the Jews that are supposed to be doing this kind of thing?** And so that was when I got in touch with JFREJ. I think prior to that I knew they existed, and I may have even occasionally sent some money, but I never went down and talked to them.—Helen

Even when one has found other places to do meaningful work in the world, there is still a need to be in community with others who share a similar cultural understanding or background, as Helen's story illustrates. While she was doing charity work, the reality of her difference was undeniable. For example, she framed her Jewishness in contrast to Christians who (1) could not grasp the concept of arguing with God, (2) only knew Jews as stereotypes, and (3) defined good deeds as uniquely Christian. Helen's strong feelings of being 'othered' while doing charity work reflected a strong personal value, which she

saw as somehow rooted in her Jewishness, and was the impetus for her seeking out a progressive Jewish community.

5.2.2.2 Groups as a Home for Alternative Jewish Identity

Respondents discussed what the groups meant to them in the context of their Jewish identities. Daniel explains how JSG has had a tremendous impact on his Jewish identity for decades because it unites his Jewish and political identities:

> The strongest thing I identify about being Jewish is the **JSG**. I've now been in the JSG for coming on 20 years. I could say the strongest thing about my being Jewish is **Yiddish** songs, learning Yiddish, **Jewish Socialism**, identification with the Jewish workers' tradition. I remain a **non-Zionist**. I remain without religious beliefs, a **Jewish atheist**.
>
> I supposed the other thing that **JSG taught me is being Jewish in a political sense**. It wouldn't have made any sense to me beforehand. [It's] the idea of Jewish practice and **Judaism as practice rather than theory**. More than just religious practice but taking part [and] being active. The fact that I'm being Jewish, the fact that I come from a background [in] which there was no doubt that my identification [was] on the Left and the Labour party. . . . [O]ne of the reasons I'm happy with the JSG is that **it puts the two together**.—Daniel

Jonathan also sees the group as having shaped his identity, and he imagines being far less happy had he never found a home for his various perspectives:

> It's **made me more confident** about who I am. Because I know lots of people who are Jewish and who are socialists, who are very kind of uneasy about that kind of combination. They are very aware that the Jewish community doesn't welcome or need them. And they don't want to be part of that, but they don't want to do away with a sense of who they are and where they come from. Some of those people don't feel engaged enough in Jewish things to join the JSG. I feel that without the JSG I'd be a bit like them, feeling aware of who I am but feeling 'What's the point of doing anything about it?' I think I'd be quite unhappy with that feeling. **So, it's made me happier, more confident, and more aware of who I am, and given me a greater sense of my own history and the community's history.** I have become more knowledgeable because of it, because of the group, and I think it's probably given me a healthier perspective on lots of things through the interactions of people that have been within it over the years. It's probably

> made me more of a socialist as well; I mean more of a different kind of socialist, someone who thinks more broadly. I would put that down to the group. It hasn't made me rich! [laughs]—Jonathan

While the degree of engagement with the group may have shifted over the years, respondents found it a reassuring 'home base' for alternative Jewish identity.

5.2.2.3 Surprise: You Are in a Jewish Group!

Some respondents were almost stunned to find themselves in a Jewish group, in particular those with strong secular identities. They hadn't realized that it was possible to be in a Jewish secular group, particularly in the US. On the other hand, someone like Jonathan is not at all surprised to find himself in a Jewish group. In the UK, perhaps, having a secular identity is more commonly accepted by Jews than in the US.

> I know in JFREJ I'm all the way over on one side. Probably the answers I'm giving are all totally different [from] the answers you've heard, but I felt that even in JFREJ I was sort of probably the most secular. **I myself was amazed that I was in a Jewish group at all.**—Alan

> JFREJ . . . turned me into a **professional Jew**! You know all of a sudden I was on the board, chairing the board of the radio show. **It's really funny. I sometimes just stand outside myself and look at myself in amazement.** It's just the last thing that anybody expected. I think we're part of the bigger discourse that's happening in the city, and we're doing it as Jews!—Ruth

5.2.2.4 Groups Unite Various Parts of Identity

Craig discusses how JFREJ brings together various parts of his identity in effective ways (also mentioned by Daniel in Section 5.2.2.2):

> **JFREJ really unites all the disparate strands surrounding my Jewish identity** because it's very much focused on social justice from a radical perspective and incorporates theatre and street theatre and protests and rallies. There's a sense of really doing something as a collective. I'm bringing cultural expressions as a way of doing social justice . . . [and] making social struggles real and immediate through role play. **Through transforming the Jewish holidays** in an activist framework. . . . There's so much there that really works for me. We can use our talents to do Jewish theatre in an activist way.—Craig

For Marc, JFREJ's positive coalition work in New York City helped him to navigate his identity publicly in a way that was comfortable for him.

> JFREJ has done a pretty good job with a lot of the kinds of people in different left and ethnic communities and others that I wind up working with, carving out a positive space for who progressive Jews are and what progressive Judaism is. That actually makes me much more comfortable. Not that people wouldn't know that I was Jewish, but I don't feel like I've got to be in denial about it or pretend. **I can be a JFREJ Jew**. I don't know that that's a way that affects my Jewish identity exactly, but it really **affects how I feel it plays out** in the world.—Marc

The groups thus played a key role for many in coalescing what might otherwise be a fragmented Jewish identity.

5.2.2.5 Groups as a Way Back to Jewishness

Sharon connects JFREJ's approach as a specifically Jewish social-justice organization to serving a useful role in the wider community by reminding Jews of their roots. Even as a rabbi she acknowledges the validity and value of an alternative Jewish community for those who eschew religion:

> I actually think these organisations, like JFREJ, and others around this country—some of these **Jewish justice organisations really do play a role in reminding us that we're Jews and what that's supposed to mean**. And that's really important. It's probably why they're growing. [laughs] They do give a way of Jewish involvement and **expression that isn't religious** per se. They do provide that possibility, and I know there are people for whom that's their Jewish community.—Sharon

5.2.2.6 Groups Evolving: Old-Timers Struggle with New Directions

In any group there are disagreements, and JFREJ and JSG are typical in this regard. In the interview quotation below Ruth reacts strongly to the recent JFREJ trend to work more closely with rabbis. Given her strong anti-religion stance, this was hard for her to accept. JSG probably would not do something similar unless it enlisted a very radical, anti-establishment rabbi.

> Sometimes I think that we're too concerned with promoting ourselves and showing that we're good Jews. I find that very troubling. I had a problem with our tendency of **trotting out rabbis.** But we're getting bigger, and [when] you get bigger . . . you begin bringing in slightly **more mainstream people**, and that's what happens. But I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing because you know we want to have credibility, and we have more credibility, and that's good, I assume. **The problem is you don't want to lose your soul in the process**.—Ruth

Like Ruth chafing against JFREJ's moving in a new direction with the rabbis, Jonathan is a longstanding member of JSG who finds himself feeling protective of the organization and reluctant to let go of too much:

> It's very rare for me to miss a meeting, but I do sometimes. I'm quite aware of being the **longest-standing member of the group** at the moment. There'[ve] been times whe[n] I get the feeling **it's hard to let go** of things, maybe because of the nature of the group. It's very unique in the Jewish community. It has sometimes felt quite fragile at times, and it did come under very, very concerted attacks by the Jewish establishment. So I suppose the group is for all of its easy-going[ness] a little bit tight-knit, security-conscious, that kind of thing. I've always felt quite close to the centre of that . . . , never wanting to sort of step too far back from it.—Jonathan

No matter how they originally found the group, how long they participated, or what exactly they were looking for, respondents were impacted greatly by their involvement. They learned, bonded, and grew, either moving on eventually or staying for a lifetime. Having a community to fall back on was a significant factor in forming an alternative Jewish identity.

5.2.3 Through Learning

Another significant way in which respondents performed their Jewish identities was through learning more about their rich history and culture beyond the traditional markers. Educating themselves about this history enriched their alternative identities, while the learning process itself was a way of embodying those identities.

Jonathan, for example, mentions how learning about Yiddish opened up a whole new way of thinking about Jewish identity:

> I also got very interested in Yiddish when I was about 21, just around the end of university. That was through people I've come into contact with in the JSG, and I did courses in it, and I went to lessons on and off over quite a long period, so I can speak a very basic Yiddish. **But the whole Yiddish thing . . . made me look at Jewish identity in a slightly different way, in a much more Diasporic sort of way.**—Jonathan

Maya also discusses the powerful impact that learning about languages had on her Jewish identity:

> I worked there [Jewish archive/research centre] for 13 years in a completely diverse Jewish environment in which I hung out every day with Hasidic Jews and Israeli Jews and gay Jews and straight Jews, suburban Jews, Conservative—you name it. Some supported mostly Ashkenazi, but *deep* Ashkenazi, and they were old people, a lot of them, so I really got to know cosmopolitan Jews from Europe before the culture was destroyed, and country Jews and city Jews, and my identity changed **because I started to know what to live a Jewish life could mean** to someone. I began to have **access to language** as I studied **Yiddish**, and I heard Russian, and I heard Polish, and I heard **Hebrew**. I used to find people so obnoxious, these JAPy Americans were just like spouting Hebrew, and I thought, 'Why do don't you learn Spanish? We live in New York, in the United States where half the people speak Spanish! Why don't you learn Spanish?' Now I find I'd love to learn Hebrew. I'm totally into it, but that's because I learned Yiddish first, and I thought, 'This is my Jewish language. It's the language of my people,' and then Hebrew is also obviously an essential language, and I **can't really speak it**.—Maya

Here again language offers an alternative connection to Jewishness and history for those who might not be interested in religious options.

In another context Esther found that she wanted to learn more about the history of Jews in her chosen profession. This offered her a way of discovering a deeper connection to her heritage.

> The first thing that I remember is that . . . when I did my psychotherapy training we had to do a dissertation, and I found that what I wanted to do was something [on] **Jews**

> **and psychotherapy**—why so many Jews were in it. It just felt that **that was what I wanted to do**. So it was an internal thing; it wasn't an external thing initially. I just recognised that . . . I saw the strong connections. . . . In a word, we're not exactly denying our Jewish heritage.—Esther

Marc, who was involved in JSG before JFREJ, found that learning about Bundist history and culture provided a new way of conceiving his Jewish identity:

> **My son's named after a Bundist— that's no coincidence. And access to that piece of the tradition** and feeling like it's Jewish and very much in the history, and that's a cultural politics as well as a social politics. In some ways I like the music and the art and the culture. It's been important . . . to help me to define my Judaism.—Marc

Lifelong learning about various aspects of Jewish history, tradition, culture, languages, music, and so on is a significant way in which respondents both perform and clarify their Jewish identities.

5.2.4 By Action and Agency

The most unifying way in which respondents enacted their Jewish identities was through their political views and actions. Taking a stand against injustice, doing things to make the world a better place, and siding with the underdog—these were core ways of performing their Jewish identities. Although we also discussed gender and class as social markers that affected individual political views, the study's focus was Jewish identity.

Marc goes straight to politics when asked how he sees his Jewish identity:

> I like to think of it as an aspirationally defined identity, **political and somewhat cultural** content. I derived a lot of satisfaction and personal identification from being involved with JFREJ, from having **politically progressive Judaism . . . shape my politics**.—Marc

> It's an important part of my identity, how I think about myself, how I ground my politics. I think I'm not exactly critical about it, but I recognise that I've given the content my own spin. . . . But it is certainly the thing that makes sense to me, and the particular brand of **progressive Judaism with a strong, radical cultural content** feels very comfortable in a way that isn't because it was in my house

> [growing up] but is definitely . . . related to what was in my house.—Marc

Like others, Arthur notes that having an opportunity to be 'out' as a Jew in a political context is meaningful:

> It's hard to say in what ways I express being Jewish. One way is being in the Jewish Socialists' Group. Another is in sometimes **taking part in things as a Jew**, like Jews Against Apartheid [in] South Africa.—Arthur

Politics, like all aspects of personal identity, can evolve over the course of one's life. Jonathan, who has been active in Jewish contexts since his teens, comments on how his politics have shifted:

> I think my most active years were the late 70s and early 80s. In the late 70s I was a student, and I could do what I wanted, and there was no responsibility for anyone. [laughs] **So I could go on a demo every week, and I used to believe it was really important that I did.** It was also a period of great political activism. I suppose when you're a young single man you can be very, very politically active and not have to worry too much about the rest of life. It's different when you've got kids, and you've got to worry about jobs and things like that. I think when the kids were very young I tried to still be very involved in political things, but it was obviously a different kind of involvement. There were a lot of things I was saying 'no' to. But I've started to become more active again, and in a way my views . . . haven't really mellowed; in some ways they've probably got[ten] stronger. I don't necessarily see the kind of cultural solutions in the same way as I did, say, 20 years ago. **I don't necessarily see the positive results from endless, mindless activism.** Activism on its own doesn't necessarily achieve results. I'm interested in exploring different ways of doing political activity.—Jonathan

Jonathan continues to explain the role he thinks JSG can play in redefining the approach of the Left, illustrating his deep connection to a Jewish politics:

> I think at the moment that JSG, particularly through the magazine, will be able to contribute to that new thinking quite a lot. I really think that the Jewish socialist experience of this century has given us lots of significant insights. **What the JSG has said in its leaflets over the years is about this idea of socialism enriched by cultural diversity and a non-monolithic socialism**. I think that idea hopefully will become one of the new common senses of the next century. And I think [it] will maybe enable the Left to get

> out of the more difficult, very narrow channels that it got into. I think we've got a significant role to play and with our small resources do what we can.—Jonathan

Maya explicitly sums up how politics replaced religion as a spiritual practice for her parents and how this value was passed on to her as a child:

> I'm not a text-based Jew, but what I know is [that] I just feel in a minority. . . . **My tradition teaches me that you can't stand by and watch**. You can change things, and in fact it's your obligation, it's your religious practice. That's what my parents taught me, "Your Jewish practice is to do this." They didn't go to synagogue; they stopped the Vietnam War, and **that was their spiritual work**. This is really trite too, but the whole thing of 'Never again, never again, never again'—it was so crammed down my throat that the message was always interpreted as 'You don't stand by. This happened to you, so you don't stand by.' You identify, and you can't stand around and scream about no one stopping it when it happened to you, like declaring war on a civilian population, you know—you can't cry about it when you're not doing anything about it. A state of emergency is not the exception; it's the rule.—Maya

Beyond the political and spiritual, Maya has personal reasons for engaging in social-justice battles:

> I get pleasure from certain kinds of activities, like social justice, like fighting for it. **It makes me feel good**. Not just about my ego gratification, [but] sometimes I feel like I'm fighting back, and that makes me feel good, **because . . . I am personally stepped on quite often.**—Maya

Similarly, Craig discusses the experience of speaking out politically as a Jew to an issue that does not directly affect him or his community:

> I know that when we were, for example, protesting outside this fish shop, where the owner had fired workers who were organising a union, black people would often come by and say, "Why are you protesting? **How is it a Jewish issue**? What's so specifically Jewish about this?" And we would always say, "**It's because of social justice**." The interesting thing is that historically, our experience as Jews, we used to be the oppressed ones. But it's interesting because people don't see the connection in the way that they used to because in those days it was the Jews themselves who were persecuted and people don't see that. **JFREJ takes the Jewish experience as a paradigm for liberation.**—Craig

This sample of stories is indicative of others' responses throughout the interviews. Political practice is a core way of performing an alternative Jewish identity, and the groups provided an essential context for this activism.

5.2.5 Through Redefining Rituals

Although respondents fell along a continuum in terms of distance from religion and Zionism as the dominant discourse of Jewish identity, they were not ready to reject them altogether. More often than not they saw redefining various rituals as ways to connect to Jewishness and also to expand on it.

Jonathan, even given his extremely negative view of religion, is open to redefining ritual with his family:

> Religion? [laughs] It means the **oppression and coercion of people**. [laughs] I think I've become more and more anti-religious over the years. I used to tolerate it. Now I've got very little time for it at all. Not just Judaism, but all kinds of religion. I've got friends who are deeply religious personally, Muslims, Christians, some Hindus, Jews. I suppose I've become not just secular but more secularist. If it's unknown, there should be rational explanations of the world that don't invent God. Religion just seems to interfere with people's lives in all sorts of ways that I find negative.—Jonathan
>
> It was an open question whether or not [the kids] would have a bar mitzvah. Yeah, they'd been to a bar mitzvah. I think they'd been to one or two traditional ones. They really hate being in *shul*. It's really quite difficult to take them to some of the more recent family gatherings because they're just bored to death with it. But they were very, very, very clear they both wanted a bar mitzvah, but they said they didn't want it in a *shul*. They didn't want any religious veneer around it. They wanted it to be about them. I suppose I was secretly happy that they decided they did want a bar mitzvah. I think I really quite wanted that. Naomi was more ambivalent. I think these things are different for women and men. I don't know. I can't quite work out what it was, what it's really all about. But I suppose it's partly [that] **I feel that if you're doing something that's not the mainstream, that you shouldn't end up just rejecting everything and doing nothing, because that can end up, if you like, enriching it. I felt that they had the right to assert themselves as Jewish people like that.** . . . And I think they

> have a right to assert that, whether or not the community recognises them in this ceremony that they had.—Jonathan

Marc also discusses how he redefined the rituals of marriage and parenthood:

> We belong to a small, quirky, lefty synagogue whose practise is more Reform than anything else, although it's not affiliated. We don't go and pray; we go to some of the events, maybe some political things. I feel pretty close to the rabbi, Sharon, not only through political work. We got married in Chicago, and we wanted Sharon there enough that we flew her to Chicago to officiate. And working on the wedding and working on [our baby's] naming ceremony were very important to me.
>
> I'm happy to share with you his naming ceremony. It wasn't a *bris*, but it has the form of a naming ceremony or a *bris*. It was just in the hospital. But its content is non-conventional. **We redefine[d] for ourselves . . . the wedding and the naming ceremony.**—Marc

Arthur is another example of a staunchly anti-religious respondent who found himself open to and participating comfortably in Jewish religious ritual:

> [A]round . . . Passover some rabbi actually did a service and bless[ed] the wine, and I participated in that. I didn't mind . . . even doing the *brachas*, which might seem out of sorts.—Arthur

Later in the interview he quotes Scripture and applies it when recounting another story:

> I had a disagreement with people at a JSG meeting a while back. It was almost like a trick question. They asked this woman whether **she expected [a man] to be any better because he was Jewish.** She said 'yes,' and somebody accused her of being anti-Semitic. I mean, actually now that I think about it, in the Bible it says, "Deal kindly with strangers, as you were strangers in Egypt." So Jewish people themselves require higher standards and need to apply these standards to their own people.—Arthur

Like Jonathan, Simon is interested in exploring religious possibilities for a secular identity, and as in Emma's experience he was hurt by not being considered a 'real Jew.'

> I also feel like, until a couple of centuries ago, religion and culture and politics and communal life were all so entwined together. The **religious aspects still are really a big part of secular Jewishness**, so I don't have to identify with the religious Jew, but as much as I may be angry at different pieces of religious movements those pieces are common for us. I'm definitely interested in looking at what those

> common threads are, and I also really have been feeling more of **a need for ritual** and different communal life, and I think religious Judaism is one way of expressing that. I'm exploring more pieces of it and am definitely **not interested in becoming religious** in terms of Judaism, but I'm interested in taking pieces of it that work for me and **not being so defensive** about it. And being able to also be clear about who I am and stand firmly in my sense of my Jewishness and not let folks make me feel like **I'm not a real Jew** or I'm a bad Jew or I don't know as much and at the same time be open to it and not dig my heels into the ground or shut down or back off.—Simon

Ruth also rebelled against the hypocrisy of her religious upbringing, yet she now feels simultaneously drawn to and aggravated by traditional forms of worship. She too is actively working to redefine practices within her synagogue:

> We've been going regularly for some time. The services are absolutely beautiful, and I can sometimes go and really just close my eyes and **float off on the music**, and it's so wonderful. I have to say that **I find the liturgy totally off-putting**. I just can't bear to think about what words are actually being said, and I'm frustrated that the synagogue, despite my urging over the years, [has] really not been willing to **creatively engage the issue of the liturgy**—particularly . . . as it relates to women. They made all the cosmetic changes in English, even in Hebrew, but they're not enough at all.—Ruth

Craig, on the other hand, speaks excitedly about the possibilities of redefining religious ritual:

> I've learned a lot [about] . . . **alternat[ive] ways of celebrating [Jewish holidays]**. . . . I think it would be **very powerful to transform [a] ritual** like the Purim party [by] being dressed up as politicians . . . , or the *tashlich*. I helped to organize New Year. I wrote a poem about hopes for the New Year and how that connected with Jewish rituals of renewal.—Craig

Maya explains how she incorporates religion and reshapes it. Like Daniel, she sees religion as ever-changing:

> I think that Judaism, belief, or religion—I think it's this big, breathing thing. **It's not static**. And there are all different ways of being religious. When I think of Jewish religion, I think of people who've said, "Okay, I'm taking on these . . . rules as my spiritual practice, and I'm interested to know all about Jewish religion," because I think it's fascinating, and

> I'm interested in ritual practice, and I'm interested in the texts and stuff like that. **My religious practice is mixed with my artistic practice and my political practice**. I haven't matched up my spirituality with the Jewish religion, because for me it's a little bit of a trap, because it's so over-represented. You have to find yourself in it. And when I do it on my own terms, I try to engage with Jewish religious ideas or spirituality and a religious life by way of projects that I do.—Maya

> It's a tool I use for a spiritual approach to life and being able to navigate the world and . . . what I think is right and wrong. **But I do it without the rigmarole of really being a Jew**, so I don't keep kosher, [and] I don't observe the Sabbath. I'd love to, [and] I think it's a brilliant idea. I don't necessarily believe that God has a covenant with the Jewish people exclusively.—Maya

At the other end of the religious spectrum is Sharon who, as a rabbi, is passionate about reinventing religion, arguing that such reinvention is a tradition:

> I think there are some ways in which my memory bumps up against Judaism's male heritage a lot. And, essentially— this isn't 100% black-and-white—but essentially we either say, "Fuck you. I'm out of here" or "I'm with you, and I'm going to adapt and change it and hope it doesn't change me too much." **I look very much to the early rabbis who turned the world upside down and said it was tradition.** That's my mode. I want to turn the world upside down and say it's Judaism, it's Jewish tradition. So, it's Jewish tradition to have a *bris* for the baby of two lesbians or to marry them or to march in Pride[5] with a congregation. That's Jewish tradition. I think women in general, and women rabbis, have a huge effect on Judaism. I think that because we're so left out of the set traditional modes, we've created so much collectively. I feel like I **stand on people's shoulders** most of the time, people who came before me. But, God, the things we've created! Ceremonies to welcome girls, ceremonies to celebrate old age, women and old age, menstruation, coming of age—all kinds of stuff. Essentially we did that collectively. . . . And I think we've also collectively had a hand in looking at community differently and less hierarchically. We've created different kinds of communities, often.—Sharon

Like Sharon, Leah believes that religion is adaptable and an important link to history on which we can continually improve:

[5] Annual Gay Pride March in New York City.

> I do think that rituals are important in people's lives, because they demarcate the eras and sections of your life, and you can commemorate life events like death, birth, and coming of age. It's important to demarcate those and to do it in a traditional way where you're linking with the people before you and then to those after you. It's something . . . what's the word? I can't remember the word. It's something to do with the passing of time, of ages, and a philosophical connection with the world. **I do think that rituals are important, but I don't believe in doing them mindlessly and without challenging authority, and when something's meaningless it should be challenged.** But then again . . . **I'm very proud that [the Jewish religion] does teach us to challenge**, and many of the festivals that we celebrate are about **civil rights** and about self-determination of the Jewish people. I don't approve of coercion into religion, however. If people want to follow the orthodox faith, it's their choice, as long as they don't interfere with my life. And I don't deny that I am Jewish as well because some of them say that we're not, really. Fundamentalism can be extremely damaging and corrupt. It's sadistic, especially toward women. Religion is notoriously anti-women. **But it doesn't have to be like that. That's just a failing, a weakness, a part of it. It wasn't intended to be like that. I think that we can have religion without its being a sexist institution.**—Leah

For the majority of respondents, despite where they registered on the spectrum of religiosity, an openness to and interest in redefining religious rituals was a way of enacting an alternative Jewish identity.

5.2.6 Conclusion

This section covered the interviews' main themes as to how alternative Jewish identities are constructed and maintained. The first was that identities are constructed intentionally *from the margins*, specifically beyond religion or religious affiliation. Second, alternative Jewish identities are constructed *in community*, with social-justice groups serving as a 'home base' to mitigate the effects of marginalisation by the mainstream community. The next three themes captured in the interviews concerned how alternative identities are constructed *through learning, action and agency,* and *redefining rituals*. Left-wing Jews who do not identify with mainstream Jewish values or communities therefore have several

options for crafting their identities. The next and final section examines the obstacles and opportunities for alternative Jewish identities.

5.3 PART 3: OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As discussed in the previous sections, even the obstacle (real or perceived) of a hostile mainstream is an opportunity to cultivate a stronger Jewish identity. Having examined the ways that respondents define what being Jewish means, and how they enact alternative Jewish identities, I now consider the obstacles and opportunities for further development of diverse Jewish identities.

Fluidity of identity is an opportunity in and of itself. Other opportunities and challenges include marginalisation, lack of knowledge, need for rituals, ambivalence and internalized anti-Semitism, potential burnout for activists, and Zionism and Israel/Palestine debates. The following section examines these themes.

5.3.1 Fluidity of Identity

Identities can always evolve, which is both an obstacle and an opportunity.

> **[M]y Jewish identity just changes**; it has and will change throughout my life, and I expect it to . . ., and that's okay. It's perfectly okay to be more religious at one point. . . . I used to wear a *yarmulke*, and it didn't work. I thought I was pretending.—Craig

Ruth has gone through a fascinating evolution in her Judaism from being a rebellious teen to an educated 'professional Jew,' as illustrated by these quotations from her interview:

> **I just had no interest**. When I was about fifteen we moved up to Riverdale, which was a upper- or middle-class neighbourhood in the Bronx, and my parents joined the synagogue because that was the way they got community, and there was always tension between us around the holidays because they were so **hypocritical about it, and I just had no interest in it. It was a fulcrum for rebellion for me**.—Ruth

> I began to realise how fundamentally Jewish I guess I really am [or] have become. And the fact is that, since we all have to be somebody, and God knows I don't want to be American now, . . . I've become much more **comfortable being Jewish as part of the complexity of things that my identity consists of. Am I angry at the public face of Jewish community in this country? Absolutely. But I no longer feel like I'm responsible for them, or that I have to disown the whole package because I'm so uncomfortable with it.**—Ruth

Jonathan discusses his evolution in relation to Zionism as part of developing his current Jewish identity:

> **Zionism** became my Jewish identity. I **didn't feel religiously** a Jew. **History** . . . and **family** played a part in my Jewish identity, but Zionism seemed to be the driving force going forward. Family and community seemed to be what had brought me here, but at the time the positive Jewish force in my life seemed to be Zionism. But I grew out of that about three years later.—Jonathan

The natural fluidity of identity is both an obstacle and opportunity for developing alternative Jewish identities. Many Jews who currently feel marginalised may be attracted to such options.

5.3.2 Marginalisation

Although some respondents celebrated their marginalisation, others were uncertain of their status. Richard illustrates one of the challenges of establishing an alternative Jewish identity—namely, that it complicates the issue of what is 'really' Jewish.

> I've got an interest in **Jewish history and Jewish issues and questions of identity,** and I suppose I feel much more comfortable living in London . . . because [it] is **very multicultural**. I certainly don't feel English, but I don't feel predominantly British either. So a kind of cosmopolitism at the moment feels comfortable. But at the same time I don't have any formal ties with the Jewish community. I **don't belong to a synagogue**, which I suppose is the main thing the organised Jewish community tends to define belonging to. I suppose my connections are through JSG. . . . **It doesn't feel very substantive**. . . . I don't really feel that belonging to JSG . . .[is] a strong link with the rest of the community. **It feels marginal**.—Richard

Following from Chapter 2, the margins 'on the ground' can also be a strength and place of empowerment, or oppressive and defeating, depending on the context and how that margin is framed and experienced.

5.3.3 Lack of Knowledge

Many respondents regretted not having a more diverse Jewish education, which is normally limited to the narrowest forms of Zionism. Many of these learning opportunities came to them because either they sought them out intentionally as adults or happened upon them through group interactions.

Like many other respondents, Helen was aware of her ignorance regarding Judaism's background. However, she is unique in that she is not interested in learning about Jewish history and culture, still connecting Jewishness with anti-progressive politics:

> **I really know almost nothing**. I'm surprised because several of my other Jewish friends [are] extremely political and . . . left-wing. I didn't think of them as relating much to . . . Jewishness. Some of them have gone back and started going to synagogue or doing things like that. And one friend . . . goes regularly to synagogue. I think if anything it sort of puzzles me. [laughs] It's not something I can relate to. And yet I think **there's an odd bit of curiosity there, but not something I have acted on yet in any way.**—Helen

Emma, on the other hand, would like to learn more about Judaism and explains why her parents did not give their children a Jewish education:

> I'm very conscious of myself as **someone who's not particularly knowledgeable about Jewish history** and all that, my own heritage, but I nevertheless think that understanding's very important to me . . . as a product of that aspect of [my] heritage.
>
> In fact, **we all regret that we weren't taught more, that we weren't involved more, in the Jewish community, and that we weren't able to feel more comfortable.** But looking back, I can see that my parents felt that the obstacles were . . . insurmountable. . . . [T]hat was certainly how they saw the situation with us as Jews in New Zealand.—Emma

Ruth explains how as an adult she realized how shallow her Jewish education had been and how much of her rejection of Jewishness stemmed from that ignorance:

> What I came to recognise was that my whole sense of Judaism as a practice was what [my partner's] mother calls 'paediatric Judaism.' Unfortunately the way kids learn about being Jewish is through these silly Bible stories and very simplistic understanding of the holidays, but obviously **there is a deep philosophical content** to all of that, which I had no knowledge of. . . . [M]y exposure to Jewish education had ended at age 16, and it had never been serious. So it was really interesting. It didn't turn me into someone who's practising Judaism, and **I'm still secular, but I see it as a philosophical framework that has an enormously deep and unique quality, and the whole notion of a constant challenging of both the practice and the philosophy and the combative relationship the Jews have with God— it's really quite interesting and has a lot more substance than I had ever imagined,** given my exposure as a kid to this really narrow ultra-Orthodox practice and this lousy education that I got.—Ruth

Even people with negative experiences in their past regarding Judaism and Jewishness find themselves wanting to learn more, an inclination that presents an opportunity for developing an alternative Jewish identity.

5.3.4 Need for Rituals

Learning how to adapt religious rituals without compromising one's secular identity represents another opportunity for enriching an alternative Jewish identity. Simon thus remarks:

> What I've been looking for is **more cultural and creative ways** to be Jewish than what JFREJ offers. More communal ritual and more communal gathering and communal support and why that is a way to express my Jewishness. . . . Definitely wanting more of that and wanting more to express my Jewishness in that way.—Simon

This opportunity is already a source of strength for some respondents, as illustrated in section 5.2.5.

5.3.5 Ambivalence and Internalised Anti-Semitism

Respondents still struggle with the impact of anti-Semitism on their lives and self-perceptions. Several were aware of their own internalised anti-Semitism. Others also discussed anti-Semitism in general and how that might impact their Jewish identities and create feelings of ambivalence.

> On the other hand I have to say that I'm still resolutely separate, and there are lots of people in the world who have vanished, and I'm **not totally sure why it should matter to** me . . . what's really special about Jews, that there's this necessity, this drive. I never had the answer to that.—Ruth

Marcia addresses this ambivalence when asked about what being Jewish means to her:

> I have **some negative stuff** about it as well as its being a source of pride and joy. . . . I'm aware of people's misconceptions . . . , They're creating an otherness that is irrelevant. That shouldn't be a big deal. Because of that I have some negative feelings about being Jewish as well. You might call internalised, whatever. . . . [M]aybe it's whatever else is going on in my life. Sometimes I feel almost entirely positive about it . . . [as] a source of **pride and joy**.—Marcia

Simon also explains how anti-Semitism helped him to understand his Jewish identity:

> I think that in some ways I had **internalized anti-Semitism** along with the guilt. I think that became more pronounced later in college. I remember definitely dismissing a lot of Jewish stuff.—Simon
>
> There was all this stuff that was helping me [to] . . . think about anti-Semitism and the real issue and Jewishness and the real heart of what I was and the **real heart of my tradition** and why it was what I was at all.—Simon

5.3.6 Potential Burnout for Activists

While many interviewees had activist roots, they confessed to a sense of burnout and disenchantment. When that occurred, those who relied on political activism to define their alternative Jewish identities had to find a replacement. Arthur recounts this odyssey:

> I haven't got the same amount of energy I used to have originally! [laughs] . . . Then I started questioning everything and realising that activity for the sake of it has really got no value. **It wears people out.** I think people on the left have to remind themselves that whatever

> organisation or party they belong to has to **have aims for humanity** as a whole and to look beyond their communities. I think what happens quite often is that organisations become only for themselves and the people in them.—Arthur

Sharon, as a rabbi who works with many Jewish activists, discussed how her congregation became a refuge for activists:

> In terms of social action, social activism, it's been a really interesting experience, because the congregation includes many of the major names in social activism in this city. Because that's what they do in their lives and for work. They don't want to do it as part of the congregation. **They often look toward the congregation to be a resting place and a place to kind of renew and recharge.**—Sharon

Esther expresses the same exhaustion:

> Actually, I don't know what is effective anymore. For many years I went to London for demonstrations, and I think I'm getting too old to do that, really. I think **they're exhausting**.—Esther

Addressing activism burnout is an important consideration since so many people working to craft alternative Jewish identities see political activism as a key mode of self-definition.

5.3.7 Zionism and Israel/Palestine Debates

Zionism and religion are the two mainstream ways to be Jewish. Several respondents mentioned feeling only marginally connected with Israel. They recognised that by being Jewish they were connected to the situation regardless of personal views. Marc observes:

> A two-state solution is the best one can hope for. I would like to see a strong and viable Palestinian state; I would like to see an Israel that a lot of Jews live in and that is a stable, secure, and sane country, not marked politically or psychologically by the set of both oppression of another people and then hatred that scars the place. **But I only feel marginally more connected to those struggles than to other international justice-related struggles**.—Marc

Some respondents were extremely clear about their views on Zionism and Israel:

> **I don't believe in Zionism**. I don't believe in religious states. I think that Israel needs to become a secular state and make peace with the Palestinians.—Alan

> **We've got to take the long view in all this. The Jewish future is much more secure as a minority in the Diaspora. The Jewish future in Israel is very uncertain and insecure.**—Jonathan

Other respondents felt more conflicted:

> My views on Zionism changed because of JSG. . . . Nevertheless, I think that this **holier-than-thou attitude** that JSG holds toward Zionists is incorrect because at the same time as the Jews have overtaken somebody else's land, we can't deny the fact that every Arab nation surrounding Israel is full of fundamentalists, religious fanatics, and . . . corrupt dictators. And the population is deliberately increasing in numbers to overthrow the Jews. So **it's a double-edged sword**. On the one hand, the socialists are saying, 'You've got to make good for the Palestinians.' And the Palestinians, on the other hand, are saying, 'We're going to throw the Jews into the sea.' After a while **I'm in this awful thing of sitting on the fence, seeing both sides.**—Leah

As individual views concerning Israel and Zionism continue to evolve, so do those of the wider culture. This could be an opportunity for the mainstream Jewish establishment to embrace, or at least tolerate, alternative Jewish identities.

5.3.8 Conclusion

Data from the interviews show that Jews disenchanted with mainstream Jewishness have a variety of ways of constructing their individual and collective identity. The main obstacles to this project are also opportunities, including the fluid nature of identity, marginality, the desire for ritualism, ambivalence toward Jewishness, activist burnout, and the Israel/Palestine quandary.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of the in-depth interviews. Using a modified grounded theory, each section built on the themes and responses from the previous. While Jews 'on the margins' are hardly a homogeneous, there are similarities in belief and action, and the need for a community of like-minded individuals was significant. This data shows that while mainstream institutions and scholars may see these Jews as a lost cause, that assumption is inaccurate. Enriching the full landscape of Jewish communities and identities and highlighting a specific moment in time, this study makes an important contribution to the field of Jewish sociology.

CONCLUSION

> I became a Marxist before I became a feminist. Once my critical faculties were really opened up, then all of a sudden I . . . saw a lot of other things. **My gender, my sexuality, my Jewishness—they're all infinitely related to each other and to my activism.**—Ruth

Identities, be they Jewish or otherwise, are complex, interwoven, dynamic, and contextual. In opening up the boundaries surrounding them, we open both ourselves and scholarship to new possibilities. Well before this study both sociologists and the Jewish community had a deep interest in Jewish-identity issues. That trend continues today. The recently created group named Reboot (www.rebooters.net), for example, is particularly concerned with how the younger generation of 20-something Jews in the US grapple with their identities, and it is generously funded by Jewish foundations seeking the key to Jewish continuity. Perhaps parts of the mainstream Jewish community are recognising that religion and Zionism simply are not enough for many people. Whether or not the goal is to coax alternative Jews back into the fold or to broaden the definitions of what being Jewish means yet remains to be seen. This study has contributed to widening the definition of Jewish identity beyond the limited scope of mainstream options. By examining how some Diasporic, non-Zionist, non-religious Jews construct and maintain alternative identities, the project addressed gaps in the literature and contributed to wider knowledge of Jewish identity formation.

Theorists and people 'on the ground' will continue to wrestle with identity issues. We desire identities to be natural and eternally stable. It is a way of having a stable point of reference in a shifting world, partly because with globalisation "that form of relationship between a national-cultural identity and a nation-state is now beginning . . . to disappear" (Hall, 1997: 175). Of course, this development opens new spaces on many levels.

I am not immune to the ambivalence and anxiety about Jewish continuity experienced by other Jews researching Jewish communities and identities. For reasons not clear even to me, I too would like to see the Jews continue for another few centuries or more, and I feel both pride and amazement the more I learn about Jewish history and diversity. Some 14 years ago I was astonished to learn about Jews who rejected Zionism, and this discovery eventually led to the present study. My hope is that, by my sharing what I have learned, other researchers and institutions will be inspired to give expanded Jewish-identity definitions a chance and to relax their anxiety about non-affiliated or intermarried Jews as a 'lost cause.'

If I had to do it over again, I would change little on the research side. I found an interesting niche at an interesting time and discovered fascinating answers to my research questions. The research process was the most stimulating phase of the whole experience. As described in Chapter 3, the challenges lay on the process side of academic supervision and real-life complications. With the benefit of hindsight, of course, I would manage this part of the experience quite differently.

After helpful feedback from the project's examiners, I learned about similar research on Jewish identity. Other scholars were examining non-Zionist and secular Jews (or those somewhere on this spectrum) using qualitative methods to capture more detail and nuance than a mass survey might. The diversity of this research proved that, even in qualitative

studies of Jews 'on the margins,' there is a wide range of approaches and underlying goals and assumptions. As far as I could see, no one else had examined the groups I chose and in the same manner. This alone shows that we can learn more about the diversity of Jewishness.

My research is also a call for researchers and the Jewish community to return to the Diaspora as a source of viable Jewish identities. In addition to literal interpretations of the Diaspora (e.g., Cohen, 1997), other scholars such as Hall (1997) stress the term's fluidity. Brah (1996) emphasizes this as a premise for her idea about Diasporic spaces. She thus builds on Boyarin's (1994) concept of a Diasporic identity not just for the Jews but for all of the ways we divide and identify ourselves. He and others such as Levine (1986) and Lavie and Swedenburg (1996) urge us to break the connection between a people and a territorial space.

Boyarin (1994) presents the most detailed outline of a Diasporic paradigm for *all* forms of identity. "I want to propose a privileging of Diaspora, a dissociation of ethnicities and political hegemonies," he writes, "as the only social structure which even begins to make possible a maintenance of cultural identity in a world grown thoroughly and inextricably interdependent" (258). He suggests that it is Diaspora rather than monotheism that constitutes the Jews' important contribution to the world. It can teach us that it is possible for a people and a culture to survive without controlling land or dispossessing others. "Renunciation of sovereignty, autochthony, indigeneity (as embodied politically in the notion of self-determination), on the one hand, combined with a fierce tenacity in holding onto cultural identity, on the other, might yet have something to offer" (Boyarin, 1994: 259). He describes "a notion of . . . Diaspora identity, which will be of value beyond the articulation of Jewishness alone" (Boyarin 1994: 242). This is an example of combining Diaspora and identity theory.

Back to the specificity of Jewish identity, Emma notes that expanding our definition of who is a Jew will enrich and expand the Jewish community, yet she struggles with definitional boundaries:

> There were a lot of people who[m] I met, like my own relations, who don't see me as a real Jew—certainly . . . the very orthodox among them . . . wouldn't even speak to us. People would sometimes say to me, "Oh, you're not a real Jew because the Jewish line goes through the mother, not the father," and . . . my response to that has always been that, **if you have an inclusive definition of who is a Jew, then there will be a lot more Jews than if you have an exclusive definition of who is a Jew, and the more exclusive you make it, the fewer there will be**. Then I found myself in this relationship with another Jew, and both of us . . . desire[d] to have children as Jews and to bring them up as Jews, whatever that might mean. And that was somehow contrary to our notion, you know, of inclusiveness. I can't really explain that, but we were coming to grips [with] **balancing being a Jew and being a citizen of the world**.—Emma

This quotation sums up an inherent tension of identity, especially the 'minority within a minority' identity that the respondents in this study were navigating. They sought to create strong identities while also connecting to the world as a whole. I agree with Emma that Jews, and many other communities, would be stronger by having as inclusive a definition as possible. Jews like Emma will continue to expand definitional boundaries of identity.

Audiences that can benefit from this study are several. Jews with similar identities to those studied here will find validation and reassurance. Scholars and Jewish leaders fretting about continuity will find reasons to expand their definitions of Jewishness. Parents and teachers will find a resource to teach children about the diversity of the Jewish experience and break out of the victimization model. Perhaps eventually, too, mainstream Jewish researchers will be inspired to expand their Jewish-identity scholarship.

While we have an "unspoken premise [of] Judaism as a fixed point," Kirsch (2001) writes, "starting in antiquity, and continuing without interruption to the present day, Jews have been defined by generation upon generation of courageous men and women who felt both inspired and empowered to re-imagine and reinvent what it means to be a Jew" (2). Many respondents in this study saw this as part of their historical role. They were creating anew or salvaging options for Jewishness. Research projects on Jews should dig deeper to consider whom they include in their samples and why.

Most historical studies of Judaism assume that Jewish identity is fixed. However, culture is constantly contested and created in context (Silberstein, 1994). More recently, many scholars question the notion of identity as something predetermined and bounded. Thus, whereas the old way of interpreting identity looks for shared values and ideals, the new way focuses on flux, movement, and non-essentialism. Power, struggle, and conflict are important in constructing identities, and these factors are finally being recognised.

Panicked about the 'vanishing Diaspora,' Wasserstein (1996) discussed French-Jewish intellectual (and possible neo-Bundist) Richard Marienstras, who argued that the Diaspora should have a meaning, purpose, and future. Marienstras insisted that "it is time to have done with the mistaken idea that one cannot 'be a Jew' otherwise than by religion or Zionist nationalism" (as quoted in Wasserstein, 1996: 289). Like many respondents here, he called for a revival of interest by secular Jews in Hebrew and Yiddish culture, Jewish history, and 'a cultural politics of the Diaspora.' While I share Wasserstein's attraction to this idea, I am not convinced of his fear that Jewish communities will eventually melt away completely to become a disembodied memory. I am encouraged, however, that despite his anxiety he is open to a range of solutions and approaches.

While identities will always be contested, especially at their boundaries, let us risk the openness of where they may lead. If nothing else, some Jews on the margins might suddenly find themselves at the centre, creating a new way just as honoured as the old. Our understanding of minority communities will become more accurate as the range of diverse voices within them is validated and recognised.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This was the guiding list of questions used for the in-depth interviews. First, respondents received an introduction about the project, purpose of the interview, confidentiality, recording, and informed consent. The interview proceeded once the respondent indicated a full understanding of the project and process and confirmed consent of participation verbally.

Demographics/background:

1. How do you spell your name?
2. Where do you live?
3. Are you currently single or do you have a partner?
4. Do you have any children?
5. What is your occupation?
6. What is your educational background?
7. When were you born?
8. Where did you grow up?

Jewish background:

1. How was being Jewish a part of your household growing up?
2. What were your parents' beliefs about Judaism and how was that conveyed when you were growing up? How did they see being Jewish?

3. What were their views on being Jewish and living in [respondent's home country], or on Zionism and Israel?
4. At this point in your life, what does being Jewish mean to you?

Jewish life now:

1. If you were to have children (*or* if you already have children, *or* for Jewish children in general), how would you like them to see being Jewish, and how would you try to instil that?
2. In what ways do you express being Jewish?
3. What would you say the idea of religion means to you and why?
4. How would you define secularism? What would you see as an ideal relationship in a society between religious faiths and religion and secularism?

Politics and other identities

1. How would you describe your political views in general?
2. How have your politics and/or the way you've expressed your beliefs and activism changed over the years?
3. What kind of political activities you prefer, and which do you see as most effective?
4. Do you see your activism as connected to your Jewishness?
5. How do you think your gender relates to your experiences, with being Jewish and also with your politics?
6. What was your class background while you were growing up? Do you see that (class issues) as also connected to your politics?

The Groups

1. How did you first hear about JSG/JFREJ?
2. When did you join?
3. What factors attracted you to the group at first?
4. Were there any other early impressions or reactions to the group? Has your impression of the group changed since then?
5. How has your level of participation shifted or stayed the same since you joined?
6. What do you see as the agenda or purpose of JSG/JFREJ?
7. Do you think that your involvement with JSG/JFREJ has had an effect on your Jewish identity?
8. How do your experiences of JSG/JFREJ compare with some of the other groups that you've been involved with?
9. What would you say are the strengths and weaknesses of the group?

Miscellaneous

1. What are your views on Zionism in Israel?
2. What do you think Jews in Israel, or the Diaspora, should be working towards, if anything?
3. Anything else you'd like to add?