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**The Threat from Within:
American Jews, the State of Israel, and Intermarriage**

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This paper investigates how dominant American Jewish organizations seek to construct a collective Jewish identity that focuses on and advocates for the state of Israel. While the state of Israel has long been at the center of Jewish collective identity, there has been increasing fragmentation among American Jews with regard to Israel over the last several years. It is within this shifting, unstable dynamic that the dominant Jewish organizations cultivate Jewish collectivity, explicitly constructing American Jews' attachment to Israel as inextricable from collective Jewish identity. For this reason, data for this paper comes primarily from ethnographic research on the representation of Israel in normative Jewish spaces in the Bay Area. Dominant Jewish organizations, the membership of which constitutes the elite leadership of American Jews, view the loss of Israel-centered collective identity among American Jews as posing an existential threat to Israel, and they link the loss of this collective identity to intermarriage. Thus intermarriage is framed as a grave threat to the state of Israel that invokes the specter of Israeli, and Jewish, destruction. The ethnographic research presented in this paper shows how the active, deliberate linking between family structure among Jews in the United States and their assigned obligations to the state of Israel works on-the-ground in dominant Jewish organizations. Stigmatizing intermarriage and promoting Jewish in-marriage has become a key tactic in a larger effort by the dominant Jewish organizations to shore up the Israeli state by creating Israel-oriented American Jews.

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Introduction

In early 2009, a few weeks after Israel ended a major military assault on the Gaza Strip, I was part of an audience in San Francisco listening to the Israeli Consul General for the Pacific Northwest, Akiva Tor. The audience was about 70 American Jews in our 20s and 30s, mostly professionals, mostly unpartnered. Tor spoke about his favorite things to do in Israel, including his favorite hike, restaurant, and date setting. During the question and answer period, he was asked what organizations are the most anti-Israel. Tor told the questioner that as a diplomat he couldn't "critique regimes." He then said, "*The number one threat is the assimilation of American Jews. Not more anywhere than the Bay Area.*"

Tor made a very explicit link between the ways in which American Jews live their lives – with whom they make their families, with which organizations they affiliate – and the security of the state of Israel, a state engaged in an active military conflict, technically at war with neighboring countries, and the object of threats from other regional powers. The Consul General posited that the choices American Jews make in their personal lives endanger the state of Israel; indeed, these choices are the most significant threat to the state of Israel. As such, Israel must address them.

The site of this exchange was a well-appointed conference room in the building that houses the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties (the Federation). It was one of many evenings I spent at the Federation as a part of the Federation's Young Adult Division's flagship educational and social program. The building sits just off the famous Embarcadero Street, home to piers and ferries, and is decorated with big, glossy PR-type posters announcing "This is Federation." The posters were decorated with photos

ranging from one showing Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marching for civil rights along with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to another of a teenage boy enjoying himself at the Federation's annual "Israel in the Gardens" gathering, which are held every June. In the second-floor conference room, along with the glass-framed photos of past Federation Board presidents, many additional posters decorated the walls the night that Tor spoke; these were part of the BlueStar PR collection, a locally based non-profit that produces catchy PR materials promoting the state of Israel. On other nights during this Young Adult series, we spoke of other topics – Jewish identity, Jewish community, the Jewish obligation to repair the world – though Israel was always a part of any discussion or presentation. The night Tor spoke was dedicated entirely to Israel, and in addition to Tor's speech we heard a presentation about eco-tourism in Israel and another about how our philanthropic contributions to the Federation are spent in Israel. After the event that night, as after every other event, we retired to the bar around the corner where we chatted and flirted.

Since the start of the Zionist movement, decades before the founding of the state of Israel, Zionist settlement in the land of Israel was dependent on financial and political support from diaspora Jews.¹ In recent years, especially since the start of the second Intifada (2000), Israel has also significantly increased its public relations efforts and engaged allies around the world, and especially Jews, to serve as advocates for the state. As citizens of the world's superpower, the wealthiest Jewish community in the world and the second largest after Israel, American Jews have long played a special role in supporting and protecting Israel.

This paper looks at the ways in which dominant American Jewish organizations, which work hand-in-hand with the state of Israel in many areas, seek to create and support a collective

¹ Since becoming a state in 1948, Israel's dependence on diaspora Jews has continued. Assistance offered by diaspora Jews is mainly in the form of financial contributions to support social services and political leverage to support military collaboration, diplomatic relationships and foreign aid.

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Jewish identity that focuses on and advocates for the state of Israel. It argues that, in the version of Jewish collectivity that dominant American Jewish organizations promote, Jewish identity is explicitly Israel-oriented. As Jewish identity, like any collective identity, exists insofar as it differentiates itself from other groups (Taylor and Whittier 1992), Jewish Israel-oriented identity rests in large part on the identification of constitutive others that pose a threat to the collective. Insofar as Israel has been “perceived as the bulwark of Jewish survival in the second half of the twentieth century” (Cohen and Eisen 2000:143), threats to Israel become threats to Jews everywhere. Similarly, because of American Jewry’s “key role in ensuring that the state [of Israel] had the wherewithal to perform that function [of ensuring Jewish survival]” (ibid), a threat to Israel becomes a threat to Jews everywhere, and a threat to American Jews becomes a threat to Israel. While Arabs or Muslims have come to represent external threats to Israel and Jews, internal threats take the form of assimilated Jews whose life choices can be interpreted as disinterest in Jewish survival.

Assimilation comes in many forms, most of which are not only accepted but celebrated by the vast majority of American Jews (such as sharing language, dress, and many customs and beliefs with other Americans) (Hyman 1995). The most controversial form of assimilation is intermarriage, widely perceived as a grave threat to Jewish life and culture and therefore highly stigmatized (Corwin 2010, Cohen 2006). Recent scholarship on American Jews suggests that younger Jews are more distanced from Israel than older Jews (Cohen and Kelman 2010, 2007). One of the most influential scholars of American Jewry, Steven Cohen, attributes this new distancing to the effects of Jews marrying non-Jews (Cohen and Kelman 2010, 2007). Intermarried Jews and their children report feeling less attached to Israel than in-married Jews

and their children,² and intermarried families also participate less in Jewish communal organizations and activities than in-married families (Cohen 2006). Given this correlation between loss of support for Israel and intermarriage, representatives of the Israeli state and its advocates show concern not only for external threats to the state (Arabs, Muslims), but especially for the marriage practices of American Jews, as the Consul General's quote above reflects. I argue that stigmatizing intermarriage and promoting Jewish in-marriage has become a key tactic in a larger effort by the dominant Jewish organizations to shore up the Israeli state by creating Israel-oriented Jews.³

Theoretically, this paper builds on Cihan Tugal's (2009) intervention into social movement theory, the "hegemonic approach," which looks at the ways in which construction of collective identities can actually alter the state. In Tugal's words, "the reorganization of everyday practices is interwoven with the transformation of the state" (429; emphasis in the original). In other words, social movement organizations reshape everyday life, such as daily practices or gendered access to space, in ways that lead to the overall transformation of the state. This paper extends Tugal's theory in two ways. First, I show that the reorganization of everyday practices can be used not just to transform the state but also to buttress it; that is, social movement organizations can construct particular forms of identity not only to reform the state but also to maintain it. Second, whereas Tugal's theoretical intervention emerges from his work on a social movement within Turkey, this paper applies his insight to explain the behavior of dominant American Jewish organizations⁴ with respect to the state of Israel. This extension of

² National Jewish Population Survey 2000-1.

³ To be clear, this paper does not argue that Jewish organizations fight intermarriage for the sake of the state of Israel *alone*. Rather than catalog the ways in which the dominant Jewish organizations address intermarriage, this paper looks at efforts to fight intermarriage as a tactic that the organizations use in their larger effort to create Israel-advocating Jews. For more on American Jews and intermarriage, see Lila Berman Corwin (2008, 2010).

⁴ Jewish community organizations form the scaffolding of a centralized collectivity widely known as "the Jewish community" and are sometimes called "the American Jewish Establishment" (Beinart 2010). In any American *Minkin, Threat from Within*

Tugal's theory shows that the social movement strategy of shaping everyday life to affect the state – the hegemonic model – can characterize the efforts of social movement organizations in a diasporic community,⁵ as well.

It is an empirical reality that every Jew who in any way connects to a version of a Jewish collective has to contend with the state of Israel and with a relationship to the state that is largely mediated by the Jewish collective as well as the American context. While Israel has long been “the principal symbol and prop of Jewish identity” (Eisen 1986: 136), there has been increasing fragmentation among American Jews with regard to Israel over the last several years. This fragmentation is a challenge to the consistency of Israel-centered collective identity, with the most pronounced disaffection occurring among young people (aged 35 and under) (Cohen and Kelman 2007). It is within this shifting, unstable dynamic that the dominant Jewish organizations, like other social movement organizations⁶, cultivate Jewish collectivity, explicitly constructing American Jews' attachment to Israel as inextricable from collective Jewish identity. These organizations all promote the centrality of the state of Israel to American Jews' personal and collective identities. For this reason, data for this paper comes primarily from ethnographic research on the construction of Israel in these normative Jewish spaces in the Bay Area.

The ethnographic research presented in this paper shows how the active, deliberate linking between family structure among Jews in the United States and their assigned obligations to the state of Israel works on-the-ground in dominant Jewish organizations.⁷ These

locale, Jewish community organizations are the local branches of nationally and internationally networked organizations that provide domestic services (promoting the ethnic, religious and political agenda of Jewish people) as well as links to Jews around the globe and especially to the state of Israel. These community organizations support, promote and initiate Jewish nation-building and collective identity projects.

⁵ Jewish communities outside of Israel are not the Israeli diaspora and so the term “diasporic communities” is not technically accurate. However, for the sake of this paper, I will refer to American Jews as a diasporic community.

⁶ In their concerted, organized programs and campaigns to create identity and community, the Jewish organizations act like social movement organizations (Touraine 1985).

⁷ This paper touches on themes of interest to gender scholars, who have looked at the ways in which women are *Minkin, Threat from Within*

organizations, the membership of which constitutes the elite leadership of American Jews, view the loss of Israel-centered collective identity among American Jews as posing an existential threat to Israel, and they link the loss of this collective identity to intermarriage. Thus intermarriage is framed as a grave threat to the state of Israel that invokes the specter of Israeli, and Jewish, destruction. At the same time, the “threat” of intermarriage is taken for granted as a common-sense assumption among Jews and, especially, strong Israel advocates.

This paper begins with a discussion of Tugal’s hegemonic model to explain how Jewish organizations’ imperatives regarding intermarriage follow the pattern of social movement institutions striving to shape everyday life to achieve a political goal. In this case, that goal is the mapping of an ethno-nation onto a civil nation, such that American Jews come to identify with the needs of the state of Israel. The paper then provides an overview of the structure of American Jewish identity and Israel in American Jewish culture. American Jews exhibit fragmentation and disagreement over the state of Israel and one’s proper relationship to it, and dominant Jewish organizations have responded by mobilizing – like social movement organizations – to cultivate Israel attachment that meets their standards. The Bay Area is a preeminent example of this mobilization and a rich site for studying the construction of Jewish identity as it relates to Israel. Following a brief introduction of the ethnographic site, the paper presents the ethnographic data that shows how this mapping works on the ground in normative Jewish spaces. This paper takes both a top-down and a bottom-up approach, looking at the messages and policies of the leadership as well as the ways in which some of the people receiving these messages negotiate

tasked with the biological and cultural reproduction of their nations, whether they are based in a nation-state (such as France [Auslander 2001]) or stateless or spanning multiple states (such as Kurds or Jews) (Yuval-Davis 2008 [1997]). The case at hand is of interest to gender scholars, because unlike both states (see Heng and Devan 1992, Yuval-Davis 2008 [1997], among others) and nations (Kanaaneh 2002), which impose demands and expectations upon women in their role as national reproducers, the case at hand includes a triangular relationship between the trans-border nation, the nation state, and reproductive demands made upon diasporic women for the sake of the non-diasporic nation-state. I will not enter into the gender literature in this paper but rather explore it elsewhere.

them.

Theoretical Framing: Constructing Identity to Support the State

Throughout the 1980s, structuralist, rationalist and state-centered theories dominated social movement theory, specifically the Resource Mobilization Theory and the Political Opportunities Model, both of which largely ignored the ways in which movements cultivate identity – collective and personal – in the service of the movement’s goals and values. Even when social movement theory took its cultural turn and began to study identity, it primarily looked at identity instrumentally (e.g. Benford and Snow 2000), as either a pre-existing resource that movements drew upon (Gamson 1996) or as another outcome of mobilization. The intervention of New Social Movement Theory offered a different approach to collective action by looking instead at movements that aimed to transform not the state but rather culture and society. A key component of this shift in theorizing is the study of identity formation in social movements as an end in itself.

In his discussion of collective identity, Alberto Melucci (1988) notes that collective identity is not only an outcome or byproduct of mobilization but is also the actual priority, the very core, of mobilization. Melucci advocates for scholarship that focuses specifically on the ongoing negotiations and interactions that form collective identity as an active and dynamic process. Similarly, Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) analyze the processes by which people build a collective self-understanding, focusing on the difference between a rigid, stable state of being and the acts that create and constitute that construct. Following these scholars, this paper focuses on the acts that create and maintain a collective sense of identity⁸ in

⁸ Though Brubaker and Cooper differentiate between the “being” and the “doing” of identity by referring to the former as “identity” and the latter as “identification,” I use their analysis but shed their vocabulary. In this paper, I use the term “identity” to refer to the ongoing, repeated and interactive work, both practices and beliefs, that creates the category we call “identity.” I see identity as an active, ongoing process and not a state of being.
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an ongoing, dynamic manner, looking at the movement actors' interactions, relationships and emotional investments (Melucci 1988) as sources for the creation of collective identity.

In his work on Islamism in Turkey, Cihan Tugal (2009) also places the construction of identity and transformation of everyday life in the center of his analysis while offering a critical intervention into social movement theory. The current consensus on social movement theory is still largely in two opposing camps: one studies movements that target the state and work to transform institutions (the Political Opportunity and Resource Mobilization models); the other (New Social Movements Theory [NSM]) looks at movements that target society through the transformation of identity and culture. While the state-centered movement theory does not offer sufficient space or tools to study the importance of meaning-making and everyday life as key components in a social movement, NSM theory does not allow for the investment or role of the state in shaping those identity practices or cultural transformations. Tugal (2009) offers a bridge model: his "hegemonic approach" looks at the ways in which movements that transform identity actually also engage with and alter the state. He focuses on the "reorganization of everyday practices" that are identity-making practices, such as prayer, social networks, and (gendered) access to space, to show how the Islamist reshaping of these practices is "interwoven with the transformation of the state" (429; emphasis in the original). It is through the reshaping or reorganizing of these everyday, identity-producing practices that the Islamist movement engages with and ultimately changes the state.

Through his hegemonic model, Tugal offers a way to study the construction of identity as an integrated social movement process that aims to both shape cultural norms and practices and, through those practices, transform the state. His model allows for studying mobilization through formal institutional channels as well as through informal networks and the shared meanings that

social movement actors create, with an understanding that mobilization involves both the constitution of people as social movement actors as well as the acts they undertake together in a movement (445).

This paper uses Tugal's model but applies it to a different context. In this application, Jewish institutions target American Jews, who are not Israeli citizens,⁹ and mobilize them not to *transform* the Israeli state but to *strengthen* it, through both direct support and lobbying the American government. In both the Turkish and the Jewish cases, daily practices, the creation of norms and the organization of everyday life are used to *engage* the state, either for transformation or strengthening. While the theory applies to these Jewish institutions in general, this paper looks at the specific ways these practices work on the ground in the Bay Area.

Working in networks of linked organizations, funders, and programs, these Jewish institutions operate within a context of decreasing Jewish attachment to both the state of Israel and to formal Jewish institutions.¹⁰ These organizations are the institutional homes for collective Jewish life in the Bay Area and the social movement actors in this model. The dominant organizations are the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation (JCF), the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) and the San Francisco Jewish Community Center (JCC). Each of these organizations is at the core of the network of Jewish community organizations in the Bay Area, around the country and internationally. The JCF is the central fundraising body that provides financial support for Jewish-organized social services, educational institutions and programs, and

⁹ By law, the state of Israel considers every Jew a potential citizen. Israel's "Law of Return" (1950) states that "Every Jew has the right to immigrate to the country." (http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2001/8/The%20Law%20of%20Return-%201950)

¹⁰ See the 2004 *Jewish Community Study*, funded and conducted by the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties (<http://www.sfjcf.org/aboutjcf/localcommunity/study/>). The report is entitled "2004 Jewish Community Study," though it was published in 2005. I will refer to it as the 2004 study.

Israel-related programs and contributions.¹¹ The JCC (as with the Jewish community centers throughout the Bay Area) is a Federation grantee and the central address for Jewish programming and events. The JCRC, also a Federation grantee, serves as the public face of the organized Jewish community, maintaining formal and informal ties to government and non-Jewish communities in the broader Bay Area region. The JCRC calls itself the “central public affairs arm” of the Bay Area Jewish community¹² and is one of 140 Jewish Community Relations Councils in the United States, all united under one umbrella organization.¹³

These institutions, and especially the JCF, interface with the Israeli government in multiple ways, including through partnerships with and fundraising for the state of Israel and regular collaboration with the Israeli consulate, with whom they produce Jewish and Israel-centered cultural, political and educational programming. While these organizations are *not* the Israeli state, they work hand-in-hand with the Israeli state on many levels, including working to promote and construct an Israel-centered American Jewish identity. Moreover, the identity they promote is not simply a passive or consumerist sense of affiliation but is rather characterized by active advocacy on behalf of the state and its interests. This active element of Israel-centered Jewish identity allows for nearly any choice a Jew makes, from whom to date to where to shop to what career to choose, to be read as having bearing on the state of Israel.

As these organizations aim to create a Jewish identity that revolves around a distinct closeness to and dependence on the state of Israel, they work through the creation of norms and practices that produce that identity as a way of life. One of the primary arenas for shaping lives is

¹¹ As the central Jewish fundraising and grant allocating organization in the Bay Area, the JCF gave out \$29 million in grants in 2009 and posted total assets worth \$1.4 billion.

¹² <http://www.jcrc.org/aboutjcrc.htm>

¹³ The umbrella organization is the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, established in 1944 by the umbrella body that links all Jewish Federations (the Jewish Federations of North America, then called the Council of Jewish Federations). http://engage.jewishpublicaffairs.org/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content_item_KEY=4147
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through prescriptions for family life, and particularly for romantic partnership in the form of marriage. Family structure and reproductive choices are critical components of both nation- and state-building (Yuval-Davis 2008 [1997], Kanaaneh 2002), with states and ethnic groups promoting endogamy or exogamy for the greater welfare of the group. As such their use among Jews in the United States (Corwin 2008, 2010; Cohen 2006) and in Israel (Kahn 2000, Enloe 2000, Yuval-Davis 2008[1997], Kanaaneh 2002) has been long observed and subject to scholarly attention. What is unique and noteworthy is the active, deliberate linking between family structure among Jews in the United States and their assigned obligations to the state of Israel. The rest of this paper will explore how this linking occurs.

Overview of American Jewish Identity: Threats to the Collective

Slogans such as “It’s your Israel”¹⁴ and “We are One,”¹⁵ widespread in the American Jewish organizational sphere, reflect the interlocking frames of global Jewish connection, interdependence, and connection to Israel that these organizations promote. The other dominant frame is that of threat of disappearance: Jews and Jewish life are always in grave danger: the state of Israel is under threat from Iran, from Gaza, from Lebanon, from the Palestinians, and from critics around the world who critique it.¹⁶ Moreover, in this worldview, Jewish community is under threat, as well, by the numbers of Jewish people who have formed families with non-Jews, and by the children of such unions who are less engaged with the state of Israel and with

¹⁴ <http://www.jewishfederations.org/index.aspx?page=1>

¹⁵ This phrase is a taken-for-granted assumption without a single source for citing. Abraham Foxman, executive director of the powerful Anti-Defamation League, addressed the ubiquity of this concept in an article exploring it, again without citation, here: http://www.adl.org/ADL_Opinions/Israel/060824_The+Forward.htm.

¹⁶ The Israeli government and the dominant Jewish organizations launched a joint new campaign, called “The Israel Action Network,” to fight critics of the Israeli state, called “delegitimizers.” (<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=192892>). The campaign began with a \$6 million dollar budget. Efforts to fight “delegitimization” have grown to include a special unit in the Israeli Military Intelligence to monitor left-wing organizations outside of Israel as part of monitoring “delegitimization” (<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/military-intelligence-monitoring-foreign-left-wing-organizations-1.350713>).

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Jewish institutions overall.¹⁷

The conflation of Jews and Israel (as in the first frame) means that a threat to one is a threat to the other, such that whom Jewish people marry can become a national security risk for the state of Israel. Fear over the threats to the state of Israel is a central tenet of collective Jewish identity and affects everyday practices, from the person with whom a Jew chooses to form a family to the news a person consumes. Through the cultivation of this threat, the dominant Jewish institutions seek to constitute Israel-attached Jews who are motivated to support and defend the state of Israel. To do so, they shape everyday life including centrally held beliefs and priorities in accordance with this threat. Questions of intermarriage (exogamy, or marriage outside the group) and assimilation illustrate this link well, both because reproduction is central to every nation-building project and because the specific Jewish history of persecution elevates questions of physical survival and fears of annihilation.

Israel in American Jewish Culture

While Israel was important to American Jews in the 1950s and 1960s, the 1967 war in which Israel defeated its multiple neighbors and captured substantial portions of land from Egypt, Syria and Jordan proved a watershed moment for American Jews (Woocher 1986). Following that war, Israel became the uncontested centerpiece of organized American Jewish society (Woocher 1986). It replaced religious observance as American Jews' central focus, becoming "the core of the religion of American Jews" (Liebman and Cohen 1990: 84). Symbolically and materially, the state of Israel represents concepts that are critically important to American Jews. American Jews came to support Zionism, the Jewish nationalist movement that

¹⁷ 2004 Jewish Community Study.
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mobilized and organized the Jewish settlement in Palestine that became the state of Israel, as both a safe haven for Jews in need of one and as an “application and extension” of their American values (Woocher 1986, Eisen 1986, Urofsky 1986, Sarna 1986). Just as American Jews believe in and promote “the promise of American life: freedom, equality, opportunity” in America (Sarna 1986), they believe they support those same values in Israel, in keeping with the legacy of U.S. Supreme Court Justice and Zionist leader Louis Brandeis, who in the early 20th century promoted the notion that Zionism and Americanism share the central tenets of social justice and democracy. Through this formulation, Zionism and Americanism both promote liberty and social justice, and being a good Jew means being a Zionist, which itself is mutually reinforcing with being a good American (Urofsky 1986, Sarna 1986, Woocher 1986).

From their unique perch as firmly embedded in America, where support for Israel makes them better Americans, American Jews’ support for Israel reflects and creates their collective sense of themselves specifically as Jews in two primary ways. First, it links them with other Jews around the world and, second, it links them with their history of Jewish persecution and vulnerability. Scholars agree that ties to other Jews around the world are very important to American Jews (Liebman and Cohen 1990, Woocher 1986), and that American Jews link their survival to the survival of Jews elsewhere and to the state of Israel (Sarna 1986).¹⁸ Israel embodies the ideal of Jewish survival in a threatening world; its emergence after the genocide of European Jewry is considered a symbol of Jewish rebirth and survival (Cohen and Eisen 2000, Woocher 1986).

Though migration to Israel is paramount to Zionism in general, American Zionism has developed such that the central commitment of American Zionists is supporting Israel without

¹⁸ Sheffer (2003) shows that symbolic and material connections with additional descendents of the same ethno-national group, including those who reside in different states, is a common and indeed central characteristic of ethno-national diaspora behavior.

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migrating there, which relatively few American Jews actually do (Woocher 1986, Liebman and Cohen 1990). Support for Israel is “part and parcel” of American Jewish consensus on the meaning of being Jewish (Liebman and Cohen 1990: 84), and American Jews show and facilitate their support for Israel through extensive fundraising for institutions within the state, political lobbying on behalf of American state-support for the Israeli state and military, and educational, social and cultural programs that include solidarity travel to the state. This support is extensive as well as expensive: AIPAC, the central lobby for the state of Israel, boasts an endowment worth \$100 million, 100,000 members and an annual \$1 million lobbying budget.¹⁹ In 2008, the Jewish Federations of North American, the primary fundraising and convening organizations in Jewish communities, allocated some \$170 million to the Jewish Agency for Israel, the quasi-governmental Israeli organization that is the primary conduit for philanthropic contributions to Israel.²⁰ Birthright Israel, a program that sends young American Jews on free trips to Israel to “strengthen participants’ personal Jewish identity and connection to the Jewish people,”²¹ has an annual budget of \$80-100 million, raised through private donors, the Jewish Federations of North America, and the Israeli government.²²

Hundreds of millions of philanthropic dollars a year continue to be funneled into building a collective Jewish identity that is defined by a sense of connection to a global entity called the Jewish people and a commitment to the state of Israel as a Jewish state. This is done through Sunday schools and summer camps, culture festivals and political lobbying, weekly newspapers and online magazines, trips to rebuild New Orleans and Birthright trips to Israel. The mission statements of every dominant communal organization in the country, from national organizations

¹⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/24/world/americas/24iht-lobby.4.12320195.html>.

²⁰ See the 2008 IRS 990 Form of the United Jewish Communities (renamed the Jewish Federations of North America in 2009), accessible on their website: <http://www.jewishfederations.org/section.aspx?id=31>.

²¹ <http://www.birthrightisrael.com/site/PageServer>.

²² http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/birthright_launches_50m_campaign_cuts_trips_20090211/.

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like the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, and religious councils²³, to nationally-affiliated but locally run Jewish Federations and Jewish Community Relations Councils, all proclaim their – and by extension, American Jews’ – dedication to a strong and secure Jewish state of Israel.

Yet if 1967 was a watershed year for American Jews with regard to Israel (Woocher 1986), the last 25 years have again witnessed changes in American Jews’ relationship with Israel. Multiple scholars write about the ways in which American Jews have become more independent of the dominant organizations, responding to political events – ranging from the 1982 invasion of Lebanon to the first and second Intifadas to the 2005 withdrawal from Gaza – with criticism for and distance from Israel, along with the creation of smaller organizations that criticize Israeli policy from both the left and the right (Rosenthal 2001, Sheffer 2003). Multiple studies over the last ten years have shown that American Jews have less attachment²⁴ to Israel than a few years prior, and simultaneously have less interest in or knowledge of the American Jewish community, and that these differences are largely generational (Cohen and Kelman 2010, 2007). These changes, generational and otherwise, have led to a fragmentation among American Jews with regard to Israel and thus a challenge to the consistency of Israel-centered collective identity.

These challenges have elicited responses from the dominant Jewish organizations, which serve as emissaries of the state of Israel, both by effect and intention. The chairman of the Jewish Agency, an organizational bridge between the Israeli government and the Jewish Federations, recently noted that “in the past we didn’t need to create commitment to Israel or to the Jewish

²³ These include Representing Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox and some, but not all, ultra-Orthodox sects (a small minority of Jews).

²⁴ Though “attachment” is the exact term used by researchers and community workers to describe Jewish feelings towards Israel, it is also an amorphous term. In this paper, I unpack the meaning of “attachment” to look at the ways in which Jewish organizations cultivate a specific orientation towards Israel: that Jewishness and dedication to Israel overlap, that Jews and Israel are always under threat and in danger, and that American Jews must defend Israel against criticism both in the larger public sphere and from other Jews.

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People – it was there in abundance. Today as we are faced with weakening connections, our challenge is to increase the identification of Jews to their People and to Israel.”²⁵ His statement affirms the dynamic and contested nature of Jewish identity while also making explicit the intentional effort to construct an Israel-centric Jewish identity. Anthropologist Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh (2002) notes that “contestation and negotiation are standard processes in the construction of identity” (57). Given that collective identity is always a work-in-progress, never stable or permanently established, the efforts to build Israel-centered Jewish identity against the backdrop of “weakening connections” or growing critique offer an excellent empirical case for this study of identity construction.

Bay Area: Promise and Threat

The Bay Area hosts a vibrant and large Jewish community, in which the dominant organizations, the Jewish Federations and the Jewish Community Relations Council, mold and direct the Jewish population in competition with the dual “threats” of an organized left²⁶ and high intermarriage rates. The Bay Area Jewish population is one of the largest in North America (Chertok, Sasson, and Saxe, et al. 2009), and it is growing; a few years younger, on average, than in the rest of the U.S., the Bay Area Jewish population doubled from 1986 – 2004.²⁷ The Bay Area is host to highly developed organized Jewish life, ranging from multiple dayschools, synagogues, and summer camps and cultural programs to extensive social services for the very

²⁵ Quoted in “Committee approves Jewish Agency move to refocus on Jewish identity” by Jacob Berkman, published on 4/29/2010. <http://blogs.jta.org/philanthropy/article/2010/04/29/2394579/committee-approves-jewish-agency-move-to-refocus-on-jewish-identity>. Accessed on May 10, 2010.

²⁶ A number of the dominant national Jewish organizations working for an “end to the occupation” were founded and are still based in the Bay Area, including Tikkun (est. 1986), and Jewish Voice for Peace (est. 1996). The New Israel Fund, which supports democracy and civil rights in Israel, was founded in the Bay Area in 1979.

²⁷ 2004 Jewish Community Study.

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young, very old, new immigrants and others.²⁸ Out-marriage among Bay Area Jews hovers around 56 percent, which is on par with the rest of the country.²⁹

With regard to Israel, the Bay Area is similar to the rest of the U.S. in that the vast majority of Jewish organizations declares an affiliation with Israel and sees Jewish attachment to Israel as a key component of Jewish identity. One element that differentiates the Bay Area from the rest of the country is the longterm existence of an organized, Jewish-identified left that publicly criticizes Israel. While these organizations range from those still generally accepted in the mainstream³⁰ to those that are not,³¹ it is the long-standing presence of an organized opposition with a substantial membership that claims adherence to Jewish values that sets the Bay Area apart.³²

At a fieldwork event in the fall of 2010, I met an Israeli foreign service officer working in the Israeli consulate, Nir, who compared his experience in the Bay Area (his first overseas post) with that of a friend who works in the Israeli consulate in Atlanta. His Atlanta-based friend, Nir said, spoke of how “enthusiastic” Atlanta Jews are about the work of the consulate. In the Bay Area, by contrast, Nir has been “very surprised by how much ... how can I put this diplomatically...*criticism* we face” (his emphasis). When I asked if he was referring to criticism from Bay Area Jews or the broader community, Nir said “both.” It is within the context of a more fragmented and critical community that the Jewish Federation and the JCRC seek to assert

²⁸ The main funders of these organizations are the Jewish Community Federations.

²⁹ 2004 Jewish Community Study.

³⁰ These include, for example, organizations such as the New Israel Fund, which dispenses some \$30 million a year to minority-rights, women’s equality and other progressive organizations in Israel, or the organization and magazine Tikkun, which aims to promote peace and social justice.

³¹ These include, for example, Jewish Voice for Peace, a national organization based in Oakland that seeks to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. The new JCF guidelines articulating appropriate perspectives on Israel marginalize Jewish Voice for Peace, which is not a Federation grantee. JCF grantees that collaborate with Jewish Voice for Peace risk their funding and relationship with the JCF and JCRC. See “Tough Love,” by Jan Jaben-Eilon, *Jerusalem Report*, June 7, 2010 for a discussion of the guidelines.

³² Other communities are home to local organizations that are critical of Israel, or to national organizations that promote progressive values in the U.S., but only the Bay Area has spawned multiple national organizations that identify as Jewish while departing from the traditional Jewish community on issues concerning Israel.

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themselves and their vision as dominant among Bay Area Jews, including their version of what constitutes active advocacy on behalf of the state of Israel.

In February 2010, the Federation made a bold move in support of its vision and published guidelines establishing which positions on Israel were unacceptable within what it calls “civil discourse.” The guidelines bar any person or organization who “undermin[es] the legitimacy” of a “secure, democratic Jewish state of Israel”³³ from receiving a Federation grant or participating in certain Federation programs, and they bar grantees from participating in programs on Israel alongside those organizations or individuals who fall outside the guidelines. Prominent Jews have called the guidelines a “litmus test.”³⁴ Claiming the mantle of authority to decide what counts as appropriate support for Israel, the San Francisco Federation’s guidelines confirm the ongoing influence of Jonathan Woocher’s (1986) claim that “American Jewry has only one heresy” that can lead to excommunication: “denial of support to the state of Israel” (77). The guidelines and the response, as well as the ongoing national and international media coverage attest to the active contestation over Israel in this community. The guidelines, along with the many other Israel-promoting efforts led by these organizations that work closely with the state of Israel, offer an ideal setting to study the ways in which identities are built towards serving the needs of a state.

Ethnographic Method

This paper is based on data gathered from more than 250 hours of participant observation research over 18 months in Jewish community settings in the Bay Area between 2008 and 2010.

³³ <http://sfjcf.wordpress.com/2010/02/18/policy/>

³⁴ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30649075/Forward-Ad-Prominent-Bay-Area-Jews-Warn-About-SF-Jewish-Federation-Guidelines-4-10>. *The Forward*, 4/28/2010.
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My aim was to discover the ways in which the central Jewish institutions articulate and produce a collective, Israel-centered identity. I utilized participatory observation to study how interactive settings allow access to the relational, dynamic and emotional nature of identity, which is never fixed and static but always responsive, reactive, and developing. In addition, I collected and analyzed the constant communiqués – newsletters, articles, email updates – that these organizations and their national and international partners disseminate, along with following local, national and international Jewish news media.

This paper draws on events and programs focused on Israel, Jewish history and Jewish community that were sponsored, hosted, or promoted by the JCF, the JCRC or the San Francisco JCC. I chose to attend community events for which no membership or philanthropic promise was required. With this strategy, I reproduced the experience of the majority of Bay Area Jews, who do not have formal affiliation with or membership in Jewish organizations.³⁵ I minimized my attendance at synagogue-based and religious events for the same reason.

At each event, I sought to understand how the organizers and presenters portrayed Israel and Jewishness and how the participants or audience accepted, rejected and contested those portrayals. I openly declared that I was in attendance for research purposes and visibly took fieldnotes when doing so was not disruptive.³⁶ I mainly observed goings-on and my primary interaction with others was one-on-one or in small groups, where I held casual conversations with people about what brought them to the events and their relationships to the organizations. Sometimes I asked participants questions about their relationships to Israel. As an American Jew who grew up closely affiliated with organized Jewish life, I entered the field familiar with Jewish community structure. Also, I am considered a young Jew and thus am included in the target

³⁵ 2004 Jewish Community Study, p. 77.

³⁶ To my recollection, the only time I did not take open fieldnotes was at Holocaust memorial events, when I refrained out of respect for the mourners and commemorators and in accordance with the program.

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audience for many programs that aim to cultivate future donors and community leaders.

Cultivating Identity and Establishing Threat³⁷

It was in early 2009 that the Israeli Consul General told a room of Bay Area Jews that “*The number one threat [to Israel] is the assimilation of American Jews. Not more anywhere than the Bay Area.*” A few months later, the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office and the Jewish Agency³⁸ debuted an advertisement³⁹ on Israeli television, as part of a project with Masa, a program that promotes longterm (often year long) trips to Israel for young Jews.⁴⁰ The advertisement shows fliers with names and faces of young people, like “missing persons” fliers, affixed in public, urban places – a train station, a telephone poll - while a somber voiceover in Hebrew explains that “more than 50 percent of young people outside of Israel assimilate and are lost to us.” The fliers are primarily in English (with a couple in Russian), naming missing people with stereotypical American Jewish names like “Joel Fine” and “Josh Feldman,” showing that the population under discussion is American Jews. In using the 50 percent figure, the advertisement was clearly referring to the rate of intermarriage, and not to other processes of assimilation,⁴¹ such as adopting the host society’s cultural patterns or entering the host society’s dominant institutions.⁴² The voiceover continues, requesting that Israelis who know Jews abroad get in touch with Masa and “together, we’ll strengthen their bond to Israel so that we don’t lose

³⁷ At the risk of sounding deterministic or instrumentalist, this paper looks at the efforts of the organizational leadership and policy to cultivate identity without specifically discussing the ways in which individual Jews negotiated with those efforts. Those “bottom-up” processes, including an analysis of how the informants in this data made meaning out of these events, are discussed in another paper.

³⁸ <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/news/watch-new-ad-campaign-targets-jews-abducted-by-intermarriage-1.8605>

³⁹ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPYGdIxIe4&feature=player_embedded

⁴⁰ Widely promoted on college campuses, Masa is a joint Israeli government – Jewish Agency organization, also supported by the Jewish Federation system. It was created in 2003.

⁴¹ In his classic 1964 text, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins*, Milton Gordon (1964) organizes and analyzes different stages of assimilation, of which intermarriage is a key component. In her discussion of assimilation, which draws on Gordon’s analysis, Paula Hyman (1995) notes that “The end point of assimilation is the dissolution of the minority by biological merger with the majority through intermarriage” (13).

⁴² Adopting the host society’s cultural patterns and entering its dominant institutions, which are considered positive developments, are widespread practices that would not require a government-driven campaign.

them.” The ad frames intermarriage as an abductor who kidnaps young Jews, and Masa as the rescuer who saves them. The Masa slogan at the end of the ad reads “Masa: one year in Israel, life-long love.” Ostensibly, the life-long love is for Israel, but it might just as well be for the Jewish partner every Jew should have.

Masa is billed as the post-Birthright program for young Jews who want to return to Israel for a substantial length of time after completing Birthright, the ten day, all expenses paid trip to Israel for Jews age 18-26.⁴³ Using travel to Israel as an intervention into diaspora Jewish identity (Kelner 2010), Birthright was created by Jewish philanthropists, the Jewish Federations of North America and the Israeli government as a well-funded, highly-coordinated response to concerns over loss of Jewish identity in the diaspora.⁴⁴ Birthright connects the dots of Israel-centered Jewish identity; as scholars who study Birthright put it, “The trips, both covertly and overtly, create links between the major threats to Jewish existence in recent decades – the Holocaust, the Arab-Israeli conflict, assimilation, and intermarriage – and Israel as a response to these threats” (Chazan and Saxe 2008: 49).

Since it was established ten years ago, more than 250,000 young Jews from all over the world have been on Birthright trips; the vast majority of these youth are from North America. New infusion of funds from the Israeli government and Jewish philanthropists may push Birthright to a “tipping point” in the next few years, such that “by 2013, more than half of all Jews in the world between the ages of 18 and 26 will have had a 10-day free trip to Israel.”⁴⁵ While fear of assimilation inspired the creation of the program, its effectiveness as a kind of

⁴³ http://www.birthrightisrael.com/site/PageServer?pagename=about_main

⁴⁴ Birthright is extensively promoted by many Jewish organizations, including *Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life* which recruits for the program on college campuses. According to extensive coverage in Jewish media as well as personal observations made at the 2010 Jewish Federations of North America General Assembly (November 2010, New Orleans), funding and promoting Birthright is considered one of the top priorities for Jewish philanthropy.

⁴⁵ http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new_york/boost_birthright_funding_tipping_point_seen
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inoculation against intermarriage has been established as its primary, statistically-proven effect. Surveys show that Birthright alumni are far more likely to marry Jews or to believe that marrying a Jew is important than young Jews who do not participate in the program (Saxe, Phillips and Sasson 2010, 2009). In the words of intermarriage scholar Lila Berman Corwin (2010), “Birthright, like other organized tours to Israel, may also function as a *shadchan*, or matchmaker” for its young travelers (104).⁴⁶ As the Israeli Consul General joked at an event I attended one night in San Francisco, Birthright is the “*cure for everything, from intermarriage to global warming.*”

In addition to fighting intermarriage, Birthright also illustrates the link between holding an Israel-oriented identity and being an advocate for the state. Shaul Kelner (2010), who has conducted extensive research on Birthright since it began, notes the political implications of Birthright tours, explaining that

The start of the second intifada in September 2000 led to a new framing of the program’s purposes. Motivated originally by concerns over weakening Jewish identity in diaspora, Taglit⁴⁷ increasingly came to be spoken of as a means of fostering political support for Israel in its intensifying conflict with the Palestinians (43).

In this way, the Israel-centered Jewish identity that this program, and through it the Israeli state and dominant Jewish organizations behind it, aims to create is not a passive, consumerist sense of identity but rather an active, advocacy-focused identity. This advocacy is specific and bounded. Recently, Birthright rejected a potential trip-organizing partnership with J Street U, the campus-based wing of the organization J Street, which boasts of being “pro-Israel, pro-peace” and aims to support Israel by promoting a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

⁴⁶ Corwin’s (2010) use of the word *shadchan*, which means *matchmaker* in both Hebrew and Yiddish, reflects the use of shared language to unify ethnic community. It also illustrates one of the points of her article, which is that institutions (funded by Jews) have stepped into roles previously held by parents (such a matchmaker). Corwin argues that Jewish institutions, including organized Israel travel programs, stepped in to remedy the problem of intermarriage, which Jewish leadership thought parents were not doing enough to fight.

⁴⁷ Taglit is the Hebrew name for Birthright.

advocating for a Jewish and democratic state of Israel and the creation of a “viable Palestinian state.”⁴⁸ Recently, Birthright has run trips sponsored by AIPAC⁴⁹ (the primary political lobby on behalf of the Israeli government) and StandWithUs⁵⁰ (a national advocacy group widely considered strongly rightwing for their support of Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank).

This sketch of Birthright shows the particular contours of how the Jewish organizational world formulates Jewish identity based on Israel. It includes travel to Israel as an antidote to assimilation and specifically to intermarriage, embraces identity-as-advocacy, and seeks the exclusion of the leftwing and promotion of the rightwing. Its starting point sees Jewish existence and identity as under grave threat from the inside and the outside, linking “the Holocaust, the Arab-Israeli conflict, assimilation, and intermarriage” and posits “Israel as a response to these threats” (Chazan and Saxe 2008: 49). In this formulation, continued Jewish existence and the viability of the Israeli state rely on American Jewish in-marriage.

Existing data on intermarried Jews shows that though many are actively involved with Jewish life,⁵¹ by and large intermarried people and their children demonstrate significantly lower attachment to Israel than their non-intermarried peers. The most recent survey of Bay Area Jews carried out on behalf of the JCF and completed in 2004, showed that children of intermarried parents are less likely to describe themselves as emotionally attached to Israel than the children of two Jewish parents (62% compared to 80%) and that “because so many Jews of interfaith parents are in the youngest age category, overall attachment to Israel is on the decline.”⁵² In this way, though the majority of all Jews claim attachment to Israel, the study – and the Jewish

⁴⁸ <http://jstreet.org/about/j-street-statement-principles/>

⁴⁹ <http://www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/JewishNews/Article.aspx?id=206732>

⁵⁰ http://www.standwithus.com/app/inews/view_n.asp?ID=828

⁵¹ Though active in Jewish life, intermarried Jews are active at a lower rate than non-intermarrieds or the children of two Jewish parents (National Jewish Population Survey 2000-1, Jewish Community Study [Bay Area] 2004).

⁵² *Ibid*, 111.

Federation, which sponsored it – casts not only assimilation but specifically intermarriage as a threat to the close relationship between Bay Area Jews and the state of Israel.

Preeminent Jewish sociologist Steven Cohen explains the link between intermarriage and decreasing attachment to Israel: “Intermarriage reflects and promotes departure from all manner of Jewish ethnic ‘groupiness,’ of which Israel attachment is part.”⁵³ According to Cohen, Israel attachment is a key part of Jewish identity, which intermarriage undermines. The notion that intermarriage threatens Jews and Israel is well-established in sociological scholarship on Jews, which is widely reported in the Jewish media and shared among Jewish elites.

Yet why is diminished attachment to Israel an actual “threat” to Israel, as the Consul General said or the Masa ad illustrates? What is at risk is not just a kind of emotional attachment to Israel but rather the concrete behaviors and practices that such attachment is supposed to facilitate. American Jews are proscribed to love Israel and to serve its interests as donors (to the Federation⁵⁴), as defenders (in the public sphere), and as political actors (voting for approved candidates and lobbying on Israel’s behalf). During his talk at the Federation’s Young Adult Division program that I attended, the Consul General invited the crowd to help Israel by doing what’s called “hasbara,” or public relations for the state of Israel. He explained that hasbara is one of his main tasks, saying, “*We’re very misunderstood, moreso in Berkeley...If we’re misunderstood, that means that we can make ourselves understood. You can help.*” How can American Jews help? Short of making their lives in Israel, he implored the crowd to “*be good educated young Jews*” and he commended the efforts of Bluestar PR, a local organization dedicated to promoting Israel’s image on college campuses and in public places throughout the

⁵³ http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/21/the_special_relationship?page=0,1. Accessed 1/19/11.

⁵⁴ Indeed, before the Consul General spoke at the Federation that night, I overheard him ask the Federation staffperson who this group was. She told him, “They’re young adults who are in this program to be introduced to the community; our aim is to introduce them to the community and turn them into donors, hopefully.”
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U.S., as an example of the kind of support we could offer Israel. How can American Jews help? By marrying Jews and proactively serving as representatives of the state of Israel in the broader American public. Intermarriage and assimilation matter not just because Jews must feel attached to Israel, but because attachment to Israel means active advocacy on its behalf. From the perspective of the Israeli government, when American Jews become distanced from Israel – much more likely when they intermarry – Israel does not just lose passive supporters but rather active donors and representatives in America.

How does the formal Jewish community, the dominant Jewish organizations, engage with this view? My fieldwork suggests that the leadership formally promotes the imperative to marry Jewish and perpetuates, either implicitly or explicitly, the stigmatization of mixed marriages.⁵⁵ The premiere young adult program that I attended at the Federation was simultaneously an entrance into the organized Jewish community and a singles event, as I learned from numerous women who suggested I retire to the bar with the rest of the participants following the program, week after week, because “*that’s where the real mingling happens,*” as one put it. Non-Jews were kept out; on the first night of the program, I learned that non-Jews, including non-Jewish partners of Jewish attendees, were not welcome in the program. Israel was a constant theme: it was part of the decorations on the walls, a high priority for the Federation, a stand-alone topic for one of our meetings, and integrated by leadership and participants into every other meeting. On the first night of the program, we were split into small groups and given an ice-breaker, part of which was answering the question “what I like about being Jewish.” Several of the people in my small group answered that they liked to travel to Israel. Later, when we talked about Jewish values, Israel was included in the list.

⁵⁵ While many outreach programs to intermarried families exist, their existence does not nullify the active promotion of in-marriage and stigmatization of out-marriage.
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Simultaneously, intermarriage was a dominant subject. We listened to a talk by a local social scientist, during which he explained that three factors form group identity: blood (genealogy), behavior (rituals and practices), and beliefs. He asked the group about each of these factors, eliciting answers for what made up Jewish beliefs, behavior and blood. When he raised the issue of blood, he touched on the sensitive topic of Jewish descent. According to traditional Jewish law, Jewishness is passed on through matrilineal descent. In the last few decades, the Reform⁵⁶ and Reconstructionist⁵⁷ movements have formally recognized patrilineal descent as well, while Orthodox and Conservative Judaism have not.

When he raised the issue of “blood,” the social scientist asked “according to blood, who is a Jew?” No one responded. From my fieldnotes:

After a moment, the social scientist said, who in here was born to Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers? A number of people raised their hands. Not that many, probably a handful max, at least as far as I could see. And someone in the back said, “Please leave.” In a joking voice, but still, it was said.

Hundreds of thousands of people are descended from Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, and many of these identify as Jews. Yet they are vulnerable to being pointed out and, as I observed at the Federation event, symbolically cast out. In the event at the Jewish Community Federation that night, none of the organizers, who represented the established, centralized Jewish community, intervened, defended the children of intermarriage, or suggested that joking about asking them to leave was unacceptable. That intermarriage is actually dangerous and threatening to Jewish people becomes clear

⁵⁶ The majority of American Jews who belong to synagogues belong to Reform synagogues. (National Jewish Population Survey 2000-1, p. 7.)

⁵⁷ Reconstructionist movements recognize patrilineal descent with caveats: the parents must commit to raising the children as Jewish, must circumcise boys, and children must fulfill the requirements of becoming a bar or bat mitzvah or confirmation. (“Resolution on Patrilineal Descent,” *the Reconstructionist*, Volume 34, No. 8, May 31, 1968.)

in the next excerpt from my fieldnotes, written the same evening (at the first event).

Following the social scientist's talk, we were given a set of questions to discuss in our small groups, with a member of the organizing committee facilitating our discussion. The questions made clear that issues of in- and out-marriage are critical to this community; one of the first questions was whether we intended to marry a Jew. Following is an excerpt of my fieldnotes from that conversation. Michael was a participant in his twenties, a recent college graduate who works in hi-tech. Molly, who also works in hi-tech, was a member of the organizing committee for this event series and facilitated the conversation.

Michael said that if he had children with a non-Jewish woman, his children would be Jewish.

Molly said: "Your mother has to be Jewish, or else you convert; otherwise, you're not a Jew. Religion is a commitment to the future, to the next 400 years. It's not just about us. Holocaust deaths were because they were Jewish. We lost people in my family. Don't spit on their deaths."

Michael said: "It's hard to have a conversation with the term 'spitting on Holocaust deaths.'"

Molly said: "Then you can't handle the conversation." And sort of turned away from him.

I said something to the extent of: "I think he was making a substantive point, not saying he couldn't have the conversation."

Molly said: "If he can't handle the Holocaust, he can't handle it."

Later in the evening, the small groups rejoined each other for a large group discussion, part of which focused on why to have a Jewish spouse. One woman, also a member of Federation leadership, said "*marrying Jewish keeps the people going...if you don't, you're killing off the people.*" Molly nodded when the woman said this.

According to these women's logic, the genocide of European Jews justifies the

imperative that Jewish men marry Jewish women who will bear children who are Jewish under every rabbinic law. Each individual Jew is accountable to the Jewish collective because of the Nazi genocide. This association is very similar to the images presented in the television advertisement by Masa that showed intermarried young people as “missing persons”:

intermarriage is “killing off the people,” and, therefore, threatening Israel. While neither Molly nor the other woman brought up Israel in their defense of in-marriage, the invocation of the Holocaust is an implicit reference to Israel. Israel embodies the ideal of Jewish survival in a threatening world and is considered *the* symbol of Jewish rebirth after the Holocaust (Woocher 1986). The Holocaust represents the nadir of Jewish life, while Israel is taken to represent its zenith. A reference to one indicates the other.

These field observations show the linkage between threats to Jewish life: Jewish disappearance because of the Holocaust and Jewish disappearance because of intermarriage, either because of the loss of Jews in number or because the loss of Jewish support for Israel endangers Israel. The fear is that if American Jews intermarry, Israel could disappear. And if Israel disappears, American Jews – and Jews around the world – are threatened. This is the master narrative that links the individual American Jewish person to the state of Israel. This link is animated by stigma: in both of the examples above, the leadership (both lay and scholarly) asked pointed questions about intermarriage, and their questions repeatedly provoked answers that stigmatized intermarriage and attempted to shame those who would consider it.

Israel and Marrying Jews: Making the Link Common Sense

In the fall of 2010, I attended a session entitled “Israel Advocacy Training” with a trainer brought to and around the U.S. from Israel by the Israeli Embassy in the U.S. The purpose of his

visit was to conduct Israel advocacy trainings on college campuses and in community and national organizations. The training events illustrate the partnership between the Israeli government and Jewish organizations. In the Bay Area, the trainer conducted events at the Federation, a college Hillel (the Jewish Center on campuses), the Jewish community high school, and another community organization. His events were co-sponsored by the Israeli consulate, the JCRC, the Jewish Community Federation, and groups dedicated just to Israel advocacy, including StandWithUs and Bluestar PR. The trainer's website notes that he is a "favored speaker for Jewish Federations" and "has helped train a new generation of Israeli diplomats as well as Israel's army and air force spokespeople." During the training I attended, he modeled successful communication techniques and role played answers to challenging questions that Israel advocates often face in public events and in the media, such as "how do you justify Israel building settlements, taking [Palestinians'] land and their water?" and "how do you justify bombing aid workers, children?" The crowd, about 60 people ranging in age from high school through late middle age, eagerly engaged in the exercises and practiced their advocacy skills, defending Israel and justifying every act the trainer offered.

The trainer repeatedly spoke of Israel and Jews as a family and Israel as home to all Jews. He said that "*at the end of the day, the best people to do this advocacy are you. You. You speak the lingo. Israeli PR. It's us. It's our Israel. Our home. Some people live at home, some live away from home.*" One audience member, a professional Israel advocate, spoke of the challenges to Israel advocacy in the Bay Area environment. The trainer had already referenced the issue, noting that "*Israel is lost in the so-called liberal agenda*" and that this is especially apparent in the Bay Area, known for its liberalism. The audience member said,

"In our area, so much of the problem is from the Jewish community. For instance...at my

synagogue a few years ago, on Rosh Hashana,⁵⁸ the rabbi said, ‘some of you have asked where we are on Israel. We stand with Israel!’ Fifty people applauded and 500 people hissed. That’s at a synagogue just across the bay. Here, it’s more of a civil war.”

In his answer, the trainer said,

“where I draw the line is in that reaction [to the rabbi’s pronouncement]. What they don’t realize is that we’re all family. Israel is the home of the Jewish people. Sometimes Israel is annoying, like family is annoying. To the younger members of the audience, aren’t your parents sometimes annoying? And to the older, aren’t your children sometimes annoying? We’re family. At the end of the day, there’s only one Israel.”

While the trainer allowed for the idea that Israel is sometimes “annoying” – that is, one need not like everything it does – he was also asserting, just like the rabbi in the synagogue across the bay, that there are only two choices on Israel: one is either with it or against it. And according to the trainer, Jews must be with Israel, because Israel and Jews are family.

The trainer referred to intermarriage, as well. He told a story about speaking with a Birthright group comprising gay and lesbian travelers, saying of their sexuality, *“Really cool, in my opinion. There’s too much hatred in the world to worry about how people are loving each other.”* Then he continued, bringing in the personal, saying, *“If my kid were to come home and say he’s gay, I’d say great, I want to meet your partner, and I have just one question: Is he Jewish?”* If the trainer saw the inconsistency in his statements – that “there’s too much hatred to worry about how people are loving each other” but his child should only date a Jew – he did not share that with the audience.

As he said *“I have just one question,”* a middle-aged woman sitting two seats away from me, a woman active in Israel advocacy, said at the same time as the trainer, *“Is he Jewish?”* In echoing the trainer’s sensibilities, the woman reiterated the ubiquity of the sentiment this question contains. The story was kitsch; a classic stereotype of the Jewish parent is that their first question with regard to a child’s choice of partner is whether or not the partner is Jewish. In this

⁵⁸ Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year, a day when many Jews attend synagogue.
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example, the trainer opposed two stigmatized forms of partnership to illustrate how ethnocentrism trumps sexual orientation. Behind the stereotype and the kitsch is the taken-for-granted assumption that a Jew is supposed to partner with another Jew and that parents should enforce that rule.

The trope of parents pressuring their children to marry Jewish was common in other parts of the fieldwork as well. During the first night of the Federation young adult event, when we discussed whether or not we wanted to marry Jewish partners, we were asked what the role of our upbringing had to do with our feelings about marrying a Jew. One woman said that intermarriage was the norm in her family and she had never dated a Jew until recently; her story points to the long history of intermarriage in the United States. Two people at the table said that they were raised to marry Jews but whether or not they did so would depend on circumstance. Their answers reflect contemporary Jewish life, in which half of the Jews who marry wed non-Jews. One person, Dana, referenced both Jewish vulnerability and community ties, saying, *“I’m from a very Jewish part of [Southern California], everyone is Jewish, I want to marry Jewish. My parents are immigrants and had to leave their countries because of being Jewish. It’s important.”* When it came the turn of one of the men around the table, Eli, Dana intervened and answered for him. She cheerfully said *“his parents will slaughter him if he doesn’t marry a Jew.”* Eli laughed and agreed with that statement, and then both Molly (the facilitator) and Dana said the same was true for them. Eli, Dana and Molly each come from traditional Jewish families that are donors to and involved with Jewish community. Their shared narrative of parental expectation and penalty shows how parents instill and enforce their children’s obligations to the nation. Together with the examples from the Israel advocacy training, we see the commonsense overlap between the Jewish family, a Jew’s family, and advocacy for the state of Israel.

Conclusion: Creating Family, Preserving the Nation

When Cihan Tugal studied how Islamism in Turkey mobilizes people and gains power, he discovered that the Islamist movement approaches the state by addressing daily life; that is, through the reshaping of everyday practices, the Islamist movement seeks to transform the Turkish state. This paper extends this model to show how it works in a diasporic community, where it is not citizens who seek to approach the state but rather the broader constituency of the imagined community (Anderson 1991) of that state. Moreover, unlike the Islamists, the organized American Jewish community looks to bolster the state of Israel, not to transform it.

The state of Israel, too, turns to American Jews to operate as its emissaries and advocates. The defining frame is danger, in the form of perceived threats to the state of Israel and to the Jewish people as a whole. The dominant metaphor is of the nation as a family, such that the shaping of any Jewish family has implications for the nation and carries deep personal, emotional, historical and political implications. Together, this frame and metaphor structure the practice of collective Jewish identity, which manifests itself in the ongoing work of drawing boundaries between Jews and others and making choices that either enhance or threaten the nation. As the American Jewish establishment endeavors to ensure its vision of a preferred Jewish future and to proactively defend the state of Israel – two goals that are deeply intertwined – it perpetuates the notion that intermarried Jews are an enemy within.

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