Wesleyan University The Honors College

Chulent:
Post-Hasidic Explorations and Jewish Modernities

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements……………………………………………..i

Glossary…………………………………………………...ii

Introduction……………………………………………….1

Chapter One: *Modernity, Progress, and the Figure of the Hasid in the American Jewish Imagination*………………………….25

Chapter Two: *Playing In Jewish*………..……………………81

Conclusion……………………………………………...122

Appendix………………………………………………….127

Bibliography………………………………………………128

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Glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish Terms Used

- The classification of language is sometimes ambiguous, as Hasidim use many Hebrew terms as part of spoken Yiddish.

- The orthography is *not* in compliance with YIVO standards. It reflects as closely as possible the most common pronunciations of these words as they were spoken to me.

- In the main text, non-English words are italicized and defined in a footnote on their first occurrence; thereafter, they appear in roman with no comment.

(*Aron Kodesh*). Hebrew: literally "holy cabinet." Torah scrolls are kept in it.

(*Ba'alei-Tshuvah*). Hebrew: literally, those who return or repent. Refers to people who did not grow up keeping *mitzvos* but are now at some stage of doing so, typically in compliance with the *halakhic* standards of the community that they are trying to join.

(*Beis-medrash*). Yiddish and Hebrew: study room. Orthodox shuls generally have a beis-medrash for smaller services, conversation, and lessons.

(*Bokhurs*). Yiddish: young, unmarried men.

(*Botei-medrashim*). Hebrew: plural of "beis-medrash."

(*Frum*).Yiddish: Orthodox, observant of traditional Jewish law. Also frequently pronounced "Frim."

(*Frumkeit*). Yiddish: Frum-ness.

(*Gut Shabbos*). Yiddish: literally, Good Sabbath. Used as a greeting or farewell during the Sabbath and the days leading up to it.

(*Halakhic*). Judeo-English: an adjective, meaning "pertaining to Jewish law *halakhah*."

(*Hasidish*). Yiddish: Hasidic.

(*Heimish)*. Yiddish: homey. "Heimish" is also a self-identifying term used by Jews whose Jewishness (including Yiddishkeit) is very similar to that of Hasidim, and who may or may not send their children to Hasidish yeshivahs, but do not associate with a particular Hasidic court or follow a particular *rebbe*.

(*Heimishkeit*). Yiddish: noun form of heimish, “homeyness.”

(*Hekhsher*). Hebrew: certification that a food product is kosher, generally imparted by a particular rabbi or group of rabbis.

(*Khinukh*). Hebrew and Yiddish: education or upbringing.

(*Kiddush*). Hebrew: blessings over wine and bread made on the Sabbath and holidays.

(*Litvish*). Yiddish: literally, Lithuanian. Used somewhat interchangeably with *Yeshivish*.

(Livush). Yiddish and Hebrew: literally, dress. Used to refer to a wide range of Hasidish, Heimish, and Yeshivish styles of dress, holding in common a black yarmulke, black slacks, and a white, collared shirt.

(*Loshn Koydesh*). Hebrew and Yiddish: literally “holy language,” referring particularly to Hebrew or Aramaic.

(*Lulav*.) Hebrew: palm branch that some Jews wave on the fall harvest holiday of *Sukkos*.

(*Mekhitza*). Hebrew: a physical divider that separates men and women in the synagogue.

(*Minyan*). Hebrew: the quorum of ten adult males required to conduct certain parts of services at Orthodox shuls.

(*Misnagdic)*. Yiddish: adjective form of “*Misnagid*.” See below.

(*Misnagdim*). Yiddish and Hebrew: the “opponents” of Hasidim, whose power base in Eastern Europe was in the north, particularly Lithuania. In contemporary times, it is occasionally used interchangeably with “Yeshivish” or “Litvish,” particularly when drawing a contrast between the described individual or group and Hasidim.

(*Mitzvos*). Hebrew: positive and negative commandments which stem from the Torah and rabbinic literature.

(*Nekumah*). Hebrew and Yiddish: revenge.

(*Niggunim*). Hebrew: Melodies for prayers, sometimes wordless.

(*Peyos*). Hebrew and Yiddish: The side-curls worn by some Jewish men in order to honor the Biblical commandments in Leviticus chapters 19 and 21 to not “round the corners of your heads or mar the corners of your beard.”

(*Pirim Shpiel).* Yiddish: Pirim play, a dramatic piece performed by some Jews, including most Hasidim, as part of the night of revelry that accompanies the holiday of Pirim (also pronounced “Purim”).

(*Rav*). Hebrew: literally “rabbi,” often used as the title for a prominent non-Hasidic, Orthodox authority.

(*Rebbe*).Yiddish: leader of a Hasidic sect. Rebbes often have extremely broad powers over many facets of their followers’ lives, and are considered to be particularly holy and knowledgeable.

(*Shiur*). Hebrew: a lesson or talk.

(*Shofar*). Hebrew: Ram’s horn blown primarily on the holiday *Rosh HaShanah*.

(*Sholem Aleikhem*). Hebrew and Yiddish: A standard greeting meaning literally “Peace on you.”

(*Shoymer toyreh u’mitzvos).* Hebrew: literally, guard the Torah and its commandments; used at times interchangeably with “frum.”

(Shul). Yiddish: synagogue.

(*Smikhah*). Hebrew: rabbinic certification.

(*Tallis Katan*). Yiddish and Hebrew: a fringed, four-cornered shawl worn as an undershirt during the day. There is a Levitical injunction to have fringes on garments with corners.

(*Takeh*).Yiddish: really. Used generally as an intensifier.

(*Tefillin*). Hebrew: phylacteries. To “lay tefillin” is a calk from the Yiddish, and means simply to put them on in the ritual fashion, around the arm, hand, and fingers, as well as on top of the head.

(*Tsnius*). Hebrew and Yiddish: rules of women’s modesty, particularly those related to appearance.

(Tsniusdikally). Judeo-English: in keeping with the modesty rules of *snius*.

(*Vi heyst ir?*). Yiddish: what’s your name?

(*Vilna Gaon*). Proper name: 18th century founder of the Misnagdic movement, and is a revered rabbinic authority in contemporary Misnagdic and some other Orthodox circles.

(*Yerushalmis*). Yiddish: Jerusalemites.

(*Yeshivish*). Yiddish: adjective form of the noun *Yeshivah*, here refers to the mix of English, Yiddish, and loshn-koydesh spoken in non-Hasidic yeshivahs. (Also can be used to describe the people who speak it).

(*Zemiros*). Hebrew: ritual songs, in Hebrew, often sung socially after a meal.

Introduction

I: Chulent

This section is an account of one of the nights that I spent performing fieldwork in the Chulent community, based closely on the field notes that I wrote the following morning. As such, it represents my early, naïve take on the weekly social gathering, interpreting Chulent as a cultural safe-space for meetings between Jews who stem from many different points on the secular-religious continuum, with each person's placement clearly and accurately signaled by their appearance and language.

I.A: The Cigarette Smokers

It's 1:30 in the morning on September 20th, 2007 and the cigarette-smoking crowd is out in full force on 6th St. between 1st and 2nd avenues. They chatter endlessly, only pausing to smoke, taking several intense puffs at a time, then throwing themselves back into the ring of rapid-fire conversation, waving their cigarettes in abrupt, staccato gestures intended to set their fellows in their place. They talk about a variety of topics: the girls inside, the week behind them, the possibility of accepting

Misnagdic authorities like the Vilna Gaon[1]. The few hangers-on who aren't smoking are trying to keep their hands busy, not knowing what to do with them: scratching their bare forearms, gesturing, picking at the peeling paint of the fence that surrounds the *shul*.[2] It is an unusually homogenous group: everyone is young (in their 20s) and male, with short-cropped, dark hair and short *peyos*[3] that run only long enough to curl once or perhaps twice over their pale cheekbones. Most are clean-shaven, but a few sport short beards. They wear black trousers (maybe a few wore navy, hard to tell in the dark), leather belts with simple clasps; dull black leather shoes; short-sleeved, collared white shirts, with a bit of undershirt poking out (the top few buttons left undone, perhaps on account of the unnatural September heat or due to the night's revelry); all this rounded out with large, flat, black, velvet yarmulkes. They switch with ease between Yiddish and English, with a dash of *loshn koydesh*[4] thrown in.

I figure that they must be *Hasidish*,[5] considering their Southeastern European dialect of Yiddish, and that they're most likely from Borough Park, on account of the length of the peyos that only barely twist past the cheekbones and are not tucked behind the ear. I don't recognize anyone I'd talked to before—which is hardly unusual—so I open the fence's gate, walk down the four steps to the synagogue below, lifting my head up to give a general "*Sholem Aleikhem*"[6] to the smokers, and, after receiving a few noncommittal grunts in response, wrest open the heavy metal door and brace myself for the inevitable chaos within.

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[1] (*Misnagdic)*. Yiddish: adjective, pertaining to the group of Lithuanian Jews who reject the teachings of the Hasidic movement.

The Vilna Gaon was the 18th century founder of the Misnagdic movement, and is a revered rabbinic authority in contemporary Misnagdic and some other Orthodox circles.

[2] *(Shul)*. Yiddish: synagogue.

[3] (*Peyos*). Hebrew and Yiddish: The side-curls worn by some Jewish men in order to honor the Biblical commandments in Leviticus chapters 19 and 21 to not "round the corners of your heads or mar the corners of your beard."

[4] (*Loshn Koydesh*). Hebrew and Yiddish: literally "holy language," referring particularly to Hebrew or Aramaic.

[5] (*Hasidish*). Yiddish: Hasidic.

I.B: The Audience, The Dancers, and the Musicians

The majority of the folks here tonight are hanging out in the large social room. Some sit on the row of stiff diner-like couches along the wall to the left as one enters the room; the others, if they are not sitting, are dancing. Everyone watches the conga drummers and guitar players who sit in the far corner of the room, arranged in a loose arc facing their audience, blocking the swinging double doors that lead to the kitchen. The diner-booth crew is composed mainly of middle-aged men. One of the men is bare-headed, clean shaven, and wears a polo shirt and khakis, with thick, square glasses obscuring his blocky features. He doesn't look *frum* at all.[7] Another sits with his large pot-belly thrust out before him like a battle flag; it wiggles and waves every time he becomes agitated, warning of the tempest ahead. It's constrained to some extent by his collared, white shirt and a navy-blue, wool vest that matches his suit. He wears no tie. A full beard and long, curling peyos frame a wide, generous face, topped by a wide, flat yarmulke resting on buzzed hair. He's definitely a Hasid, judging by his peyos and vest; and my guess is that he, like the cigarette smokers, comes from Borough Park—but maybe it’s just because I’ve never seen a Williamsburg Hasid with his hat off. The two men engage in intermittent Yiddish conversation as they watch and listen to the musicians.

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[6] (*Sholem Aleikhem*). Hebrew and Yiddish: A standard greeting meaning literally "Peace on you."

[7] (*Frum*). Yiddish: Orthodox, observant of traditional Jewish law.

The dancers are more exciting to watch. Several sort of vibrate in place while intently gazing at the players, nervously jiggling their limbs to the beat. The others move like doped-out whirling dervishes, twirling their torsos and arms around and around without pause, but limply, without much focus or energy. This ambivalent movement is accentuated among the women, whose dress—long, colorful saris, light, sequined scarves, and beaded necklaces—rotate centrifugally with each spin. Their dreadlocked hair moves much like their jewelry: the degree of violence of their rises and falls are proportionate to the amount of enthusiasm devoted to a given twirl. The men among them have heavy, unkempt beards. These Jews appear to be crunchy, California types, into natural body oils and mysticism, intellectual followers of the late Hasidic mystic leader and musician, Shlomo Carlebach. They must be frum because the men wear yarmulkes, and much more tellingly, the women’s dress is in careful accordance with Orthodox rules of *tsnius*,[8] carefully arranged so that very little bare flesh shows: arms obscured to the wrist, ankles barely peeking out, not a hint of décolletage. I walk up among them and stop to watch the musicians and listen.

The guitar players are dressed similarly to the cigarette-smokers: short-sleeved white polo shirts, dark slacks, etc. Their faces, however, are different: none of them wears a beard, and more remarkably, none of them have peyos. They do have yarmulkes perched on top of their heads. These are smaller, stiffly conical and black, with a smooth finish to them. Odds are they're from the Flatbush Orthodox community, with those starchy-stiff yarmulkes and bare cheekbones. Considering the polo shirts, it's possible they're from the more traditional wing of the Yeshivah University crowd. One of them is singing *zemiros*[9] in Hebrew, with an Askenazi[10] accent. The song's beat is kept by two drummers. The drummers' long-sleeved, white shirts are rolled back to their elbows, and their long, curly peyos drape the side of their conga drums as they bend their heads intently over the instruments. On top of their heads I see large, flat, black velvet yarmulkes, and I can make out full beards decorating their cheeks. One of them lifts his head briefly, looks around for a bit, and perhaps recognizing me, flashes me an ecstatic smile before returning his gaze and attention to the work at hand. I'd met him a couple of weeks before. His name's Yoel and he comes down every Thursday night from Kiryas Joel, NY. If I hadn't already known that he's Satmar,[11] I probably would have made him for another Borough Park Hasid.

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[8] (*Tsnius*). Hebrew and Yiddish: rules of women’s modesty, particularly those related to appearance.

A tentative "Hello," comes from my left and I turn to meet the eyes of a very tall man who—in that first, incredibly brief moment in which we first see someone and make an instantaneous rush to judgment of their race, gender, beauty, amicability, threat, taste in politics, taste in music, taste in food, taste in humans, etc.—strikes me as homeless. It is probably due to his thick, matted beard, unwashed hair, and the deep circles under his eyes; his clothes are ragged at the edges, and his sandals have seen much better days. "Hi, how are you?" I reply. I am excited—the other homeless men I'd met here before had all been fascinating conversationalists. He introduces himself as "Matisyahu—or Matthew" and we talk for a while. It comes out that—as has happened to me many times at Chulent—my first impression was wildly off. He is not homeless, but rather a student at a *Chabad yeshivah*[12] out by Morristown, N.J. The last few years, he's been at a meditation retreat center in the Northeast. When I tell him that I'm a student at Wesleyan, he becomes excited and tells me that about ten years ago, when he was a student at Harvard, he went on Wesleyan's study-abroad program to Jerusalem; he's disappointed when I tell him that the program has been discontinued due to safety concerns. He finishes our conversation with a paean to his yeshivah, which has provided him with room, board, and learning, all on full scholarship.

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[9] (*Zemiros*). Hebrew: ritual songs, in Hebrew, often sung socially after a meal.
[10] Eastern-European Jewish.
[11] Satmar is the largest Hasidic group in America. They live primarily in Williamsburg, Brooklyn and Kiryas Joel.

We both move our attention back to the musicians, as the singer switches from zemiros to a morality tale sung in English. The ballad is about a rich Jew lending money to a poor Jew, and as he hems and haws and stumbles the story, it becomes obvious that the singer is extemporizing; but what he lacks in polish he makes up for in heart. He punctuates his contemplations of the poor Jew's suffering by crying out "*gevalt*!", Yiddish for "help!". Moments of kindness he interjects with "*avadeh*," Aramaic for "of course." This mode is instantly familiar to me, but it takes me a while to place it. After a few minutes, I realize that this kind of musical storytelling is in the style of Shlomo Carlebach. No doubt that's why the crunchy Jews are digging it so much, despite its dubious aesthetic quality. The singer sometimes forgets where he is in his story, or perhaps where the narrative is going, and so a number of times he retreads familiar ground along the way to the conclusion. He finishes the rather confused story with the lesson that forgiving another Jew's debt when they are in need is "worth *takeh*[13] more than a hundred million bucks. Or one million, whatever it was I said. Oy..."

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[12] Chabad: The name is an acronym for the Hebrew words *Khokhmah, Binah, Da'as,* meaning wisdom, comprehension, and knowledge. It was an early Hasidic movement that focused on creating a Hasidic style of Talmudic learning; over time, it has become more and more exclusively associated with the Lubavitche Hasidim. Yeshivah: an Orthodox Torah academy for men, focusing on the study of rabbinic literature.

I.C: The Beis-Medrash

I decide to wander into the *beis-medrash*,[14] passing through the large, central foyer to get to it. The beis-medrash's thick, maroon carpet, wooden walls, and full bookcases lend it a quieter, more intimate feeling than the social room (it also about a one-third the size). Rows of benches surround long, plastic tables covered with half-empty bottles of beer, malt liquor, and Russian vodka. Some of these bottles are being nursed in men and women's hands; others are long abandoned. No one hangs out near the *aron kodesh*.[15]

On my left as I enter the room sit three or four men with long peyos, beards, dark, woolen coats, and large, flat yarmulkes, who all look to be in their early 30s; two men of a similar age with long, curly, uncovered hair, one wearing jeans and one wearing a stylish set of silk shawls, sit with them; one young woman, darker complexion than the rest, with long, uncovered hair, long-sleeved black shirt and a skirt that goes well past her knees, sits on a chair just outside the male circle, her body facing the rest of room, but her head turned to watch the men and listen. This is an eclectic group. The first bunch appears Hasidish, dressed formally, quite possibly Satmarers from Williamsburg. The two bare-headed men are ciphers, because despite their appearance they're clearly quite comfortable engaging in the kind of debate one learns to enact in only the most rigorously frum, *heimeishe*[16] yeshivahs, where at the very least one dresses modestly and with a black yarmulke on the head. They're having a vigorous *halakhic*[17] argument, loud and very animated—as I step in, I see one of them jump up and wave his finger furiously under another man's nose. I can't follow their conversation at all—their speech is too fast, and it's particularly difficult to follow their interweaving Yiddish, English, and loshn-koydesh. The young woman is dressed *tsniusdikally*[18]—to the degree an Upper West Side Modern Orthodox woman might follow, but scandalous by the standards of e.g., Satmar Williamsburg—and does not contribute to the conversation at all, which is not surprising because only someone with Hasidish yeshivah training would be able to do so.

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[13] (*Takeh*).Yiddish: really. Used generally as an intensifier.

[14] (*Beis-medrash*). Yiddish and Hebrew: study room. Orthodox shuls generally have a beis-medrash for smaller services, conversation, and lessons.

[15] (*Aron Kodesh*). Hebrew: literally "holy cabinet." Torah scrolls are kept in it.

A couple of men sitting in the far corner across from the great debaters catch my eye and I make my way toward them. My interest quickens when I see that a chessboard is unfurled on the table between them. As I walk up to them, the two men pause their conversation to give me the once-over, then go back to their game. Their Yiddish is too quick for me, so I ask in English “is it alright if I watch?” One of them looks up and says curtly, “As long as you don’t talk, that’s the rule.” I sit down on a chair next to the board and look at the players. The man I’ve just talked to looks to be in his late 30s. He has short-cropped, reddish brown hair covered by a large yarmulke, and an even redder beard. His face is dominated by two accoutrements: the first, a pair of impossibly thick, plastic glasses, the other long, curly, deep red peyos that wind down all the way to his breastbone. There, they come to a rest on his *tallis katan*,[19] which is itself draped over a white, collared shirt. He’s clearly Hasidish but for the life of me I’ve never seen anyone quite like him before—those peyos are exceptionally long. Across from him sits a younger man wearing a thin, white nylon yarmulke on top of gelled, combed hair that smoothes out into a narrow jaw-line beard. The pallor of his skin stands out in sharp contrast to his black hair and the dark pits under his eyes. He wears jeans and a non-descript t-shirt. This guy looks just like a million other young New Yorkers, but his Yiddish indicates that he’s most likely from a frum background.

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[16] (*Heimishe)*. Yiddish: homey. "Heimish" is also a term used by some Jews to identify themselves, whose Jewishness (including Yiddishkeit) is very similar to that of Hasidim, but do not associate with a particular Hasidic court or follow a particular rebbe.

[17] (*Halakhic*). Judeo-English: an adjective, meaning "pertaining to Jewish law *halakhah*."

[18] *(Tsniustically)*. Judeo-English: in keeping with the modesty rules of *tsnius*.

I look at the board and see that it has a happy story to tell for Peyos (as I’ve been thinking of him): a superior pawn structure combined with better play on the files for his rooks. The two of them schmooze in Yiddish as they play, frequently pausing to debate the merit of Gelled-Hair’s moves, sometimes deciding to allow a take-back. Their dialects are very different from the one I've learned in my collegiate studies, which presents some difficulty to me, but I can understand enough to tell that the banter is insulting but clearly affectionate. Gelled-Hair's Yiddish accent is highly unusual, but I place it as having its roots in Southeastern Europe, indicating that he's probably Hasidish—he couldn't have picked up such an accent in a university classroom, and the preponderance of frum Jews from Southeastern Europe are Hasidish.

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[19] (*Tallis Katan*). Yiddish and Hebrew: a fringed, four-cornered shawl worn as an undershirt during the day. There is a Levitical injunction to have fringes on garments with corners.

After Peyos has won easily, I ask "Can I get next?" He gives me a grudging okay, and his friend gets up to go smoke a cigarette. I sit down and say, "My name's Yoineh Hersh. *Vi heyst ir*?"[20] "Mohammed," he answers without so much as a wink. "Now, let's play." I settle down at the table and we play. He shocks me by absolutely destroying me. The other player is still outside smoking, presumably, so we play again, and again it's ugly. Peyos is not even paying much attention to the game, making phone calls and gazing in bored dejection around the room in between moves. Occasionally he rests his eyes on me for a moment, narrowing his eyes and pursing his lips before moving on.

Gelled-hair comes back from his smoke in time to see me getting creamed for the second time around. It's a great surprise to him, then, when he sits down for a game and I almost beat him. And it's a real shock when we play a rematch and I do beat him. We talk as we play. His name is Yoily and he was born in Paris but grew up in Antwerp. He speaks French, Dutch, Yiddish, and English. I foolishly boast of my high-school French education; he tests my recall and is kind when I fail. While playing, he keeps his head tilted down toward the board, while his eyes peek up to look at me. This tendency, combined with the jaw-line beard, his light, rolling accent and quick, small smile, lend him a certain air of absurd, unthreatening slyness. When I win our second game, and Mohammed insists on playing next, he stands up with a rueful grin painted across his face, and says “All right. But I want my *nekumah*!”[21]

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[20] (*Vi heyst ir?*). Yiddish: what's your name?

Mohammed is paying a little more attention, and he still beats me handily, while he talks with Yoily about one of the women there. This time I can follow their Yiddish. They’re not saying anything nice—complaining how “*zee iz an alteh, in nisht kein sheine, a meyeseh*.”[22] Once Mohammed is done vivisecting me, Yoily takes his position across the table and starts asking me a bit about myself. I tell him that I’m a college student, and that I major in religion and economics. “Religion, huh?” He purses his lips, unimpressed, “That’s basically like, uh, theology, right?” I explain to him that it’s more about “studying how theology gets made in societies and how it works in people’s lives.” He purses his lips, drawing them back into a tight smile, and nods a few times. “Oh okay, that’s cool man, that’s cool. You know I’ve always been interested in that shit. Like the Sinai story, between me and you I’ve always figured that that’s kind of like our Santa Claus. I wonder where that shit came from.”

We’ve been playing and talking for about ten minutes when a few people wander over to sit on our benches and watch. I look up and recognize them as part of the halakhic debate contingent—the two long-haired men and the one young woman. They’re with a new young woman, with long, straight hair; thin, delicate nose and cheekbones; wearing extremely stylish narrow jeans and a clingy black sweater. I say hello to them, and the men introduce themselves: Akiva is wearing jeans and has long hair that explodes into many distinct curls; his friend Leyvi is covered in gauzy, colorful silks and has long hair that is pulled back to the nape of his neck. They ask me my name and I say “Yoineh Hersh.” A few moments later I tell the stylish young woman that it is “Jonah.” (I contemplate my name change, and decide that it is because she doesn’t look Jewish). I never catch the name of the other woman for certain, but have the impression that it is Wendy.

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[21] (*Nekumah*). Hebrew and Yiddish: revenge.

[22] (*Zee iz an alteh, in nisht kein sheine, a meyeseh*). Yiddish: She’s old, and she ain’t cute, she’s ugly.

Yoily and I go back to playing, but I keep both ears on our neighbors’ conversation. Akiva takes out a copy of the *Forverts* (a Jewish weekly with English and Yiddish editions,) and starts reading out loud, in stentorian fashion, an article about a fashion show. Leyvi keeps on cracking up; the women glance around the room and sigh. I peek over Akiva’s shoulder at the article—it’s easier for me to make sense out of reading Yiddish than from listening to it—and see a picture of Leyvi on it, in fabulous clothes. I ask him if he models often. He and his stylish young lady friend give out faintly scornful laughs, and he says “No, I’m a designer.” Leyvi turns and asks Wendy how she liked the halakhic argument from the far corner, and she shrugs. “You didn’t like it, then?” he asks her. “No,” she replies with another shrug, “it’s just that I don’t understand Yiddish. I mean the gesturing, the emotion, the theater is great, but only for so long and then it gets boring.” Leyvi and Akiva give uncertain half-nods, their brows wrinkled in confusion. These men, it strikes me, take knowing Yiddish quite for granted—a sort of rusty utensil everyone keeps in the back of their kitchen cabinet. Yiddish is so unexceptional to them that they have been assuming that Wendy knows it and they are confused and unsettled when she reminds them otherwise.

I look up at the clock. Somehow it's 4:15 in the morning. Luckily, I don't have to wake up for work or classes on a Friday morning, but I've got my limits. I make my excuses to Yoily and the fashionistas, say "*gut shabbos*"[23] to people I pass on the way out. Thank God, it's only a four block walk home through the uncharacteristically still Lower East Side streets, and five minutes later I'm able to collapse in bed, exhausted, my mind spinning like a dreidel in a sandstorm.[24]

II: Background

The path that took me to Chulent that night was a winding one. There are a number of possible beginnings to that story, but there is one night in particular that stands out as a catalyst for my critical curiosity about the cultural intersections between members of dramatically disparate Jewish groups. During the fall semester of my sophomore year at Wesleyan University (October 2005), I attended a standup-comedy show put on by a group of undergraduates. One woman, a fellow sophomore with whom I was casually aquainted, did a bit on her trip to her Hasidic cousin's wedding: she recounted how she tried to hug her male cousin, but he refused to touch her—"What?" she said, "Do I have cooties or something?"

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[23] (*Gut Shabbos*). Yiddish: literally, Good Sabbath. Used as a greeting or farewell during the Sabbath and the days leading up to it.

[24] This phrase is adopted from the 1998 movie *Wrongfully Accused*, starring Leslie Nielsen.

The crowd liked it, but I did not. I found it confusing—the audience thought it was socially acceptable to mock Hasidic cultural practices because she was an insider, a cousin and a Jew; but at the same time, her joke was fundamentally based on her outsider status—by inviting the audience to laugh at Hasidic strangeness, she was aligning herself firmly with the audience, distinct from the Hasidim. (I should add that there was an implicit gender dynamic in her comedy that I did not give thought to until quite recently. Her comedy could be seen as an act of resistance against certain male Jewish practices that narrowly categorize and oppress Jewish women, such as Hasidic purity and modesty rules. Additionally, in my experience as a consumer and producer of standup-comedy, female comedians often have an extra burden to appear edgy or shocking, to prove to the audience the masculinity of their humor.)

This evening troubled me profoundly. I was angry that she could have it both ways—outsider enough to mock, insider enough to get away with it. Over time, I began to think about it in a more and more critical way, and to develop a set of questions that would go on inform my thesis research: What does it say about the comedian‘s Jewishness, and Jewishness in general, that she made this kind of joke? What makes her and her Hasidic cousin both Jewish? What does it say about the mixed Jewish and non-Jewish audience? (At Wesleyan, somewhere between 1/4 and 1/3 of undergraduate students identify as Jewish). In general, how do different types of Jews look at each other? How do Jews define themselves not only in relation to the non-Jewish hegemonic Other, but in relation to their Jewish others as well?

These questions drove me into the field, with the vague idea of performing a ethnography of how mainstream Jews look at Hasidim, and vice versa. I chose Hasidim in particular because, firstly, I imagined them to be the most culturally distant group from mainstream American Jews; and secondly, partly due to this great distance, Hasidic voices rarely appear in academic work. There are a small handful of standard ethnographies of American Hasidim, most notably Jerome R. Mintz's *Hasidic People: A Place in the New World* (1992) and Egon Mayer's *From Suburb to Shtetl: The Jews of Boro Park* (1980), and several works of dubious scholarly quality, such as Lisa Harris' *Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family* (1985) and Israel Rubin's *Satmar: An Island in the City* (1972). The latter set includes very few Hasidic voices from the researched communities; while the former set does so much more comprehensively, in these works Hasidim speak almost exclusively of their own community, not their outlook on others. A notable exception to this is my advisor Henry Goldschmidt's work *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, which closely analyzes Lubavitche Hasidic outlooks on their Crown Heights neighbors. But to my knowledge, there is no extant critical analysis of how American Hasidim imagine other Jews, so when I began my fieldwork I sought to discover their perspective myself.

As with any ethnography, mine immediately took unexpected turns. Over the summer of 2007, I developed a couple of contacts in Borough Park and Williamsburg, Brooklyn while taking classes in Yiddish through the YIVO Institute for Jewish research on the NYU campus in downtown Manhattan. I had met my primary contact in Borough Park, Mordechai (Motty) Mendelbaum, the previous summer, when he had given a group of interns at the National Yiddish Book Center (including myself) a tour of Hasidic Borough Park. My Williamsburg contacts were made through an acquaintance, a fellow congregant of the Stanton Street Shul, who at the time held a position at an international telecommunications company in the neighborhood which was owned and predominantly staffed by Hasidim. I greatly enjoyed getting to know these different people, particularly Motty, and they served as great guides to the basic organization and mores of their respective communities. But I quickly became frustrated, because I realized that the very ease with which I had met them signaled that they were already atypical members of their communities, and I had set out to find the core Hasidic perspective on the outside world.

One of my Williamsburg contacts, a former Satmar Hasid named Dov who had most recently been working for American Apparel, told me I should go to Chulent. I knew a little about it from a March 18th, 2007 New York Times article, "City of Refuge," which described a bohemian mix of Yiddish-speaking people who had grown up Hasidic drinking, smoking, and eating the eponymous chulent (a classic Ashkenazi Jewish stew of barley, beans, potatoes, and sometimes meat, traditionally slow-cooked beginning before sundown Friday, in order to provide a cheap, hot meal for Saturday lunch, in accordance with halakhic prohibitions against cooking on shabbos). I'd also heard a bit about it from a young French klezmer clarinetist, the daughter of a close friend of my parents who worked at YIVO at the time, who had lived in the city the past year. Dov told me where and when to find it—Thursday nights at the Community Synagogue on 6th st. between 1st and 2nd avenues. It was three blocks from my home, and I'd had my bar-miztvah there, so I really couldn't say no.

I immediately found Chulent to be intoxicatingly riotous, bizarre, and wonderful (impressions which I've attempted to convey in the preface). I was setting out to write a thesis on the otherness between Jews, and here was the greatest concentration of culturally disparate Jews that I could imagine. It was a small, easily accessible community that, to my eye, included representatives from each of the American Jewish worlds in which I was interested. Most importantly, I saw frum Jews of every stripe: a handful of Lubavitchers, a number of Satmarers, some Bobovers, and a larger mass with *peyos* and full *livush*[25] whose group identity I could not immediately identify. And they would meet every Thursday night, just three blocks away from my parent's home. Great!, I thought, I'll focus my ethnography on these Hasidim—they're diverse, easy to find, and by virtue of their attendance, signaled a certain willingness to engage with (and presumably to think about) non-Hasidic Jews.

As soon as Chulent had laid its peculiar enchantment over my ethnographer's senses, it also forced me to reevaluate my critical approach to my research. On my second or third visit, I explained a little bit about my project to Isaac Schoenfeld, Chulent's founder, central organizer, and quiet authority. "My thesis basically looks at how secular Jews look at Hasidim," I told him, "and how Hasidim look back at them." "Aha!", he answered, with his right finger jabbing at the ceiling in amused protest, “and what if they’re looking at each other from inside the same head?” Although it would take me many months to grasp the full ramifications of his question, it made me immediately take notice that Chulent was no “normal” community, that its Hasidic members were not “normal” Hasidim, that its secular members were likewise strange, and that this was not the place to discover how the mainstreams of either community looked at each other. This was rather, the perfect location for a different kind of ethnography, one which would analyze a tiny cultural time-space in which heavily guarded boundaries had been seriously eroded with marvelously unpredictable results.

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[25] (*Livush*). Yiddish and Hebrew: literally, dress. Used to refer to a wide range of Hasidish, Heimish, and Yeshivish styles of dress, holding in common a black yarmulke, black slacks, and a white, collared shirt.

This change in approach occurred also as a consequence of my continuous (if, at times, haphazard) research into American Jewish scholarship. I wanted to find out how mainstream American Jewish academia interprets the challenging differences presented by Hasidim. The figure of the Hasid popped up in many places that I wouldn’t have imagined (or maybe I just started seeing it everywhere). And as I read more and more, I realized that academic views toward Hasidim, which tend toward viewing them as impossibly distant, ultra-religious Jewish Others, did not exist in an intellectual vacuum but rather formed one small but crucial part of American Jewish efforts at self-definition. I found that in the last fifty years, a large number of the academic strains of renegotiation of American Jewish identity have been centered around efforts to move closer to White, Protestant hegemony. In the process, Jewishness becomes more and more narrowly defined, fitting in with American modernity’s ontology of cultural identity, in which “religion” and “ethnicity” are distinct categories and Jewishness becomes a genealogically inherited “Judaism.”

And I realized that because contemporary America Hasidic Jewishness doesn't fit well into these narrow confines, it becomes the foil for the process of hegemonizing American Jewry. The figure of the Hasid becomes the static, ultra-religious Other against whom these modern Jewish narratives measure their progress.

Chulent's members simultaneously represent a challenge to mainstream definitions of Jewishness-as-religion, as well as to the commonly imagined stagnancy of Hasidic culture. How can a man identify as a Bobover Hasid, dress as most other Bobove Hasidim do, speak Yiddish on a daily basis, spend long hours debating Talmud, and eat pork? How can a man who has no material cultural markers of Jewishness speak a flawless *Yeshivish*[26] Yiddish and studiously check for a *hekhsher*[27] each time someone offers him some food? Why is this woman, who attended an Ultra-Orthodox college and modestly covers her hair, willing to shake my hand? Why do these people come to Chulent at all?

The shape of these questions in and of themselves make strong assumptions about the "natural" behavior and identity of a man who looks *like this*, a woman who talks *like that*, assumptions that are prevalent, to varying degrees, across most of the Jewish and non-Jewish American world. Indeed, it is the transgressions of such unstated norms by Chulent's attendees that make it possible for us, by indirection and implication, to critically examine what the dominant definition of Jewishness and, even more centrally, the terms and structures used to describe and frame these identities. I use my ethnography of Chulent to critique the mainstream American Jewish narrative of secularization and progress, arguing that Chulent proves that Jewishness can be a much broader cultural identity than simply a “religion,” and that there are contemporary, American Jews who are playfully experimenting with their Jewish identities in ways that do not quite fit into American, Protestant modernity’s imagination of cultural choice. I do not make a definitive, final claim about Chulent’s exact placement on the map(s) of American Jewish life, because it is impossible, in current terms, to describe exactly where it is placed. No doubt, this may make for some frustration on the part of the reader (and let’s not forget the author, too)—but I argue that it is this very quality of Chulent, its elusiveness from identification, definition, and placement, that renders it so valuable in subverting the geography and lexicon of the dominant mappings of American Jewry.

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[26] (*Yeshivish*).Yiddish: adjective form of the noun *Yeshivah*, here refers to the mix of English, Yiddish, and loshn-koydesh spoken in non-Hasidic yeshivahs. (Also can be used to describe the people who speak it).

[27] (*Hekhsher*). Hebrew: certification that a food product is kosher, generally imparted by a particular rabbi or group of rabbis.

III: Outlining This Work

The first chapter, “Modernity, Progress, and the Figure of the Hasid in the American Jewish Imagination,” examines the ways in which mainstream American Jewry’s self-narratives are implicated with secularization and modernity. It begins with an overview of the most recent scholarly theory on secularism and modernity—particularly American modernity—and then uses that theory as a critical lens on different mainstream America Jewish texts, showing how these texts work to construct a contemporary American Jewish identity whose shapes and values are as resonant as possible with secular (or Protestant), American hegemony. I make the argument that this secularizing effort is fundamentally linked to acts of distancing from American Jewish Others, particularly Hasidim. The continued alterity of American Hasidim from a number of American Jewish modernity's projects—projects as sweepingly diverse and profound as secularization, relegation of the religious to the private domain, universalism, secular education, Whiteness, liberalism, class-climbing, and assimilation into dominant non-Jewish lingual and material cultures—poses a real problem for any narrative of American Jewish modernization and secularization. Solutions to this challenge, I argue, are founded on the twinned denials of both Hasidic coevalness and presence in American space, claims which are effected through the rhetorical relegation of Hasidim to a distant, timeless East European *shtetl* past. Contemporary American Hasidim become reduced to a single object in Jewish history: *homo religiosus*, a primitive, unemancipated being whose whole life is suffused with and defined by religious authority and meaning. In the narrative of American Jewish progress (echoing American secular and Protestant stories about pre-modern European Christians, particularly Catholics) Hasidim become that from which modern American Jewry has progressed, and as such, differences between Hasidim and mainstream American Jewry are described along the lines of difference between *homo religiosus* and *homo economicus*, between the irrational, unliberated religious other and the rational, free secular self. And, as I argue, the Hasid also becomes *homo religiosus* in the sense that *he* [sic] is portrayed almost exclusively as male.

The second chapter is my ethnography of Chulent, one that focuses particularly on its members that grew up Hasidish, Heimish, or Yeshivish.[28] The chapter begins with a relatively brief history of Chulent, written with a particular eye to the role that local space has played in its ever-shifting identity. From Borough Park to the mid-town Manhattan Millinery Center Synagogue to its present location in the Community Synagogue in the Lower East Side's northern edge, the constituency and temperament of Chulent has changed drastically with each location. The movement from the purely local Hasidic, Heimish, and Yeshivish crowd that formed Chulent in Borough Park to the geographically and culturally diverse group that make it up now in the Lower East Side are revealing testaments to the power that local space holds on the community (and of course on time, as the movements across New York City have happened across a number of years), a power which must dispel any notion of New York Hasidim as being fundamentally separated from their neighbors and neighborhoods.

I argue that the terms of this dominant American Jewish discourse fail to adequately describe Chulent's cultural space or even the mainstream and Hasidic spaces which it lies between. Rather than defining the community by determining its placement in the set of binaries that are usually described to differentiate American

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[28] (*Heimish)*. Yiddish: homey. Here, I'm using "Heimish" in its sense as a self-identifying term employed by Jews whose Jewishness (including Yiddishkeit) is very similar to that of Hasidim, and who may or may not send their children to Hasidish yeshivahs, but do not associate with a particular Hasidic court or follow a particular *rebbe*.

Similarly, I'm using "Yeshivish" here not in the sense of the lingual mix, but as self-identifying term used by Jewish men who attended rigorous, non-Hasidic yeshivas.

Jews from one another (and are the dominant terms in the two articles that been written about Chulent to this date), either/ors such as religious/ secular, primitive/modern, faithful/cultural, past/present, and East European/American, I argue that the Chulent scene can best be made intelligible when thought about in terms of markers like gender, language, dress, haircut, musical aesthetic, (anti-) Zionism, education, etc. This latter vocabulary represents a shift from the narrow discourse of religion as the foundation of Hasidic identity to a wider set of cultural differences from the mainstream, centered around Ashkenazi Jewishness, a lingual and material culture that (not necessarily) includes observance of *halakhah* and an extensive background in rabbinic texts. This re-alignment suggests that rather than thinking about the cultural wandering that occurs in Chulent in terms of movement along a secular/religious continuum, we should be thinking about it as a creative space where mainstream American Jewish and American-Ashkenazi-Hasidic people, language, dress, education, and popular culture interact unpredictably with each other, with new results. There aren't too many cultural spaces in the world where someone dressed in full livush who lives in Kiryas Joel could play the Conga drums with a mixed crowd of men and women twirling right along.

The conclusion explores the possible ramifications of my proposed shift from the hegemonic conception(s) of contemporary American Jewishness, suggesting that, among other things, changing our discourse on Jewishness in such a way renders it a far more fertile cultural space for creating critical projects that subvert white, male, Protestant, capitalist, modernist hegemony.

IV: My Voice

This work in many ways represents a personal quest for understanding Jewishness that began long ago in my youthful movement across a wide variety of Jewish worlds, from a Lower East Side Hasidic tenement synagogue to a Communist, Yiddishist summer camp, to a Conservative movement Jewish Sunday school, to Wesleyan's open Jewish community and beyond. The insights I gained as an insider-outsider to each of these Jewish cultures have in many ways come into their fullest articulation in this work, especially in the first chapter. Despite the fact that I rarely use the personal voice in it, the chapter is nonetheless embedded in my Jewish experiences, where I have many times seen how insiders use their imaginations of other Jews, particularly Hasidic Jews, to define and justify their own Jewish spaces. In the second chapter, I use personal experience of the Lower East Side and the Community Synagogue in which I had my bar-mitzvah in order to explain the relationship between Chulent and its space; and in my ethnographic accounts of Chulent, I frequently and unabashedly interweave my own voice with that of others'. In this respect, I take Barbara Myerhoff's ethnography of a 1970s Southern Californian community of elderly Jews, *Number Our Days*, as my model.

Chapter One: Modernity, Progress, and the Figure of the Hasid in the American Jewish Imagination

Overview

This chapter contains three primary sections. In the first, “Modernity, Religion, and America,” I survey some of the most recent critical literature on secularism and modernity, drawing heavily on the theorists Talal Asad, Vincent Pecora, Janet Jakobsen, and Ann Pellegrini. They critically examine modernity’s narrative of universal, inevitable human progress, as defined variously by increased autonomy, rationality, and freedom from religious dogma. They argue that modernity and secularism in fact are rooted in a particularly Protestant worldview, in which “religion” is a distinct, private sphere, separated from the public, secular domain. When modernity is confronted by the contemporary existence of “religious” Others, it recasts them as objects of its own history—primitive, stagnant, and unfree. Edward Said’s critique of Western Orientalism show how this process has functioned in Western treatment of “religious,” Oriental Others. I finish by analyzing American modernity in particular, which I contend is founded on notions not only of a modern time, but a modern space. That space is, of course, America, and it defines itself as the territory for free religious choice, in sustained contrast to non-Western spaces, which are defined as religiously oppressive. In this discourse, American Jewishness becomes reduced to Judaism, one of many options presented on the great American "buffet of the spirit."

The second section, "Hegemonizing American Jewishness" takes an extended look at American Jewish modernity and narratives of progress. It begins by briefly critiquing the way that Said portrays a monolithic, Orientalist West, then looks at how Jewish studies has been used (but rarely) as a means to subvert Christian hegemony from "within" the West. The bulk of this section is an examination of how American Jewish scholarship has been complicit in a project of "hegemonizing" American Jewry. It starts with a lengthy analysis of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's classic sociological work *Beyond the Melting Pot*. I argue that Glazer and Moynihan, in their quest to fashion American Jews as a "model minority," discipline Jewishness into something whose forms are consonant with those of White, Protestant modernity. They do so by constructing distinct categories of Jewish "ethnicity" and "religion." This is tightly interlinked with their story of Jewish progress, in which modern American Jewry has become secular, middle-class and modern Jewishness has become condensed to an increasingly attenuated, genealogically inherited "Judaism." I take a look at how this dominant narrative of American Jewish evolution and the narrow construction of Jewishness as a form of religious difference extend across different parts of academia, from the ethnography of Barbara Myerhoff, to quantitative analyses of American Jewry performed by economists and sociologists. The section finishes by broadening its scope a little bit, briefly examining how these tropes function in two pieces of popular journalism.

In the final section “The Hasid as the Primitive Jewish Other,” I analyze the role of the Hasid in mainstream American Jewish narratives of progress and self-definition. I argue that their continued existence in American space presents a serious challenge to American Jewish secularization narratives, as well to correlated definitions of Jewishness in terms of religion. I revisit Glazer and Moynihan, seeing how they rhetorically cast contemporary American Hasidim into a pre-modern, East European Jewish past in order to solve the problem presented by their proximate coevalness. The Hasid then becomes the historical Jew, that from which American Jewry has evolved—an eternal, unchanging, primitive, religious Jewish Other. The remainder of this section examines how this process of distancing contemporary American Hasidim across time and space functions in several ethnographies of American Hasidim. This occurs un-self critically in Helen Winson’s book *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*, and is an object for self-reflection in Shifra Epstein’s article about her first entrance into studying Hasidim, ““Going Far Away in Order to Better Understand the Familiar: Odyssey of a Jewish Folklorist into the Bobover Hasidic Community.” This is followed by a look at Jack Kugelmass’s incisive analysis of the production of coffee-table picture books of Hasidim. He argues that these works tend to construct Hasidim as panchronistic and essentially religious. I finish the section by examining how Ira Moskovitz’s book of drawings (with text by Isaac Bashevis Singer), *The Hasidim*, does very much the same, and in a way that reveals how the eternal Hasid is particularly male.

I: Modernity, Religion, and America

I.A: Secularism and Modernity

In the last fifteen years or so, with the rise of a new, diverse wave of scholarly cultural criticism of secularism and modernity, part of an ever-expanding field of post-modern discourse, the disciplining of the categories of “secular“ and “religious“ has come under increased scrutiny. Talal Asad heralded this academic movement in his 1993 book *Genealogies of Religion*. In it, he argues, among other things, that modern public and academic categorizations of “religion“ are particularly Westeran and Protestant, despite modernity’s insistence that, in its pervasive rationality it is the (by definition one and only) “universal universal,” as Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini term it in their introduction to *World Secularisms at the Millenium* (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 14).

Asad continues his analysis of the intersections of modernity, secularism, and religion in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (2003), arguing that “modernity is a project—or rather, a series of interlinked projects—that certain people in power seek to achieve. The project aims at institutionalizing a number of (sometimes conflicting, often evolving) principles: constitutionalism, moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom of the market—and secularism” (Asad, 2003, 13). These principles, of course, must be held in contrast or opposition to some negative shadow; every Occident must have its Orient, to borrow Edward’s Said’s formation. “Secularization is at the heart of the intertwined Enlightenment narratives of modernization, rationalization, and progress" write Jakobsen and Pellegrini, "all of which depend on the overcoming of religious dogma by reason" (4). The categorization of individuals, groups, and ideologies as "religious" is a particularly common and potent othering performed by modern power, one that instantly marks them in opposition to the aforementioned principles. It also is simultaneously an effort to defang them, rendering them into private modes of belief, rather than public modes of action.[29]

These binaries of private/religious/faithful/impotent versus worldly/secular/rational/powerful are fundamental to modernist-secularist perspectives. Vincent Pecora argues in his book *Secularization and Cultural Criticism* that modernity claims to effect "the rationalization of religious *beliefs*, in which the increased distance of a monotheistic god allows for the decreasing use of magic, increasing invocation of ethics based on utility, the dominance of purposive or instrumental rationality, and hence the most efficient pursuit of *worldly* aims in science, economics, and politics" (Pecora, 7, emphasis added). A close reading of this tightly packed phrase is worthwhile here. In the first element, "the rationalization of religious *beliefs*, in which the increased distance of a monotheistic god allows for the decreasing use of magic" we see modernity's central claim that it is replacing religion with rationality or science. The religiousness that is being replaced is understood in terms of "belief" and a "monotheistic god," particularly Protestant imaginings of "religion." "The increased distance" of that god is a retreat from the worldly, public space, which has resulted in "the decreasing use of magic"—magic, I think, representing "worlded" or public religion, religion with power, a combination that was traditionally despised by Protestant ideologies.

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[29] If this division between private, religious spheres and public, worlded spheres echoes the Gospel of Matthew's injunction "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's," it is not coincidental—Paul Monod argues that secularism can be understood as a "'worlding' of Christianity" (from Pecora, 5). As Pecora observes, "In its more practical sense, 'secular' originally defined those members of the clergy who lived 'in the world' rather than in monastic seclusion—for example, the secular abbot or canon—and it is this sense of worldliness, produced from within religious tradition, that I believe has been a core if often disavowed component of extrareligious and anticlerical humanist sensibilities in cultural criticism up to the present day…what we may complacently understand as 'secular' about such [secular] criticism comes with certain historical and religious strings attached" (Pecora, 2) despite secularism's claims to universal objectivity.

The retreat of religion from the public realm (from potent forms such as magic, into a private mode of belief in a "distant monotheistic god,") is accompanied, or better yet caused, by the entrance of "invocation of ethics based on utility, the dominance of purposive or instrumental rationality." Pecora's words here echo Jakobsen and Pellegrini when they write that modernity is based on fundamental claims about the universal nature of its ethics and morality, in opposition to the particularist ethics of religions (and thus, that modernity makes the implicit claim that secularism and religion are both at root concerned with issues of morality) (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 2**).** The basis for this claim is a mantra of scientific utility, rooted in 18th and 19th century Protestant British thought. Here we see the most explicit articulation in the passage of secularization's concerns with public power. This rationality is "purposive or instrumental," meaning that it is no mere act of sophistry or fantasy, but rather is expressly produced in order to maintain and increase power: it is the path to the "most efficient pursuit of *worldly* aims in science, economics, and politics." We can read "aims" with an eye to Asad's laundry list of "constitutionalism, moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom of the market—and secularism" (Asad, 2003, 13).

Elsewhere, Pecora argues that modernity's claims about the aforementioned process of "rationalization" are deeply implicated with a teleological view of history, in which "the present epoch opens a new perspective without precedent, and…men are capable, and more and more capable, of 'making' history" (Pecora, 5, adopted from the work of the French philosopher Paul Monod). The "new perspective" will inevitably ("more and more") take stronger and stronger hold; that is, each moment in the future will be more rational than the moment before it and will look forward to an even more rational moment succeeding it. Pellegrini and Jakobsen argue that this "traditional narrative of secularization is part of a broader sociological narrative about societal development or evolution" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 4), one in which, in the present moment, any given "social unit…is in some sense more autonomous relative to its environment than were its less complex ancestors" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 4, from Robert Bellah, "Religious Evolution"). This "autonomy" parallels Pecora's notion of "'making' history." It suggests increasing power, power which is derived increasingly from the strength of rational human thought, as opposed to magic, god, chance, non-human life, etc.

To underscore his skepticism concerning modernity's claims of the inevitability of secularization and the triumph of Enlightenment values, Pecora calls our attention particularly to the United States, which, like Scotland, experienced a boom in church-building during its industrial revolutions in the 19th century. While religious worship has plummeted in modern Western Europe, American "church attendance in a climate of religious pluralism has been more sustained" (Pecora, 8). Moreover, the rise of American Protestant fundamentalisms[30] represents a challenge to modernity's claims about the inevitability of secularization. As much as the trajectory of religion in America is bitterly contested, the importance of religion in many non-Western countries has become increasingly universally accepted. These cases, of which Arab (both Sunni and Shi'ite) Islam have received particularly great attention in this decade, likewise create problems for any secularization thesis claiming the inevitability of "freedom from dogmatism" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 1).

Jakobsen and Pellegrini contend that the most common and powerful rhetorical responses to these problems are centered around a translation from space to time: "Differences across space that make for cultural differences become differences in time, so that all those living in the unenlightened world become the history of those who live in the enlightened world" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 9-10). This is fundamentally linked with an Orientalist discourse of Oriental panchronism and anachronism, one in which the natives are described as living exactly as they always have, a narrative of a regressed state which the anthropologist (and my advisor) Henry Goldschmidt characterizes as "languish[ing] in a fantastical world of religious tradition, with identities and politics based on supernatural beliefs we deem unfounded or irrational" (Goldschmidt, 31). Edward Said contends in his seminal work *Orientalism* that Orientalism's "central argument is the myth of the arrested development of the Semites" (Said, 307). If modernity is a narrative of progress, in which as time goes on, humans must become more rational and more free, then those who continue unchanged, unevolved, and irrational must not be moving forward in time. To put this another way, if the forward movement of time is inextricably linked with progress, then those who do not progress do not move forward in time. They are stuck, and not in the present, but rather in some sort of eternal past imperfect.[31]

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[30] Or better yet, the rise of a body of media and scholarly publications describing those fundamentalisms. As Susan Harding shows in her *Book of Jerry Falwell*, American Protestant fundamentalisms have been around since the first Great Awakening, but dropped out of popular and scholarly consciousness after the Scopes "Monkey" trial in 1925.

Bernard Lewis' essay "Islamic Concepts of Revolution," which Said examines in the chapter *Orientalism Now*, provides a sharp focal point for these intersections between modernity and Orientalism, between narratives of time and narratives of space. Said quotes Lewis' discussion of the Arabic word *thawra*, which according to Said means "revolution":

> In the Arabic-speaking countries a different word was used for [revolution] *thawra*. The root *th-w-r* in classical Arabic meant to rise up (e.g. of a camel), to be stirred or excited…It is often used in the context of establishing a petty, independent sovereignty…*Thawra* is the term used by Arabic writers in the nineteenth century for the French Revolution, and by their successors for the approved revolution, domestic and foreign, of our own time (Lewis, from Said, 314-315).

Said argues that this etymology is a "clever way of discrediting the modern Arab revolution," and of insinuating that "revolutionary stirrings among 'the Arabs' are about as consequential as a camel's getting up" (Said, *Orientalism*, 315). Indeed, according to Lewis, *thawra* only truly means "revolution" when it is describing the paradigmatic French Revolution or any contemporary "approved" revolutions (the modifier implying that the Arab taxonomy of revolutions is determined by dogmatic authorities, and that, conversely, Western taxonomies are decided by unfettered reason alone). As concerned as Said is with differences across space, he does not comment on the fact that in this passage time itself is modified strangely: who is the collective “we” indicated by Lewis’ “our own time”? Presumably Lewis does not intend to include any Orientals in his plural community, for Orientals are objects of study, not participants (Said, *Orientalism*, 40). Rather, “our own time” is a Western, Orientalist time, one that can solely be inhabited and possessed by the West, and the only time in which true revolution (read: progress toward personal liberty) can occur; in contrast, their--Orientials’--“own time” lays in some distant past, in which revolutions (again: think progress, change, and freedom) cannot occur, only the rising up of camels and “petty, independent sovereignties.”

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[31] Johannes Fabian laid the groundbreaking work on this academic process in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, where he explores how ethnographic writing is implicated in the "denial of coevalness" of the studied Other.

These rhetorical twists invert L.P Hartley’s famous adage that “the past is a foreign country”: rather, a foreign country is the past, and indeed “they do things differently there” (Hartley, 17). Jakobsen and Pellegrini argue that this inversion does not only address the problem of the continued importance of religion, but also solves a fundamental paradox within liberal secularism’s claim to being the only “universal universal”:

> The relation between the secular and the religious that makes for secular equality and nonviolence creates another set of inequalities between those who are religious and those who are secular. The assertion of universal equality that solves the problem of religious difference institutes a problem of difference between the secular and the religious (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 9).

By claiming to be rational and universal, liberal secularism seeks to escape the narrow chauvinism of religious thought, but in doing so constructs a hierarchy of knowledge in which secular (universalist) thought and thinkers are privileged and religious (particularist) thought and thinkers are inferior—to such an extent that the former group is ontologically distinct from the latter (there are two kinds of humans: one kind has the French Revolution, the other camels standing up). Secularism is thus chauvinist in its perspective on the religious other. The distancing of religious others into the past (thereby robbing them of any Enlightenment birthright to the fruits of modernity's progress: liberty, equality, rationality, and agency) assuages liberal secularist guilt over these power relations. The project(s) of modernity is thus ineluctably founded on the wide-scale dehumanization of religious, Oriental Others.

I.B: Cooking up the American "Buffet of the Spirit"

American modernity has its own particular ideological focuses of self-definition (and thus of the definition of its Others as well). One of the central meanings of "America" is the space of freedom for private, religious choice and public secularism, a secular nation founded by Puritan exiles seeking to practice their faith in peace.[32] A folk articulation of this view was published in an article in the March 2nd, 2008 *New York Times.* Entitled "Religion is Less a Birthright Than a Good Fit," it was a personal response to a recently released Pew Forum poll that showed considerable change in adult Americans'religious identification from that of their childhoods (Banerjee). The author, Dana Jennings, generalizes the trope of American religious choice, writing, "When it comes to religion, it seems, Americans prefer a buffet of the spirit…We Americans lust after movement: from town to town, from spouse to spouse, from religion to religion."[33] He also makes it quite personal when he contrasts his family's Protestant upbringing "in a Rockwellian [think prototypically American] New Hampshire village", to its current religious heterogeneity: " these days my sister and my middle brother are born-again Christians, and my youngest brother is a Catholic. Me? I'm the Jew."

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[32] I don't mean to reinforce this story, but merely to note that it is a central myth to American identity.

These narratives of increasing religious "fluidity" and "movement" imply that American religious identity is more and more determined by free choice. This construction of religion as something to be chosen is fundamentally based on the delineation of a distinct domain of cultural activity marked as "religious": to step up to the "buffet of the spirit," we must first mark what properly belongs on the table. Each offering in this buffet may offer a slightly different taste, but they all lie in similarly shaped vessels and provide similar nourishment to the consumer. It is not so much what lies in vessels, but the movement between them that is considered important, as part of an individual spiritual quest: as Jenning writes, "I suspect that my path to Judaism isn't much different from other American journeys to a new faith — whether it be from megachurch to Zen monastery, or from mosque to the Cross."[34]

What are the shapes of these vessels? Who designs them? While the shapes may claim to be universal, we have seen that they are in fact quite particular to Protestant imaginations of religion:[35]

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[33] "Religion is Less a Birthright Than a Good Fit"

[34] Ibid. What about a journey from Cross to the mosque?

[35] In *Borderlines*, Daniel Boyarin observes that some "scholars have claimed that 'religion' in the sense in which we use the term today is a post-Enlightenment concept and category produced within Protestant Christianity. Other scholars locate

> By making all religions fit a model established by Protestantism, what was supposed to offer a means of recognizing differences among 'religions' in fact ensured that these different 'religions' were the same. And yet 'other' religions also could never be fully the 'same.' They would always at best be poor imitations of the original (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 9).

Jennings' article overflows with Protestant tropes which resonate closely with Williams James' aforementioned Protestant-centric definition of religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James, 31): religion as an individual quest; equation of "spirit" and "religion"; characterization of Judaism (forget Jewishness) as a source of "wisdom and meaning" and "depth"; religious conversation and thought consisting of "talk of God, talk of faith" and "nibbling at eternity"; religion as a means to "try to explain ourselves" to "ourselves," etc.[36]

Jennings' piece is an example of the intimate connection between American notions of free religious choice—or, to put it another way, notions of America as the space for free religious choice—and the process of defining "religion" as a distinct category of cultural life that, despite its claims to universal objectivity, is in fact Protestant-centric. Non-Protestant religions become reduced to a continuum of alternatives to Protestantism, a "buffet of the spirit" presented to participants in American hegemony, with some dishes (e.g., Reform Judaism, Unitarianism) more

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'the invention of religion' not in the Enlightenment but during the time of Christianity at the dawn of antiquity" (Daniel Boyarin, 2004, 11). He tends to favor the latter characterization, but either way, he sees Jewishness as in a sustained, ambivalent discourse with Christian notions of religious identity over millennia, at times resisting it and at times moving closer to Jewishness-as-religion.

[36] Ibid.

palatable to the hegemonic American tongue than others (e.g. Hasidic Jewishness, any Islam). Wendy Brown notes this pervasive metaphor, writing that “for liberal subjects, culture becomes food” (Brown, 301), in echo of Goldschmidt’s observation that “Jerk chicken is to gefilte fish as Kwanzaa is to Hanukah, or dreadlocks are to yarmulkes, because all are considered equivalently ‘cultural’” (Goldschmidt, 13). Goldschmidt places this rhetoric of culture-as-food in a larger multicultural discourse which seeks to flavor and to compress the cultures of Others into something more easily consumable, “claim[ing] to accommodate difference, but only accommodat[ing] difference of certain kinds” (Goldschmidt, 13). I will explore these issues in greater depth in the second chapter, when I analyze how the cultural explorations of Chulent’s members both are enabled by and subversive to dominant American discourses of religious choice, movement, and definition. For now suffice it to say that I see a powerful tension between the ways that Chulenters’ wanderings challenge American modernity’s definition of cultural difference and the ways that American modernity enables these wanderings in the first place.

II: Hegemonizing American Jewishness

II.A: Subverting a Monolithic West

As useful as Said is in understanding how the West dominates its Others through the construction of oppressive bodies of knowledge, he does not subvert the very categories of East and West. While his construction of the East tends toward enrichment and empowerment, his construction of the West is thoroughly monolithic—everyone's a secular, liberal colonialist (e.g. all Jews are European Zionists). In this way, Said's work (both in *Orientalism* and in other works such as *The World, the Text, and the Critic*) is thoroughly embedded in Protestant Western modernity's narrative about the inevitability of Western secularization. Pecora examines the intellectual roots of Said's construction of secular criticism, writing:

> He draws upon a specific version of the religious history of the West, in which we find among other things, Vico's idea that gentiles and Jews are to be understood more or less as different species ('human' is synonymous with 'gentile' in Vico's prose, not with Hebrews); in which the gentile nations and the modern nation-states that are built upon them are thought to come into existence only with the foreclosure of the sacred; and in which the individuated human will, presumably unfettered by allegiance to any collectively maintained or even pseudo-sacred beliefs, becomes the only measure of authentic human existence (Pecora, 4).

Said accepts a narrow narrative of a hegemonic West, one constructed by a small community of its most privileged members, and is thus incapable (and most likely, undesiring) of looking within the Western worlds for sources of critique of that elite community of Orientalists.

Jewish studies has at times functioned as a locus for the subversion of the Christian hegemonic West. The continuous tension between participation and marginality for Jews living in the Christian-dominated West can be fruitful for those seeking to disrupt narratives of a culturally monolithic West. Susanna Heschel articulates this notion in her contribution to the book *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, a chapter entitled "Jewish Studies as Counterhistory." She seeks to revive some "radical" aspects of the earliest mode of Jewish Studies, practiced by 19th century German Jewish scholars like Heinrich Gaertz, who "saw the study of Judaism as not simply an addition to the general curriculum, but as a revision to that curriculum, an effort to resist and even overthrow the standard portrayal of Western history" (Heschel, 102). She draws parallels between Christian study of Jews and Orientalism and argues that for centuries Jews and Judaism were objects of study and domination for Christian Europe. When the objectified proclaim agency—e.g. when she or Said publish critiques of Western Christian bodies of knowledge—they work towards "the establishment of a variety of gazes that will unsettle and throw into question the complacency of academic categories and analyses" (Heschel, 112). Historiographers such as Magda Teter, rhetoricians like Daniel Boyarin, and anthropologists like Jonathan Boyarin, among many others, have employed Jewish Studies to disturb a sweeping variety of "natural" thought, from traditional Catholic histories of early modern Poland, to macho, heterosexual maleness, to the construction of "religious minorities" in civil jurisprudence.[37]

Although these works are but several among many, as a whole they are the exception to the rule: American practitioners of Jewish Studies are no innocents in the production of oppressive bodies of knowledge. Heschel laments the recent history of Jewish Studies scholarship in America, arguing that in response to mid-century pressures on American Jews to assimilate into Christian society,

> Jewish studies became transformed into a conservative field whose goal was the incorporation of Jewish history into the larger framework of Western civilization. The study of Judaism was presented as an effort not to undermine Christianity but to contribute to its understanding and reinforce its hegemony…Maimonides, for example, was to be studied in order to better understand Aquinas, without implying

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[37] See Teter's *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era*, Daniel Boyarin's *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, and Jonathan Boyarin's *Circumscribing Constitutional Identities in Kiryas Yoel*.

> any challenge to the preeminence of medieval Christian scholasticism (Heschel, 103).

Such cooperation with oppressive academic projects is not limited solely to making Jews look more like heroic Christians, but also extends to the demonization of White, Western Christianity's Others. If we understand the formation of Western hegemony as a process rather than a *fait accomplit*, then Jewish disciplining of the mainstream's Others can be seen as an assimilative act in and of itself, imitating (and to some degree joining) the process by which Western hegemony continuously defines and redefines itself.

II.B: "Ethnicity," "Religion," and American Jewish Identity

In *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*, Karen Brodkin criticizes the role of a group of predominantly Jewish mid-century City College intellectuals, including Irving Howe, Nathan Glazer, and Daniel Bell, who aided the project of "Whitening" American Jews by trumpeting American Jewry as a "model minority," in contrast to "deficient minorities" such as African-Americans and Puerto Ricans (Brodkin, 146). This racial transformation, she argues, was based equally in growing identification with mainstream White culture as well as in expanding rejection of the cultures of African-Americans and "off-white" ethnic minorities. In their writing, American Jewish success is founded on positive cultural values, such as education, family unity, and rationality, while African-American failure is caused by flaws such as institutional and family disunities and uncontrolled sexuality. Brodkin seeks to interject into this discourse that the process of whitening and the privilege of maleness were central predicates for male American Jewish success:

> In contrast to prewar Jewishness, especially its progressive variants, which distanced itself from bourgeois society and culture, postwar Jewishness propounded by these male intellectuals celebrated its resonance with the mainstream. The virtues and rewards that they claimed for themselves as good Jewish sons depended upon showing how similar Jewish culture was to bourgeois cultural ideals and upon differentiating Jewish culture from a depraved and unworthy African American culture. What I see as white male privilege they saw as universal entitlements earned though the exercise of the virtues given them by their Jewish heritage (Brodkin, 150).

Brodkin's disruption of this "model minority" rhetoric problematizes the narrative of an essentially successful Jewish culture and reveals the underlying systems of gendered and racialized power that enabled Jewish success (through sexist, racist institutions such as the G.I. Bill). Most powerfully, it shows that increased "Jewish resonance with mainstream" was inextricably linked with a distancing from that mainstream's others, achieved through the construction of oppressive bodies of knowledge that devalued and demonized non-White cultures: "Glazer and other Jewish public intellectuals created this portrait of 'good' Jewishness as much by contrast with 'bad' African Americanness as by descriptions of Jewish culture itself" (Brodkin, 146).

Brodkin's analysis of racial privilege in the making of American Jewish success is an important subversion of a chauvinist American Jewish rhetoric of essential cultural superiority, but I think that it is a too-narrow focus on an important part—but only a part—of a larger process[38] of American Jewish movement towards White, Protestant modernity. This movement was characterized not just by an increased embrace of "bourgeois cultural ideals," but also by closer adoption of Protestant modernity's ontology of human identities. When, for instance, Moynihan and Glazer write in their classic study of New York City culture, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, that "the powerful Board of Estimate…consist[s] of five Jews, one white Protestant, one black Protestant, and…one lonely Catholic" (Glazer and Moynihan, lviii), they are making a comparison between Jews, Protestants, and Catholics that *a priori* assumes that Jewishness, Protestantness, and Catholicness all belong in the same ontological realm and all are variations on a theme of religious identity. At the same time, these religious identities are interlinked implicitly or explicitly with racial assignments.[39]

Glazer and Moynihan also ambiguously tie "religion" into the category of ethnicity. The above quote about the Board of Estimate is described as part of New

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[38] For an extended justification of viewing "Blackness [and Whiteness] and Jewishness [and Gentileness]…as complex products of ongoing social processes, rather than stable or unchanging essences," (Goldschmidt, 9) see Goldschmidt, note 5 to the introduction on p. 240.

[39] I give the interplay between race and religion a closer examination as part of my critique of Brodkin in the second chapter. For now, let me constrain myself to endorsing Goldschmidt's argument that despite the seeming rigidity of these categories,

> racial and religious identities (and others) have been inextricably woven together, to such an extent that 'race' and 'religion' have each helped define the very nature of the other. Throughout America history, these seemingly distinct discourses of difference have borrowed and contested each other's social hierarchies, mixing and mingling in complex dialectics that may rarely be reduced to either term alone. They are, I would argue, co-constituted categories, wholly dependent on each other for their social existence and symbolic meaning (Goldschmidt, 26).

For more on this, see the collection *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas* (2004), edited by Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister.

York's "ethnic history" (Glazer and Moynihan, lviii). The authors make this relationship more explicit, and throw into the mix class politics, when they assert that "in New York…to name an occupational group or a class is very much the same thing as naming an ethnic group, and to name an ethnic group is very much the same thing as naming a religious group" (Glazer and Moynihan, lvii).[40] This is *not* to say that they are claiming that the cultural spaces contained in "class" "ethnicity" and "religion" are mixed or interchangeable—quite the opposite, as the whole work is thoroughly embedded in a discourse about cultural identity in which "class," "ethnicity," and "religion" form distinct spheres. Rather, they are claiming that they are interchangeable as *markers* of identity. That is to say, "Anyone who is x is of course y; anyone who is y is of course x"; such a formulation still reifies the categories of "x" and "y." Furthermore, this claim is made in a generalized, or universal fashion. It implies that class, ethnicity, and religion interact consistently across all cultural groups; that is, the identities of being, e.g., "Italian" and "Catholic" interact with each other in the same way as being, e.g. "Jewish" and, well, "Jewish." Already, we see that this formation exhibits a certain strain: it is obviously more tautological to state that Jews are Jewish than to say that Italians are Catholic.

Behind all their discussion of New York's "ethnic" groups, lies the silent shadow of the hegemonic WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), whose Whiteness had historically been exclusively possessed through nativity and Protestantness. But as Brodkin shows, around the 1950s, Whiteness, or better Whitening, became available to people who did not share those other privileged identities, particularly Ashkenazi Jews (and to an ambivalent extent, Italians, Irish, and other people of European descent). I would like to argue that a crucial part of this process of becoming White was adopting Whiteness's ontology of cultural identity; not just its values, but its forms.[41] Goldschmidt analyzes the construction of these "forms" in his ethnography *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, with a particular eye to the intersections of Blackness and Jewishness with multiculturalism:

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[40] Specifically, Irish people are working-class and Catholic; Italians are working-class and Catholic; Blacks are poor and Protestant (or radical or Godless); and Jews are middle-class and Jewish.

> "Categories like race, and for that matter religion, help us accommodate, and contain, cultural difference by reducing its limitless expressions to familiar and manageable forms—forcing Blacks and Jews, and everyone else, to define their identities in equivalent ways. Blackness and Whiteness are seen as equivalently 'racial,' while Judaism and Christianity are considered equivalently 'religious.' Jerk chicken is to gefilte fish as Kwanzaa is to Hanukah, or dreadlocks are to yarmulkes, because all are considered equivalently 'cultural' (Goldschmidt, 13).

Beyond the Melting Pot attempts to construct Irish, Italian, and particularly, Jewish ethnicity as equivalent to White nativity and their religions as equivalent to White Protestantness.[42] When they mark ethnicity and religion as distinct categories, but claim that they are interchangeable as indexes of particular groups, they do so in unspoken imitation of the relationship between White nativity and Protestantness. In this relationship, they are tightly divided into two distinct cultural spaces—White American nativity contains the secular sphere of bourgeois rational thought, action, and material culture and Protestantness contains the religious sphere of the church, the home, and individual belief—but are still tightly interlinked in that they are both interchangeable markers of the same group (WASPs). But as we will see, this imitation is flawed: it's far less clear with Jews which elements belong in which spheres (and the same goes for Italian Catholics).

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[41] An interlinked part of this movement was, as Jon Stratton argues in *Coming Out Jewish*, the rise of a White endogamy that increasingly included Jews (as well as a corresponding rise in Jewish exogamy within those parts of American Jewry most involved in moving closer to White, Protestant hegemony). See Stratton, pp. 207-208 and 228-230.

[42] Brodkin briefly addresses the ways in which Christianity and Whiteness constructed each other in America, as part of the of the process of enslaving and racializing an African labor force (68).

The weaknesses in *Beyond the Melting Pot*'s project of molding Jewishness into White, Protestant forms are inevitable, according to Jakobsen and Pellegrini:

> By making all religions fit a model established by Protestantism, what was supposed to offer a means of recognizing differences among 'religions' in fact ensured that these different 'religions' were the same. And yet 'other' religions also could never be fully the 'same.' They would always at best be poor imitations of the original (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 9).

To join WASP hegemony, Jewishness had to resemble WASPness, and so intellectuals like Moynihan and Glazer attempted to construct Jews as a "model minority," one whose cultural forms lay closest to WASP America—but the best they could do was create a "poor imitation of the original," in which the copied formations of ethnicity and religion do not quite define and interact as they ought to. Moynihan and Glazer's complicity in the project of forcing Jewishness into the Protestant model, and the difficulties in achieving such a goal, come across strongly in their account of Jewish policemen's request to have a day off on Yom Kippur:

> A good deal of…Jewish togetherness is frightened and unimaginative, and its only purpose is to maintain separateness…a few years ago, the Police Commissioner of New York spoke out in irritation against Jewish policemen who were taking off Yom Kippur as a holiday when he needed every man to guard [Cuban leader Fidel] Castro and [Soviet leader Nikita] Khrushchev, who were attending a meeting of the U.N. General Assembly. Married to a Jewish woman, knowledgeable about New York and New York Jews, he said that he knew many of them were not planning to spend the day in the synagogue. The outburst against him by Jewish organizations was violent…such incidents…lead one to reflect on the future of the Jewish community.

> What is it afraid of? What is it defending? Are these minor slights matters that should so deeply concern it? (Glazer and Moynihan, 176-7).

Reading this account between the lines, we see that the fundamental sources of conflict lay where Jewish identity resists modern, Protestant forms. The request for a day off for Yom Kippur represents an intrusion of the religious into the public sphere because it interferes with the public, secular demand on the officers to defend Castro and Khruschev, leaders of two secular states. Such a request for leave might or might not be acceptable if it were based a legitimate religious need, but the upshot is that the commissioner, head of the public police force, knew that it was in fact not a legitimate religious need: "he said that he knew many of them were not planning to spend the day in the synagogue." What is marked as legitimately religious here, to the extent that it may on occasion trump public, secular need, is that which takes place in the synagogue. Any other mode of acting differently on Yom Kippur does not "fit a model established by Protestantism" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 9) and is thus not properly "religious," meaning that Jewish police officers who do not go to synagogue on Yom Kippur do not have a right to the day off.

We do not know from this account what was the substance of Jewish organizations' "violent" reaction to the commissioner's words, or who the particular actors were, but I will take the liberty of commenting, from my personal observations, that Jewish observances of Yom Kippur are far from limited to the synagogue, and often consist of some combination of fasting, abstaining from work, and personal contemplation, none of which necessarily occur in the synagogue or in the home. These may be public acts, and may very well interfere with Jews' public duties on that day.

Glazer and Moynihan are contemptuous of the Jewish community's response to the situation. When they write that "a good deal of…Jewish togetherness is frightened and unimaginative, and its only purpose is to maintain separateness" (Glazer and Moynihan, 176), they are not only criticizing the divisiveness in the Jewish cops' decision to take off Yom Kippur (because it set them apart from non-Jewish police officers), or Jewish communal reaction to the commissioner (because it likewise set them apart from other communities), but more fundamentally because the whole incident was an act of Jewish public servants' resistance to modern America's demands on their time and definitions of their identity, as well as of organized Jewish communal defense of this resistance in the face of publicly empowered reaction. Such Jewish "togetherness is frightened and unimaginative" because it represents to the authors a setback to the process of modernizing Jewish identities. They laud communal togetherness to the extent that it fits a model-minority story of a community with unusually high adoption of "bourgeois cultural ideals" like higher educational attainment, greater economic success, and stronger nuclear families. Jewish togetherness becomes "frightened and unimaginative" when it threatens public values and resists hegemonic forms of identity. Glazer and Moynihan distance themselves from the Jewish community's resistance ("What is it afraid of? What is it defending? Are these minor slights matters that should so deeply concern it?") in order to move themselves closer to Protestant modernity, in parallels to the way in which they distance "deficient" minorities from the Jewish "model minority" in order to move the Jewish community closer to modern hegemony.

The inextricable linkage between knowledge and power, which Said focuses on in his study of Orientalism and Western domination, comes into sharp focus in the above passage. The connection between the commissioner's knowledge (or definition) of Jewishness and the disciplining (to borrow Michel Foucault's terminology) of the Jewish policemen's bodies on Yom Kippur is a strong example of the way in which the production of hegemonic bodies of knowledge and domination over the bodies of the hegemony's others sustain each other. Within the narrative itself, the police commissioner would like to deny leave to Jewish officers because he "*knew* many of them were not planning to spend the day in the synagogue" [emphasis added]. His expertise is justified because he was "married to a Jewish woman, [and] knowledgeable about New York and New York Jews." His denial of a holiday is thus grounded on private knowledge of what Jews do on Yom Kippur, as well as what constitutes legitimate, religious activity for them. Moynihan and Glazer's explanation of his knowledge is not very different from the infamous "Some of our best friends are so-and-so" trope, and indeed, we can say that the commissioner has a very good Jewish friend in Nathan Glazer, who is willing to fight so fiercely in support of the commissioner's knowledge and power.

If we think back to Said's model of the Oriental and the Orientalist, of the knower and the known, the ruler and the ruled, who fits into these camps when we consider *Beyond the Melting Pot*? Serious consideration of this question problematizes Said's aforementioned binaries. The authors here are Irish and Jewish respectively, so in their time they were already White, or perhaps better, very close to White, just distant enough to strive to move ever closer to White, Protestant, native modernity. Already, in this slight fraction from the hegemony, in this almost-Whiteness,[43] we see minute cracks develop in the monolithic face of the kind of structure of oppressive, hegemonic scholarship that Said characterizes in his own work, and there are even more profound fissures in the categorization of the oppressed. Blacks are the most explicit foil for Glazer and Moynihan's work, a group characterized as cultureless in a book that lauds the power of ethnic culture.[44] There is a more ambiguous discussion of New York's Italian population, which has a slightly deficient culture, one incapable of great progress along bourgeois lines, and so is never permitted to be a model minority.[45]

Most disturbing to Said's binary is the fact the Jewish community itself becomes an object of study for Glazer and Moynihan, valorized for its "model minority" status only insofar as it fits into Protestant American Whiteness (e.g. strong nuclear families, many great intellectuals, large professional workforce, increasing secularization and relegation of religious activity to the temple and the home). As much as Brodkin is incisively perceptive in revealing the categorization of Jews as a "model minority" as both empowering of and empowered by White privilege, she does not analyze how this act of definition also acts to confine Jewish "goodness"—

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[43] What Homi Bhabha pithily terms "white but not quite" (Bhabha, 86).

[44] And to the extent that there is a Black culture, it is retrograde: for example, one of the five chapters on the city's black population is entitled "the family and other problems."

[45] E.g.: "The slow change that characterized Italian Americans in the…character of the family-based culture may also be seen when we consider their occupational history. The first-generation men were principally workers. Three-quarters of them were to be found, in 1950, in the categories of skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled workers. Two-thirds of the second generation were still workers" (Glazer and Moynihan, 205-6).

and Jewishness itself—to the values and forms of White, Protestant modernity.[46] If *Beyond the Melting Pot* is to succeed in its portrayal of Jews as a model minority, then it must define contemporary Jewishness in terms of its "resonance with the mainstream" (Brodkin, 150)—and this means not only the full range of "bourgeois cultural ideals," but also the very structure of cultural identity, including the retreat of the "religious" into the private sphere, accompanied by the entrance of the "ethnic" into the public sphere.

We've already seen one fairly explicit instance of this project in Moynihan and Glazer's account of the police commissioner's imbroglio with New York City Jewish policemen and institutions. In this case, tensions between the authors' definition of Jewish culture (that Jewish religion does not interfere with the public good) and lived Jewishness (Yom Kippur observance superseding the demand to guard Castro and Khrushchev) were strong enough to lead Moynihan and Glazer to lash out condescendingly at the Jewish community. The ethnic and the religious showed themselves to be interlinked in complex ways—e.g., that being Jewish might mean not working on Yom Kippur even if one doesn't go to synagogue—that disrupt Protestant modernity's division between the two categories.

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[46] Again, Stratton points out that one of the key differences Jews had to relinquish was Jewish endogamy. The entrance of Jews into White endogamy not only made Jews "less Jewish" but it also offered White America the chance to become "more Jewish." (See Jonathan Freedman's *Klezmer America*.)

II.C: Secularization and American Jewish Progress

As invested as Glazer and Moynihan are in showing how White and modern Jews are *now* (in contrast of off-White and Black others), that effort is part of a larger underlying narrative of Jewish progress (e.g. in contrast to a continued working-class Italian stagnation), one which tells a story of how Jews have evolved from *there* and *then* to *here* and *now*. *Beyond the Melting Pot* is thus just as thoroughly (if more silently) involved in defining past Jewishness as it is in present Jewishness. Take, for instance, its account of Jewish secularization: “Jews broke with the most orthodox and traditional of religions to become open to everything new…they seized upon everything new because the old things were so often tied up with social snobbery, anti-Semitism, and obscurant conservatism” (Glazer and Moynihan, 172). “Everything new”—that is, American and in the present time—is understood here in terms of its opposition to everything old, including a stiflingly rigid religion and large social terms that marked Jews as unprivileged. Jewish movement away from “the most orthodox and traditional of religions” and “obscurant conservatism” of the past is to be understood as movement toward flexible, rational, and liberal thought of the present; this change walks hand-in-hand with leaving behind “social snobbery [and] anti-Semitism,” presumably for greener pastures of social acceptance and participation in the non-Jewish mainstream. [47]

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[47] Among other things, this narrative places the burden to end anti-Semitism squarely on Jewish shoulders; the solution to prejudice was for Jews to embrace “everything new,” not for “everything new” to itself be changed. (Can we see echoes of Theodore Herzl’s Zionist ideology? See Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, chapter VII, entitled “The Colonial Drag: Zionism, Gender, and Mimicry.”) If “everything new” means secular

This linkage recalls Pellegrini and Jakobsen's comment that the "traditional narrative of secularization is part of a broader sociological narrative about societal development or evolution" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 4). For Glazer and Moynihan, Jewish secularization is intimately tied into other markers of progress such as professional success and increased social mobility:

> Why then do large numbers of psychoanalysts and patients come from this group [Jews] in the United States? The explanation probably lies in the effects of secularism on Jews, who have been so rapidly divorced from traditional religion and who have accepted the possibilities of science and intellect so completely that a movement like psychoanalysis—even had its founder been a German anti-Semite—would have been irresistibly attractive. For here was a scientific form of soul-rebuilding to make them whole and hardy, and it was divorced, at least on the surface, from mysticism, will, religion, and all those other romantic and obscure trends that their rational minds rejected. And then too, it was also a new field with room for new people, which fact may explain why so many Jews became analysts. But it is primarily the complete secularization of the second-generation East European Jew in America that explains why so many became patients (Moynihan and Glazer, 175).

The overarching theme of progress encapsulates twinned processes of secularization and socio-economic success. "Science and intellect" replace "traditional religion": psychoanalysis becomes the medicine for Jews' "rational minds," replacing "mysticism, will, religion…and other romantic and obscure trends" which had been used for "soul-rebuilding." We are reminded that psychoanalysis also provided a great deal of social mobility to Jews, being "a new field with room for new people" (the double usage of the modifier "new" acts to link the cutting-edge modernity of a "new field" of science with the cutting-edge modernity of a "new people," American

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modernity, then any admission of its agency in oppressing Jews would greatly complicate any Jewish quest to embrace it.

This is not the only place where Moynihan and Glazer turn a blind eye toward mainstream anti-Semitism. They quite glaringly comply with very old anti-Semitic tropes when they write without reflection that "in the avant-garde circles of the twenties, thirties, and forties Jews were very often the critics (and entrepreneurs), non-Jews the creators" (Moynihan and Glazer, 173).

Jewry). In this narrative, opportunities for professional and economic success for Jews arise hand-in-hand with their “complete” secularization, each enabling the other.

The language of “complete secularization” and “rapid…divorce…from traditional religion” disguises the complexity of the New York Jewish community that it is attempting to describe. And indeed, it is first and foremost a shift in perspective from the single to the plural—community to communities—that allows us to see that Glazer and Moynihan are really interested in only talking about one type of idealized Jewish community, one which has closely adopted hegemonic forms and contents. When a group such as Jewish policemen interferes with this model, they are upbraided strongly by the authors.

II.D: Jewish Progress and Loss: Yiddishkeit and Judaism in *Number Our Days*

Barbara Myerhoff’s *Number Our Days*, published in 1979, is a classic ethnography, a pioneer in the anthropological movements toward self-reflexivity and the study of the proximate Other. As I mentioned in the introduction, this work has been very formative for me in my understandings of ethnography and of the painful beauty of lived Jewishness. It analyzes the social life of a small group of elderly Jews in Venice Beach, California in the 1970s, who, separated physically and emotionally from their children and their neighbors, struggle to fashion a rich, meaningful social life for and with each other. These Jews were almost all born in Eastern Europe, and were in the twilight of their lives and of their experience as immigrants to America.

Myerhoff's summary of their immigrant experience evokes the tropes of secularization, assimilation, emancipation, and success that we saw in Glazer and Moynihan's account:

> In the drastic decision to leave their natal homes and countries, they were exchanging life in the Old World for a new life. It was a trade-off—America brought them gains and losses. They gained religious freedom but lost their sacred traditions by this move. They gained physical safety for themselves and their children but lost their families of origin and communities; they gained access to educational and economic opportunities for their progeny but ultimately this led to severe separation from the following generation, and eventually contributed to their present physical and cultural separation from their children (Myerhoff, 105).

They are the in-between generation, Glazer and Moynihan's Lower East Side denizens who must permanently stand in the "portal to America," unable to integrate but able to effect an integrated future for their American Jewish children.

Myerhoff's narrative of bitter-sweet American Jewish progress in which Jewish parents and children have been irreconcilably torn from each other is based on the collapse of Jewish cultural difference to a discrete category called "Judaism." "The Judaism practiced by younger Americans," she argues, "is so different from that known to the elders, and so diffuse, that it is nearly unrecognizable. The most important dimension of their [the elders'] Judaism, Yiddishkeit, was almost certain to die out with their or the next generation" (Myerhoff, 105).[48] The reason that this new "Judaism" is "nearly unrecognizable" is not just that, as Myerhoff claims, it contains different content (the Temple in place of the shul and Yiddishkeit), but because it represents a very different form of cultural identity. For these elderly Jews,

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[48] The recently released *Stories as Equipment For Living: Last Talks and Tales of Barbara Myerhoff*, redacted by Marc Kaminsky and Mark Weiss, contains field notes from Myerhoff's last project before she died, among the Hasidim of Fairfax, California. Her fieldwork there certainly troubled this claim. See particularly: pp. 140-145, "Interview with Rav Naftali E."

Yiddishkeit was just as integrated into their daily lives as English, hip-hop, and the Super Bowl are for many Americans today. Yiddishkeit is too large and diverse of a cultural object—as Myerhoff puts it, "the warp and woof of what held them together, the stuff of their common childhood in Eastern Europe" (Myerhoff, 96), or, more simply, as her primary informant Shmuel the tailor states, "'Yiddishkeit is our culture'" (Myerhoff, 96)—to fit into this tiny vessel called Judaism, confined to the temple and the home. The cup runneth over! And so no wonder these elderly Jews had such a violent cultural break with their children—where their Jewishness was a tapestry, interweaving without studied distinction Yiddish, Yiddiskeit, the market, and the shul, their progeny's Jewishness was a carefully delineated Judaism, something to be chosen or rejected, relegated to the temple and the home. But Myerhoff instead casts the mold of "Judaism" on to the elders, and thus sees the difference between the parents and children in terms of the content of the vessel, rather than the vessel's shape (or, better yet, the vessel's *shaping*). When she argues that "In this country for the first time Jewish identity became genuinely optional" for these Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants (Myerhoff, 97), in echo of larger American myths of America as the space of religious freedom, she reifies a construction of Jewishness as a distinct, limited thing that can be accepted or rejected, a freedom that is only gained through the collapse of lived Jewishness to "Judaism," the Jewish religion.

II.E: Ethnicity, Religion, and Jewishness in Quantitative Analyses of American Jewry

Within the realm of academia, Glazer and Moynihan's classic ontology of Jewishness and narrative of American Jewish progress is not constrained to anthropology. It has extended as far the field of economics. In the fall of my junior year at Wesleyan, I took an economics class called "Race, Ethnicity, Labor Markets." For the final project, I conducted a survey of the literature of the economics of American Jewry. The most salient feature of the field is its scarcity. The small body of scholarship is dominated by Professors Carmel and Barry Chiswick and a few colleagues of theirs at the University of Illinois in what I have coined the "Chiswick School."[49] In his article "The Skills and Economic Status of American Jewry: Trends over the Last Half-Century," Barry Chiswick argues that Jews, as a model ethnic minority, can be compared quantitatively to other ethnic minorities in order to better discover the failed cultures' flaws:

> The study of American Jewry is also important for a broader understanding of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States…The study of a group with higher levels of achievement than the majority population may generate insights essential for an understanding of disadvantaged minorities (Chiswick, 230).

In his eyes, Jewish ethnicity is a qualitative category that is associated with a range of quantitative data, enabling comparison of Jews with other cultural groups of the same form—ethnicities. Elsewhere, with Jidong Huang, another member of the "Chiswick School," he treats "religiosity" as a distinct qualitative category with quantifiable markers, analyzing the relationship between, e.g. Jewish Orthodoxy and earnings (Chiswick and Huang, 16).

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[49] Elements of this section have been lifted from the final paper I wrote for Econ 209, entitled "Few and Far Between: A Review of the Economic Analyses of American Jewry."

"Jewish Distinctiveness in America: A Statistical Portrait," continues a similar project of comparison between Jews and other ethnicities and Jews and other religions, likewise echoing Glazer and Moynihan's model, and reifying these cultural categories as natural and clearly distinct. In 2005, the American Jewish Committee commissioned Tom W. Smith, director of the General Social Survey (GSS) at the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago to use GSS data to describe and interpret Jews' place in the American ethnic and religious landscapes. Smith defines variations within Jewishness—that is differences between Jews—strictly in terms of placement on a continuum of religiosity ranging from "cultural" to "Orthodox":

> Cultural or ethnic Jews would mostly consist of those raised as Jewish but with no current religion, those not identifying with any of the denominational groups of Jews, and those with low attendance of religious services. Religious or practicing Jews would tend to be those with Jewish as their current religion, with a denominational affiliation, and with moderate or greater attendance. Within the three main denominational groups, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, religious practices are naturally most traditional for the Orthodox and least for the Reform. In addition, levels of observance for a wide range of Judaic rituals (e.g., fasting on Yom Kippur, keeping kosher, holding a Seder, and attending services) are highest for the Orthodox and lowest for the Reform (United Jewish Communities, 2004 a, b, c). Thus, Reform Jews are closer to cultural Jews than Orthodox or Conservative Jews are on the traditional/nontraditional and observant/nonobservant continua (Smith, 61-2).

Jewishness is collapsed to variations on a religious theme. Those who identify *ethnically* as Jewish are free to choose the degree to which they will embrace Judaism: "Jews, as a religious group, are expected to maintain and pass on their Jewish identity. As an ethnic group, their religion is not only an attribute of individuals and families, but a trait of the collective Jewish community" (Smith, viii). This formulation echoes Wendy Brown's argument that the modern, emancipated hegemony claims to "have culture" or religion, while primitive, religious Others are reduced to "being culture" (Brown, 299-301). It also recalls Jakobsen and Pellegrini's observation that cultural deviations from Protestant hegemony are disciplined by reducing them into "religions," which can "at best be poor imitations of the original" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 9).

These methodologies—the Chiswick School's and Smith's—are grounded in a discourse of American Jewishness in which Jews are a model ethnic community who have their own distinct religion, Judaism, which different sections of the community follow to different degrees of rigor; in which Jewish ethnic success is defined in terms of its ability to adopt hegemonic values, in sustained contrast to other racial or ethnic groups' failure to do so; and in which there is no room for a mode of Jewishness that abrogates these fixed categories of race, ethnicity, and religion, a challenge to the social scientists' methodology that cannot be countenanced.

II.F: Narratives of Jewish Progress in American Popular Media

The intertwined narratives of American Jewish progress and the primitive Hasid are not confined to the academic sphere. As I was working on this project, I was repeatedly struck by how often they appeared in some of my favorite mainstream journalistic media, like the New York Times and Slate.com. On January 17th an article by Shmuel Rosner named “The Next Jewish Challenge” was published on Slate.com. It places the (then recent) decision by the Conservative movement to ordinate openly queer Jews in a larger story of the inevitable liberalization of Judaism:

> Conservative Judaism is a movement torn between conservatism and liberalism, being squeezed between its two competitor branches of Judaism—Orthodoxy on the right and Reform on the left. Orthodox Jews adhere to ancient religious law in everyday life, and Reform long ago rid itself of those archaic constraints. Conservative Jews walk the middle ground: They follow halacha, or Jewish law, but try to make it more adaptable to the needs of current generations, a delicate and always complicated maneuver in these times of polarization. The great game of Jewish evolvement has a clear pattern. Take a look at Reform Judaism, and you'll see where Conservatives might be tomorrow. Take a look at Conservative Jews, and you'll see what the Orthodox will need to debate even later (Rosner).

Rosner modifies the classic narrative of inevitable secularization to argue that while Jewish religion will continue, it will be inevitably liberalized—in terms of key issues like queer people’s and women rights, as well as easing on restrictions like intermarriage and halakhic practice. In his formulation, the chain of Orthodox→Conservative→Reform (a continuum which contains all variations of American Jewish difference) is a story of “evolvement,” with the Reform movement embodying contemporary American, liberal values and the Conservative and Orthodox movement lagging behind them. (Recall that in Tom Smith’s paradigm, “Reform” identity is the closet to secular “cultural or ethnic” identity).

This story is built on a conception of time where, by lagging behind in the process of evolution, Conservative Jews and to a larger degree Orthodox Jews are living in the past, but are moving forward inexorably into the present time. Rosner’s narrative is a classically American modernization story, where the problem of continued religious existence is solved by arguing that religion does not disappear over time, but instead becomes more and more attenuated and impotent, localized to the church and the home, one option for Americans among many. Emancipation here means increasing autonomy from “religious” law (such as Levitical commandments condemning “man lying with a man”) achieved through increasing adoption of rational Enlightenment values (all people, including homosexuals, are created equal). Such a narrative solves the problem posed by the presence of contemporary groups like Hasidim who exhibit radical difference from Protestantized, liberalized “religion” by arguing that they are merely lagging in the process of evolution, but will some day become modernized just as mainstream (here, Reform) Jews have. Such an outlook collapses important differences between Hasidim and other Jews (including “Orthodox” ones) such as language, appearance, and educational background into difference in terms of degrees of “freedom from dogmatism” (Pellegrini and Jakobsen, 1). This story is rather unsophisticated compared to other modernization narratives because it becomes so fragile when confronted not only with the continued existence, but the *flourishing* of Hasidic communities who speak Yiddish, wear the livush, and refuse to cordon off a contained religious sphere in their cultural lives.

On March 2nd, 2008, the New York Times Magazine published “How Do You Prove You’re a Jew?” by Gershom Gorenberg. The article chronicles the increasing difficulty American Jews face in trying to establish their Jewishness to Israeli rabbinical courts, a problem with quite material consequences in a state that institutionalizes privilege for those who are certified as “Jewish.” Gorenberg argues that the recognition process is over-strict, and to prove his point, he relates the stories of several Americans who are “clearly” Jewish but have still had trouble gaining official Jewishness in the eyes of the Israel government. He presents his case for one woman's pedigree:

> Suzie's maternal grandfather, David Ludmersky, was born in Kiev. When he was drafted into the czar's army, he deserted, fled to America and worked to send a ticket to Rose, the girl he left behind. The Merskys (an Ellis Island clerk shortened the name) moved to the small Wisconsin town of Wausau, where their daughter, Belle (Suzie's mother), was born. Suzie has heard that they didn't like the place, that they consulted a fortuneteller, that she told them to move west to Minneapolis. There David Mersky indeed made his fortune, working his way from peddling fruit to owning one of the city's first supermarkets. **I recount this family history because of its pure American Jewish normality.** In Minneapolis, Belle Mersky married Julius Goldstein in a Conservative ceremony. **This, too, was typical: Conservative Judaism was the common choice for American Jews leaning toward tradition.** Julius's brother became a Conservative rabbi. Belle and Julius raised their family on Minneapolis's North Side, "a totally Jewish neighborhood then," Suzie recalled. She went to Sunday school at Beth El Synagogue, a Conservative congregation (Gorenberg, **emphasis** added).

Gorenberg attempts to "prove" Suzie's Jewishness to the reader by placing her family story—in all of "its pure American Jewish normality"—in a broader set of family and communal narratives that are instantly recognizable to the reader as Jewish narratives, and in the process of doing so, shaping the contents of that set. The shared tropes include immigration from Eastern Europe to America in order to escape oppression (here, the czar's draft), economic success ("working his way from peddling fruit to owning one of the city's first supermarkets"), a secularization or denominization of Judaism (thus fashioning "Judaism" as a distinct and optional cultural category, and defining Jewishness as placement in the Judaism continuum: "Conservative Judaism was the common choice for American Jews leaning towards tradition"), initial location in a now-dissolved Jewish ghetto ("Minneapolis's North Side, 'a totally Jewish neighborhood then'"), and the confinement of Jewishness to a Judaism of the synagogue or the home ("she went to Sunday school at Beth El Synagogue").

This article, an extended apologetic for the Jewishness of American Jews, points to the unsettling ambiguity of Jewish identity for contemporary mainstream American Jews. Goldschmidt observes that "American Jewish identity has rarely, if ever, been so clearly defined [as e.g., Buddhist, Haitain, or Jamaican difference]" (Goldschmidt, 24) and that while "there is absolutely nothing about Jewishness itself, independent of its social contexts, that makes it inherently more ambiguous than other identities…for a number of specific historical reasons, Jewishness is somewhat more ambiguous than most other American identities" (Goldschmidt, 25).

III: The Hasid as the Primitive Jewish Other

III.A: American Jewish Evolution: From Pre-Modern, East European Hasid to Modern, American Jew

Hasidim present an enormous mass of contradictions for mainstream narratives of American Jewish progress such as Moynihan's and Glazer's. They perform, often silently, the role of the ultimate Jewish other for other Jews, the foil against which Jews define themselves as modern. Hasidim are both invaluable to these narratives—they are used to paint the picture of the Jewish self of *there* and *then* from which "we" have progressed—and stubbornly challenging to such stories at the very same time, by dint of the very existence of a "pre-modern" Jewish self in the *here* and *now*. In *Beyond the Melting Pot*'s only passage on Hasidim, this tension comes out in sharp relief:

> The separation of the Hasidic groups is even more extreme [than of ‘other Orthodox’ ones]. Living in Williamsburg, one of the oldest Jewish neighborhoods (but now largely Negro and Puerto Rican), and on Eastern Parkway, a much better and newer neighborhood (but one bordering the growing Negro neighborhood of Crown Heights), the Hasidim insist on a more complete separation than other Orthodox Jews. Not only do they have their own schools, more Orthodox than the ordinary Yeshiva, but they retain traditional peculiarities of dress and hair arrangement that marked off Jews from non-Jews in Eastern Europe centuries ago. In this group, one must wear Judaism on one’s face in order to strengthen the Judaism of one’s heart. One of the reasons Hasidim live next door to Negroes is unconcern because nothing in the modern world—the drive for respectability, fear of Negroes, or what other people think—affects them much (Glazer and Moynihan, 165).

The marks that set Hasidim apart from other Jews (and from the American mainstream) are their greater Orthodoxy; their appearance; their juxtaposition of the public and the religious (“one must wear one’s Judaism’s on one’s face”); and their indifference to the threat posed by their Black neighbors. These differences are explained by their “more complete…separation” across both space and time: differences in material culture are explained as “traditional peculiarities of dress and hair arrangement that marked off Jews from non-Jews in Eastern Europe centuries ago,” placing that mode of difference in a timeless past in a vague Eastern European place. Hasidim are indifferent to Blacks because they are indifferent to the “modern world” as a whole, and as Goldschmidt explains, this is considered to be a fundamentally religious, irrational stance, one that denies a rational, pragmatic Jewish fear of Blacks:

> The Jews and others who left Crown Heights in the 1960s may be condemned, by some, for their racial and economic politics, but their decision to leave the neighborhood is generally seen as a ‘rational response’ to the realities of their time. The Lubavitchers who stayed, by contrast, are seen as ‘irrational’ and ‘anti-modern,’ because their decision was governed by ancient religious texts and the charismatic authority of a spiritual leader (Goldschmidt, 32).

If Glazer and Moynihan’s (and others’) construction of white, ethnic identities is built in sustained opposition to dangerous Blacks, then Hasidic refusal to take part in fearing Blacks represents a rejection to take part in a crucial method of Whitening and of modernizing American Jewishness. [50]

Here lies a serious problem for *Beyond the Melting Pot*'s tale of the "complete secularization of the second-generation East European Jew in America" (Moynihan and Glazer, 175)—a claim that is indispensable to the book's narrative of American Jewish progress—and an imaginative solution, all wrapped up in one tangled bunch. Hasidic proximity to and coevalness with the rest of American Jewry problematizes claims of universal Jewish secularization, or even of a universal movement toward secularization, because Hasidim do not comply fully with the projects of modernity (such as the creation of a "religious" sphere of life, confined to the private domain). Rhetorical denial of Hasidic proximity and coevalness, in which Hasidim are relegated to "Eastern Europe centuries ago" neutralizes this threat to the modernization project. Moving Hasidim to a timeless Jewish past and placeless Jewish space renders them an object in mainstream Jewish history. American Jewish modernity's imagination of its past, pre-modern self is superimposed onto the Hasid; or, to put it another way, the Hasid becomes the pre-modern Jew self and the pre-modern Jews becomes the Hasid. This reified historical object, the Hasid, becomes

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[50] That said, the claim that Hasidim are fundamentally "unconcern[ed]" with their Black neighbors (and thus from modern Whiteness) is grossly inaccurate now and presumably at the time in which Glazer and Moynihan wrote as well. As Goldschmidt amply proves, Crown Heights' Lubavitcher Hasidim have a whole lot to think and say about their Black neighbors (occasionally with real fear, as they show when they use the language of "pogrom" to describe the neighborhood's violent inter-communal clashes), and are fully present in their neighborhood's space.

homo religiosus,[51] the primitive, and (to invoke Said's language, knowing that such an invocation at one and the same time subverts his blanket paradigm of Jews as Orientalists) the Oriental. This is what Wendy Brown terms the "organicist creature" in her article "Subjects of Tolerance: Why We Are Civilized and They Are the Barbarians": a being "considered to lack rationality and will, [for whom] culture and religion (culture *as* religion, and religion *as* culture—equations that work only for this creature) are saturating and authoritative, while for the liberal one, culture and religion become 'background,'can be 'entered' and 'exited,' and are thus rendered extrinsic to rather than constitutive of the subject" (Brown, 301).

The categorization of the Hasid as the Jewish religious primitive[52] is tied ineluctably into claims about both Hasidic (lack of) and mainstream Jewish (possession of) rationality, liberty, and humanity, which come out in the following passage about the historical Lower East Side:

> When the Jews lived on the Lower East Side and in other working-class areas, they led a separate life. But they were intensely curious about everything going on in the outer world, eager to participate in it and to master whatever had to be mastered for this participation. When the Jews were thus most Jewish, when they took their Jewishness for granted, they looked forward to a time when all barriers would be down and they could participate freely in the labor movement, business, and politics, culture, and social life. The ideology of the working-class Jews was not separation but the fullest involvement in society; Jewish culture and religion, they felt, could take care of itself (Glazer and Moynihan, 180).

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[51] I take this term from Mircea Eliade's classic introduction to religious studies, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Eliade's *homo religiosus* lives in a world sharply centered around the *axis mundi* of the sacred and sees himself (*homo religiosus* is certainly male) as part of a sacred history that predestines and defines his every movement and thought. See particularly the section entitled "Reactualizing Myths" in the 2nd chapter, "Sacred Time and Myths."

[52] The above passage flashes signals of this categorization in its descriptions of Hasidim's extreme Orthodoxy, and in the construction of a hierarchy of cultural expression in which "dress and hair arrangement" are in service of public religious expression (of the "Judaism on one's face") which is in turn in service of inner religious experience (the "Judaism of one's heart").

“mastery”: the domination of other Others, including Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Italians, and Hasidic Jews.[54]

If the Hasid is representative of a timeless, East European Jewish past, and the modern, successful, secular Jew represents the American Jewish present, then this Lower East Side moment falls somewhere in between, a point of tension in the narrative, the place and moment where and when Jewishness moved from the Hasid to the secular, modern American Jew. Glazer and Moynihan construct an ambivalent Jewishness for these Lower East Side Jews, one that is simultaneously at its “most Jewish,” yet whose central preoccupation is devotion to the American, gentile mainstream. (Of course, there is no ambivalence in *Beyond the Melting Pot* about which direction is the correct, inevitable one). For these people, “Jewish culture and religion…could take care of itself,” meaning that on the one hand it was, in Brown’s words, so “saturating” that it needed no defense; but that on the other hand, these Jews already had established a modern distinction between “culture” and “religion,” and that they were distant enough from these things—had enough of the freed, universalist secular perspective—to be able to have some element of rational choice in deciding to take it for granted.

The vector of Jewish progress from Hasidim→Transitional Jews→Modern Jews obviously moves along the axis of time: e.g. vague pre-modernity→turn of the 20th century→now. The passage about the Lower East Side Jews reveals that this narrative is fundamentally tied to space as well: e.g. vague pre-modernity/East Europe→turn of the 20th century/Lower East Side and other "working-class neighborhoods"→ now/America. The Lower East Side epoch is the fulcrum in the narrative of Jewish evolution because it involved a change in Jewish space, away from East Europe. It was not quite America, because "they led a separate life," bound by the same constraints ("social snobbery, anti-Semitism, and obscurant conservatism," [Glazer and Moynihan, 172] which had given "East European Jews…an abnormal social position"[Glazer and Moynihan, 175]). But if the Lower East Side space is not constructed as part of America, it certainly is a "portal to America,"[55] close enough so that its Jewish residents constantly gazed outwards, lifting their eyes over the cultural ghetto walls[56] toward a place and a time where and

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[54] And Jewish interest in radical politics, i.e. wishing to “participate freely in *the* labor movement” (emphasis added), exists only on in terms of interest in the “universal” movement (“*the*” meaning universal), a opposed to a particularly Jewish one such as the Bund or the Arbeter Ring, which fought both to preserve Jewish difference and to improve all workers’ rights.

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[55] I borrow this phrase from the title of the book *Portal To America: The Lower East Side, 1870-1925: Photographs and Chronicles. The Epic First America for Millions of Immigrants*. To further make my point about the Lower East being not-quite-America, I challenge the reader to imagine a book being published with the title *America: The Lower East Side, 1870-1925*.

[56] These walls were imagined by narratives like Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers*, which paint the neighborhood as a, or the, purely Jewish ghetto within New York City space, and deconstructed most notably by Hasia Diner in *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America* and by works like Tony Michels' *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*.

One of the things that Diner points out is that the Lower East Side was not even the largest Jewish neighborhood—that honor rested on Brownsville, Brooklyn. In recognition of this, and the fact that Glazer and Moynihan include other "working class neighborhoods" along the Lower East Side, here is a narrative of Brownsville from Alfred Kazin, a contemporary of theirs: "Why did they live *there* [Manhattan] and we always in 'Brunzvil'? Why were they *there*, and we always *here*. Why was it always *them* and *us*, Gentiles and *us*, *alrightniks* and us? Beyond Brownsville was all 'city,' that other land I could see for a day…Beyond was the strange world of the Gentiles" (Bloom, 28). Note how the separation between spaces—*there* and *here*—corresponds with a separation between Gentiles and Jews, and the wealthy (the *"alrightniks"*) and the working class. Kazin's words are an indictment of this dynamic, as he speaks with injured pride for his native "*Brunzvil*." Nonetheless, his crossing between the spaces, as he, Glazer and their peers achieved through their when they “could participate freely…[with] the fullest involvement in society” (Glazer and Moynihan, 180).

The definition of America as the land of rational, free choice and participation is in contrast to unemancipated non-American spaces. As Goldschmidt puts it:

> Too many Americans continue to assume a stark opposition between ‘the West’ and ‘the Rest’—the former imagined as modern, rational, and secular, while the latter is thought to languish in a fantastical world of religious tradition, with identities and politics based on supernatural beliefs we deem unfounded or irrational (Goldschmidt, 31).

It’s not only the past that is the world of *homo religiosus*, but other spaces as well. When Hasidim are rhetorically placed into an Eastern Europe of centuries ago, they are forced by their double bindings with the past and Orient into becoming *homo religiosus*, Wendy Brown’s “organicist” creature.”[57] They are placed there because of the threat posed by their current presence in American space.

III.B: “The Black-and-White Streets of Eastern Europe”—In Brooklyn

The rhetorical relocation of Hasidim to a distant time and space, correlated with the construction of Hasidic Jewishness as religious and oppressive, informs

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entrance to City College, meant not just a trip across boroughs but an entrance into privileged, Gentile, moneyed space, away from Jewish, Yiddish (“*Brunzvil”*), working-class space.

[57] And, as recent scholarship has shown (see particularly Larry Wolff’s *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*) “Eastern Europe” has long stood as a barbaric frontier to the civilized West, first as pagan to Western Christianity, then Catholic to Western Protestantism, then as religious to Western secularism, then as Communist to Western democracy. All of these binaries are tied into narratives of an intelligent, civilized (and with the rise of the Enlightenment, free) West in contrast a wild, uncivilized (and enslaved) East.

Helen Winston's 2005 analysis of men and women who grew up in Hasidic communities in Brooklyn and then decided to leave in *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*. The work is an outgrowth of her dissertation in sociology, but its writing style smacks far more of journalism than academia. This approach has its strengths and its weaknesses. Winston is a very good storyteller, and her characters come to life under her pen in an entertaining fashion. Her critical analysis, however, is intermittent and unconvincing. She tends to explain her characters' wanderings in light of the tension between "the Hasidic movement's" founding and current ideologies. It began, she explains, "as a reaction against what he perceived to be the overly hierarchical, rigid, and legalistic Judaism" (Winston, 3), but now "much of what the Hasidic movement originally sought to critique has now been incorporated into it" (Winston, 57)—meaning a fossilized communal authority and the absence of joy and mysticism in everyday life. This perspective reifies a distinct "Hasidism," transformed over time, that acts as a kind of impersonal organizing force on Hasidic peoples lives, a top-down approach which portrays Hasidic life as monolithically oppressive (and oppressed) and misses out on the culture processes that go into creating and recreating those lives. Hasidim become objects of authoritarian religion, rather than agents of culture. To put this in Brown's terms, this is the difference in modern eyes between "being culture" and "having culture."

For Winston, Hasidic wandering results from a repellence from narrow-minded religious dogma and concomitant attraction to the material, intellectual, and popular culture of the non-Hasidic world. She defines the transformation of their Jewish identities in terms of emancipation, particularly from religious authority. In the process, as we've seen before, the core Hasidic world becomes narrowly defined in terms of religion, while the mainstream American world represents a whole world of choices and freedoms, attained through secularization. The Brooklyn Hasidic communities, monolithic structures of close-minded authority, become distant in space and time:

> The stores are now shuttered, and the streets are almost empty, save for the occasional Hasidic man buying a bouquet from one of the many Latino workers who set up shop on Friday afternoons, their shopping carts filled with flowers…it is still somewhat disconcerting to see them here, however, a colorful touch of Latin America on the black-and-white streets of Eastern Europe (Winston, 125).

"Latino" and "Hasidic" humans become separated from their Brooklyn space, relocated to "Latin America" and "Eastern Europe." Their cultures are condensed into easily consumable visual impressions. The "colorful touch of Latin America" recalls American stereotypes about "passionate" Latinos. "The black-and-white streets" suggest a drab, joyless space. They also may evoke an older time-space: all the pictures and film we have of pre-war East European Jewish life are in "black-and-white."[58]

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[58] For another, older example of this kind of treatment of Hasidim, see Lis Harris' 1985 book *Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family*. Goldschmidt gives an incisive critique of her work:

> "For example, in her popular account of Lubavitch family life, the journalist Lis Harris describes a busy Crown Heights grocery store, then observes that: 'Except for the thin veneer of modernity represented by the refrigeration, the plastic food wrappings, and the fashionable wrappings of the women, the store seems to have been freshly transported to Brooklyn from [the author] Sholem Aleichem's [fictional shtetl of] Kasrilevke' [Harris, 57]. Although this shtetl in Brooklyn is largely a product of her imagination—or rather, a product of her inability to imagine radical differences *within* the modern world—its presence is somewhat unsettling to Harris, and to many others living in what Harris describes as the 'ordinary world' [Harris, 13] of secular modernity. 'On my first daytime visit to [Crown Heights]," she writes, "I felt as if I had wandered into a dream'[Harris, 14]" (Goldschmidt, 31-32).

III.C: A Young Shifra Epstein: One Anthropologist's Self-Reflections on Her Hunt for Her Primitive, Jewish Other

Shifra Epstein, who has made a career of studying Borough Park's Hasidic communities, reflects on the influence of Jewish modernization narratives on her early ethnography in her article "Going Far Away in Order to Better Understand the Familiar: Odyssey of a Jewish Folklorist into the Bobover Hasidic Community." She recalls the night of Purim in 1975 when she joined the anthropologist Barabara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett on her annual ethnographic trip to the Bobover Hasidim's *Pirim Shpiel*[59]:

> I was overwhelmed by the sea of people around me and especially fascinated by the men's uniform black clothing, the smell of food and wine, and the sound of Yiddish. Everything was familiar yet foreign. Standing in the midst of the Bobover women, I wrote in my fieldwork notes, 'What do I have in common with the Bobover, are we really members of the same tribe? We speak different languages, we live in different worlds set apart by our dress and life styles as well as our beliefs and world views.' And I answered, 'It is possible for people to share history, tradition, and even the Holocaust, but to live differently in the present and perhaps not to have a common future' (Epstein, 202).

In her field notes' question, we can see the problems posed by the Jewishness of contemporary Hasidim, arising from Hasidic difference from Epstein's world in terms of "language," "dress," "life styles," and "beliefs and world views." Confronted with the reality of a radically different contemporary Jewishness, Epstein testifies to admitting that she shared some heritage with these people but that that heritage had taken very different paths into the present day, to the degree that they might “not have a common future” (Epstein, 202). This solution admits the real tensions between opposing visions of Jewishness without denying the current reality of the mainstream’s Jewish opponents.

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[59] (*Pirim Shpiel)*. Yiddish: Pirim play, a dramatic piece performed by some Jews, including most Hasidim, as part of the night of revelry that accompanies the holiday of Pirim (also pronounced "Purim").

But in the naïve eyes of the young Epstein the similarities and differences between herself and these coeval, proximate Hasidim are still to be interpreted in terms of the difference Epstein and the timeless East European past inhabited by Epstein’s ancestors:

> However, the scenes, noises, and smells resulted in a nostalgic experience for me. They brought me close to my two pairs of grandparents who died before I was born, among them my maternal grandmother who died in Auschwitz. I remember also thinking about my maternal grandfather, who continued to be a Razvadover Hasid many years after he left Kulbuszowa (Kulboshow in Yiddish), Galicia, for Germany after World War I. I wondered where he sat during the piremshpil. Did he receive the honor of being invited to sit in the first row, next to the Rebbe? At that moment, in the course of recognizing my differences with the Bobover, I felt closer to my grandparents than I ever did before (Epstein, 202).

The Hasidim that she is seeing before her eyes become her grandparents, or perhaps her grandparents’ community, an object of Jewish history rather than a challenge of the present moment and place. As I’ve shown above, this method of rhetorically distancing Hasidic Jews to an East European past is one of the most effective and prevalent methods of “solving” the dilemma posed by their coevalness and proximity. Hasidim become mainstream American Jews’ grandparents, the people from whom they’ve evolved and whose cultural legacy lives on today in considerably modernized, assimilated form. Epstein’s reflection is a particularly stark example of the shaping influence of this rhetorical technique on her younger, untrained self, as she was able to accomplish the removal of Hasidim across time and space *while standing in a room with hundreds of them*.

III.D: Picturing the Hasid as the Jewish Past

In his contribution to the collection *Jews and Other Differences*, entitled “Jewish Icons,” Jack Kugelmass explores how American Jewish concerns about identity manifest themselves in the production and consumption of photo books about Hasidim. He argues that they serve two central purposes which are in some tension with each other: to “act as icons of identity…[doing] so by a discursive process of appropriation that promotes a sense of connection to ethnic subgroups from which the greater collectivity has significantly diverge” (Kugelmass, 43); and to create a “metaphor, [in which] the Hasid represents not one facet of the family of American Jewry but a differentness that for most of us has passed and is therefore no longer part of lived reality…the metaphor works to remind us of disruption” (Kugelmass, 50). On the one hand, these books are given and received among mainstream Jews in order to signal and define a collective Jewishness; on the other, they serve to emphasize the radical difference between the consumers of the books and their subjects.

In these books, differences between the producing and consuming communities and Hasidic communities are generally reinterpreted with many of the rhetorical techniques with which we have become so familiar: Hasidic life becomes a sort of ultimate religious expression, set in a world and time apart. The medium lends itself to a different mode of rhetoric, combining images with captions. The photos and their accompanying texts, argues Kugelmass, work to portray "a great chasm…between subject and audience…[with this photographic] project exist[s] solely as a bridge between two radically different sets of humanity where none had previously existed" (Kugelmass, 33).

This chasm is not just one of appearance, but also one of time and identity. Kugelmass draws our attention to the following passage from the epilogue of *Face of Faith* by George Kranzler and Irving I. Herzberg:

> Williamsburg is a testimony to the ethos of a tortured and persecuted but proud people that dwells in a realm of eternal values, regardless of the temporary setting and conditions that affect their individual, social, and communal lives. This Hassidic spirit of Williamsburg infuses the drab, dreary brownstone ghetto of the low-income neighborhood in Brooklyn, N.Y., with warmth, love, and inspiration. The ecological, economic, and social features recede. They merely serve to heighten the joy of communal living, of life itself, of survival and of confirmation of a faith that overcame concentration camps and gas chambers, as it had survived the tortures of [the] Roman arena, auto-da-fes [*sic*] of the Inquisition, and the pogroms of Cossacks in the past (Kranzler, 111 from Kugelmass, 33).

Kugelmass observes that "the panchronism apparent in the last statement is not a rhetorical flourish. It pervades the book. Hasidim are represented here as timeless manifestations of an authentic Jewish spirituality" (Kugelmass, 33).

This passage is particularly striking because it employs subtly but significantly different tactics to imagine Hasidim. Like the other narratives we've seen, this one prefigures Hasidim as religious objects in "our" Jewish past. But this one is different in that the past place to Hasidim are relegated is not specifically pre-modern Eastern Europe. Rather it panchronistically ranges from the 'Roman arena' to the Cossacks' pogroms. In this narrative, argues Kugelmass, "Williamsburg represents not so much the Old World as a very ancient world" (34). Instead of portraying Hasidim as being caught in a single, unspecified eternal moment in pre-modern Eastern Europe, this work describes Hasidim as being trapped in *every* moment, in a long line of essential faith and religious praxis that extends all the way from the Roman arena to the Nazi's liquidation chambers to Williamsburg. (No wonder Kugelmass writes that "the book reads as a eulogy" [Kugelmass, 32]). This is a subtly different solution to the problem of current American Hasidic life. Instead of denying that Hasidim are truly present by talking about them as if they live in a spatially distant past, this narrative argues that Hasidim are indeed present in America in the here and now—to the exact same degree that that they are present in ancient Rome. This rhetorically separates Hasidim from the mythic American space of social evolution and freedom by placing them in all Jewish places and all Jewish times (past times, that is) at once.

One option that this strategy offers that others do not is that it constructs out of Hasidim a kind of "eternal Jew," a potential source of communal solace and focus in a time of communal insecurity and fragmentation. What makes this Jew "eternal" and comforting is his static religiosity, continued in an era and place that defines itself in terms of evolving religious freedom. (The Hasid's panchronism is *not*, for instance, defined by the maintenance of a Jewish vernacular throughout the millennia.)

III.E: Drawing the Jewish Past as Hasidic and Male

The Hasidim, a collection of text and drawings published in 1973 (and thus lies outside of Kugelmass' scope of photographic works), contains similar themes.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Nobel laureate Yiddish author, writes in the introduction about the "return" of Jewish artists to "the life of the ghetto that the Haskalah [Jewish Enlightenment] despised, to its pious anscestors and to the joys that only Hasidism in its early stages could bring to the Jew" (Moskovitz and Singer, 22). He goes on to laud the book's artist, Ira Moskovitz, claiming that "in his work he has recaptured the religious view of God and of the world. It is comforting to know that our artists are returning in ever-growing measure to the roots from which we draw our life blood and to the spiritual soil from which we have sprung" (Moskovitz and Singer, 24).

The volume contains more than 75 of Moskovitz's drawings, lithographs, and sketches. Of these, of more than two-thirds are variations on the following scene: a bearded Hasidic man with a ritual object, such as a prayer book, Torah scroll, shofar, or *lulav*.[60] Sometimes this occurs in disembodied space, sometimes in a synagogue or beis-medrash. The subject often has his eyes closed; if they are open, they gaze half-lidded into the heavens or onto the ritual object. Often there are small groups of Hasidic men, but they almost never look at each other, but instead stare deep in thought at a Talmudic text or Torah scroll (the chief expression is deep solemnity, punctuated occasionally with ecstasy, again directed toward Heaven or text).

The collapse of Hasidic difference into a purely religious world—marked by the synagogue, objects like the shofar and the lulav, texts such as the prayer book and the Talmud—is ineluctably tied into a process of constructing the Hasid as particularly male. Hasidic life becomes defined in terms of activities and spaces that are exclusively or almost exclusively available to Hasidic men.[61] Moskovitz's drawings include only a small handful of women as subjects. In his work, Hasidic women only seem to exist to the extent that they can help reproduce the male Hasid's way of life, appearing as silent accessories in scenes of weddings or Friday night family *kiddush*.[62]

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[60] (*Shofar*). Hebrew: Ram's horn blown primarily on the holiday *Rosh HaShanah*. (*Lulav*.) Hebrew: palm branch that some Jews wave on the fall harvest holiday of *Sukkos*.

The projection of the male Hasid onto the Jewish past doesn't just make the male Hasid look more ancient, but also makes the pre-modern Jew look more and more monolithically Hasidic and male. This forms a mutually amplifying and validating pair of images—male, American Hasidim and male, pre-modern Jews—that serve to sustain a larger discourse of American Jewish evolution. This process as a whole does not just marginalize "Hasidim," but particularly female Hasidim. Where Hasidic men are granted a half-real, "eternal Jew" (or alternatively a pre-modern, Ashkenazi) existence, Hasidic women disappear almost completely. There is no time or place for them to inhabit, for their voices in any way to be heard. And that is not all—if past Jewishness becomes defined as the male Hasid, there is no room in Jewish memory for past Jewish women. This means that *all* contemporary Jewish women must mediate their Jewish memory through male actors and experiences. Yet another of the achievements of the mainstream, *male* (the authors are almost always male) American Jewish evolution narrative is to deny to mainstream, American

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[61] Visual difference, too, is more easily apparent to the untrained eye in Hasidic men than women (the beard and peyos are a dead giveaway), so it becomes easier to signal Hasidicness through portrayals of Hasidic males. (On television, Hasidim—often acting as an overarching representative of all Jewry, as Kugelmass argues—are always male).

[62] (*Kiddush*). Hebrew: blessings over wine and bread made on the Sabbath and holidays.

Jewish women the past as a shared resource, confining women’s options in Jewishness. When the Wesleyan comedienne made fun of her Hasidic male cousins for refusing to hug her, she wasn’t just Othering them as irrationally religious; she was also resisting the overt sexism that is part of their contemporary communal practice. And perhaps, too, she was reacting to the association of male Hasidim with a history of the Jewish past that has no room for Jewish women’s voices.

Chapter Two: Playing in Jewish[63]

Overview

This chapter is my ethnography of Chulent, of the ways that it is subjected to and at times resists the mainstream American Jewish narratives of Jewishness, religion, and the Hasid that we explored in the previous chapter. In the first section, I give an overview of Chulent's history as a community, showing how it changed over time and place. In the second section, I critically examine two recent articles about Chulent: "Hasidim on the Fringe," appearing in the Winter 2006 edition of *The Current: A Journal Of Contemporary Politics, Culture, and Jewish Affairs*; and "City of Refuge," in the March 18th, 2007 *New York Times*. I also look at Hella Winston's brief description of Chulent's Borough Park incarnation in her book *Unchosen*. I set these pieces in the context of the larger streams of American Jewish narratives that we explored in the previous chapter. I critically examine the ways that these articles participate in the process of Othering Chulenters as "our" exotic, religious Others, forcing their stories through the dominant, American framework of cultural identity which treats religion as a distinct category of cultural life, and religious choice as a particularly American right. As a result, I argue, they elide other crucial aspects of Chulenters' Jewish difference.

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[63] A nod to Jonathan Boyarin's work, *Thinking in Jewish*.

In the third section, I look at Samuel Heilman's ethnography *Defenders of the Faith* and Chulenters' own articulations of their communal and individual identities to better understand how this dominant framework affects Chulenters and Hasidim in general. The fourth section briefly examines how the naming of this community as "Chulent" places it in a larger discourse of food-as-culture. In the fifth section, I suggest that my early, naïve account of one September night at Chulent, which appears in the introduction, be treated as a text written with a perspective very close to that of the aforementioned articles, likewise falling more or less firmly into mainstream narratives of Jewish identity and the Hasid. I perform a "re-reading" of that September night as well as of the articles written about Chulent, arguing that we (and particularly I) must shift away from a narrow, secular/religious binary or continuum in order to begin properly understanding the Chulent community. The final section is a brief reflection on my own place in the Chulent community as ethnographer and Jewish seeker.

I: From Borough (Park) to City

Chulent, or something like it, started in the early 90s, in Issac Schonfeld's office in Borough Park.[64] Isaac has "always been a little different." A half-Hungarian Hasid, he grew up in Borough Park and went to a yeshivah there as a child. When he was 14, he moved to the Torah V'Daas high school in Queens, a yeshivah run by the *Litvish*[65] community of Lakewood, N.J. and known for its high level of learning. After two years, Issac dropped out, for reasons he is in no hurry to disclose to me—"you know, it happens."

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[64] The majority of the information in this section comes from interviews with Isaac Schonfeld, with some corroborating accounts from other Chulent members and from newspaper articles.

Since then, he has been largely self-educated, and this has taken him to distant shores, to subjects and language where a yeshivah would not take him. My college-educated English is barely sufficient to keep up with him, as he tosses out gems like "deleterious" and "ineffable"—not bad for someone without a high school diploma. He has a wide-ranging intellectual curiosity. Most recently, he has been working on a *shiur*[66] on the Spanish Inquisition, arguing that "it really wasn't as bad as everyone says—bad, but not *that* bad," citing for evidence Gentile and Jewish prisoners' petitions to be transferred from medieval Spanish criminal jails to the Inquisition's facilities.[67]

Isaac is a middle-aged man of average height and thin, compact build. A large, flat black yarmulke rests on his head. He wears dark navy-blue pants, a white, collared, button-up shirt, and simple, black leather shoes. His short, straight peyos are tucked behinds his ears. There is nothing about his appearance to mark him as different from other Borough Park Heimish Jews.

Every movement and word of Isaac's comes out with a certain nervous intensity, accentuated by the clear fatigue in his eyes (he often gets only a few hours of sleep at night), but he still somehow manages to project an aura of patience and calm into his conversations. When he is speaking to you, his gaze never falters, and it is clear that he listens intently, too. On another man, his balding head and wispy, slightly forked beard might appear diabolical, but their edge is taken off by the large, circular, wire-framed glasses that dominate his face, lending him a certain owlish air of humbleness and wisdom. This sagacious mien is itself frequently disrupted by his smiles, which are often in silent laughter at his own expense. Any insight is sure to be followed by incisive self-deprecation.

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[65] (*Litvish*). Yiddish: literally, Lithuanian. Used somewhat interchangeably with "Yeshivish".
[66] (*Shiur*). Hebrew: a lesson or talk.
[67] His working title is " 'The Cushy Red Chair': Historical Fact or Pythonian Myth?" (a pun on the British comedy troupe's famous sketch, "Nobody Expects the Spanish Inquisition!").

“When Chulent started, or what was there before Chulent, anyway, it was mainly people who didn’t fit in somehow, who were for some reason different, often because they questioned a little bit more, but mainly it was people who were divorced or, God forbid, I’ve never heard of such a thing myself,” Isaac lets out with an impish grin, “older and unmarried.” Starting in the early nineties, he would stick around his mail-order electronics company‘s Borough Park office until two or three in the morning as friends and aquaintances would drift in and out. They were all Hasidish, Yeshivish, or Heimish types, almost all male and almost all from Borough Park (a handful came from neighboring Flatbush and occasionally someone from Williamsburg or Crown Heights). At first, at least, they were almost all, like Isaac, completely halakhically observant—“*shoymer toyreh u’mitzvos*.”[68] They came from the full gamut of frum Borough Park society—Bobover, Munkatscher, Boyaner,

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[68] (*Shoymer toyreh u’mitzvos)*. Hebrew: literally, guard the Torah and its commandments. On his observance, Isaac had this to say: "I guess I am what you would call an Orthodox Jew. I observe all the commandments, pretty much as best as I can—except for getting up on time for prayer, that one's a little difficult.”

Vishnitzer, and Stoliner Hasidim, *heimish* Jews unattached to any particular Hasidic court, and Yeshivish guys from all over the neighborhood.

People would come to chat and relax, to "get away." They'd talk about many of the same things that they'd talk about in their *botei-medrashim*,[69] but also about stuff from the "outside world" that was generally frowned upon as "low," like American movies, world history, prostitutes, and Yiddish literature. There was a computer with an (extremely slow) Internet connection, something which many of the men did not have easy access to elsewhere, because it is considered in their home communities to be a medium for "pollution" from the outside world, much like television.

In the late 90s, Isaac moved his business to Church Ave, northeast of the core of the Borough Park frum communities. It was a slightly bigger, better space and was more comfortable for larger groups to hang out in. He purchased a television and amassed a tiny, diverse library, because "if that's what people wanted, that's what they got." For refreshments, there was sometimes soda or crackers "or something else to nosh on." One Thursday evening, soon after the move, someone "I don't remember who, brought a chulent over. They had bought it somewhere, it was very tasty of course, and everyone ate it up. So I decided it was a good idea, but do you have any idea how expensive chulent is to buy for who knows how many people, I mean even then it was too many, 20 people or whatever, but could you imagine now? Anyway, to make a chulent though, costs *bubkes*. Haha, get it? *Bubkes* costs *bubkes*! Oh yes, and that's the other thing. Why is it vegetarian? Yes, everyone can eat it this way and you don't have to worry about *milkhik*, *fleishik*, that's one thing. But do you have any idea how much it would cost to make a *fleishik* chulent for this many people? *Fleish* doesn't cost *bubkes*, only *bubkes* do." Thursday nights became chulent night, and over time, the weekly gatherings became simply "Chulent."

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[69] (*Botei-medrashim*). Hebrew: plural of "beis-medrash."

In the winter of 2006, the rabbi of the Millinery Center, an Orthodox synagogue located on Manhattan's 6th avenue between 38th and 39th streets, contacted Isaac and invited him to bring the Thursday night scene over there (Bleyer). It offered a much larger space and Isaac was getting out of the electronics business (and thus his office), so the timing worked out well. The building was not in the best shape, but the Chulent crowd didn't exactly mind: "It wasn't nice, certainly—I mean, the paint was peeling off the walls, it smelled, there were problems with the roof—but there was still something intimate and heimish about it." The synagogue "was opened in 1948 by a congregation of dressmakers and hatters" who worked in the surrounding nearby Garment District. As time has gone on, the number of synagogue-attending Jews in the local millinery business has dropped, and the Millinery Center has experienced a corresponding drop in attendance, finances, and structural integrity. Nonetheless, a small, core *minyan*[70] continues services there.

The move across the river had far-reaching consequences. "That's where it really opened up, all kinds of people from all over started hearing about it and coming," from Manhattan, Crown Heights, Williamsburg, Far Rockaway, New Jersey, Kiryas Joel, and elsewhere. The Millinery Center does not lie in or near any particularly Hasidish space, and so didn't carry any particular frum politics with it.

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[70] (*Minyan*). Hebrew: the quorum of ten adult males required to conduct certain parts of services at Orthodox shuls.

Losing its Borough Park space, the community lost its Borough Parker concentration. It also meant moving away from a neighborhood that is one of the most dominant and visible geographic centers of American Hasidic, Yeshivish, and Heimish life (Mintz, 101).[71] The space it was moving to was far from neutral. As one Chulenter told me about his Thursday night trips across the bridge from Williamsburg, "for a lot of people, Manhattan is *takeh* another world," representing a broader, more diverse metropolis.[72] In fact, many Hasidim find their way to Manhattan on a regular basis for work or for individual pursuits; but at the very least Manhattan represents a space that is safely geographically distinct from their own Hasidic communities. And for those participants who do not come from Hasidic or Yeshivish communities, Manhattan is a much more comfortable space than Borough Park.

So the new Millinery Center Chulent found itself flooded with newcomers from every direction: those seeking a somewhat familiar space far away from their native realms and those looking for altogether strange space within their own demesne. "It really exploded": the Millinery Center was filled to the brim with Jews of every stripe.[73] It drew people from Satmar Williamsburg and Kiryas Yoel,

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[71] This is partly because it is so densely Jewish: "A survey prepared in 1983 by the Council of Jewish Organizations of Borough Park showed that 90 percent of the (then 83,000) residents of Borough Park were white, and that 85 percent were Jewish" (Mintz, 101). Anecdotal accounts from Motty and Judee, who have both lived in the area for over four decades, suggest that if anything the area has become even more and Jewish and even more Hasidish, Yeshivish, and Heimish.

[72] This contains echoes of the Alfred Kazin passage we saw in the previous chapter: "Beyond Brownsville was all 'city,' that other land I could see for a day…Beyond was the strange world of the Gentiles" (Bloom, 28).

[73] And one or two non-Jews. As one of the Chulenters, a woman who grew up Hasidic and whose current professional and social life is populated by as many Gentiles as Jews, told me, "I've tried bringing my non-Jewish friends here. They just find it really boring."

Lubavitcher Crown Heights, Yeshivish Far Rockaway, Park Slope, the Upper West Side, downtown Manhattan, the Bronx Almagamated Housing Cooperative, and elsewhere. The gender gap narrowed significantly, as a number of non-*tsniusdike* women started attending. Faces started getting a lot younger, too, as more yeshiva *bokhurs*[74] started coming.

The community that had previously moved in a loose, eccentric orbit around Isaac Schonfeld expanded rapidly, drawing in interlocking strands from the larger, fragmented Jewish world, bringing in Yiddishists, *ba'alei-t'shuvah*,[75] homeless, yuppies, Y.U. (Yeshiva University) types, and Upper West Side Modern Orthodox, to name a few. As the community started gaining greater mass and exerting greater gravity, it began to more and more warp the fabric of the communal borderlines that lay around it.

As the crowd changed, so did the atmosphere. Evenings would begin around nine or ten with a scheduled shiur, a tradition that had been started in the last year of Chulent's tenure in Brooklyn. Topics varied, but would mainly focus on wrestling with rabbinic texts.[76] As the night went on, more and more people would show up, some interested in the shiur and others not. The shiur would wrap up by about eleven, as the room started to fill up. Bottles of booze, cigarettes, and hookahs would suddenly sprout up like a mushroom forest, covering the tables and floors. Usually, someone would bring some musical instruments, and voila! a party would be born. The rest of the night—easily until five or six in the morning, would consist of drinking, smoking, schmoozing, arguing, yelling, flirting, dancing, singing, and learning. No one particularly ordered this set of activities, and the proportions of each would change from week to week with different participants and different zeitgeists.

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[74] (*Bokhurs*). Yiddish: young, unmarried men.

[75] (*Ba'alei-Tshuvah*). Hebrew: literally, those who return or repent. Refers to people who did not grow up keeping *mitzvos* (commandments) but are now at some stage of doing so, typically in compliance with the halakhic standards of the community that they are trying to join.

[76] The shiur series has been going every Thursday night at the beginning of Chulent for over a year now. When the topic is on rabbinic texts, the language tends to be a tri-glossic mix of English, loshn-koydesh, and Yiddish; otherwise the shiur is in English. For a sampling of the most recent and upcoming shiurs, see the Appendix.

In early June 2007, after less than a year of this ebullient madness, Chulent was forced out of the Millinery Center—"To be perfectly honest with you, I still don't know why," says Isaac. Some Chulenters think that it was because people were abusing drugs, particularly marijuana; others think it was simply too rowdy and strange a group to fit in. When Dov, my Williamsburg contact, told me that I could find Chulent at the Community Synagogue on 6th street between 1st and 2nd avenues, it had only just moved there a week before.

The Community Synagogue (and Max D. Raiskin Center) has always been a bit of an eccentric on the Lower East Side synagogue scene. It was founded in 1940, three or more decades after most of the neighborhood's synagogues had been built. It was located in the northwestern corner of the Orthodox Jewish area, occupying an abandoned Lutheran church at a time when other local synagogues were already beginning to be converted to churches.[77] Over the years, the congregation has maintained a gender division in services (including a very low *mekhitza*[78]) and a strictly kosher kitchen while welcoming many members who do not observe shabbos or kashrus *mitzvos*[79] outside of the synagogue. This stands in considerable contrast to most of the neighborhood's synagogues— particularly the ones that lie further southeast, closer to the neighborhood's dwindling Yeshivish and Hasidish population—which pride themselves on their members' strict halakhic observance (Mintz, 271).

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[77] The building had lain vacant for over 35 years. On June 15th, 1904, the entire congregation of the St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church went on their annual summer outing upriver. Their ship, the General Slocum, caught fire during the passage and most of them—over a thousand men, women, and children—were killed, as in their panic they discovered that the lifeboats had been nailed to the deck and that many of the lifevests were filled with sand and iron. Few of the passengers survived. This catastrophe "was New York's deadliest tragedy until September 11th, 2001."

The Community Synagogue's open attitude toward Jews has become stronger over the last decade. In the mid-90s, when I started attending shabbos services there about once a month, the board of directors hired a Lubavitcher rabbi named Naftali Rotenstreich to increase the synagogue's outreach to non-affiliated Jews in the neighborhood, recognizing the area's changing demographic. Around this time, too, congregants began referring to themselves as being in the "East Village" rather than the "Lower East Side," a rhetorical turn toward a younger, wealthier, unaffiliated Jewish crowd, away from older Yiddish speakers and middle-aged professionals.[80]

The current rabbi, Charlie Buckholtz, has been installed for close to two years now. He is only recently returned from the yeshiva in the West Bank where he

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(For more, see Edward T. O'Donnell's 2003 book, *Ship Ablaze: The Tragedy of the Steamboat General Slocum*).

[78] (*Mekhitza*). Hebrew: a physical divider that separates men and women in the synagogue.

[79] (*Mitzvos*). Hebrew: positive and negative commandments which stem from the Torah and rabbinic literature.

[80] The synagogue's current website is "EastVillageShul.com." Unlike any of the other synagogues I went to or heard about growing up in the Lower East Side, Community was usually called in the English, "synagogue," as opposed to the Yiddish "shul." Its congregation was considerably more bourgeois and younger than elsewhere. The use of "shul" in the web address may reflect an ambivalent "return" to the place's Yiddish, *heimish* roots, ones which were in fact always comparatively weak.

obtained *smikhah.*[81] "Charlie" (or "Rabbi Charlie"), as he goes by, has an unusual background. Growing up in Washington, D.C., his best friend was a Black kid named Sedar (older brother of the comedian Dave Chappelle), who has since become an imam.[82] They remain in close touch. Charlie is humble and wise, with an unexpectedly wicked sense of humor (he's the first rabbi I've heard make a joke about cocaine). He was the one who invited Isaac to bring the Chulenters over to Community after they were kicked out of the Millinery Center, and he has advocated continuously for them with the synagogue's board of directors.

The Community Synagogue is in many ways perfectly placed for Chulent. Lying on the disputed boundary between the East Village and the Lower East Side, it has just the right mixture of mainstream hipness and Lower East Side *heimishe* authenticity. It is safely distant from Borough Park and other Hasidish or Yeshivish communities, but lies close enough to its own local frum community to make it a comfortable, familiar space. And for many of the Chulenters who do not come from frum backgrounds, the Lower East Side represents a world of Jewish intensity that they are searching for in various ways—in Yiddish, in increased halakhic observance, in mysticism, etc. And these people understand its East Village side quite well—many come here on weekends for barhopping. Fundamentally, it is Community's placement on the fault lines between several Jewish worlds that makes it so fitting for Chulenters, who spend most of their lives slipping through those cracks.

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[81] (*Smikhah*). Hebrew: rabbinic certification.
[82] His background information comes from an article "Faithful Friends," written by his older sister Alison for the metropolitan website "Washingtonian.com." (URL is provided in the bibliography).

II: Reporting on Chulent

In the previous chapter, we saw how Helen Winston tends to describe her subjects' cultural exploration as movement along a secular-religious continuum, and that in doing so, she reifies the Hasidic community as a relic of an oppressive, religious past. She carries a similar interpretation into her analysis of the Chulent community. She visited it while it was still in Borough Park, sprawled across the backyard of "Chaim's' (Isaac's) office. Winston categorizes the members of the community in terms of their apparel ("Hasidic 'summer' dress" or "more contemporary attire") and in terms of religiosity: "By the end of the night, close to fifty people will fill the small patch of dirt, almost all men, of varying ages and religious commitments, some not even Jewish" (Winston, 49). She draws "Chaim" into a conversation about Jewish exploration and then poses to him, "If wanting more freedom is such a big concern for the people who come to Chaim's place, why, I ask, don't some of them just become what is known as modern-Orthodox? This would allow them to engage with the secular world, go to college, and enter the profession, while remaining strictly observant" (Winston, 55). The dream of "freedom," in this formulation, is the "secular world," "college," and "the profession." It can be tempered by a halakhic observance that does not disturb the secular world's boundaries. It seems to her to be a perfect balance: keeping the "religion" that makes Hasidim who they are, while shedding its authority over their public and professional lives.

Avi, a divorced, middle-aged man, “comes quickly to Chaim’s rescue” (Winston, 56). He presents to her a complex, lengthy polemic against the modern Orthodox:

> ’Modern Orthodox Jews are fakers,” Avi tells me, moving his hands in the air as if he is brushing off an invisible man’s suit. ‘They want for it to be both ways,’ he continues with a big shrug. ‘To be modern and traditional at the same time. But it cannot work. They just end up bringing all of their cold, modern rationality to their performance of the mitzvot…there is no *feeling*, no *heart*, no *fire*,’ Avi explains. Apparently, the modern Orthodox are an altogether different breed from the Hasidim, the *real* Orthodox, who wear exotic outfits and sing and dance, and actually do tremble before God, who tell rebbe stories and colorful Yiddish jokes, and who live in a *real* community, where people do for each other. **For Avi at least, the modern types are so busy with their laws that they have no culture.** (Winston, 56, **emphasis** added).

This is, an articulation of, at the very least, a profound aesthetic distaste for modernity’s delineation of a distinct, narrow sphere of life called “religion.” The separation of halakhah (i.e.“laws”) and “exotic outfits,…rebbe stories and colorful Yiddish jokes” (i.e. “culture”) is what makes the modern Orthodox “ ‘fakers’ “ and “cold.” This aesthetic sense is one that I often hear described simply as “heimish”: not just “homey” in the sense of the presence of similar food or songs, but rather familiar and comfortable in the ways that all the constituent parts (food, Yiddish, song, dance, prayer, texts, men, women, children, etc.) and processes (kashrus, child-rearing, communal authority, teaching, learning, gender division, etc.) fit together.

For Winston, who interprets Hasidicness, and Jewishness in general, in terms of its placements along a secular-religious continuum, Avi’s differences from modern Orthodox Jewry become simply divergent attitudes toward religious practice:

> Suddenly, I realize that Avi is sounding very much the way I imagine the original Hasidim might have sounded, when, in their attempt to revive a beleaguered Eastern European Jewry, they rejected the spiritually bereft and legalistic Judaism they had

> inherited, in favor of one that emphasized ecstatic prayer, charismatic leadership, egalitarianism, and pageantry (Winston, 55-56).

This casts current Hasidic-modern Orthodox differences in terms of religious attitudes toward “Judaism,” in parallel to the presumed religious nature of the divisions between 18th century Hasidim and *Misnagdim*.[83]

I think that Winston is on to something here, that there are elements in Avi’s polemic that echo the ways in which contemporary Hasidim articulate their distaste for Misnagdim.[84] I remember, once after I told Motty, my fringe-Bobover contact, that my father’s family were Misnagdim, he laughed at me and told me this joke which plays on the theme of “coldness”: “You know, the rumor is that every Misnagid’s heart is made of lead. But Yoineh, the question is, how do we find out if this is true? Well, they say you should take one aside and cut him open to see—either you find out it is indeed made of lead, or at least you’ve got one more dead Misnagid.” But this stereotype of Misnagdic coldness is typically attributed to the sort of joyless legalism that Motty mocked in another joke: “You know, they say that there was once was a *rebbe*[85] so holy and powerful that he had a bright, flaming aura that extended around him twenty feet in every direction. A Misnagid, doubting, came to inspect this aura for himself. He saw for himself that when birds flew over the rebbe, they were burnt into crisps. And you know what he had to say about this? ‘Nu, is he *khayiv* [legally liable for their destruction] or *lo khayev* [legally exempt]?’” These jokes do *not* imply that, as Avi said of the Modern Orthodox, they “are so busy with their laws that they have no culture” (Winston, 56): Hasidic-Misnagdic difference is not generally articulated in terms of lacking Yiddishkeit or “exotic outfits.” By placing Avi's speech in a centuries-past Hasidic-Misnagdic discourse, Winston is able to perceptively note the ways that it imitates that discourse, but by doing so she collapses its articulation of broad Hasidic-Modern Orthodox differences into narrow, religious terms. She thus misses a crucial part of his critique: that for the Modern Orthodox, Jewishness is confined “to the performance of mitzvoth,” coldly severed from what Avi understands to be the “fire” and “heart” of Jewishness, like telling “rebbe stories and colorful Yiddish jokes.” It is the linkages between all these elements that make Avi’s Jewishness different from that of the Modern Orthodox. Most centrally, where Yiddish was in fact a unifier (given variation in dialect) between 18th century Misnagdim and Hasidim, the disparity in Yiddish knowledge between contemporary Hasidic and Modern Orthodox communities is one of the primary sources of difference between them.

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[83] (*Misnagdim*). Hebrew: the “opponents” of Hasidim, whose power base in Eastern Europe was in the north, particularly Lithuania. In contemporary times, it is occasionally used interchangeably with “Yeshivish” or “Litvish,” particularly when drawing a contrast between the described individual or group and Hasidim.

[84] I should add that, unlike Winston, I’m not necessarily willing to project this difference onto the early Hasidim and Misnagdim—this history has come under increased critical scrutiny in recent years, from the likes of the University of Haifa’s Adam Teller.

[85] (*Rebbe*).Yiddish: leader of a Hasidic sect. Rebbes often have extremely broad powers over many facets of their followers’ lives, and are considered to be particularly holy and knowledgeable.

In contrast to the perceived rigidity of Modern Orthodoxy’s boundaries between religious, halakhic Judaism and “the secular world,” Chulent provides a space for forms of Jewishness that playfully and creatively blur those boundaries. Like Winston, Shoshana Olidort, in her Winter 2006 article on Chulent’s Millinery Center incarnation “Hasidim on the Fringe,” interprets this cultural wandering strictly in terms of a religious-secular continuum, where one end represents chafing authority and the other intellectual emancipation: it is a "'Jewish religious limbo,'" in which people are "torn between feelings of loyalty to family and faith, and the longing for freedom" (Olidort). When she writes, "Among those who do identify with ultra-Orthodoxy, individuals vary in personal commitment to faith, observance, and tradition" (Olidort), she succeeds in troubling the fixedness of certain points on the continuum—such as "Hasidim," "ultra-Orthodox," and "Modern Orthodox"—but fails to disturb the continuum itself.

In the *New York Times* article "City of Refuge," which was written during the last months of Chulent's stay at the Millinery Center, Jennifer Bleyer takes a similar approach to Olidort, portraying Chulent as a disruptive, chaotic middle ground between the Hasidic and secular worlds:

> But for the small percentage who question aspects of their religion, and yearn to form a community of their own, events like Chulent are increasingly common in New York. As the secular world exerts an ever more powerful pull, a growing array of tools — including Web sites and under-the-radar gatherings like this one — are springing up to serve their needs and ease their way (Bleyer).

Hasidicness becomes a "religion" to be "question[ed]"; on the other side lies the rational, intellectual freedoms of the secular world.[86] This secularization is characterized as a "worlding" of their religious thought: "In one corner of the room, a knot of men engaged in intense, freewheeling conversations on topics as varied as Wittgenstein and the nation's immigration policy, as if intellects honed during years of studying Talmud were suddenly being flexed on worldly subjects” (Bleyer). More than Winston or Olidort, Bleyer explains the Chulent community in terms of a wider narrative of American—and American Jewish—religious choice and progress. She compares Chulenters’ wandering to “the Amish rumspringa, the period when young Amish may live freely in the outside world before deciding whether to return to their customary ways” (Bleyer) and observes that "accounts of Jews straying from Orthodoxy can be found throughout the history of modern American Jewry” (Bleyer).

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[86] Note also the reinforcement of the progressivist notion that the secularization of these Hasidim is abetted by cutting-edge technology like the Internet, as humans gain ever-increasing autonomy through science.

But Chulent and Hasidicness are too radically different from mainstream American modernity to fit cleanly into Bleyer’s story of religious experimentation and wandering. The broad-reaching diversity of Hasidicness, which crosses over modernity’s distinct categories of religion, ethnicity, and culture, (as well as the ways that Chulenters playfully refashion the forms and values of their Hasidicness) come out in Bleyer’s depiction of one crazy moment late one Chulent night:

> Inside, people beat on African drums, chain-smoked cigarettes, spoke Yiddish, drank beer, played electric guitars and sang old Hasidic songs at the top of their lungs, creating a mutant yet richly textured variation of the culture they grew up with. Young men wearing yarmulkes clutched one another’s shoulders and danced. A man and woman sat in a corner studying a volume of ancient text. Sholom Anarchy and his friends scrawled graffiti on a wall (Bleyer).

Clearly, this scene is not just the product of a simple tension between religious dogmatism and secular freedoms and pop culture, but rather represents a series of complex, unstable negotiations between Hasidic culture—including, but not limited to “Yiddish,” “old Hasidic songs,” “yarmulkes,” and “studying a volume of ancient text”—with other cultural elements and forms that usually do not appear in the Hasidic worlds, like “electric guitars” and mixed-gender study.

Olidort, Winston, and Bleyer's interpretation of Chulent as a social scene for religious experimentation—a place "for people to expand their 'horizons on a human and intellectual level' and to think critically rather than subscribe to dogma" (Olidort), as part of a kind of Hasidish rumspringa—collapses the myriad ways in which Chulenters are renegotiating their Jewishness into an (albeit messy and ambivalent) movement from religious serfdom to secular emancipation. It also further reifies "the Hasidic world" as a stable space cut off from modernity, where there is no room for cultural creativity or change because everyone must unthinkingly "subscribe to dogma."

III: Chulent and Modernity

In his excellent ethnography of Israeli Haredim, *Defenders of the Faith*, Samuel Heilman argues that "in spite of their claims to be absolutely enclosed in the past, haredim were not" (Heilman, 352).[87] By defining their own communities in terms of their difference from outside society, "haredim are inextricably linked to the ways of life they oppose. And those are always changing" (Heilman, 38). This restores the realness of haredi existence in the here and now, and opens up room to critically examine haredi culture as a process rather than an eternally stable product:

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[87] He uses "Haredi" in much the same way I use "Hasidish, Yeshivish, and Heimish." I use the latter set because those are the self-defining terms that I commonly heard during the course of my fieldwork. This to some extent reflects a difference between American and Israeli Jewish languages, and also may indicate that the umbrella term "Haredi" elides over differences between Hasidish, Yeshivish, and Heimish people that they consider important.

"To succeed in being haredi, their opposition must be dynamic and flexible, ready to shape itself to the ever-changing realities against which it has set itself" (Heilman, 38).

Seeing haredi life as contigent in this fashion might lead one to imagine it as one option among many open to those in modern, democratic societies. Such an interpretation, though, would require that we imagine haredi culture as something clearly distinct and chooseable. And there is nothing more distinct and open to free choice in modernity, particularly American modernity, than "religion." When Chulenters articulate their Jewishness and cultural wandering in the terms of one modern choice among many, they themselves tend to reduce these things to, respectively, Judaism and movement along a secular-religious continuum:[88]

> These [first Chulent-going] men 'found themselves at the periphery of society because their religious convictions were being challenged internally,' says Schonfeld. Together they created a "mini-society" with Chulent serving as their '*ir miklat*,' or 'city of refuge' (a reference to the biblical cities of refuge to which a accidental killer was sent to escape a potential avenger) [Olidort].

Isaac elsewhere calls this a "spiritual struggle," (Bleyer) portraying the community as a meeting between two distinct secular and religious spheres (undermining modernity's usual claim to the superiority of the secular domain): "'We've tried to create a place where we could escape the barbarity of the world,' he said. 'For some people, it's the religious world. For some, it's the secular world. We're all on the periphery'" (Bleyer). Another Chulenter describes his Hasidic upbringing as "growing up religious" (Bleyer), and a number of times in my conversations there, different Chulenters would refer to Hasidish, Yeshivish, Heimish communities as "religious."

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[88] Winston, Olidort, and Bleyer are thus in many ways accurately reporting their informants' own takes on the Chulent community (as well as the Hasidish, Yeshivish, and Heimish ones) when they interpret it in secular-religious terms.

When Chulenters express their cultural experimentation in terms of a secular-religious continuum, and articulate their Jewishness as a "religion," they are adopting the dominant American discourse on Jewish identity. The invocation of this mainstream vocabulary is a powerful tool for Chulenters, used to delineate and confine their Jewishness to yet another dish on the "buffet of the spirit." By reducing Hasidicness (and Jewishness) to one modern option among many, it becomes more possible for them to pick and choose elements to shed and to keep. When Isaac claims that for Hasidim, Jewishness is a "ritual life that affects many parts of their existence, of their daily life…that some find off-putting and stifling" (Bleyer, "Audio Slideshow"), he places the "stifling" pervasiveness of Jewishness in their lives in the narrow category of "ritual life"—in other words, "religion." In a country that defines itself as the land of free religious choice, this disciplining of Hasidic Jewishness makes that Jewishness a much more easily manageable entity, open to socially endorsed experimentation and reformation.

But the Chulent scene resists this modernizing articulation (even from its own members). It is not clear what it means for these people to move away from being Hasidic, when being Hasidic means so many things—it is not just a distinct religious choice, but a broad, messy culture which produces (and is produced by), among other things, Yiddish vernacular usage, distinct dress and appearance, rabbinic authority, close textual study, and widely disparate education for men and women. For many Chulenters, their Jewishness is too broadly integral to their selfhood to shed simply by wearing “secular” clothing, shaving, “questioning faith,” studying Wittgenstein, eating ham, and smoking pot, or some mix thereof. That’s why, to respond to Winston’s questions, its members don’t simply become secular, Reform, Conservative, or Modern Orthodox Jews—each of these options, in the view of Chulenters, offers an unrecognizably narrowed and starved Jewishness. They have grown up in worlds where Jewishness means far more than just “Judaism.” Chulent exists as a space where Jews can playfully reform their Jewishness in ways that do not necessarily reduce to just Judaism.

I do not want to deny that Chulenters have choice and possibility when it comes to (re)fashioning their cultural identities, or that, as Heilman argues, the production of haredi culture is thoroughly entangled with non-haredi modernity. To do so would reify their culture, or their “culture-as-religion,” as so “saturating” that it is impossible to escape (Brown). This is clearly not the case, as Chulenters prove at every turn when they struggle with their Jewish identity, and as haredim show when they produce their communities in sustained contrast to the rest of society. But the fact that Jews come to and produce Chulent instead of simply becoming, e.g. Modern Orthodox, and that their shared activities cannot be simply reduced to “religious” or “secular,” indicates that their construction of Jewishness as a modern choice is itself a process rather an inevitable, natural fact.

The particularly emphatic variety, intensity, and pain of this process reflects the difficulty in reducing Hasidish, Yeshivish, and Heimish Jewishness—or its abandonment—into a distinct, manageable choice. This suggests that we must read Heilman carefully. Although Hasidicness is in some sense a cultural option in response to and enabled by modernity, to varying degrees *similar* and *comparable* to other types of options, like being Italian, Amish, or Protestant, it is *not* the *same* type of option. Hasidicness is an unusual combination of interlinked cultural elements that do not conform easily to the dominant, distinct categories of "ethnicity" and "religion."[89] For this reason, it is particularly difficult to shed: for Hasidic Chulenters, their Jewishness is as "saturating" for them as Americanness is for George W. Bush.

It is particularly difficult then, for Chulenters (to return to the previous chapter's Jewishness-as religion-as food metaphor) to render their Hasidish, Yeshivish, or Heimish cultures into an easily digestible, or for that matter, repellant, option on the "buffet of the spirit." Chulent, then, can be understood as a space not only for experimenting with the flavors of the meal of Jewishness, but also as a playground where the shape of the meal's vessel—which determines its placement on the buffet line—is continuously battered and reshaped. We know this because of the insane profusion and intensity of cultural processes at Chulent, from Carlebach niggunim sung to a conga drum's beat to loud, drunken Yiddish arguments about Madonna: every time a hammer strikes the vessel, sparks fly.[90]

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[89] And, for that matter so are "Italian" and "Amish" and even "Evangelical Christian." Hasidicness is not the only the identity that is forced, in Jakobsen and Pellegrini's terms, to become a "pale imitation" of (partially secularized) White, Protestant nativity.

[90] Echoing Nahum Norbert Glatzer's title for his 1962 collection, *Hammer on the Rock: A Short Midrash Reader*.

IV: Eating Chulent

There is an actual crockpot of dry, vegetarian chulent that sits on a table in the large social room. Not everyone likes Isaac's cooking, but enough do that it mostly gets eaten up by the night's end. Calling the community "Chulent," does, in a pragmatic sense, reference the actual dish that gets made by Isaac every Thursday night. It also fits into a larger multi-culturalist discourse of food-as-culture. It reduces all the chaotic variety of Chulent to a single dish that is not necessarily shared by all of its members. Chulent (the food), which generally slow-cooks over the entire Sabbath, in accordance with halakhic rules forbidding cooking, is most closely associated with Ashkenazi *heimishkeit.*[91] In the invocation of food-as-culture, heimishkeit becomes reduced to something easily consumable, that fits into models of cultural identity that reduce complex cultural processes (i.e., an Ashkenazi, halakhically observant world) into simple product. Noting Goldschmidt's observation that in this multi-culturalist model, "Jerk chicken is to gefilte fish as Kwanzaa is to Hanukah, or dreadlocks are to yarmulkes, because all are considered equivalently 'cultural'" (Goldschmidt, 13), we can throw "chulent" into the mix, too.

Another possible layer of meaning of the community's naming might be in reference to an American-culture-as-salad-bowl model (as opposed to an-American-culture-as-melting-pot mode), in which many different ingredients, more or less distinct from each other, come together to make a tasty whole. But as we've seen in Glazer and Moynihan's work, this too has a reductive tendency, reifying the boundaries between different groups. In this model, someone has to be the potatoes and someone has to be the barley. You can't change from one to the other, and you certainly can't be both.

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[91] (*Heimishkeit*). Yiddish: noun form of *heimish*, "homeyness."

Regardless of which reading of the meaning of "Chulent"-as-culture is more persuasive, both tend to reduce the community's complex social interactions and their native identities to easily identifiable and distinguishable parts. This transforms the wide, entangled threads of Ashkenazi *heimishkeit* and Jewishness into something distinct and manageable, something to be eaten or not eaten. The community's entrance into the dominant food-as-culture discourse is thus one means among several (such as characterizing itself as a space for secular-religious experimentation) to enable it to mark and transform the radically pervasive web of culture that is Hasidicness.[92]

V: Exegesis

When I first started going to Chulent I was an uncritical participant in the process of reproducing dominant American Jewish identity—more so, I would like to believe, than I am now. Like a young Shifra Epstein, I went searching among Hasidim for a radical difference that was still Jewish. Where her quest was to reconcile their strange Jewishness with her own, mine was to understand how they formed their Jewishness in opposition to a secular majority culture. Looking for interactions between secular Jews and Hasidim, I found them, at least at first. I interpreted Chulenters' material culture, particularly hair and dress, as strictly accurate signals of their placement on the secular-religious continuum.

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[92] This stands in contrast to the larger Crown Heights Lubavitcher community, which, Goldschmidt argues, resists the reduction of the cultural process of kashrus to easily marked food products, thus distancing itself from participation in the multi-culturalist model.

But at every turn, this framework of secular-religious difference suffered from telling slippage. The community itself resisted this articulation, bursting forth in dimensions that crossed through the secular-religious continuum. The earliest hint of this came on my first night at Chulent, in June of 2007, when (as I related in the introduction) I told Isaac Schonfeld that I was researching "how secular Jews look at Hasidim, and how Hasidim look back at them," and he responded, "Aha! And what do you do when they're looking at each other from inside the same head?" His question considerably muddied the waters of my ethnographic outlook, suggesting that "secular" and "Hasidic" were not as firmly distinct categories as I had imagined. This reconsideration—thinking of "secular" and "Hasidic" as (at times contested) processes rather than inevitable, stable categories of difference—combined with a growing awareness that Chulent, in all of its chaotic splendor, could not be reduced to a single binary of Jewish difference, pushed me to think outside and beyond the standard secular-religious continuum, searching for the ways that it failed to adequately explain the Chulent community, and conversely, for the terms that might render this micro-culture (or "fragmentary community"[93]) better intelligible.

In the introduction, I presented my naïve impressions of one September night at Chulent, seen through the lens of the dominant American Jewish discourse on

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[93] See Jonathan Boyarin's "Death and the Minyan," an essay from his 1996 book *Thinking in Jewish*.

Jewish identity and difference. If we consider my experiences of that night as a text, then what I write immediately below is a reinterpretation of that text, constructed over the course of six months' further fieldwork and critical thought.

When I walked through Chulent on that night, I went looking for interactions between secular Jews and Hasidic Jews. What I actually found was a safe space for playful experimentation with Jewishness, more usefully and accurately described in terms of, among other things: gender; race; level of immersion in Ashkenazi food, dance, and song; haircut; dress; language; halakhic knowledge/attitudes; educational background; choice of halakhic observance; level of contact with gentiles; choice of which strains of Jewish historical narrative to adopt (e.g. Yiddish literature, neo-Sabbatianism,[94] etc.); politics (Zionist, Neturei Karta,[95] etc.); and, to a certain degree, secular/religious.

V.A: The Cigarette Smokers

The cigarette smokers did not particularly interest me because they appeared homogenous, and I was searching for interactions between religious and secular Jews. One thing I've learned during the course of this ethnography, though, is that material signals can be deceptive. This is especially true of the Chulent community, where, due to their marginal or outcast status from the communities they grew up in, individuals are particularly conscious of the claims of belonging that choice of appearance makes. As Isaac put it to me, “Listen, some people here dress that way [frum], but don’t keep any mitzvos. Some people don’t look like it at all, but keep shabbos[96] and kosher. Some keep shabbos but don’t keep kosher. You can’t tell by just looking at someone.” So despite the homogeneity of their appearance, there was quite likely a wide range within that group across the continuum of what we generally consider secular and religious: some who believe in God, and others who do not; some who keep shabbos, and some who do not; some who go to shul regularly, and some who don’t; some who closely obey the authority of a rebbe, and others who do not.

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[94] Sabbatianism was a 17th century Jewish messianic movement. Its latest iteration has grown to include Zen Sufism among its many roots. See http://www.donmeh-west.com/, "The Neo-Sabbatian Collective of the Internet."

[95] Neturei Karta is a group of *halakhically* observant Jews most well known for its virulent opposition to the state of Israel, based on the grounds that Jews should only have a kingdom in the land of Israel after the Messiah comes.

In my quest for secular-Hasidic relations, I could have used the cigarette smokers as fruitful objects of study, if I’d been aware of the broad differences in “religious” practice obscured by the similarity of their dress. But, as I’ve argued, such an approach would have failed at the basic task of rendering these people’s actions intelligible to myself and to my readers. Looking anew at the smokers, I would argue that the operative terms that bound them as a group were primarily their age, maleness, heterosexuality, Yiddish, and similar education—not some sort of notion of religious congruence or difference.

The interplay of these identities is to some extent simple and obvious: their youth, gender, and straightness created a common ground for them to talk about women as objects of desire; and their Yiddish and yeshivah education lent them a common vocabulary and common knowledge to discuss the value of the Vilna Gaon's teachings. But these identities are not distinct from each other, and they interact in complex ways in the production of the smokers' group unity.

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[96] “Keeping shabbos” means following the *halakhic* rules for shabbos, such as not working, not handling money, not cooking, etc.

Yiddish use is generally correlated with maleness at Chulent, because only a very small handful of the women at Chulent speak Yiddish.[97] The main reason for the dearth of female Yiddish speakers at Chulent is that the vast majority of women who grow up in contemporary Yiddish-speaking communities have children to take care of and a household to run by the time they're 19 or 20 years old—their marriages were most likely arranged, and they are expected to have at least five or six children. (Although male Chulent members who grew up Hasidish, Yeshivish, or Heimish tend to explain women's absence as a result of women's lack of intellectual curiosity [Winston, 58 and Olidort]). Gender differences in Chulenters' native communities thus create a correlation between maleness and Yiddish at Chulent; at the same time, the use of Yiddish to create a male space in which to discuss the physical appearance of women and rabbinical disputations reinforces the male-Yiddish connection.

The smokers' yeshivah educations tie in inextricably with their other identities. Their Yiddish is both a tool and product of that education. Their fondness for all-male spaces mirrors the gender segregation of their childhood (and quite likely of their adulthood). When they are able to discuss the Vilna Gaon, it is because they are male and were raised by parents who send their boys to yeshivah. If these men have sisters, those sisters would not be enabled to discuss rabbinic authorities in the same style and depth, because women in their communities receive a much shallower education in rabbinic literature and hermeneutics.[98] The language of this male domain of intensive textual study is a fluid combination of loshn-koydesh, Yiddish, and local vernaculars like English, sometimes referred to as “Yeshivish” (Isaacs, 15). In any setting, then—not just at Chulent, where the women tend to come from less traditional backgrounds—halakhic banter, in its language and its topics, is both a product of and producer of maleness (similar to, for instance, how male chatting about football functions elsewhere in American society).

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[97] This is an inversion of the dominant equation of Yiddish with femininity. (See Naomi Seidman's *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish*).

These terms—gender, education, etc.—serve to make the cigarette smokers’ space far more intelligible than an analysis grounded in the narrow vocabulary of religious and secular. To describe these people’s commonality as “religious” is to tame it into a far smaller, distinct domain than the wide array of cultural processes that it actually sprawls across. One could, for instance say that all shared a similar “religious education”; but to describe a yeshivah education in this way misses out on how that education also produces and is in turn produced by the communal roles of gender, language, rabbinic authority, dress, and the like; it would also obscure the differences between various communities’ yeshivas.

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[98] See Isaacs, 15-16 and Ayala Fader’s October 19th, 2007, work-in-progress chapter from her dissertation, “Chapter Five: Ticket to Eden: Raising the Next Generation of Hasidic Women in Brooklyn.”

V.B: The Audience, The Dancers, and the Musicians

Several months after that night, I learned that the nerdy-looking guy in the glasses and mainstream American clothing, who was sitting on the diner couches on the social room wall, had appeared in Pearl Gluck's documentary *Divan*, a movie about her personal quest for identity after leaving her Hasidic upbringing. In it, he talks about his Hasidic childhood, and his desire to start a one-man Hasidic sect, with one rebbe (himself) and one follower (himself). Meanwhile, he speaks in Hasidic Yiddish with a man in full livush, sharing a common language that is a product and producer of Hasidic difference from outside societies. But it is not clear who is inside and who is outside here; the boundaries are blurred.

The relationship between the dancers and the musicians makes for a richer tapestry. To the nuanced eye, despite the vast differences in appearance between the dancers, the guitar players, and the drummers, they all look shoymer toyreh u'mitzvos. The varieties of halakhic practice that their clothes signal, however, are vastly different. The dancers dress similarly to "crunchy" (nature and naturalism-oriented) Jews I've met in the progressive Orthodox shul in Berkeley, California. They take their intellectual and aesthetic inheritance largely from the hippy neo-Hasidic movement launched in the 1960s-70s in the Bay Area by Zalman Schachter and Shlomo Carlebach as well as from the primarily Israeli-based Broslever Hasidic movement, which emphasized public displays of ecstatic dance and prayer.[99] The drummers most likely would identify themselves as "Yeshivish," that is, as Jews who attended an Orthodox yeshivah but don't closely follow a particular *rav* or Hasidic rebbe, and are less likely to speak Yiddish at home.[100] These Jews tend to be centered in Flatbush, Brooklyn; they're also scattered over the Lower East Side, Queens, and New Jersey. The drummer who I knew, Yoel, was a Satmar Hasid from the tight-knit upstate New York community in Kiryas Joel.[101]

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[99] See Yaakov Ariels's article "Hasidism in the Age of Aquarius: The House of Love and Prayer in San Francisco, 1967–1977."

The differences between these frum groups are profound. The Californian Jews have almost no institutionalized authority; the Yeshivish Jews tend to have a large number of decentralized institutions; and Satmar Hasidim have enormous amounts of central authority concentrated in their rebbe's court.[102] Yiddish language plays a huge part in Satmar identity. I've met young Satmar men, born in Brooklyn to parents who were themselves born in Brooklyn, who speak broken English because for their entire childhood they talked almost exclusively in Yiddish to other Satmar males. Some Yeshivish Jews speak Yiddish, others do not.[103] I've never met a crunchy Jew who speaks Yiddish. Satmar Hasidim tend to be aggressively anti-Zionist, following the cue of the late Rebbe Yoel Teitelbaum; attitudes towards Israel vary widely across both Yeshivish and California-crunchy communities.

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[100] (*Rav*). Hebrew: literally "rabbi," often used as the title for a prominent non-Hasidic, Orthodox authority. The word "rebbe" is exclusively used to refer to the leader of a Hasidic sect. In general, rebbes are more likely to be part of a genealogical dynasty (which can include brothers, nephews, sons-in-law, etc.) and are more likely to revered as intercessors armed with holy powers. A rav is more likely to be associated with a particular yeshivah or community, and his authority stems more narrowly from his brilliance in interpreting and teaching *halakhah*.

[101] Both the man and town take their name from Yoel Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rebbe who established a Satmar court in America immediately after the Second World War.

[102] Satmar Hasidim actually have two rebbes now, the result of a long and bitter dynastic struggle between two brothers. One brother has Kiryas Joel under his purview, the other has Williamsburg. I was told by several Satmarers that each of the rebbes is followed much less dogmatically than the rebbe before them; and that Rebbe Yoel Teitelbaum himself sought to decentralize day-to-day *halakhic* authority in the Satmar community (while centralizing economic authority).

[103] It's much more common for American Yeshivish men to speak Yiddish than for Israeli Yeshivish men, as was kindly explained to me by an Israeli Yeshivish guy who sat next to me on a plane ride last year from Milan to New York City. For more on this, see Isaacs, 12-14.

The dancers, the guitarists, and the drummers all found common Jewishness in the music, not just because "music is universal," but rather because the musical style of Shlomo Carlebach is a subtle cultural thread that runs through each of their Orthodox worlds. In his lifetime, Carlebach managed the rare feat of successfully straddling several different Jewish worlds at once, always keeping one foot firmly planted in the Lubavitcher community,[104] and because of that, a wide variety of Jews have claimed his music as part of their cultural inheritance.[105] The dancers were likely close devotees of his music and philosophy; his *niggunim*[106] are occasionally sung (with some sense of transgression) in both Yeshivish and Hasidish circles. And Carlebach's style, while fairly innovative and unique, was very much grounded in Hasidish styles that would be deeply familiar to these players. The common ground for the dancers and musicians thus lay in a particular musical genre and their differences lay across language, politics, space (Flatbush vs. Williamsburg vs. Berkeley), and communal structure. Differences in gender and halakhic practice were exemplified by the presence of women among the dancers: unlike women from the Yeshivish or Hasidish worlds, these women had the option of being unmarried and childless in their mid-20s without becoming social pariahs; and they were able to dance in the same space as men.

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[104] Ariel, "Hasidim in the Age of Aquarius."

[105] I happened to visit Borough Park on the anniversary of Shlomo Carlebach's death (called in Yiddish his "*yortzeit*"). One of my heimish informants told me that this was a big day in the neighborhood, that a lot of people were honoring him and playing his music that day. That said, his music is almost certainly *issur* (Hebrew for "forbidden") in the Satmar communities and in many parts of Borough Park, too.

[106] (*Niggunim*). Hebrew: Melodies for prayers, sometimes wordless.

This analysis can itself be subverted to some extent because it relies largely on signals given by material culture; as we've seen already, such signs can be (at times deliberately) misleading. Matthew, the dancer who I talked to, turned out to be forging a Hasidic identity for himself by attending a Lubavitcher yeshivah—something the dancing women would not have been able to do. (If they desired to become Lubavitchers, they would receive a very different type of education, one that would focus on learning Torah, simple domestic mitzvos, and lessons in ritual purity and child-rearing.) I have no idea what kind of lifestyle Yoel leads, to what degree, e.g. he is halakhically observant or not, other than that he grew up in Kiryas Joel and currently lives there with his wife and children.[107] Furthermore, to whatever degree Shlomo Carlebach's music, or any music for that matter, is played in Satmar communities, I can say with some certainty that it is not played on conga drums. But in Chulent, where the only authority is a painstakingly tolerant Isaac Schonfeld, such mixing and experimentation is not only possible, but welcome. The boundaries that separate Jew from Jew (and from non-Jews) are generally far more fluid than we tend to think; at Chulent, this is all the more true.

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[107] This last bit of information comes from Shaechter's article, "Unusual Ingredients Make Social Group Simmer."

V.C: The Beis-Medrash

I’ve always found chess to be an amazing bridge across cultures. It doesn’t require anything in common between two players other than shared knowledge and love for the rules and tactics of the games. Mohammed and Yoily, who have been friends for several years, liked to play chess because it’s fun. For me, it was a great way to be able sit down and start talking to people.

Mohammed and Yoily form, on the face of it, an odd couple. Mohammed, with his foot-long peyos, beard, and *tallis katan*, is a Satmar Hasid who is a fervent proponent of Satmar’s anti-Zionist stance. Despite having many friends at Chulent, this gave Mohammed a certain air of the willed outcast, a status that I think he enjoys very much. His politics toward Israel set him apart from many Chulenters. As generally tolerant as they are of each others’ identities and intellectual expressions, many Chulenters find Mohammed’s anti-Zionism highly provocative. I’ve seen a Zionist guy walk up to him, loudly declare a blessing in Hebrew for the state of Israel and the destruction of its enemies, and declare “Zionism is for me what it is to be a Jew.” Another time, someone asked Mohammed if he was really against the state of Israel, and when he comfirmed it, the man just said “Oy,” and walked away. Mohammed is hardly shy about his views, although he’s not confrontational in large crowds. “Israelis are a bunch of assholes,” he once confided to me over a game, “except for the *Yerushalmis*.[108] Animals.”

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[108] (*Yerushalmis*). Hebrew: Jerusalemites.

In contrast to Mohammed, his friend Yoily could have fit into any hot New York late-night scene, with his gelled hair, carefully trimmed beard, and cool blue jeans. Obscured by these material differences are their common backgrounds, which, among other things, includes common fluency in a Jewish vernacular. Yiddish for them acts as both a bridge, binding them together and reinforcing the commonality of their respective *khinukhs*,[109] functioning as a tool with which to produce an exclusively male space where they can talk about women in frank, unkind terms.

When Yoily compares the story of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai to Santa Claus, he is exercising the intellectual freedom with which most Chulenters identify so strongly. By looking at the Torah as a man-made object, he distances himself from his native community's foundational narratives, to a point where he can stand outside those narratives and critique them. While it would certainly be possible for people in his native community to think like this, there are almost no safe spaces to talk like this. Chulent, with its lack of institutional, hierarchical authority, permits this kind of expression. This is what Chulenters often see as Chulent's defining characteristic—the ability to take any intellectual stance on their "religion." But it is important to note that Yoily's explicit rejection of a central "religious" narrative does not transform him into, say a secular or Reconstructionist Jew. He still comes to Chulent and seeks out the company of people with similar backgrounds, with whom he can speak Yiddish and recreate the homogenously male spaces of his yeshivah childhood (and to transgress these spaces as well; I saw him bring female friends to Chulent several times).

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[109] (*Khinukh*). Hebrew and Yiddish: education or upbringing.

And how does Yoily perceive difference between Jews? He came to synagogue, the Stanton Street Shul, for Yom Kippur. The shul was led by a Hasidic rabbi and populated by Ashkenazi Jewish natives when I was growing up in it; today, it is a highly unusual mix, with some remnants of the older congregation outnumbered by young, successful Modern Orthodox Jews and a young, Modern Orthodox rabbi. After Yom Kippur had just ended, and we were streaming downstairs to break our fasts with orange juice and sponge cake, Yoily observed, with a wry grin, "You know what the difference is between here and a Hasidish joint? If this were Hasidim, people would already be breaking out the cigarettes."

The conversation between our friendly chess watchers, Leyvi, Akiva, and Wendy, was extremely revealing of the ways that Hasidish, Heimish, and Yeshivish upbringings inform not just a narrow "religious experience," but rather a whole host of worldviews. When Leyvi and Akiva asked Wendy what she thought of the big halakhic debate, they were assuming that she was able to follow the argument. To be able to understand, let alone participate, in such a conversation requires intensive yeshivah training particularly at the kind of school where Yiddish was the language of instruction. This is due both to the argument's form and its substance: that style of rapid-fire debate, the seamless transitions between English, Yiddish and loshn-koydesh, and the depth and breadth of familiarity with rabbinic literature require years to master (Isaacs, 15). When Leyvi and Akiva, who attended yeshivah for over a decade, assumed that Wendy was able to follow along, they were assuming that she had also had access to a type of education that is not only confined to Hasidish, Yeshivish, and Heimish communities, but is also only available to the White males within those communities.[110] They weren't just viewing a particular type of khinukh as normative, but Whiteness and maleness as well, despite Wendy's dark complexion and (almost-certain) female identity. For these men, male yeshivah training is so natural that it is invisible to them, to the extent that they assume that others share the products of that education, like the ability to carry a halakhic argument in three languages. When Wendy told them that she couldn't understand the argument, they were taken aback by her assertion of her sexual, racial, and educational differences. Note that these represent a broader (and more accurate) array of cultural markers with which to understand the differences between Wendy and the two men than simply arguing that she is less religious than they are.

This interchange is particularly provocative because of Akiva and Leyvi's appearances. They exhibited no material sign of having a yeshivah background, of currently keeping mitzvos, of being Yiddish speakers, etc. Aside from the kinkiness of his hair and a few vague facial clues, there would be no reason to mark Akiva as anything other than a White male. It was largely a similar situation with Leyvi, although the colorful silks he wore expressed some sort of deviance from the gender norms of mainstream American society (and of the kind of Jewish community he grew up in[111]). To the extent that their material culture signaled Jewishness, it was the kind usually associated with "secular" or "cultural" types, despite an upbringing generally marked as "religious." By shedding their livush and peyos and taking on a secular appearance, these men did not suddenly rid themselves of the complex web of constructions of race, gender, Jewishness, language, and politics with which they see the world. (It's possible that they even maintain some halakhic observance.) People may look at Akiva or Leyvi and see a secular Jew, but Akiva and Leyvi certainly do not look at people with the eyes of a secular Jew[112]—such a Jew would never assume that Wendy would be able to have followed the halakhic discussion, because, among other things, they themselves would not have been able to do so.[113]

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[110] White because Yiddish would only be taught in an Ashkenazi community, and as Goldschmidt argues, even Hasidim are marked as White by their Black Others and to some degree are granted White privilege (See Goldschmidt, 52). There are rare exceptions to this rule (of Yiddish being correlated solely with Ashkenazim), when non-Ashkenazi children attend Ashkenazi yeshivahs. (See Isaacs or Shaechter),

[111] There is a rabbinic commandment against dressing in the way of the other gender (one which is superseded once a year in Hasidish communities in their *Purim shpiln*).

VI. Self-Reflections: Mr. Boyarin Goes to Chulent

Part of what makes Chulent so fun is the ambiguousness of Chulenters' identities. People signal to each other through their dress, peyos, and education what kind of background they are coming from, and what kind of community they are currently in. But these signals often are mixed, and can be confusing, so the guessing game is a haphazard process at best.

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[112] By "secular Jew" I mean narrowly a Jew who has had little *halakhic* and rabbinical education, and does not practice *halakhic* observance. This thesis attempts to subvert this construction—but I do not deny its social power that is simultaneously or variously self-marked and socially imposed.

[113] The small number of Yiddish speakers who did not grow up in Hasidish, Yeshivish, or Heimish would not have been able to follow the conversation. As Miriam Isaacs argues, this form of conversation is conducted in a particular tri-glossic mix, and focuses on topics, that only yeshivah-educated males learn.

When I started going to Chulent, I was sporting a face full of patchy, wispy hair.[114] I covered my head with a cap (as I usually do), and wore my usual mainstream American clothes, a t-shirt and jeans. One of my first nights there, before the YIVO intensive program had started and my spoken Yiddish was still very weak, a young Yiddishist asked me several, rapid-fire questions in Yiddish. Seeing that I couldn't handle them, he said in English, "Oh I assumed you know Yiddish, because with that facial hair you totally look like one of those Hasidishe kids." Later in the year, when I had shaved my face but had slightly longer head hair, a Yeshivish guy from Far Rockaway asked me, "Are you from Crown Heights?" I told him that I was not and asked why he thought so. "Oh," he told me, "because you know you've got that Lubavitcher style of peyos where they come down from your temples." On that same night, a man in full livush asked me whether I would lay *tefillin*[115] on the next morning as a favor to him, "because it would give the *malakhim b'shamayim* just a little *hanooeh*."[116] I asked him why he didn't ask me to do something bigger, like keep shabbos, and he said to me, "Because looking at you, I know it would be too hard for you. God knows, if I didn't grow up that way, I wouldn't be able to do it."[117]

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[114] My father, a product of the Jersey Shore around 1970, kept insisting that I like the young Bruce Springsteen pictured on the cover of his album "The Wild, the Innocent, and the E-Street Shuffle."

[115] (*Tefillin*). Hebrew: phylacteries. To "lay tefillin" is a calk from the Yiddish, and means simply to put them on in the ritual fashion, around the arm, hand, and fingers, as well as on top of the head.

[116] This combination of Enligh, Hebrew, and Yiddish translates to: "because it would give the angels in heaven just a little pleasure."

[117] Later, when someone next to us spilled a glass of vodka-and-Coke on the chess board, he said that it was probably caused indirectly by his own failure to lay tefillin that morning.

But I did grow up keeping shabbos and still do my best to, despite his assumption otherwise (although I did ask him a leading question to get him there). As unusual as everyone's identity at Chulent is, mine is at least as hard to define. When Sruli, a Lubavitcher Hasid from Crown Heights who runs an online Yiddish translating service and writes articles about world literature for the Lubavitcher Yiddish publication *Der Algemeiner Dzjournal*, asked me one time "So, nu, what *are* you?", I replied, simply, "I'm a Lower East Side Yid." This was a shorthand for meaning many things—that I am some mixture of heimishe, shoymer toyreh u'mitzvos, and integrated into wider society. While this in some ways accurate—my parents speak Yiddish and so do I, we keep many but far from all mitzvos, and I go to college—it also obfuscates the ways that I am not these things at all. Another night, Sruli, somewhat drunk, asked me more about myself and the Lower East Side. "You're frum, right?" "Well…yes, more or less." "And you learned Yiddish from home?" "Well, sort of, to understand. My parents speak it, but they studied it in college, and so did I." "Aha," he answered, not really listening, "And there were many children like this in your shul?" "No," I shook my head, "I was the only kid in my shul. My father was the next youngest." Sruli sighed heavily, and gazing into the far corner, not really talking to me anymore, "So you see, it can't last over the generations, it assimilates too easily." I realized that I had, for Sruli, become an avatar of his vision of a Jewishness that seamlessly integrated Yiddishkeit, *frumkeit*,[118] and integration into larger, Gentile society.[119] He was disappointed because my experience confirmed to him that this kind of Jewishness cannot have lasting continuity, because it crosses too much into mainstream society.

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[118] (*Frumkeit*). Yiddish: Frum-ness.

[119] Contrast this to Winston's claim that "the modern Orthodox pose the greatest threat to strictly Orthodox Jews, passively challenging them to consider that perhaps

In Sruli's imagination of me as a complete, worldly Jew, he ignored the reality that although I am a little bit of every kind of Jewishness he cares about, each part (or so, during my dark nights of the soul, it seems to me) is a pale imitation of the depth of his. Where his Yiddish is fluent, mine is schooled and forced; where he observes *halakhah* rigorously, I do so in a haphazard, idiosyncratic fashion; where he has years of training with rabbinic texts, I have at best a limited ability to engage with them. As for so many others, Chulent became for me a playground for cultural experimentation, a space where I could strengthen, entwine, and transform the diverse mix of Jewish threads that make up my own identity. My fieldwork began, in some sense, as part of a quest to make sense out of my own Jewish differences, and Chulent provided me with a space to pursue this project both academically, in the production of this thesis, and in a real, lived sense, as I was forced to negotiate and renegotiate my Jewishness every time I joined its community.

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one can live a 'Torah life' and engage with the modern, secular world" (Winston, 56). For Sruli, the Modern Orthodox hold no particular threat or temptation because they have almost no Yiddishkeit. A Jewishness that could integrate Ashkenazi culture, Yiddishkeit, and frumkeit is for him the most disturbing (ideal in the sense that it challenges Hasidish claims that one needs to be separate from outside society in order to be fully Jewish).

Conclusion

American modernity and secularism rely on a set of interlinked narratives of human progress. This progress is defined by, among other things, greater autonomy and freedom from religious dogma, achieved through the ever-increasing rationality of the individual, scientific mind. Any story of communal progress must also mark that from which "we" progress; to know how "we" have evolved, it is necessary to know what "we" have evolved from. Modernity employs a host of binaries to differentiate "us" from "them": secular/religious; rational/dogmatic; free/enslaved; modern/primitive; creative/stagnant; and progressive/eternal, among others.

Secularism wraps itself in cloak of inevitability, its advance one of the key markers of progress into the human future. Conversely, with every step back in time, farther into "history," humans are viewed as more and more primitive and religious. The past thus becomes the primary site in which Western, Christian hegemony constructs its others. But this stands at tension with secularism's claims to universality: individuals and societies "from" the primitive, religious past continue to exist, and most threateningly, grow. Modernity has a solution to this problem: as Jakobsen and Pellegrini argue, "Differences across space that make for cultural differences become differences in time, so that all those living in the unenlightened world become the history of those who live in the enlightened world" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 9-10).

As we've seen, in the last fifty years or so, sections of American Jewry have struggled to join with a White, Protestant American hegemony that defines itself as modern and also as secular, in the precise sense that religion is relegated to a distinctly private domain). This process of “hegemonizing” American Jewry not only seeks to move Jewishness’ values closer to that of the mainstream, but in turn reshapes Jewishness itself. Scholars like Nathan Glazer imagined a modern, American Jewry whose Jewishness was held in clearly delineated categories, “ethnicity” and “religion.”

These hegemonizing narratives construct this form of Jewishness as normative for all American Jews, and so they are troubled by the contemporary existence in American space of Hasidim, a community or set of communities whose forms of Jewishness transcend the firm boundaries between “ethnicity” and “religion” and between “religion” and the public domain. This challenge is rhetorically solved by placing these Hasidim in a narrative of American Jewish progress, in which they become “our” distant selves, across both time and space. Coeval, proximate Jews are portrayed as really inhabiting a timeless, pre-modern East European Jewish past. For mainstream American Jewry to define itself as increasingly modern, secular, and free, it must do so in contrast to that from which it has evolved: the primitive, religious, unemancipated Hasid. The shorthand for the difference between “us” and “them” is placement along a narrowly-conceived spectrum from secularism to religiosity.

This interpretive lens has been cast on the Chulent community in several articles and in one book. Its members are labeled as inhabiting different points on a secular-religious continuum of Jewish life; their cultural experimentation is cast in the dominant American discourse’s terms of religious choice. At times, Chulenters themselves employ this lens, using modernity’s vocabulary in order to describe themselves and their community. Their invocation of the mainstream discourse on Jewishness enables them, with some success, to delineate and confine their Jewishness to a narrower realm of “religion.” For Jews who have grown up in communities where Jewishness crosses almost every cultural domain, and now seek to reinvent themselves in significant ways, imagining Jewishness as a religious identity it far more manageable, something that can be chosen, rejected, or reshaped, something they can “have” rather than “be.”

Despite Chulenters’ own articulation of their space in secular-religious terms, the community itself resists this characterization at every turn. It overflows with expressions of Jewishness that are *not* confined to narrow “religious” or “secular” spheres, but extend across a wide array of cultural domains (much as they do in Chulenters’ native Hasidish, Heimish, and Yeshivish communities). Music, language, gender, appearance, education, and politics are a sampling of the complex set of identities that better describe the differences and similarities between Chulenters than simple placements on a secular-religious continuum. As these Jews playfully—and at times painfully—refashion Jewishness, they do not do so only in terms of becoming more or less religious, or some unusual combination thereof. They reinvent Jewishness in terms of Yiddish, rabbinic texts, maleness, Zionism, Ashkenazi food, and Carlebach’s music. (And this is to name only an important handful from a much wider set of activities, identities, aesthetic tastes, and bodies of knowledge that serve as the putty for their new shapes of Jewishness).

Chulent, when understood in this broad set of terms, fundamentally disrupts hegemonizing American Jewish narratives. It shows that there are forms of contemporary American Jewishness that are not necessarily just a genealogically inherited “Judaism,” but rather extend to the fullest reaches of life. This broader Jewishness is not just a static, eternal (religious) essence, but is open to creative play. It is just as enmeshed in current time and American space as any other kind of Jewishness or cultural identity. The ways in which Chulent’s changes in geographical placement have affected its community are testaments to the importance of American space in Chulenters’ lives. Although it should go without saying, it shows that Hasidim do not live in an East European shtetl, but are rather as fully transformed by (and transforming of) the New York City landscape as anyone else. Rather than being chained to an eternal, oppressive religious structure, Hasidim produce and are produced by a Jewishness that crosses many culture domains and is constantly open, with particular pain and difficulty, to renegotiation.

Focusing on this contemporary, dynamic Jewishness reveals serious fault lines in the mainstream narratives of Jewish progress. There is in fact nothing inevitable about the assimilation of Jewishness into dominant forms of cultural identity, because alternate, vibrant forms of Jewishness are being constantly fashioned and refashioned. This movement toward the mainstream was a contested process in which many Jews were complicit. It had many costs, among them the Othering of Hasidic Jews, the imagination of Jewish history as monolithically male, and the denigration of non-Jewish minorities. Its greatest cost, perhaps, (and in some eyes, no doubt its greatest success) is that much of American Jewry has lost much of its Otherness from the Christian West, as Jewishness is imagined to look more and more like, to use

Goldschmidt’s phrasing, an “equivalently” different form of White, Protestant nativity.

More constructively, Chulent suggests the viability of forms of Jewishness, no matter how marginalized, that actively resist modern, secularist ontologies of cultural identity. Put differently, to be Jewish in the way some Chulenters are is to stand in a sustained, ambivalent relationship to modernity. On the one hand, in its difference from hegemonic forms of cultures, it offers the ability to stand at a critical distance from modernity, making it easier to see the power structures that seem invisible and natural from within the mainstream; on the other hand, the very existence of this kind of alternate identity is in some sense enabled by modernity’s ideology of individual and communal freedom, choice, and autonomy. There are no truly objective stances—a point that Pecora and Jakobsen and Pellegrini make when they observe the awkward position of those who criticize secularism while still employing secular, humanist worldviews that are in fact particularly Western and Protestant. Looking at Chulent, perhaps we can imagine a Jewishness that is not secular but, in its lived distance from modernity’s ontology of cultural identity, is still a particularly fertile cultural ground from which to conduct post-modern criticism.

Appendix

This is a listing of recent shiurs given at Chulent (including only the second instance that it's been by a woman). It is published on the Chulent Facebook Group's discussion board [http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2414593380&topic=4013]:

> This week's presentation will be by film maker Menachem Daum.
>
> We intend to begin at 9:15 PM
>
> From Menachem Daum:
>
> "In January of 1989, I had the great privilege of accompanying Reb Shlomo Carlebach on a 10-day series of concerts he gave throughout Poland. Wherever he performed Shlomo used music and storytelling to spread his message of joy and peace, to Jews as well as to Christians. This trip had a profound impact on me and the films that I have made and those that I am currently working on. I will be honored to share some video highlights and discuss Reb Shlomo's trip with the Chulent chevra.
> I will also be showing clips from my recent film, "Hiding and Seeking," as well as my films-in-progress that have been inspired by Reb Shlomo's teachings."
>
> Q&A to follow.
>
> Menachem Daum an acclaimed film maker has directed a number of award winning documentaries, two of which are of particular interest to the Jewish community, "A life Apart: Hasidism in America" and "Hiding & Seeking: Faith & Tolerance after the Holocaust." Directors Daum and Rudavsky, commented, "A Life Apart was our attempt to humanize Haredim (ultra-Orthodox Jews) for outsiders. Hiding and Seeking is our attempt to humanize outsiders to the Haredim."
>
> Upcoming Lectures
>
> April 10th Itzik Gottesman : All Baldies to Egypt! : A Strange Shabes Hagodel Custom.
> April 17th Nicole Leifer : Witnessing Quantum Phenomena
> May 1st Nataly Levich : Photography presentation

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