Not "Just A Trip":

Personal and Political Implications of American Jewish Tourism in Israel/Palestine

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Departments of Sociology and Feminist and Gender Studies

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

Hailey Corkery

March 2020

On my honor,

I have neither given nor received

unauthorized aid on this thesis.

Hailey Corkery

March 2020

Abstract

This thesis explores how travel to Israel/Palestine affects young liberal American Jewish tourists' identity, feelings of attachment to Israel, and political opinions about the Israeli occupation. In order to investigate these topics, I conducted twenty in-depth interviews with young liberal American Jews who have been to Israel/Palestine. Based on this research, I have found that travel to Israel/Palestine affects both one's beliefs and sense of self through introducing tourists to narratives about Israel being a safe place, sparking new relationships between tourists and other Jews, showing travelers that Judaism is not monolithic, and instigating contact with people living in the region. Travel to this region also has larger political consequences that harm Palestinians; from the Palestinian perspective, this tourism is exploitative. While my research is specifically about young liberal American Jewish travel to Israel/Palestine, it also gives insight into the ethics and implications of tourism more generally. My main argument about tourism is that while it seems like a leisure activity, it is inevitably a political practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I explore how travel to Israel/Palestine influences young liberal American Jewish participants' Jewish identity, feelings of attachment to Israel, and political opinions about the Israel-Palestine conflict through literature and qualitative research methods. In order to do this, I examine different mechanisms of travel, including family vacations, travel through organizations (e.g. Taglit-Birthright), study abroad programs, gap-year travel, and family trips. Through my research, I have found patterns and common themes in travelers' experiences during and after the trip, as these are mediated by their positionality. Through grappling with these themes, my hope is to provide a multilayered analysis that reflects the complexity of diasporic Jewish subjectivity while at the same time rendering visible the ways in which it is conscripted by the promises of the Israeli nation-state. In my analysis, I argue that travel to Israel/Palestine affects one's beliefs about Israel/Palestine, influences their sense of self regarding their Jewish identity, and has larger political consequences in the region. My project draws upon scholarship about birthright, diaspora tourism, Israel/Palestine, and Judaism as well as feminist and sociological theory about tourism, diaspora, and identity formation.

Positionality and Stakes

I write this paper as a white Jewish American. As my Jewishness makes me eligible for free trip programs (e.g. Taglit-Birthright), I could take advantage of a free trip to Israel at any moment, which implicates me in the politics of travel to Israel. My positionality as a white American Jew also involves me in the subject of Jewish diaspora tourism, as I am a part of the group that participates in this phenomenon.

I am also very invested in the Palestinian liberation movement. After taking a sociology class about Israel-Palestine in 2018, I became more aware of the human rights violations that Israel has committed and continues to perpetrate against the Palestinian people. I also realized the political implications of many forms of support for Israel, including participation in its tourism industry. As Israel's maintenance of a regime of settler colonialism and occupation over the Palestinian people is only possible because of international economic and ideological support (Palestinian BDS National Committee 2019), I believe that diaspora tourism in Israel contributes to the oppression of Palestinians. My frustrations with this phenomenon caused me to get involved in research about diaspora Jewish tourism to the West Bank with my professor, Emily Schneider. This research in turn led me to begin to ask questions about the implications of tourism to Israel/Palestine in general, which then spurred this research project.

My positionality influences my research by giving me a strong connection to the topic; I have ties to diaspora tourism and Israel while I am politically opposed to certain forms of diaspora tourism (e.g. Birthright) and Israel's occupation of Palestine. Also, as Butler (2012) argues, "a Jewish critique of Israeli state violence is at least possible, if not ethically obligatory" (Butler 2012:1). By critiquing Israel's violence as well as the tourism industry that perpetuates it, I am not only doing the work I feel I am obligated to do as a Jew, but I am also affirming "a different Jewishness than the one in whose name the Israeli state claims to speak" (Butler 2012:2). In other words, I am illustrating that one can be both Jewish and anti-Zionist.

Patricia Hill Collins' idea about researchers taking on the "insider/outsider" role–though her writing about this discusses the role of black women in sociology–is extremely applicable to my project. As an insider who has "undergone similar experiences, possess[es] a common history, and share[s] taken-for-granted knowledge that characterizes 'thinking as usual'" (Collins

1986:26) as other Jews and a Jew whose "allegiances may militate against their choosing full insider status" (Collins 1986:26), I am an outsider within. My anti-Zionist ideologies and politics are what make me an outsider to young Jews who travel to Israel, as many have Zionist ideals.

As a diaspora Jew, I seek to use my research to open up the conversation amongst other diaspora Jews about how travel to Israel is more than just a trip and can have harmful implications. Inspired by Jennifer Nash (2014), I am hoping to present a "loving critique" (8) to the American Jewish community. By using this ethos in her work, Nash hopes to use critique in order to better her field for her and her colleagues, rather than to harm it. While Nash's work was aimed at Black Feminists, I am hoping to apply her concept to my own community.

Structure of the Paper

In the following section, I provide a historical overview of the Israeli occupation and American Jews and liberalism and review the literature on liberal Zionism and its tensions, Jewish identity formation, tourism in Israel-Palestine, and youth diaspora programming in order to situate my research in relation to relevant academic work. Next, I discuss my methods in regard to how I conducted my interviews, who my interlocutors were, and how I analyzed my data. Then, I analyze my interviews, discussing my interlocutors' reasons for travel, travel to Israel's effect on their connections to Israel, travel to Israel's effect on their Jewish Identities, their trips' discussions of the occupation, travel to Israel's effect on their political opinions, and the political implications of travel to Israel. I conclude by summarizing my findings, expressing the limitations of my research, and discussing how my research sheds light on how all tourism influences politics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Background

Israeli Occupation

As the Israeli occupation is the main political subject (and oftentimes unspoken context) of tourism in Israel/Palestine, I begin my literature review with a brief overview of its history. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, often referred to as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,[1] is a "nationalist conflict fueled by tensions over land, indigeneity, and settler colonialism" (Schneider 2019:10). The origins of this struggle can be traced to the rise of Zionism, "the political ideology and movement for a Jewish national home" (Schneider 2019:10) in the 19th century. Because of this ideology, a small number of European Jews immigrated to Palestine, which was under Ottoman rule at the time, in the late 19th century (Smith 1988).

As more Jews moved to Palestine, Zionism's exclusionary tendencies were revealed, as these Jews had no interest in forming a state where Palestinians would be treated as equal citizens (Spangler 2005). After the British took control of Palestine in 1917, the Balfour Declaration, which "sanctioned the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, despite the fact that Jews made up just six percent of Palestine's population at the turn of the century" (Schneider 2019:15), was issued. This led to an influx of Zionists, who abused the land's political and economic resources and dehumanized the Palestinian people (Schnieder 2019).

In 1947, after World War II and the Nazi Holocaust–which is often referred to simply as "the Holocaust"–the U.N. passed Resolution 181, which called for the creation of two states

---

[1] I purposefully name what is often referred to as the "Israel-Palestine Conflict" the occupation as I believe this more accurately depicts the power struggle between the occupying force and the occupied people; the term "Israel-Palestine Conflict" implies an equal amount of power between the Israeli government and the Palestinian people, which does not accurately reflect the dynamics of the issue. I do, however, use the word "conflict" throughout the paper to refer to the occupation for brevity.

(Urofsky 1978). Even though Palestinians made about two-thirds of the region's population, only 42 percent of the land was allocated to them, while 55 percent was designated as a Jewish state (Tessler 1994).

In 1948, what Israel calls "the War of Independence" and what Palestinians refer to as the *Nakba* broke out.[2] During this war, somewhere between 65 and 85 percent of the Palestinian population fled or was expelled from the land (Gelvin 2005). This settler-colonial event led to the creation of the Jewish state of Israel, which now occupied 78 percent of historical Palestine (Schneider 2019). The creation of Israel led to institutionalized discrimination against non-Jews, as rights were given to Jews and were denied to Palestinians.

The Palestinian population is now fragmented; while many live in various places around the world, a great number live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Morris 1987). Even today, around five million Palestinians refugees are denied the "right of return" (Schneider 2019), meaning they are not allowed to return to their ancestral land in historical Palestine. Any Jew in the world, however, whether or not their family has ever lived in Israel, is granted the right to become an Israeli citizen through the Law of Return.[3]

Today, Palestinians are highly controlled under Israeli military occupation. Israel appropriates 80% of the West Bank's water supply, limits Palestinians' movement by maintaining over 98 fixed checkpoints, prevents Palestinians from accessing oil and gas reserves on their own territory, subjects Palestinians to Israeli law, and requires Israeli permission for Palestinians to be able to leave Israel/Palestine (Visualizing Palestine 2017).

---

[2] This word means "catastrophe" or "disaster" in Arabic. For more information on the Nakba, please see *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* edited by Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod.
[3] For more information on Israeli citizenship please see https://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/pages/acquisition%20of%20israeli%20nationality.aspx.

In order to "solve" this conflict, there are debates amongst politicians, activists, and the general public about whether the "one-state solution" or the "two-state solution" should be enacted. In the one-state scenario, Israel/Palestine would become a secular, democratic state which would give citizenship and equal rights to all people–Jews and Palestinians alike–living in the region. The two-state side argues that Israel should remain a Jewish state and Gaza and the West Bank should be made into a state with its own government. Neither argument is within a specific political camp; people with both left-leaning and right-leaning political stances on the conflict argue for both options.

Dominant discourse surrounding the occupation often discusses the "two sides" of the conflict. This is incorrect and homogenizing, as it assumes that all Jews and all Palestinians have the same opinions about the occupation. There are, in fact, many different sides to the conflict; there are Anti-Zionist Jews who want a one-state solution; there are Jews who want a two-state solution and consider their politics to be pro-Israel *and* pro-Palestine; some Palestinians think a one-state solution would be best, and some do not; there are Mizrahi Jews[4] and refugees who are also mistreated by the Israeli government. The political situation is much more complex and nuanced than merely having two distinct sides.[5]

American Jews and Liberalism

As I am specifically studying young liberal American Jews in my research, I felt it necessary to include a chronicle of Jewish liberalism in America in my work. American Jews have historically been known to be liberal, as they overwhelmingly voted for Franklin D.

---

[4] "Mizrahi Jew" is a term used to describe individuals who are descendants of Jewish communities that previously existed in the Middle East or North Africa. For more information on who Mizrahi Jews are and how this identity emerged, please see "The Invention of the Mizrahim" by Ella Shohat.

[5] Though the terms themselves are homogenizing of populations, for brevity I will use "pro-Israel" to refer to opinions that support the Israeli government and "pro-Palestine" to refer to opinions that prioritize Palestinian rights/anti-occupation stances.

Roosevelt in the 1930s, were outspoken about the dangers of anti-communist rhetoric throughout

the 1950s, and heavily supported the African-American civil rights movement in the 1960s

(Dollinger 2000:3). Jewish American left-leaning politics, which especially emerged in the early

20th century, stemmed from Jews' desire for inclusion in larger American society. In the 1920s,

scientific racism reached a high point in the U.S., and nativists dreamed of creating and Anglo-

Saxon nation that did not include Jews (Dollinger 2000:41). Because of this, liberalism was an

attractive ideology for American Jews, as it "not only permitted but demanded ethnic

differentiation: a diverse society that was built upon the sacred principle of tolerance offered the

best defense against totalitarianism" (Dollinger 2000:42). American Jews, therefore, embraced

progressive values to combat nativists' racist and xenophobic aspirations.

Since the overwhelming Jewish endorsement for the political left in the U.S. began in the

early 20th century, Jewish support for the Democratic party has remained high. "Yet at historical

moments when Jewish social mobility clashed with a liberal political orientation, American Jews

dissented from the dominant left-leaning trend. Faced with a choice between liberal politics and

their own acculturation, Jews almost always chose the latter" (Dollinger 2000:3). This has

especially been true when it comes to Israeli politics and Zionist ideologies.

Liberal Zionism and its Tensions

Many Jews, including some of my interlocutors, consider themselves to be liberal

Zionists. "The original tradition of combining Zionism and liberalism...meant ending the

occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, supporting a Palestinian state as well as a Jewish state

with a permanent Jewish majority, and standing behind Israel when it was threatened" (Lerman

2014). This combination, however, creates a lot of dissonance, especially in light of recent

politics. Since his election, Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu has overseen multiple military actions that have led to the oppression–and often death–of Palestinians. These harmful government practices, however, are not limited to Israel; in 2018, U.S. President Trump proposed to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Since East Jerusalem is Palestinian territory, this was Trump's way of giving the Israeli government his approval to continue claiming Palestinian territory, effectively "endanger[ing] whatever thin chance remains of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (Goldberg 2018). Netanyahu's anti-Palestinian stances, combined with Trump's oppressive politics, have contributed to the xenophobic and exclusionary nature of Zionism. As these discriminatory practices go against liberal ideals, liberal Zionism is in my view a contradictory ideology, causing many Jews to face tensions in their principles.

Despite the horrendous consequences of Israel's political agenda, there has not been a significant shift in Jewish Diaspora opinion. "Beleaguered liberal Zionists still struggle to reconcile their liberalism with their Zionism, but they are increasingly under pressure from Jewish dissenters on the left" (Lerman 2014). As Lerman (2014) has argued, American liberal Zionism, due to its liberal facade, "provides cover for the supremacist Zionism dominant in Israel today."

Jewish Identity Formation

Since the cultivation of Jewish identity is a key component of organized tours for young Jews in Israel, I spend this next section tracing literature about identity formation.

Similarity and Difference

Identity is not an accomplished fact, but "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 1990: 222) and therefore relations of power. While cultural identities have important histories, they are undergoing constant transformation and are constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. This is especially true of Jewish identity; shared history and ancestry are woven into many Jewish religious and cultural rituals. Diasporic identities are especially constructed in this way, as their histories include an imposition of "an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation" (Hall 1990:224). Because of their fragmented nature, "[d]iaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1990: 235).

Identity is formed by both similarity and difference, being defined as both "in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self'...which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall 1990: 223) and as a recognition that "there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become'" (Hall 1990:225). Jewish identity is particularly formed by difference, as it is constructed by differences within the group, such as the varying locations of diaspora Jews and Israeli citizens, and outside of the group, as Israelis and Palestinians/Jews and Muslims in part define each other (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007:195).

Collective Memory and Generational Trauma

Collective memory–especially that of trauma or crisis–is a large part of Jewish identity. (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007). According to psychoanalyst Paul Marcus (1984), the process of arriving at a Jewish identity requires one to integrate their individual experience as a Jew and the

collective experience of the Jewish people into his, her, or their identity, including traumatic elements like the Holocaust. This focus on remembering the Holocaust may bring danger of forgetting that "Jewish individual and communal relationships with non-Jews were not always genocidal or even always hostile" which may cause an "existential isolation" (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007:201) of Jews. This isolation, in turn, makes Jews possessive of the Holocaust and their "linked status as victims" (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007:201).

What Does it Mean to be Jewish?

There is much debate surrounding the racial aspect of Jewishness. Questions often posed include: Are white Jews white? Is Jewish a race? According to Kaye/Kantrowitz (2007), Jews are not a race but are hated as if they are one. But saying they are not a race "overlooks the confusion, the waffling and uncertainty about Jewish racial identity, and the anxiety created by this uncertainty" (27-28). Many people, especially in the U.S., assume Jews to be white and Ashkenazi. However, "[t]he number of Jews of color is large enough that Jewish whiteness should never be assumed" (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007:100). Due to its complicated relationship to race and ethnicity, along with many other of its facets, Jewishness is also not just a religion. "[T]o reduce *Jewishness* to *Judaism* is to forget the complex indivisible swirl of religion-culture-language-history that *was* Jewishness until relatively recently" (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007:28).

Kaye/Kantrowitz (2007) argues that what it means to be Jewish is very limited for diaspora Jews, especially those in America, as the U.S. has "narrowly prescribed options...for expressing and nurturing Jewish identity; rarely venturing beyond Zionism; religion; and anti-semitism/the Holocaust" (195). Jews who are critical of Israel, who do not feel close to the Holocaust, who cannot afford a synagogue membership, or who are secular/atheist/cultural Jews, therefore, are often considered "less Jewish" than those who fit the mold. I have personally

experienced this, as other Jews have tried to invalidate my Jewishness because of my critiques of Israel and my secular Judaism.

Jewish Identity and Israel

Many Jews in the United States see Israel as a "surrogate identity kit [rather than] a nation with its own destiny and the most powerful military in the region, heavily funded by U.S. tax dollars" (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007:212). This means that a great number of American Jews see a connection to Israel as a required aspect of their Jewishness, causing Israel to become "instrumental" to one's American Jewish identity (Magid 2016:63). However, despite the pervasiveness of American Jews' strong connections to Israel, there is no academic consensus about attachment over time (Kotler-Berkowitz and Ament 2010; Sasson, Kadushin, and Saxe 2010; Saxe and Boxer 2012). As some studies show that attachment to Israel is less pervasive amongst young Jews (Sasson, Kadushin, and Saxe 2010), institutions such as Taglit-Birthright use tourism in order to increase this demographic's attachment to the state.

Tourism in Israel-Palestine

Pilgrimage

There is a "sensitive and complex relationship among Judaism, tourism, pilgrimage, heritage, culture and politics" (Collins-Kreiner and Luz 2018:52). Pilgrimage, the most prominent feature of Jewish tourism, is "a movement towards a sacred centre aimed at being exposed to God's presence" (Collins-Kreiner and Luz 2018:53). While Jews have been traveling to Israel for hundreds of years, a new phase of Jewish pilgrimage tourism has come about within the last century, due to "the sociopolitical changes that ultimately led to the emergence of Israel as a Jewish state within the geographical setting of the biblical Holy Land" (Collins-Kreiner and

Luz 2018:56). Zionist ideology has also influenced Jewish pilgrimage to Israel. Zionism has "targeted the Land of Israel as a platform for national resurrection based solely on the Jewish collective memory of Eretz Israel" (Collins-Kreiner and Luz 2018:59).

Overtime, pilgrimage to Israel has changed, as "the sacred increasingly...encompass[es] practices and sites that are not necessarily religious (e.g. tourism, war memorials and sites of tragic death)" (Collins-Kreiner and Luz 2018:53). Also, since Jewish tourism serves to maintain a community of believers, "the commodification of national identity has been one of the most distinctive features of [its] development over the past decades" (Collins-Kreiner and Luz 2018:61). As this benefits the Israeli government, Jewish tourism is strongly backed by state, city, and regional authorities.

Youth Diaspora Tour Programming

Birthright

Taglit-Birthright (also known as Birthright), is a popular free trip for young Jews to visit Israel. [6] Emerging in the 1990s from American Jews wanting to address issues of being Jewish in North America, this program is now "the largest, most long-standing and most elaborated deployment for diaspora building purposes in the world today" (Kelner 2010:xvii). Functioning as both a "*diaspora-building* enterprise" (Kelner 2010:xx) and an effort in "*political socialization*" (Kelner 2010:xx), Birthright tours are intended to build diaspora, connect young Jews, make Israel feel familiar, and generate sympathy for Israeli perspectives on the Israel-Palestine conflict. As these tours are also recognized as a means of creating transnational

---

[6] While not all of my interlocutors went to Israel/Palestine through Birthright, this program is both the most commonly attended by young Jews and the most thoroughly researched by academics. Because of this, I chose to focus on this particular program in my literature review. I will note important aspects of other programs as I speak about them in my data analysis.

community, the U.S. and Israeli governments and various Jewish organizations promote Birthright, making it politically powerful. Since diaspora communities are a valuable national resource for Israel, Birthright uses the trope of "home" in its programming to generate emotional attachment to Israel and strengthen Jewish youth diaspora. As the program's main goal is to create feelings of belonging and obligation to the state of Israel, "tours like Taglit are intended not to show Israel...but to show 'Israel,' a tailored depiction for a targeted audience intended to accomplish defined identity-related goals" (Kelner 2010:92).

Birthright shapes young Jews' understandings about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by politicizing the normal and normalizing the political. For example, these tours often portray wartime mobilization as a normal phenomenon in Israel. Also, while Palestine may be discussed during these tours, it is not experienced as Israel is. Because of this, tourists' sympathy for Palestinians and deep love for Israel can still exist simultaneously. However, new policies, which ban Palestinian speakers from Birthright trips, cause the programs to speak very little (if at all) about Palestine, causing the rhetoric to be heavily biased towards Israel. While Birthright does influence participants' knowledge about the conflict, it also decenters the conflict narrative, challenging the idea that the Israel-Palestine conflict is the only way to understand Israel.

All site visits are presented by the tour guides. As the guides get to choose how to represent a site, this comes with political implications. To plan the itineraries, programmers start with a set of themes–including the Birthright's educational core of "Narratives of the Jewish People," "Contemporary Israel," and "Ideas and Values of the Jewish People" (Birthright Israel 2020)–and then pick which sites to take the tourists to in order to represent them. These themes are carefully chosen to depict a specific "Israel" to accomplish specific identity-based goals as discussed earlier. Throughout the trip, Israel must be represented as a "modern Jewish society."

A recurring narrative of these tours is "that of ashes-to-redemption" (Kelner 2010:93), which is represented as an answer to threats to Jewish survival. By focusing on moments of Jewish oppression, like the Holocaust and other instances of antisemitism, Birthright seeks to generate collective memory and solidarity amongst young Jews. Guides also focus on two overarching themes of Jewish culture: military and Jewish religion. Through their programming, tour guides serve as models of nationalism and Zionism. To help tourists internalize their connection to Israel gained from the tour, leaders facilitate group discussion circles. Tour organizers believe events in Jewish history must be engaged with personally in these discussions in order for them to be effective.

METHODOLOGIES
Interviews

When pondering how to best explore the personal and political implications of American Jewish travel to Israel, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews. Though I considered conducting quantitative survey research to explore my topic, I decided against it, as this method can privilege the researchers' own preconceptions, which could limit my interlocutors' expression of what they deem to be important (Ross 2017). While qualitative research may also privilege the researchers' own preconceptions, I attempt to quell this by centering my interlocutors' own words

Inspired by Emily Schneider's work (2019), I instead conducted semi-structured interviews. As she does in her study of alternative tourism in the West Bank, I use "an exploratory qualitative approach…[instead of] a traditional, quantitative approach that treats tourism as a variable in and of itself" (Schneider 2019:103). By using this approach, I am hoping

to explore how tourism in Israel/Palestine impacts American Jews' relationships with their

Judaism and Israel/Palestine as well as how it politically impacts the region.

While conducting my interviews, I used a predetermined set of open-ended interview

questions (Appendix A), but often omitted questions or asked additional questions throughout

the interview as I saw appropriate. By doing this, I allowed for participants to speak about their

experiences without imposing my expectations on them. This led to the emergence of unexpected

themes, which I found to be extremely valuable.

To collect the data I was interested in without asking leading questions or glossing over

important information about my interviewees, I created interview questions that were

"sufficiently general to cover a wide range of experiences and narrow enough to elicit and

elaborate the participant's specific experiences" (Charmaz 2006:29). I began the interviews with

open-ended questions about their expectations of Israel before they got there, what influenced

their decision to travel to Israel, what kind of avenue (birthright, family trip, gap-year program,

or other organized trips) they traveled to Israel through, and what their experiences in Israel were

like. I then transitioned to questions about how their trips influenced their connections to

Judaism, other Jews, Israel, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Holocaust, and Zionism. I

concluded my interviews with questions about my interlocutors' Jewish identity.

My interview questions were designed to avoid revealing my own political views in order

to avoid influencing participants' responses. For example, I called what I normally refer to as

"the occupation" the "Israel-Palestine conflict" and I referred to the land I usually label

"Israel/Palestine" as "Israel." Though no language is completely politically neutral, the words I

used could be interpreted as pro-Israel, pro-Palestine, or neither due to their common use by

governments, organizations, and the public. By using this language, I attempted to create space

for my interlocutors to honestly communicate their opinions and beliefs regarding Judaism and

Israel/Palestine. I felt torn and conflicted that the only way in which I could be seen as a reliable

interlocutor was through using this language, especially when it came to terminology

surrounding the Israeli occupation. Indeed, neutrality is often invoked as a silencing mechanism

specifically in regard to Israel/Palestine. This is so because of the inaccurate equation of anti-

Zionism with antisemitism, as well as the dominant narrative of a need to represent "both" points

of view. While using this terminology made me uncomfortable, I felt that if I used the language I

wanted to use, my conversations would be unfruitful or, in extreme cases, immediately shut

down. On the other hand, I found that some of my interlocutors also used similar language,

which I am guessing was to avoid being judged by me. This illustrated that these interviewees

may have felt uncomfortable telling the full truth about their relationships to Judaism and

opinions on Israel/Palestine.[7] I often felt this discomfort in my interlocutors' hesitation or refusal

to answer questions about their political opinions. The power dynamic between me, as someone

who is extremely critical of Israel, and my interlocutors, as people who are not critical (or are

less critical than I am) may have altered my analysis due to the possible omission of political

beliefs from both parties.

Interlocutors

My group of interlocutors consisted of twenty young[8] American-Jewish tourists who had

traveled to Israel.[9] In order to avoid portraying the American Jewish experience as a monolith, I

---

[7] Though I omit them in the quotes from interviews I cite throughout my paper for clarity, my interlocutors often used speech tics like "um" or "like" while discussing their political opinions. This indicated that my interviewees were either unsure about or uncomfortable disclosing their personal connections and/or political opinions.

[8] All interviewees were between 18 and 25 years old.

[9] For the chart detailing these specific demographic characteristics as well as the trip(s) that the interlocutors attended, please see Appendix B.

tried to find interviewees with differing racial/ethnic backgrounds, degrees of religiosity/secularity, socioeconomic backgrounds, genders, locations, and sexualities. However, my interlocutors were predominantly white, upper-class, and female, and were all either enrolled in higher education or had completed a Bachelor's degree. This particular group, while not fully representative of the American Jewish population, may offer "a useful window into understanding how privileged tourists from the Global North respond to the narratives of oppressed populations in the Global South" (Schneider 2019:119). All of my interlocutors self-identified as liberal, which I purposefully looked for in order to explore liberal Zionism and its tensions. Most of my interlocutors traveled to Israel through Taglit-Birthright, but a minority traveled with family, through gap-year programs, or through other organized trips. I felt that this was representative of young American Jewish tourists, as Birthright is an extremely popular avenue of travel.[10]

While Kimberley Crenshaw (1989) coined the term "intersectionality" to refer to the unique positionality in which Black women experience multiple oppressions, I use it in my work. Keeping her idea of intersectionality in mind, I will analyze the ways in which diaspora tourism influences each individual interlocutor with special attention to how all of the aspects of their identity intersect rather than examining each facet individually. I will also focus on the "multidimensionality" (Crenshaw 1989:139) of my interlocutors' experiences. By this I mean that I will not render my interlocutors as one-dimensional by focusing on one aspect of their identity, nor will I simply list out all of their characteristics and call that intersectional. Rather, I will be attentive to the ways in which multiple oppressions intersect to influence each

---

[10] According to Taglit-Birthright, about 50,000 young Jews travel to Israel through Birthright every year.

interviewee's individual experiences as well as the multiple ways my interlocutors relate to power.

As I used snowball sampling[11] to find people to interview, over half of my interviewees were Colorado College students. While this, again, caused my sample to be unrepresentative of the American Jewish population, snowball sampling is valuable, as it can "lead to dynamic moments where unique social knowledge of an interactional quality can be fruitfully generated" (Noy 2008:328). I feel that snowball sampling did lead to these dynamic moments; having friends in common with my interlocutors established a rapport between us before the interviews even began, both giving us social knowledge about how to best interact with one another and making the interviewees more comfortable with sharing personal information.

My positionality as an American Jew is particularly influential to this project. As an insider/outsider (Collins 1986), I was able to easily establish comradery with my interlocutors, as we had many things in common. However, as I have different political views than most of my interlocutors and never been to Israel/Palestine, I could not relate to most of their experiences in and related to the region.

A small minority of my interviewees were people of color. Though I tried to interview as many Jews of color as possible in order to accurately represent the diversity of the American Jewish population, I was only able to interview one Mizrahi Jew, two Black Jews, and two Asian Jews. Because of this, I run the risk of tokenizing these interlocutors and their experiences. By tokenization, I am referring to the phenomenon of research, workplaces, and other spaces only including minorities to present the appearance of diversity. This can be harmful to those who are tokenized, by valuing them for their minority status rather than their experiences. I am hoping,

---

[11] A sampling procedure in which the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants (Noy 2008).

however, that by using an intersectional analysis of my interviews and centering my

interviewees' own words in my analysis, I can minimize doing violence to these interlocutors.

Analysis

In order to analyze my interviews, I transcribed them, read through them, and highlighted

pieces of my conversations relevant to my exploration of Jewish identity and political opinions

on Israel/Palestine. While I found this to be the best method to analyze my interviews, this

process of selection made me uncomfortable, as it ultimately did violence to my interlocutors'

experiences. By hand-picking sections of interviews to explore and ignoring statements that felt

irrelevant to my project, I feel that I do not fully capture participants' feelings, beliefs, and

experiences. Still, I hope that my interlocutors will feel that I faithfully represented their points

of view, even though I was not able to include all that they shared with me.

After picking relevant pieces of my interviews, I organized them by theme. These themes

originally included "personal implications" and "political implications," but expanded to include

"connection to Israel," "connection to Judaism," "political opinions" and "Zionist ideologies."

Though I separated my analysis into two main sections of personal and political, I would like to

recognize that these two facets are intertwined and that I use this separation merely as a heuristic

device. Therefore, in my analysis, I often reference political beliefs in my sections about

personal connections and vice versa.

ANALYSIS

In this section, I examine my interlocutors' reasons for traveling to Israel, how this travel

effects participants' connections to the state, how this tourism influences participants' Jewish

identities, how these trips discuss the occupation, how this travel impacts tourists' political

opinions, and how travel to Israel has political implications. In analyzing each of these

phenomena, I illustrate how, though tourists' subjectivities and the effects they experience differ,

touring in Israel significantly impacts young liberal Jews' connections to Israel, connections to

Judaism, and political opinions. Despite this heterogeneity in experience, I do find patterns in

this tourism's effect on young liberal Jews, which I discuss at length. I also demonstrate how

travel to Israel has harmful political consequences, as it is exploitative of Palestinians.

Reasons for Travel

While all of my interlocutors had different reasons for traveling to Israel/Palestine, eleven

of the twenty participants in my study mentioned a free trip[12] as being part of their motivation.

While the free aspect of these programs makes them more accessible to Jews of low

socioeconomic status who might not otherwise be able to afford such a trip, it also makes the

opportunity to travel for free difficult for Jews of any class to pass up. Elizabeth, a white Jew

who went on Birthright, said:

[Birthright is] free, that was the only reason I [went]. I don't think that I would have
chosen to travel to Israel independently using my own money. I don't feel particularly connected
to it in my Judaism. I don't have family there. I don't have family who [were in] the Holocaust.
So, I think… yeah, that honestly was the reason: because it was free.

Like Elizabeth, many young Jews (or people who do not identify as Jewish but are

eligible for Birthright or other programs through Jewish ancestry) who would not otherwise

travel to Israel on their own go on these trips because they are cost-free. These free trips,

therefore, have the potential to sway people who most likely have little or no personal connection

to Israel to develop feelings about Israel, as these programs are used to send young Jews–

---

[12] Birthright and Let Our People Know are both free programs.

particularly those who have little knowledge about Israel–to "learn how to think, act, and feel" (Kelner 2010:16). As these trips are often funded by donors with right-wing interests (such as Sheldon Adelson and Benjamin Netanyahu), their programming tends to be very pro-Israel (Impact 2017). This phenomenon of young Jews going to Israel merely because it is free, therefore, causes many people to be more supportive of Israel than they would have been had they not traveled there through a free trip.

Two reasons that were given that seem to come from external pressures are going for social benefits or being expected to go. For example, Hannah, an Ashkenazi Jew, only went on Birthright because her friends were going:

> I went with my camp friends who are people I love dearly but I don't get to see them often because we live and go to school all over the country. But they're some of the oldest friends I have and people I'm closest with and still probably talk to every single day or at least text every single day...We don't see each other very often at all, just once a year, so it was gonna be a time to spend more time together. So that group decided like, "We should do this. We should go."

Many other people go to Israel for similar reasons to Hannah. Social pressure often emerges from friends either going on a trip or having gone on a trip in the past. Whether using an Israel program as an opportunity to spend more time with friends or going because countless peers told them they *have* to go, social factors carry a lot of weight in many young Jews' decision processes when considering traveling to Israel.

Ruth, an Ashkenazi Jew who went to Israel on the USY (United Synagogue Youth) Eastern Europe/Israel Pilgrimage[13], felt obligated to go due to social and familial pressures. "All my sisters went on [the USY Pilgrimage] and so [it] felt like the thing to do...I didn't know anyone else going that year, but I knew people who had gone years before and I knew people who were planning to go years after. [Going on this trip] was the standard, I guess." Ruth is the

---

[13] This trip includes travel to Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Israel. For more information, please see https://www.usy.org/trips/eastern-europe-israel-pilgrimage/.

perfect example of how in many Jewish communities, traveling to Israel is an expectation. This causes many young Jews to go, even if they are unsure about or against going.

Other reasons that were given for traveling to Israel included exploring one's Judaism, learning about the history of Israel and the Israel-Palestine conflict, and seeing Israel for oneself. Because of their desire for learning and self-exploration, many of my interviewees went on organized trips that included tours and other educational aspects.

What I found to be interesting about my interlocutors' reasons for traveling to Israel was that many of them seemed to be unrelated to their Judaism or a desire to see Israel. However, all tourists I spoke with–even those who went to Israel purely for a free trip or for social reasons– were personally influenced in some way by traveling to this region. In other words, my interlocutors' subjectivities and the effects they experienced are not homogeneous, it is unmistakable that touring in Israel significantly impacts young liberal Jews.

Travel to Israel's Effect on Connection to Israel

Expectations of Israel

I asked my interviewees about their expectations of Israel, as I cannot discuss how travel to Israel transforms young Jews without mentioning what they expect beforehand. When I asked my interlocutors what they thought Israel would be like before they got there, most of them described their expectations of the desert landscape. Some interviewees, however, discussed how their Jewish education influenced their vision of Israel. Arianna, a Mizrahi Jew, talked about this at length:

So I went to a Jewish day school and so Israel was like Disneyland on a stick...angels would come down and sing to you. And all of our Hebrew teachers would talk about how they were from there, so they were all nostalgic for the homeland...I was expecting just like this

beautiful, life-changing place where I would immediately touch the ground and feel welcome and feel like I've come home even though America is technically my home.

Arianna's experience is a good example of how "[f]or many U.S. Jews, Israel is a fantasy" (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007:207). As made evident through her response, this fantasy is often fostered by Jewish education. Organized trips often function as an avenue to perpetuate this dreamy view of Israel, as "the job of so much of mainstream Jewish institutions is to drum up support for this fantasy" (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007:207).

Zara, who has a black mother and a white Jewish father, also based her expectations on her previous experiences with Judaism: "I imagined it to be pretty homogeneous racially...like an expanded version of what upper- and middle-class Jews in...the tri-state area [are] like."

Similarly, Jess, an Asian-American Jew, talked about being nervous to go to Israel. "I have a unique standing because...I'm Jewish not by blood but...through adoption. So, it was a little scary…[I wondered] if I would fit in."

The expectations of Arianna, Jess, and Zara illustrate how expectations of Israel are different for different people based on their positionality and subjectivity. Zara and Jess particularly demonstrate how traveling to Israel can be different for Jews of color. Zara was the only one of my interlocutors who discussed her expectations of the racial make-up of Israel. This, along with Jess's experience of fear of ostracization based on her Asian identity, demonstrates how nonwhite Jews may think about race more than white Jews as they prepare to go to Israel. Although my white interlocutors did not highlight questions of race in their imaginaries of Israel, race is inherent in all their expectations; by not mentioning race, my white interviewees showed that their expectations of Israel are already raced as white.

Israel and Safety

Many of my interlocutors described their connection to Israel in relation to it being a safe place. Elijah, an Ashkenazi Jew whose parents are from Israel, had a realization about this while talking to an Israeli citizen:

I was talking to [a] cab driver while I was there…he [said]: "At the end of the day...if you ever experience any kind of scary violent antisemitism, you have...Israel as a place to come back to." And that really stuck with me...if [something bad happens]...I feel comfortable and safe in knowing that there would be easy...unquestioned immigration to Israel. And that's something that I feel secure [about] and that I want to be there.

Elijah's realization that Israel will always be a safe place for him to turn to if he experiences antisemitism in the U.S. significantly shifted his relationship to the state; before, his connection was primarily built on his family that has lived there. This illustrates both that the narrative of Israel being a safety net made his connection to Israel more personal and that he highly values Israel because of this narrative.

Reference to the Holocaust in educational programming seemed to especially influence my interlocutors' view of Israel as a safe haven. Jacob, an Ashkenazi Jew, had this experience:

I would say [learning about the Holocaust on my trip] made me realize...how important the state is in terms of its existence. It made me realize really why the state exists and what my opinion is because...I don't think the state would exist without the Holocaust but the Holocaust...proved to me that it's necessary for the state to exist and that there's no really safe place for Jews to live securely other than Israel...I think [learning about the Holocaust] definitely confirmed for me that Jews need a home other than other countries.

Jacob came to believe that Israel is necessary for the safety of the Jewish people and, therefore, his connection to Israel was strengthened. He also mentioned that Jews need a home specifically in Israel (rather than elsewhere), exceptionalizing Israel and diminishing the worth of diaspora Jewry.

On Ruth's trip, her group spent time in the European portion discussing the Holocaust. They went to Israel directly afterward, which had an impact on Ruth's view of the state:

[The program] had our family members write us letters and we read those for our last night in Poland. That kind of stuff was really strong and powerful and they start the trip off with that, which makes it so Israel is seen as this beautiful, fun thing, after this really sad week. And it just immediately connected us all [to both Israel and each other] on the trip.

The programming Ruth went through was especially strategic; by taking students through a week of emotionally laborious Holocaust education and then showing them "the beauty of Israel," the trip organizers created an image of Israel as a necessary safe haven. The reference to beauty was reminiscent of what Mimi Thi Nguyen calls the "biopower of beauty" (2011). In other words, beauty was utilized by trip organizers as a way to indicate which lives are worth living (Israeli and Jewish lives) and which places are worth physically and politically supporting (Israel).

On Birthright, participants often are taken to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust museum. Elizabeth described her experience visiting the museum in these words:

The trip to the Holocaust museum...it felt like the most meaningful thing that we did on the trip because it felt like...everything is political, but I think it did a really nice job covering the history until you walk out at the end and it's...this beautiful view of Israel and that carries a strong message.

Like Ruth's trip, Elizabeth's program purposefully juxtaposed devastating information about the Holocaust with a beautiful image of Israel. By doing this, the tour attempts to get participants to see Israel as a safe place they can retreat to if they experience any antisemitism.

A few of my interlocutors, like Hannah, rejected this idea of Israel as a safety net: "I don't think I see Israel as a safety net the way [my dad] does...maybe it's because I can't picture a scenario where we need to go there...what I do see [are] the...terrible things that are happening now with the occupation of Palestinian territories." While Hannah felt an increase in her

connection to Israel after the trip, her relationship to the state does not rest on a belief in its safety. Hannah seems to be particularly critical of discourses about safety in a way that I would like to highlight; she articulates how these discourses deflect attention away from discussions of the occupation. This deflection is significant to participants' connections to and ideas about Israel, as it distracts from negative aspects of the state.

I found it interesting that so many of my interlocutors mentioned the idea of Israel being a "safety net," especially because I did not ask them about it directly. This showed me that many trips' goal to instill this idea in tourists is successful, as many walked away thinking about it (both in agreement and critically). I argue that the idea of Israel as a safe place for Jews is both a main point of the narrative these trips cultivate and is key in regard to personal transformations through tourism in Israel.

Travel to Israel's Effect on Jewish Identity

Community Building and Relationships

Most of my interlocutors expressed that their Jewish identity originated from their family traditions and heritage. Going to Israel, however, caused many of their connections to Judaism to expand to include a relationship with the greater Jewish diaspora.

David's connection to Judaism before his trip was mostly based on his Ashkenazi Jewish family's traditions. However, this changed once he went to Israel with Birthright:

I haven't really connected with that many Jewish people [in the U.S.], but Israel is a totally different story...I felt like everyone there was just so fantastic...I made most of my connections there with Israelis rather than Americans, which I thought was interesting, but I was surprised at how similar we work culturally...and just how fantastic they were.

After meeting Jews he could relate to and get along with, David seemed to experience a large shift in his connection to Judaism; his enthusiasm about his newfound friendships

illustrated the great impact they had on his connection to his religion and heritage. Now that he

has close Jewish friends with whom he can relate, he feels a greater connection to diaspora Jews

as a whole than he did before.

Like David, Lilly, an Asian woman adopted into a white Jewish family, did not connect

with many other Jews outside of her family before her first trip to Israel. After meeting other

young Jews on her trip to Israel, however, she became more invested in this facet of her identity:

After I came back the first time...it had changed my life...I loved the friends I made...so I came back and I was like, "Well, I love that trip. I love Israel so much. I wanna try and find a way to be more connected to Judaism and like Israel." So, I joined...the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization[14]."

Lilly wanted to continue to nurture her Jewish connections and got more involved in her

local Jewish community. Her connection's trajectory illustrates the immense impact relating to

one's Jewish community members can have on one's connection to Judaism itself.

Some young Jews, especially those who go on Birthright, connect to other Jews–from

both Israel and the diaspora–through hookup culture or romantic relationships. According to

Kelner's study (2010) on Birthright, the institution encourages this, as "[t]rip sponsors hope that

the tours will make [participants] more likely to marry other Jews" (146). The hookup culture on

Birthright especially implicates the IDF soldiers who socialize with participants; Kelner found

that "[t]here was a lot of competition, especially among the females to talk to the Israelis" (138).

While none of my interlocutors personally took part in the Birthright hookup culture,

many of them mentioned the phenomenon. Elizabeth, a queer-identifying woman whose

Birthright trip was for LGBTQ participants, stated:

I have heard that [there is a Birthright hookup culture] and have heard...that the purpose of Birthright is to...make [participants]...meet a nice Jewish boy, and go live in Israel and have babies...I would say it was definitely different on a queer trip but there was a hookup culture to

---

[14] For more information on BBYO, please see https://bbyo.org/.

some extent...I think Birthright does promote this hookup culture, but I think that they don't promote it maybe for queer groups because a lot of queer people can't have babies in the way that other people can.

As childrearing is often mistakenly assumed to be impossible for queer couples, Elizabeth believes that Birthright is less invested in matchmaking with its LGBTQ groups. In regard to the heteronormativity of sexual encounters between tourists and soldiers on Birthright, Kelner stated:

I was well aware that the mifgash encounter was a highly sexualized one…[and] that this sexualization did not structure all interactions equally. Strongly heteronormative, it primarily shaped the interactional field through which Israeli men and American women related to one another (137).

Through his years of observing Birthright trips, Kelner discovered a pattern of sexual interactions between American women and male IDF soldiers. This phenomenon was presumably encouraged by Birthright, as Elizabeth postulated, to promote participants to both marry and have children with other Jews. According to one study, compared to Jews who did not go on Birthright, participants expressed "a stronger desire to marry someone Jewish and raise Jewish children" (Saxe et al. 2013:25). This illustrates the effectiveness of Birthright's encouragement of sexual and romantic relationships on the trip to influence tourists' desires regarding future and family.

David also noticed a hookup culture on Birthright:

There were definitely a lot of hookups on the trip. I went in a relationship, so that didn't apply to me, but it was an instant focus for everyone else on the trip. They were all like, "Oh, who am I going to hook up with?"...there were a lot of people on the trip that had their first experience with alcohol, which...kind of enabled them to hook up with other people, I think.

As the drinking age in Israel is 18, many young tourists, as David mentioned, have their first experience with alcohol on their trip and this, as he suggests, might have contributed to

lowering their inhibition about hooking up. This may also be a motivator for young Jews to

travel to Israel, as those between the ages of 18 and 20 cannot legally drink in the U.S.

Hannah expressed disbelief in the idea that Taglit-Birthright as an organization

encouraged sexual interactions:

I think that there was no expectation of people are gonna hook up with the IDF soldiers, but it's more like you just hear it happened...it's just something people talk about...for the most part [my trip] was very frienshippy...but [hookups] happened pretty organically because you go out and you club and you're dancing and that's no different than here...but it definitely wasn't pushed on us...I don't think they're really pushing like, "Yes, go fall in love with your Israeli and move to Israel and live here happily ever after." But it's certainly something you do hear through the grapevine.

Jess, on the other hand, did feel that the hookup culture was pushed on her and the other

Birthright participants: "A lot of people were pushing us...[trying to] couple us with the soldiers

or...were like 'this is like what you're supposed to do on Birthright,' which I was turned off

about."

While Hannah believed the hookup culture was purely created through tourists' desires,

Jess thought that some trip leaders and participants were putting pressure on her to partake in it.

Though both of these speculations could be accurate, as the two women were in different groups

with different leaders at different times, previous research in conjunction with my own findings

illustrate that Taglit-Birthright as an institution encourages participants to have sexual

interactions with both each other and Israelis. This is significant, as it illustrates how the

institution exploits young Jews' sexualities to perpetuate a pro-Israel political agenda.

My interlocutors' encounters with other young Jews on their trips had a greater impact on

their connections to Judaism than I anticipated. I especially found these relationships to impact

the ways in which my interviewees interacted with Judaism; by creating close relationships with

both Israelis and American Jews, some of my interlocutors began associating Judaism with the

larger diaspora, while before they only thought about it in relation to their families or local Jewish communities. Based on these findings, I argue that for young Jewish tourists, creating relationships with other Jews is an extremely formative facet of travel in Israel/Palestine.

Different Modalities of Judaism

Many of my interlocutors mentioned discovering that not all Jews think and act in the same ways on their trip. Shoshana, who is a Black Jewish convert, felt a stronger connection to Judaism after learning about its different manifestations: "I felt more connected to Judaism after the trip [because I learned] there's not one modality of being Jewish." Secular Jew Elizabeth felt similarly: "I guess [Birthright] broadened my knowledge of how Jewish people can be...In that way, I would say [it influenced my connection to Judaism]." Both Shoshana and Elizabeth felt that learning about understandings of Judaism that were different than their own strongly connected them to both their own identities and Judaism as a whole.

Through learning about the different ways of enacting Judaism, Miriam, an Ashkenazi Jew, realized she could create her own version of it: "I was able to redefine [Judaism] from what I thought to be the very rigid cultural boundaries that my parents had set it to be." Before her trip, Miriam felt disconnected with Judaism because of her desire for it to be more secular. After seeing secular and progressive examples of Judaism in Israel, she realized she could define her own Judaism and, in turn, became more connected to it.

Elena, an Ashkenazi Jew, however, felt less connected to Judaism after learning about the different ways people practice and interpret it:

I think kind of one thing that I thought [before the trip]...was that Jews are kind of all the same and they just have the same...pretty liberal but not super liberal opinions. And then...[in Israel] it's so not like that...And I think that was kind of weird for me to be like..."there are Jews that strongly disagree with me...we're directly opposed on [every value]."...I'd always thought, "Oh, Jewish community, we share similar values"...recognizing that every value can kind of be

twisted the way you want it to be...that was hard for me. It was like, it's not this one giant community and it's really divided and divisive and there are so many different forms of Judaism and I think that's good, but it's just something I had never experienced before. So I think I feel more disconnected [from Judaism] because of the way that people practice Judaism in different parts of the world is not how I relate to it that.

While many of my interlocutors felt more connected to Judaism after learning about different modalities of being Jewish, Elena's experience highlights my argument that these trips do not affect every participant in the same way. They do, however, have some kind of impact on everyone who goes on them. These findings also allow me to argue that learning about different forms of Judaism is a part of touring Israel that is can heavily impact young liberal Jews' connection to Judaism.

Out of my twenty interlocutors, ten had an increase in their connection to Judaism, nine connections stayed the same or were solidified, and one interviewee felt more disconnected from their Judaism after the trip. Fourteen of the twenty interviewees felt more connected to Israel after their trips, while the connections of the other six stayed the same or were solidified. None of my interlocutors felt less connected to Israel after travelling there.

Overall, I found that forming relationships with other Jews and learning about different modalities of Judaism were the two most influential factors on my interlocutors' connections to Judaism and the idea of Israel being a safety net was the dominant influencer on attachment to Israel. This, along with the great number of interviewees whose connections were strengthened, illustrates that tourism in Israel/Palestine intensifies many young liberal Jews' connections to both Judaism and Israel. This makes sense, as seeing the origins of one's religion and tradition as well as interacting with other people with the same heritage can easily make one feel more connected to that culture and belief system. Travelling to Israel's effect on young liberal Jews' political opinion, however, is where it gets more complicated.

Israel Trips' Discussion of the Occupation

No Discussion

Most of my interlocutors who went on family trips did not have any formal discussion of or education on the occupation. Rather, they gleaned their opinions from everyday interactions or sights. For example, a conversation Black-identifying Jew Zara had at the dinner table informed her political stance:

So, my grandparents had these friends…and we went to dinner at their house. I very specifically remember them saying some very racist things about Palestinians...talking about how Palestinians...were a problem and also calling [them] threats and terrorists...I don't think we really tried to talk about Palestinians or anything...those comments [just came] up. I know that I was super uncomfortable. I don't know if [my family] ever talked about it after.

Even though this interaction Zara had did not immediately influence her political opinion, the discomfort she felt informed her general feelings about the conflict; feeling uneasy about the racist rhetoric caused her to associate it with the Israeli perspective. When she formed her political opinions years later, which are anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian, these racist sentiments stuck with her: "that [incident] is something I [still] think about."

The USY trip to Europe and Israel seemed to be the only organized trip that did not discuss the occupation. When discussing this, Ruth stated:

Honestly, I don't think [my trip influenced my political opinion] because up until that point, I didn't really have any information on the conflict. It was hard for it to influence that opinion. Thinking back, I understand how skirting around the conflict is in itself like a form of brainwashing or skewed education.

Ruth's experience illustrates that, even without saying a word about the conflict, programs can give participants a biased view of Israel.

Biased Discussion

All interviewees who mentioned their trips being biased towards the Israeli government's perspective went on Birthright. Elizabeth felt like conversations her Birthright group had about the conflict were restricted by the trip leader:

[Our leader led] limited conversations around land and Palestine [which] felt really uncomfortable and also I think especially because she held a lot of power within the group, right, like if you get kicked off of Birthright, you have to pay for your flight home, so that really feels like a way where they're literally controlling conversations that are able to be had.

Elizabeth and her other group members felt like they would be punished if they challenged the staff in any way. This restricted conversations regarding the occupation on her trip to only include pro-Israel rhetoric, even though, as Elizabeth stated, her group members were "politically engaged...and skeptical about Birthright as an institution."

Some trips focused on the positive aspects of Israel in order to distract from the harm the government is doing to Palestinians. Jess noticed this on her Birthright trip: "I actually had very limited knowledge on the Israel-Palestinian conflict before I went to Israel and then on Birthright, a lot of it was very pro-Israel. We got a lecture about the complications of the conflict and what Israelis are doing to help their country." By discussing the occupation in a way that focused on Israelis protecting themselves and their country, the Birthright staff warped the narrative to place Israel in a positive light and avoid discussing the government's oppression of Palestinians. This deliberate concealment of important information about the conflict gave participants a false idea about what the occupation means and what its harmful consequences are.

In 2018, Birthright placed a ban on Palestinian speakers on their tours. According to Birthright's Code of Conduct, which was updated in 2018, "Taglit-Birthright Israel expects each participant to maintain the personal integrity needed to build the intimate, intense and holistic

group experience that typifies its trips. In order to ensure the trip's overall integrity and educational mission, Taglit-Birthright Israel rejects any attempt, by any individual or organization, to manipulate its open climate. Efforts to coerce, force or suppress opinions, hijack a discussion or create an unwarranted provocation violate Taglit-Birthright Israel's founding principles and will not be permitted." This clause has led to the removal of events with Palestinian speakers from Birthright's itineraries. Some of the interviewees who went on Birthright after this ban was enacted felt the absence of these narratives; Hannah mentioned this during her interview:

[My trip] definitely changed my knowledge of [the occupation] as I did not get to speak with Palestinians...that's not something our trip does. But speaking to Israelis and talking to them about their understanding of the occupation was really interesting. It was a subject that I…wanted to talk about more but also wanted to tread lightly as a guest in someone's home country.

By limiting who trip participants talk to, Birthright erases Palestinian narratives, only allowing for a very specific pro-Israel narrative to reach and influence them.

Many liberal Jews say that they can go on biased trips to Israel and not have their opinions change if they are aware of this bias. Most of my participants who discussed going while knowing that their trips were biased, however, were affected by the trip's politics. Lilly, for example, was affected by the pro-Israel bias even after being aware of it:

When I first went [to Israel], I feel like the whole goal of it...I mean I've heard that NFTY is kind of like a propaganda organization where they, in a sense, take people there and they want them to leave feeling like they just had the best time of their life and that they're very pro-Israel...and that is kind of what happened after that trip...my life now is like, "I love Israel."

Though Lilly knew that NFTY uses trips to spread "propaganda," she still absorbed what she saw as its pro-Israel message, illustrating trips' efficacy of spreading biased ideas despite participant awareness of their positions.

Elizabeth talked at length about Birthright's pro-Israel bias and her disagreement with the organization's politics, stating: "I feel super anti-Birthright." Even so, she left the trip with sympathy for the Israeli perspective as shown in the previous section. Elizabeth's increase in sympathy for Israeli narratives surrounding the conflict also reflects the effectiveness of politically biased programs. This is especially notable as she went into the trip aware of and rejecting Birthright's biased politics. Based on my interlocutors' experiences, I argue that awareness of programs' political messages does not always translate into resistance to them.

"Balanced" Discussion

The Let Our People Know trip, which both Aaron and Arianna attended, is marketed as an alternative to Birthright that includes a "dual-narrative" tour. Let Our People Know[15] is a trip run by J Street, a "pro-Israel, pro-peace" organization. [16] Aaron, an Ashkenazi Jew, thought the program did a good job of showing multiple perspectives:

The goal was to...show us both the messiness and horror of what's going on and...at the same time, the beauty that remains and all the people who live there–Jews, Christians, Muslims, Israelis, Palestinians, whomever. And so, yeah, I think they did a good job doing that with everyone.

Arianna, on the other hand, did not completely agree:

All of the Palestinians we spoke to...had neutral to positive feelings about Israel and everyone that we spoke to had what I would call like a pro-peace bias. They were super interested in coexistence work and a two-state solution...we didn't speak to any extreme settlers or any [people] who...don't give a shit about the Palestinians. And we also didn't speak to any Palestinians who are like, "Israel is illegitimate and there should be one state" or anybody who believes in one state at all, which is a huge contingent of the Palestinian people and...a sizeable number of the Israeli population...I think it accomplished its job of making the nuance of the situation so apparent that people felt almost paralyzed about how to do anything about this

---

[15] For more information on Fact Finders, please see https://www.maccabeetaskforce.org/maccabee-task-force-the-pro-israel-group-that-is-quietly-defeating-bds-on-campus/

[16] For more information on J Street, please see https://jstreet.org/about-us/#.XjMKzBdKifU

conflict and take action because any step you take in any direction will seemingly negatively impact one party or the other.

By leaving out radical stances on the occupation, J Street erased many narratives surrounding the conflict which, in turn, made the region seem a lot more peaceful and the occupation much less violent than they are in reality.

Talia, an Ashkenazi Jew who went on a trip through her Jewish summer camp[17] which is part of a youth movement called Habonim Dror, thought her trip was not biased:

We delved deeper into the conflict [than Birthright does] and...actually talked to Palestinians...during my trip I learned a lot more [about the conflict]...It really showed me all the complexities of it. I remember we talked a lot about...what do we think the Israeli government should do? And obviously there's the two-state solution and things, which are a step in the right direction, at least I think so. But at the same time, if that doesn't work then what do Arab kids do? Are they forced to learn Hebrew? There are so many barriers and it's so complex.

While her language indicates her belief that her trip represented "both" narratives, Talia does not explicitly mention specific things she learned about the occupation besides it being "complex." If the program did, in fact, only talk about how the occupation is "complex," then it dismisses the blatantly racist, xenophobic, and rights-violating actions the Israeli government has perpetrated against Palestinians.

In addition to attending Let Our People Know, Arianna went on a Fact Finders trip. Fact Finders[18] is a "dual-narrative" tour that advertises itself as taking college students to Israel and the Palestinian territories in order to show them a balanced perspective of the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, as this trip is funded by the Maccabee Task Force[19]–a pro-Israel group that

---

[17] Talia did not give me the name of this camp, but described it as a "progressive social justice camp" that "talk[s] about progressive Zionism."

[18] For more information on Fact Finders, please see http://gmufourthestate.com/2018/09/10/mason-hillel-sends-twenty-students-to-israel-and-west-bank/.

[19] For more information on the Maccabee Task Force and its goals, please see https://www.maccabeetaskforce.org/about/.

conflates Palestinian activism with antisemitism–it has what I would describe as a skewed

perspective. Arianna spoke about this during her interview:

> They take the group to Israel and the West Bank and it's supposed to be a dual-narrative type of thing. But the reason the trip was established...is that they want to take non-Jewish student leaders, largely students of color, to Israel and Palestine, so that they understand the nuance of the situation, and therefore don't support BDS. It's...a way of combating BDS on campuses. It's explicit.

While it advertises itself as a "dual-narrative" trip, Fact Finders has a pro-Israel agenda.

By pretending to show students "both" sides, but pushing an anti-BDS agenda alongside this

occupation education, the program is actually promoting rhetoric that harms the Palestinian

liberation movement. Arianna's experiences, along with those of the other interviewees who

went on "dual-narrative" tours, illustrate that a "balanced" education on Israel/Palestine on

organized trips to Israel are often skewed to portray Israel in a positive light.

Overall, I found my interlocutors' thoughts about the nature of their tours' discussions

about the occupation to be extremely informative. First, participants whose trips did not

explicitly discuss the occupation still seemed to form opinions about the phenomenon. This is

significant, as it illustrates that even encounters that do not explicitly discuss the occupation can

still influence participants' political opinions. Second, participants who recognized the pro-Israel

bias of their tours were still affected by it, showing that this recognition of bias is not necessarily

the same as resisting it. Last, whether purposefully or not, many interlocutors illustrated that trips

advertised as showing a "balanced" perspective of the Israel-Palestine conflict were not

successfully impartial. This is especially noteworthy, as it demonstrates how the information

organized trips give to participants may be painted as "neutral" or "balanced" when it is not.

Based on these findings, I argue that every type of trip to Israel has the potential to impact

tourists' political opinions and that these influences are more likely to be pro-Israel.

Travel to Israel's Effect on Political Opinion

About half of my interlocutors' opinions on the occupation shifted after they went to Israel. Most of these opinions changed to align more with the Israeli government's side.

Increase in Pro-Israel Beliefs

The political opinions of Arianna, who was adamantly pro-Palestine and anti-Israel before her visits to the region, were noticeably impacted by her experiences as a tourist: "I think these trips have softened my [pro-Palestinian] positions into ones that are genuinely about nuance...I am now really attuned to the human dimension of this conflict." By being exposed to the Israeli perspective on her trips, Arianna feels more sympathy for the Israel actors in the conflict. By talking to Israelis on her trips, she saw them as ordinary people rather than as part of an oppressive government, making her more sympathetic to their perspectives.

Elena experienced a similar political shift:

I think before the trip, I was more like "fuck Israel. I hate it." But I still went...I wanted to figure out why. And I think afterwards I understand a lot more, like my whole experience was from the Israeli point of view...so, I think my sentiments have drifted more towards...strongly believing in a two-state solution but knowing much more from the Israeli side than from the Palestinian side.

While Elena does not fully support Israel and wants a solution to the conflict that she hopes would benefit both parties, her opinion has moved from being anti-Israel to understanding the state's–and its people's–motives.

Like Elena, Elijah also cited knowing more about the Israeli perspective as influencing his opinion:

I don't have a lot of understanding of the Palestinian perspective on the issue. I obviously have read stuff online...But I don't know any Palestinians personally. I haven't heard any accounts or personal stories in the way that I have for Israelis, so I don't think I empathize with Palestinians as much as I could be able to...Not to say that I don't agree, it's just that I haven't heard enough to be able to say I can also understand that feeling.

Elijah's narrative assumes that one has to personally know people in order to understand their struggle.

Jacob's experiences in the region also made him more pro-Israel:

I would say before I went, I was wary of Israel...I understood that there's controversy around the country and what was happening...I wasn't gung-ho like, "I'm all in on Israel" before I went, and I definitely sympathized with the Palestinian cause...After going, I...definitely sympathized less with the Palestinian cause and much more strongly with the state of Israel...after my trip and now today I definitely lean...I don't know...a lot of my friends...who were in Israel are very strongly pro-Israel and they think I'm the biggest lefty out there because I criticize Israel...but I would say I'm right of J Street...I'm pro-peace but I side a little bit closer to AIPAC[20] world.

Despite his right-leaning beliefs on Israel, his friends consider him to be extremely left on the issue. This social pressure seemed to contribute to his political shift, illustrating that the group one travels to Israel with can also influence one's beliefs.

I found Jacob's friends' beliefs to be perplexing; how can they think Jacob is "the biggest lefty" when he compares his beliefs to that of AIPAC, an organization that promotes far-right ideologies about Israel? Based on Jacob's interview, it seems that his friends consider anyone with any sort of critique of Israel to be politically left. This demonstrates how many right-wing Jews expect other Jews who identify as pro-Israel to have no criticism of the state and its government.

Increase in Pro-Palestine Beliefs

A few of my interlocutors became more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause after going to Israel. However, most of them, rather than becoming enthusiastically pro-Palestine, either went from pro-Israel to only slightly more pro-Palestine or merely became confused.

---

[20] For more information on AIPAC's political stances, please see https://www.aipac.org/learn/legislative-agenda.

Lilly went on two trips to Israel–one with NFTY[21] and one with her family and a private tour guide. While her first trip gave her extremely pro-Israel opinions, her second trip created tension within herself regarding her political beliefs:

We didn't even meet any Palestinian people but it's just that our guide was willing to say that Israelis have done some not great things to Palestinians…And that's why it's really hard because then when I came home, I was like, "Well, I still love Israel just as much, but in a political sense, I'm not gonna be pro-Israel because it's not...there is not just a black and white answer because there are families that live in Palestine. And that's what our guide was telling us. Everyday people...get caught in the middle of it. And that's just not right. And there's no right answer to it. I don't know.

Lilly's shift in opinion demonstrates how many liberal Jews, even after learning about Israel's actions that go against their progressive core values, cannot bring themselves to fully support the Palestinian cause/directly oppose the Israeli government.

Ashkenazi Jew Noah has also had multiple political transformations. When he was 15, his experiences in the region made him devoutly loyal to the state of Israel and its decisions. However, when he went back five years later, he had a change of heart:

[When I was 15] I was ready to march into the West Bank and raid villages. That's a horrible thing to joke about, I had no idea that was going on, but I was...very much radicalized as a...Zionist zealot. And it sounds funny to put it that way, but that's how I see myself. But meanwhile, going to Israel when I was 20, I really tried to see things in a different light. And it was really shocking and emotionally difficult. And it really forced me to reevaluate my beliefs and opinion. So, I'd say [going to] Israel really did help challenge and change my beliefs in a way that was informative.

Like Lilly, Noah faced a lot of emotional difficulty while learning about the Israel government's actions. While discussing this, he said: "I love Israel still. I have a lot of investment and, I don't know...when you love something, that thing can then break your heart. And Israel breaks my heart a little bit more every day." This inner tension of loving Israel but

---

[21] For more information on NFTY (the Reform Jewish Youth Movement) , please see https://nfty.org/

hating what it is doing to Palestinians, rather than completely shifting Noah's political opinions, only complicated them. Also, rather than explicitly discussing the atrocities Israel commits against Palestinians, both Lilly and Noah are only willing to acknowledge that the occupation is complicated.

A few of the interviewees expressed that their opinions either did not change at all or were solidified by their trips. Katie, a white Jew who was mostly raised Catholic because of her father, knew very little about the conflict both before and after her trip: "At the time I went, I knew very little about the conflict...had I known more, I probably would not have gone. Since the trip, I've learned a lot more and I'm leaning more towards the Palestine side. I don't have a super strong opinion...I don't know enough about the issues."

Ashkenazi Jew Rachel also went into the trip with little knowledge about the conflict, but felt pro-Palestine from the small amount she knew. Despite Birthright's attempt to change her opinion, she did not budge: "In general, I'm not really on Israel's side. Both guides attempted to change that opinion through some programming. It did not work." Rachel did mention, however, that her Birthright trip was outdoors themed and focused on hiking and camping a lot more than discussing the occupation. Because of this, the pro-Israel programming she referred to may have been minimal.

Although there were multiple ways that my interlocutors' opinions developed from their trips, a common theme that was mentioned was tourists knowing more about the conflict from the Israeli perspective. I found this especially noteworthy, as most of the interviewees who mentioned this had stronger pro-Israel ideas after their trips. This illustrates that whom tourists speak to in Israel has effects on what perspectives they are hearing, leading me to argue that whom they speak to also influences the political opinions they hold when they leave the state.

Narratives of Sympathy

Even participants who claimed to remain unchanged in their pro-Palestine opinions after their trip often said things that indicated an increase in sympathy for and understanding of the Israeli perspective. Hannah demonstrated this when talking about everyday life for Israelis:

It was just something to think about...these people are terrified and living under fear. I'm not saying everything is rational, but I do understand how from an outside perspective or...a U.S. foreign policy perspective, it's a little different than knowing it in a single point in time. Your home or the home of your loved ones is under attack or could be under attack or is at risk...it's just this constant seed of paranoia.

Elizabeth had a similar sentiment: "Something that did make an impact was seeing how Jewish people do live [in Israel] and don't have another place to go, so that feels like it can't be ignored." Though both Hannah and Elizabeth stated that their political opinions had not changed after their Birthright trips, they both expressed that they gained sympathy for the Israeli perspective after seeing or hearing it on their trips. Because of this, I argue that even those who believe that travel to Israel did not influence their political opinions may have experienced some sort of ideological shift.

Political Implications of Travel to Israel

Through conducting interviews and delving into literature on Israel/Palestine, Birthright, and colonialism, I have found that young liberal American Jewish tourism in Israel has multiple political implications. First, interactions with Israelis–particularly with IDF soldiers–give trip participants a greater stake in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Through social activities with Israeli soldiers, "Jewish Americans are socialized into a positive, cordial orientation towards the Israeli military" (Schneider 2019:140). If they come out of their trip with a positive view of the IDF,

diaspora Jews are likely to develop some sense of support for the soldiers, whether it is for their actions or purely for their wellbeing.

Forging relationships with individual soldiers especially has an impact on tourists' politics, as it leads them to develop "a sense that they have a personal stake in the conflict's outcome" (Kelner 2010:48). By creating a positive connection with an IDF soldier, a tourist has a greater stake in the military occupation, as they want the soldier they met to survive the violence. By rooting for the IDF soldier's well-being, one may, in turn, root for the IDF's success, which then means supporting the oppression of Palestinians. The hookup culture of organized trips mentioned earlier makes the stakes even higher, as the intimacy of sexual relationships may create a different kind of attachment than friendships.

Another political implication of diaspora Jewish travel to Israel/Palestine is the validation of the Law of Return. As mentioned earlier, the Law of Return grants any Jew the opportunity to receive Israeli citizenship. The law also denies Palestinians the right of return, meaning Palestinians whose families were expelled from their land during the *Nakba* are not allowed to move back to their homeland, even if it has been in their family for generations. These Palestinians are often not even allowed to step foot on this land, as Israeli checkpoints restrict their movement. By traveling to Israel, tourists take advantage of their legal right to go to and/or immigrate to Israel. This, I argue, validates the Law of Return which, by default, validates the denial of the rights of Palestinians.

A clear pattern I noticed in my interlocutors' statements was the idea that they could not have fully understood the occupation without seeing Israel/Palestine for themselves. Arianna expressed this: "It was validating to me that it is worthwhile for me to be there with [Palestinians] and not just read about it in a textbook." Aaron felt similarly: "I did feel a stronger

connection to [the occupation] mostly because I saw it with my own eyes." To me, this rhetoric feels reminiscent of colonial nostalgia.

I argue that the idea of needing to physically be in Israel/Palestine to understand its politics is part of the (neo)colonial imagination. When discussing the colonial imagination, I am referring to how Westerners may think of themselves as powerful over and/or different than the colonial 'other' (Korpela 2010). As the "personal imaginings of tourists…are influenced by institutionally grounded imaginaries implying power, hierarchy, and hegemony" (Salazar and Graburn 2014:2), Western tourists in Israel/Palestine see Palestinians and their stories as colonized others available for their consumption.

In his study of tourism in Zanzibar, Sumich (2002) stated: "While colonialism is now generally considered an immoral enterprise by most of the tourists I spoke to, the colonial imagination still exists among them." (43). This applies to tourism in Israel/Palestine as well, as participants often see themselves as doing anti-colonial or social justice work by touring the West Bank. However, tour participants still view residents of the region as others and their tours do not positively affect Palestinians. Miriam, though she had good intentions, exemplifies how many tourists consider their travel to be anti-occupation work: "We got a personal walking tour of East Jerusalem and that was really great. It's things like that where it really humanizes people…and it doesn't create this...ethereal other that's so hard to reach, and conceptualize, and grasp in your mind." By saying this, she is portraying travel to Israel/Palestine as the best way to see Palestinians as real people, which both functions as a way to uphold claims about one's politics and further justifies tourism in the region.

The effects of visits upon host populations depend on "the social composition of fellow tourists and the social composition of those living in the place visited" (Urry 1990:140). By

seeing the conflict from up close and consuming Palestinian stories, predominantly-white tourists feel righteous about themselves as Western subjects learning about politics in the Middle East from Arab Palestinians (Geldman 2018). Though none of my interlocutors were outright about feeling righteous, many spoke about feeling proud of themselves for doing the "hard work" of seeing the occupation firsthand, which implies that sentiment. Despite these feelings, "colonial tourism has done little over the years to better the situation of the Palestinians [and] [t]he visitors...are not authentic stakeholders in the conflict, and most never return." (Geldman 2018). Because of this, travel to the West Bank is only beneficial to the tourists and, despite the idea that this tourism is anti-occupation, actually harms Palestinians through exploitation. This tourism is exploitative as it promises an exchange of culture and life experiences, when it is in fact a one-sided transaction where tourists take from Palestinians. Though tours may slightly contribute to Palestine's economy, their opportunistic way of taking from the local people does, in my view, more harm than good for Palestinians.

While neocolonial relations underly trips to Israel/Palestine that interact with Palestinians, it also exists in other travel in the region that do not involve such encounters. For example, Elena, who did not speak to Palestinians, made a statement about not being able to have the same understanding of the region without having been on the land: "I just feel like I have more perspective, I think from taking that year and it's just given me a deeper understanding that I'm really grateful for that... without living there, I wouldn't have been able to experience." Elena's sentiment, along with others who feel similarly, invoke having been on the land to authorize their views, which is a common colonial practice. Her use of comparative language indicates that she believes she has a richer understanding of the region than others who

have not been there. This false sense of expertise is dangerous, as it justifies both travel to and the extraction of knowledge from Israel/Palestine.

Historically, a major aim of colonialism has been "to learn about the unknown parts of the world and its peoples" (MacMillan 2015) through the travel to and procurement of lands. In a way, tourists can be said to participate in the same logic by temporarily occupying the land for the purpose of learning more about it and strengthening their self-understanding as Jews.

Though American Jews and Israeli Jews do not have a colonizer-colonized power dynamic, by feeling the need to be physically present in Israel/Palestine to learn about the region and Judaism, young Jewish tourists are thinking in colonial terms. Zara is a good example of this, as she believes that she had to have been in the region to learn about Israel/Palestine: "I think it is helpful to go there to have gone there to know [about the region]...I feel really lucky and grateful that I...could go there."

I do want to acknowledge that the colonial imagination that many of my interviewees hold is subconscious–and often unwanted. Because of my interlocutors' pro-Israel Jewish educations and upbringing in xenophobic post-9/11 America, colonial thought about the Middle East–and particularly about Palestine–has become hegemonic. Hegemonic thought, because of its normalization, is almost impossible to recognize. This is significant to recognize because I do not want to falsely portray my interlocutors as ill-intentioned individuals. But they may nevertheless be subconsciously influenced by these culturally pervasive ideas.

CONCLUSION

Through my research, I have found that, though the effects of travel to Israel are heterogenous and dependent on the tourists' positionalities, all kinds of trips have personal and

political implications for diaspora Jewish travelers. An overwhelming majority of my interlocutors expressed some kind of personal transformation after their experience in Israel, whether it was an increased connection to Judaism, a stronger relationship with the state of Israel, or a shift in their political opinions about the Israeli occupation. I found that on my interviewees' trips, learning about the idea of Israel as a safe place for Jews, creating relationships with other Jews, and learning about different forms of Judaism were the most influential experiences that affected their connections to Judaism and Israel.

Though not every change in political opinion was the same, travel to the region seemed to mainly generate more sympathy for Israeli narratives and/or confuse the opinions of people who went into the trip identifying as pro-Palestinian. Whom tourists spoke to in Israel heavily influenced the political opinions they left the state with, making participants who did not speak to Palestinians more sympathetic with Israeli narratives surrounding the occupation. Even tourists who spoke about their awareness of programs' pro-Israel biases and political messages had ideological shifts. In other words, travelers who went in expecting political propaganda were still affected by it, proving that recognition of bias does not translate into resistance to this bias or to dominant discourses.

I also found that American Jewish travel to Israel/Palestine perpetuates Israel's colonial regime and oppression of Palestinians. Tourists' interactions with Israelis gave them a greater stake in the Israel-Palestine conflict, making them more likely to support the occupation. Travel to Israel also validates the Law of Return, legitimizing the exclusion and oppression of Palestinians. I also argue that the idea of needing to physically be in Israel/Palestine to understand its politics is harmful, as it is part of the (neo)colonial imagination.

While I have provided some insight into American Jewish travel to Israel's implications, my research of course has limitations. First, I only interviewed twenty people, which limited my findings. Also, while I purposefully chose to only study liberal Jews, my research does not shed light on how conservative travelers are influenced by this tourism. In addition, my interviewees were predominantly white and affluent, which made the group unrepresentative of the American Jewish population. Further research about the effects of travel to Israel/Palestine should be conducted with a larger and more racially, socioeconomically, and politically diverse pool of interviewees.

My research is significant as it not only gives insight into tourism in Israel/Palestine's implications, but it also alludes to the consequences or politics of tourism in general. We now live in a world where it is extremely difficult to cite a place people have not travelled to. In every region, there is conflict and inequality. Because of these omnipresent dynamics, there is no such thing as apolitical tourism. All tours are mediated by dominant discourse that either hides or denies oppression. Hawaii, for example, is portrayed in its tourism as a tropical paradise, while in reality, its residents struggle with "colonialism, military occupation, tourism, food insecurity, high costs of living, and the effects of a changing climate" (Aikau and Gonzalez 2019). Due to its exploitation of indigenous people's resources and its contributions to locals' hardships, tourism is inherently colonial and extractive.

Based on my findings about tourism in Israel/Palestine in particular, I urge young diaspora Jews to boycott travel to the region until the Israeli apartheid is over. By refusing to travel to Israel/Palestine, young Jews can stand on the side of justice and join in solidarity with the Palestinian people. As an American Jew myself, I cannot understate how much being exposed to critiques of the occupation and tourism in Israel/Palestine have transformed my world

view. Learning about this has been extremely valuable to me and has impacted both my ethics

and my Judaism. Despite what some may expect, these critiques have actually strengthened my

connection to Judaism, as it has affirmed my Jewishness that is different "than the one in whose

name the Israeli state claims to speak" (Butler 2012:2). I also feel closer to Judaism through

exploring critiques of Israel because I feel a moral obligation as an American Jew to advocate for

Palestinians, both due to my positionality and my strong belief in Jewish values surrounding

social equality.

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.

Aikau, Hōkūlani K. and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez. 2019. "Introduction." Pp. 1-13 in Detours:

    A Decolonial Guide to Hawaii. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of*

    Nationalism. London: Verso.

Arendt, Hannah. 1944. "Zionism Revisited." n.p.

Barghouti, Omar. 2017. "Two Degrees of Separation: Israel, Its Palestinian Victims, and the

    Fraudulent Use of Antisemitism." Pp. 139-151 in *On Antisemitism: Solidarity and the*

    Struggle for Justice. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Ben Daniel, Tallie. 2017. "Antisemitism, Palestine, and the Mizrahi Question." Pp. 71-80 in *On*

    Antisemitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Birthright Israel. 2020. "Our Story." Retrieved January 30, 2020.

    (https://www.birthrightisrael.com/about_us).

Butler, Judith. 2012. *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism.* New York:

    Columbia University Press.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative

    Analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1986. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance

    of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33(6):S14–S32.

Collins-Kreiner, Noga and Nimord Luz. 2018. "Judaism and Tourism Over the Ages: The

    Impacts of Technology, Geopolitics and the Changing Political Landscape" Pp. 51-67 in

    Tourism and Religion: Issues and Implications, edited by Richard Butler and Wantanee

Suntikul. Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black

Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist

Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989(1):139-167.

Dollinger, Mark. 2000. *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America.* Princeton,

NJ: Princeton University Press.

El-Haj, Nadia Abu. 2008. *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial

Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Geldman, Ardie. 2018. "Humanitarian Intervention or Colonial Tourism?" The Jerusalem Post .

Retrieved February 23, 2020

(https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Humanitarian-intervention-or-colonial-tourism-563553).

Gelvin, James L. 2005. *The Modern Middle East: A History.* New York: Oxford University

Press.

Goldberg, Michelle. 2018. "Is Liberal Zionism Dead?" *New York Times*, January 8.

Goldwag, Arthur. 2017. "Trump, the Alt-right, Antisemitism, and Zionism." Pp. 83-90 in *On

Antisemitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice.* Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Hall, Stuart. 1990. "Cultural identity and diaspora." Pp. 222-237 in *Identity: Community,

Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Impact. 2017. "The Cost of Birthright." Retrieved February 5, 2020.

(https://www.notjustafreetrip.com/the-cost-of-birthright).

Kaye/Kantrowitz, Melanie. 2007. *The Color of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism.*

Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Kelner, Shaul. 2010. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism*.

New York: NYU Press.

Korpela, Mari. 2010. "A Postcolonial Imagination? Westerners Searching for Authenticity in

India." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(8): 1299-1315.

Kotler-Berkowitz, Laurence and Jonathon Ament. 2010. "The Israel Attachments of American

Jews: Assessing the Debate." *Contemporary Jewry* 30(2-3): 165-173.

Lerman, Antony. 2014 "The End of Liberal Zionism: Israel's Move to the Right Challenges

Diaspora Jews." *New York Times*, August 23.

Lerman, Antony. 2017. "Antisemitism Redefined: Israel's Imagined National Narrative of

Endless External Threat." Pp. 7-20 in *On Antisemitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for

Justice.* Chicago: Haymarket Books.

MacMillan, Ken. 2015. "Ideologies of Colonization." Oxford Bibliographies. Retrieved February

26, 2020

(https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-

9780199730414-0034.xml).

Magid, Shaul. 2017. "On Antisemitism and Its Uses." Pp. 59-69 in *On Antisemitism: Solidarity

and the Struggle for Justice.* Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Morris, Benny. 1987. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*. Cambridge,

UK: Cambridge University Press.

Nash, Jennifer C. 2014. *The Black Body in Ecstacy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography.*

Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Nguyen, Mimi Thi. 2011. "The Biopower of Beauty: Humanitarian Imperialisms and Global

Feminisms in an Age of Terror." *Signs* 36(2): 359-383.

Palestinian BDS Committee. 2019. "What Is BDS?" BDS Movement. Retrieved January 23,

    2020 (https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds).

Raider, Mark A. 1998 The Emergence of American Zionism. New York: New York University

    Press.

Ross, Karen. 2017. Youth Encounter Programs in Israel: Pedagogy, Identity, and Social Change.

    Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Salazar, Noel B. and Nelson H. H. Graburn. 2014. "Introduction." Pp. 1-30 in *Tourism*

    Imaginaries: Anthropological Approaches. New York: Berghahn Books.

Sasson, Theodore, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe. 2010. "Trends in American Jewish

    Attachment to Israel: An Assessment of the "Distancing" Hypothesis." *Contemporary*

    Jewry 30(2-3): 297-319.

Saxe, Leonard and Matthew Boxer. 2012. "Loyalty and Love of Israel by Diasporan Jews."

    Israel Studies 17(2): 92-101.

Saxe, Leonard, Shira Fishman, Michelle Shain, Graham Wright, and Shahar Hecht. 2013.

    "Young Adults and Jewish Engagement: The Impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel."

    Waltham, MA: Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies.

Schneider, Emily. 2015. "Jewish Tourism to the Occupied Palestinian Territories and its Effects

    on Diaspora Identities and Politics." MA thesis, Department of Sociology, University of

    California, Santa Barbara.

Schneider, Emily. 2019. "Now That I've Seen Their Faces: Contact, Activism, and Tourism in

    Israel/Palestine." PhD dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California,

    Santa Barbara.

Smith, Charles D. 1988. *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflic*t. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan

    Education.

Spangler, Eve. 2015. *Understanding Israel/Palestine: Race, Nation, and Human Rights in the*

    Conflict. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Sumich, Jason. 2002. "Looking for the 'other': tourism, power, and identity in Zanzibar."

    Anthropology Southern Africa 25(1-2): 39-45.

Swanson, Joel. 2019. "A Lot More Jews Are Anti-Zionists Than You Think." *The Forward*.

    Retrieved February 7, 2020

    (https://forward.com/opinion/430535/a-lot-more-jews-are-anti-zionists-than-you-think/).

Tessler, Mark. 2009. *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN:

    Indiana University Press.

Urofsky, Melvin I. 1978. *We Are One!: American Jewry and Israel*. Garden City, NY: Anchor

    Press.

Urry, John. 1990. *The Tourist Gaze.* London: Sage Publications.

Visualizing Palestine. 2017. "The One State Reality: Israeli Control of Palestinian Daily Life."

    Visualizing Palestine. Retrieved February 8, 2020

    (https://www.visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/the-one-state-reality#&gid=1&pid=1).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

- What did you imagine Israel would be like before you got there?

- When did you go to Israel and why did you decide to go?

- Did you go to Israel with your family, an organization, or through another avenue? Why did you choose to travel this way?

- What did your trip entail? Was there an educational aspect/a tour included? If so, what did you see/learn about?

- What were some of the most memorable moments from your trip to Israel?

- Were there any particular moments or activities that made you uncomfortable? Why do you think they caused discomfort?

- Did you come out of the trip with any new meaningful relationships? If so, were they with Israelis, IDF soldiers, Palestinians, or other diaspora tourists? How did these relationships come about and what are they like today?

- How would you describe your connection to Judaism? How did your trip influence this, if at all? Were there any particular moments or activities on your trip that influenced your connection to Judaism?

- What is your relationship to other Jews, whether living in Israel, the US, or abroad? How did your trip influence this, if at all? Were there any particular moments or activities on your trip that influenced your connection to other diaspora Jews?

- What is your relationship to Israel? How did your trip influence this, if at all? Were there any particular moments or activities on your trip that influenced your connection to Israel?

- What is your knowledge about the Israel-Palestine conflict? How did your trip add to your knowledge, if at all? Were there any particular moments or activities on your trip that contributed to your knowledge about the Israel-Palestine conflict?

- What is your political stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict? How did your trip change your perspective, if at all? Were there any particular moments or activities on your trip that changed your political opinions about the Israel-Palestine conflict?

  - Probe: Do you think the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be remedied with a one-state solution or a two-state solution? Why?

- How do you feel about Netanyahu and his politics? Did this change after your trip to Israel? Why or why not?

- What is your relationship to the Holocaust? Did this change after your trip to Israel? Why or why not?

- What does the word Zionism mean to you? How would you describe your relationship to Zionism? Did this change after your trip to Israel? Why or why not?

- What were the most noticeable changes overall, if there were any, in your sense of self and beliefs after your trip to Israel?

- Would you say you feel more comfortable around other Jews? Why or why not?

- How do you feel when you are the only Jew in the room?

- In what spaces or circumstances are you aware of your Jewishness? When are you unaware of it?

- What about your life or identity makes you feel Jewish? Why?

- What about your life or identity makes you feel not Jewish or less Jewish? Why?

  - Probe: How, if at all, does your racial identity influence your Jewish identity?

Appendix B: Interviewee Demographics

Pseudonym[22]	Gender	Race/Ethnicity/ Jewish Classification	Trip Type
Arianna	Female	Mizrahi Jew (Persian)	Birthright, Let Our People Know, Fact Finders
Elena	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Gap-Year Program
Lilly	Female	Ashkenazi Jewish family by adoption (Asian)	NFTY
Elizabeth	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Birthright (LGBTQ)
Hannah	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Birthright
Shoshana	Female	Jewish by Conversion (Black)	Birthright
Katie	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Birthright
Miriam	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Gap-Year Program, College Course
Ruth	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	USY Eastern Europe / Israel Pilgrimage
Talia	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Family Trips, Habonim Dror Trip
Elijah	Male	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Family Trips
Rachel	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Birthright (Israel Outdoors)
Sari	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Family Trips, Gap Year, Birthright
Jacob	Male	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Gap-Year Program
Zara	Female	Half Black, Half Ashkenazi Jew (Biracial)	Family Trip

---

[22] I have used pseudonyms for all of my interlocutors to protect their personal information and identities.

Jess	Female	Ashkenazi Jewish family by adoption (Asian)	Birthright
Aaron	Male	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Let Our People Know
Ariel	Female	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Birthright
Noah	Male	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Family Trips
David	Male	Ashkenazi Jew (White)	Birthright