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You Can Check Out,
but You Can Never Leave

Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!

—**Michael Corleone,** *The Godfather, Part III*

The superstition in which we grew up, though we may
recognize it, does not lose its power over us. Not all are free
who make mock of their chains.

—**Gotthold Ephraim Lessing,** *Nathan the Wise*

I was raised in the ultra-Orthodox Hasidic community known as
Lubavitch. I spent my childhood and young adulthood in Lubavitch ye-
shivas and summer camps studying religious texts, praying, and
strengthening my bond with the spiritual leader of the community, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Although the community forbade the
teaching of secular subjects such as English reading and writing and math-
ematics in its schools, I learned to read English on my own and at twenty-one
sat for the GED high school equivalency exam. I eventually enrolled in
Brooklyn College, and by the time I graduated from college, I had shaved my
beard, had stopped wearing a skullcap (yarmulke), and no longer believed in
God, let alone the spiritual powers of Rabbi Schneerson.

In graduate school at New York University, I read Karl Marx, Émile Durk-
heim, and Max Weber and eventually found myself poring over contempo-
rary scholarship on political economy, social movement theory, and the so-
ciology of religion. It was not long before I found myself reading sociological
literature on religious exiters like myself. That was what stopped me in my
tracks and ultimately led to this book.

Despite my enthusiasm to better contextualize and theorize my exit, I
was surprised to find that the existing literature offered me few tools to help
make sense of my story. I was searching in particular for scholarly literature
on individuals who leave religion and on where they end up once they do.
Most of this existing literature relates to the boom in new religious move-
ments (NRMs), popularly known as "cults," in the 1960s through the 1980s.
Within this area of study in particular, sociologists have been much more

interested in why and how young, educated adults from middle-class backgrounds *join* fringe religious communities than why and how they *leave* them (Albrecht, Cornwall, and Cunningham 1988; Richardson 2009). The scholarship I found on religious exiters—for example, David G. Bromley (1988, 1998), Janet Liebman Jacobs (1987, 1989), and Stuart A. Wright (1984, 1987)—tended to look at people who were raised in mainstream society and then decided as adults to join the NRMs, only to leave those groups afterward. That population is different on many levels from the population of individuals who leave the religious communities they were born into.

Such stories of joining and then exiting religious movements have much to tell us about what people look for from these religious movements, how their leaders cultivate a following in their particular context, and how these movements succeed or fail in retaining converts. But it does not tell us about the habits and perspective instilled by a life raised within a totalizing point of view, how those unique circumstances transition to life beyond the community, how exiters must invent new ways of being that their upbringings had not prepared them for, and what these particular individuals lose and retain in the exit process. I was confident that individuals born into totalizing religious groups had something new and valuable to offer to the work done thus far on religious exit. And perhaps the experience of these particular individuals might reveal new insights into the nature of identity and the transition between identities more broadly.

The dominant focus on NRMs in the literature on religious exit leads to what my research concludes is an incomplete picture of religious exit. The narrative of an individual falling in and out of a "cult" might lead one to assume a binary, "in or out," nature of leaving a religion. The possibility of a prolonged in-between state might not suggest itself to researchers within the limits of existing studies and merits further consideration. Wright suggests that if an individual goes through an extensive process of transition, including adopting an alternative plausibility structure from the one held by the group one is leaving, it is possible for this individual to "put the past behind him/her" (1987, 79). Wright also states that for individuals who go through this process of transition, "defection is complete. The old life is history. The individual begins a new life" (81).

Similarly, Susan Rothbaum tells us, "Two or three years after leaving, they may go for months without recalling [their experience in the religious movement]" (1988, 228). These quotations show a binary in the literature that maintains that nothing remains of former identity post-exit. Although this may be the case for Wright's or Rothbaum's interviewees, who joined a religious movement for only several months or years, the same cannot be said about me or people like me who were born into their religion and lived within it for decades. This book dives into the alternative possibility that for individuals raised within certain religious worldviews, the old life is very

much bound up in the new. Further, it explores how this binding of old and new lives plays out in the lived experience of exiters.

One can find evidence of the power of the binary transition narrative even in studies of exiters who were born into the religious communities they eventually left (A. Mauss 1969; Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Hoge, McGuire, and Stratman 1981; Streib et al. 2009; Zuckerman 2012; Bengtson, Putney, and Harris 2013), as well as the literature specifically on ex–Orthodox Jews (Shaffir and Rockaway 1987; Shaffir 1998; Winston 2005; Topel 2012).[1] This assumption is embedded in the language used to describe the behavior of these individuals: "leaving," "exiting," "apostasy," "deconversion," "disiden-tification," "disaffiliation," and so on. All these terms describe a process that is unidirectional and appears permanent. At stake in this characterization is what we can learn from taking the exit process seriously as its own inquiry, with its own fruitful complexities and contradictions. When we learn how the exit process is ongoing, we learn which aspects and pieces of a totalizing identity lived in since birth can be rejected, which linger, which come and go, which haunt an individual in the process of building a new identity, and which take new forms. Such an understanding brings us closer to fundamental questions of how religion functions in social life and the process of identity construction more generally.

There are exceptions to this narrative pattern that do show greater attention to the continued process of exit. Among scholars who study religious communities, several have noted the long-term effects of religious exit, such as Benjamin Zablocki (1980) and Stephanie Levine (2003). Similarly, within the literature on religious exit, several scholars have discussed this fact. Norman Skonovd uses the term "floating" to describe the confusion, doubt, fear, and guilt associated with the decision to leave a religion, although even he seems to believe that after a while this subsides (1981, 133). Similarly, Eileen Barker challenges the "clear-cut distinction between members and non-members of movements which are in tension with their social environment" (1998, 83). Although Barker expands the view of the literature by introducing the idea of marginal and peripheral members of religious communities,

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1. An extreme example of this binary view of religious group membership is found in the dispute between Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman (2010) and Chaim Rapoport (2011) regarding the biography of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the last leader of the Lubavitch community, known simply as "the Rebbe." They all assume that before the Rebbe arrived in America from Europe in 1940, he was either Orthodox and committed to Hasidic life or he was non-Orthodox, ignorant of Hasidic life, and wanted only to be a professional and assimilate into secular Parisian society. Why is it not possible that the Rebbe wanted to do both, that he had multiple desires and conflicting goals? There were many people in Berlin and Paris at the time who came from deeply Orthodox homes and felt very connected to them but also wanted to be part of the larger European cultural milieu (for an analysis of six such transitional Eastern European Jewish figures, see Goldberg 1989).

she too ultimately assumes that once a member ventures out from the movement to join the broader society, the individual has left his or her community of origin behind for good.

Another exception is Lucinda SanGiovanni, who studied ex-nuns and coined the term "passage lag" to describe "the appearance in the new passage of specific values, self-images, preferences, and behaviors derived and carried over from the prior passage." SanGiovanni notes that some of her respondents missed the sense of community and purpose they shared in the convent, still spoke softly because of their training as a nun, felt guilty for spending money and being "materialistic," and struggled with an inability to make small talk, since as nuns they were taught not to discuss "trivia" (1978, 114–115). This all highlights the extent to which it may be difficult to jettison the socialization one undergoes within a religious environment.

This book presents for the first time a detailed portrait of the exit process for those exiting ultra-Orthodoxy. I interviewed seventy-four exiters from two ultra-Orthodox Hasidic communities, Lubavitch and Satmar. My research explores the features and implications of the prolonged state of being in between that characterizes exiters from both communities, including the significant traits and practices from their upbringing that remain and transform in their new lives as exiters.

To remain consistent with the scholarship, I do not introduce a new term to describe the phenomenon of distancing oneself from a religious community while remaining in an in-between state. Instead, I adopt the term "exit," introduced by Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh (1988a, 1–2) and used by numerous scholars. But this book shows, first, that the journey of those who were raised in strict religious communities and deviate from them is not completely unidirectional and, second, that these individuals are not completely disconnected from their roots once they "arrive" at their new destination. Therefore, I describe interviewees as "exiting" rather than as "having exited," allowing for the possibility that they feel pushed to move outside their community, but they may also feel pulled to remain connected to it. Exiting is an ongoing process of becoming. One of the main contributions of this book is to complicate the assumed binary in much of the scholarly literature on religious exiting and detail the prolonged in-between state that many exiters experience.

Beyond the NRMs, most scholarship on religious exiters focuses either on exiters from liberal or mainline religions rather than from strict ones or on a combination of individuals from various religious backgrounds. A good example is the large-scale work of Heinz Streib and colleagues (2009). Because of the design of the study, the researchers combined data from conservative exiters and liberal exiters (only approximately half of their 126 interviewees who "deconverted" came from religions in "high tension" with their surrounding society that may be called strict religions). Thus, although the

authors acknowledge this and try to incorporate this difference into their analysis, the most they can do is outline six types of "destinations" that various exiters might choose among. The study leaves open for future research the question of why an individual from a particular religious background will choose a particular destination or, more important, describe what that choosing process entails. This book begins to address these issues.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes the distinctiveness of the outcomes for those exiting from strict religious communities, attending especially to the type of social institutions or environments from which people are exiting in the understanding that a strict worldview will have particular effects on the nature and trajectory of the exit. This opportunity informed both my choice of which religious exiters to study and my inclusion of contextual information about the religious communities from which they were exiting.

The broader scholarly literature on personal transformations also stands to benefit from a deeper understanding of the effects of different types of social institutions or environments being abandoned. For example, when Ebaugh develops a general model to be applied to all personal transformations to explain the "generic social processes" involved (1988a, 32), major traumatic experiences (such as exiting a religious order) are grouped in with other types of experiences (such as the retirement of a physician). Might not some of these experiences have more long-term effects than others? This book addresses this question by identifying the aspects of ultraconservative religious identities that prove resilient and those that prove more fungible for individuals in the process of transition, as well as what factors lead these characteristics to vary from exiter to exiter. The book embraces the opportunity to deepen our understanding of how personal transformations may differ depending on the nature of the identity from which an individual is transitioning.

The foundational principle from which this book seeks to launch its inquiry is that people born into strict religions who decide to exit them remain in an in-between state even years later because of the internalization of the totalizing institutions in which they were raised (Goffman 1961). This argument builds on Ebaugh's idea of "role residuals," which helps us think about the long-term effects of major life transitions (1988a, 173–174). From there, the book explores the patterns among the experiences of exiters, including the ways that the old life continues within the new. For the individuals in this study, the transition in identities goes beyond what would be in play for other Americans changing religions, even religions they were born into. This study addresses a form of detachment and reinvention from a cultural and social world much more enveloping than the word "religion" may ordinarily connote.

This is not simply a case of individuals suddenly deciding to completely disconnect themselves from their religious upbringing. Nor is it about them

choosing to stay connected to some vague "symbolic ethnicity" or "symbolic religiosity" (Gans 1979, 1994) or some kind of "ethnic option" (Waters 1990), transitions with which many people exiting less orthodox forms of Judaism might identify. However, this study explores how those who were raised in "total institutions" (Goffman 1961, 4) and "greedy institutions" (Coser 1974) that focus on rigid conformity and are encompassing of all aspects of its members' lives internalize elements of their upbringing such that they are unable to disengage completely from them, even after years of trying. Instead, they transform themselves over an extensive period and blend aspects of their past with aspects of the broader society to shape a new future for themselves.

To use Charles Taylor's language, this is not a "subtraction story" in which individuals abandon their religious past to reveal a completely modern or secular identity (2007, 253). It is about the tension between continuity and discontinuity that manifests in the identities they shape.[2] I explore how the form and substance of their exiting directly relates to their upbringing. This exploration yields tools with which future research might interrogate other transitions from similarly or even less totalizing identities.

Although there are significant aspects of discontinuity in the lives of exiters from the Lubavitch and Satmar communities of Hasidic ultra-Orthodox Judaism, there are also many aspects of continuity with their religious upbringing, some of which they are aware and some of which they may not be aware. Clear examples of discontinuity are the radical changes in dress, abandoning the traditional religious garb for more modern clothing. Often men shave off their religiously mandated beards and (for Satmars) cut off the long side curls, the *paiyyes*.[3] Women often begin wearing pants rather than skirts as well as more revealing clothing, and married women uncover their hair instead of wearing the wig (*sheitel*) required by the religious community. Discontinuity could also include discarding one's Yiddish or Hebrew name for a more Americanized name and physically moving out of the community to live in a different neighborhood not surrounded by other ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Other less visible aspects of discontinuity include eating habits; exiters begin to eat nonkosher food. Religious beliefs are also affected by the exiting. Exiters often stop believing in the divine authorship of the Torah, a central

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2. As Isaac Deutscher observes, "The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition" (1968, 26). This contention supports David Biale's broad claim that secular Jews are directly linked to the tradition that they are rejecting. Referring to Baruch Spinoza, Heinrich Heine, Sigmund Freud, and others, Biale observes, "They were all heretics, yet their heresy might be understood as a rejection that grew out of the Jewish tradition itself" (2010, 1).

3. I am transliterating here according to the Satmar pronunciation. Other religious groups within Judaism may pronounce the term differently.

dogma of the religious community. Some doubt the very existence of God or of the supernatural powers ascribed to the religious leaders of their community. Although discontinuity has been the focus of most prior scholarship on religious exiters, this book focuses on the other side of the coin: aspects of continuity in the life of religious exiters as seen in their habits of thought as well as habits of action.

One important aspect of discontinuity, however, needs to be clarified. Exiting is not the same as relinquishing faith in God. Exiting a religious community is a public act, while relinquishing one's belief in God is a private, and potentially completely secret, feeling or thought. Furthermore, exiting and relinquishing faith are not necessarily even linked. It is possible to stay in the community without believing, and it is possible to leave the community while still believing in God and the basic veracity of the Bible. This study focuses on the consequences of actually exiting the religious community. What actually happens to those who do exit? What residual effects remain of their upbringing, and how do they negotiate their new identity, both within themselves and with their families and communities?

The individuals in this study retain elements of continuity and discontinuity with their upbringing, but the focus here is on interrogating the elements of continuity, in part because thus far the literature on religious exiting focuses largely on the elements of discontinuity. In addition, there is a philosophical perspective that drives my interest in continuity. This study challenges the basic Enlightenment idea about the power of reason to transform individuals and society. This idea leads observers to overestimate the power of personal choice in identity transformation. This study illustrates the limits of personal transformation by noting that although people can change much about their appearance, attitudes, and behaviors, there are aspects of the self that are highly resistant to change and may never be totally transformed. This study proposes to probe some of the boundaries of what individuals can construct in their identity and what a particular context is capable of constructing for them.

To describe the in-between state of people who exit strict religion, I adopt a variant of Victor Turner's (1967, 1969) usage of the term "liminality." Liminality describes the position of exiters in the world once they distance themselves from their religion but before they enter fully into the broader society (if indeed they ever do so). Turner calls the ambiguous and paradoxical period in between two states "the liminal" and describes it as being caught "betwixt and between": "Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence," and when in the liminal period individuals "are at once no longer classified and not yet classified" (1967, 93–110).

This description of liminality captures essential aspects of the individuals' plight. They are in the process of exiting from strict religion, but because

of their unfamiliarity with their new surroundings and of the internalization of their religious upbringing, they are still struggling with forging their new selves. There is a crucial difference, however, between Turner's original usage of the term "liminality," for which he is remembered, and the way I use it here.

Whereas Turner views the liminal as a temporary situation, I use it to refer to a long-term or even permanent condition.[4] It is of course possible that the individuals will at some future time emerge from this liminal state to be completely disconnected from their religious backgrounds, but my research shows that this state of liminality is more than the temporary situation Turner describes. But even according to Turner there are instances of the "institutionalization of liminality," where it becomes a permanent condition, such as in various monastic and millenarian religions (1969, 107, 111). Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell (2012) also use the term "liminal" to refer to a long-term condition rather than a temporary state. My use of the term "liminal" to describe a long-lasting or permanent in-between state is somewhat unusual but warranted and helpful.

My divergence from Turner does not relate merely to whether liminality is temporary or permanent. More significantly, we have a fundamentally different view of the nature of liminality. Turner sees it as liberating, assisting individuals in moving from one state to the next, becoming ever more integrated into their original society. I emphasize the way that individuals' capacity for change is fundamentally circumscribed and limited. People are not completely able to reinvent themselves. They can make great strides, but they will forever be connected to their past.

I open this chapter with my personal story for two reasons. First, my background is not incidental to my research. Having been raised in the Lubavitch community, I have intimate knowledge of its symbols and language, its practices and beliefs, and its educational system. This not only made it possible for me to understand various dynamics and realities, but it also helped me gain the trust of my Lubavitch interviewees and eased communication with them. This knowledge also helped with my Satmar interviewees, who share much in common with the Lubavitchers, including their use of the Yiddish language. Likewise, Ebaugh (1988a) argues that being an ex-nun was essential for gaining access to other nuns in cloistered convents and for interpreting the information gathered.

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4. The idea of liminality as it is being used here is similar to Georg Simmel's (1908) idea of the stranger and to Robert E. Park's idea of the "marginal man." As Park notes, "There are no doubt periods of transition and crisis in the lives of most of us that are comparable with those which the immigrant experiences when he leaves home to seek his fortune in a strange country. But in the case of the marginal man the period of crisis is relatively permanent. . . . [He] is one who lives in two worlds, in both of which he is more or less of a stranger" (1928, 893).

But the second reason I begin with my own background is that I want to lay my cards on the table. My personal relationship to this topic, in addition to aiding my research, also poses a danger that I project my personal experiences onto the interviewees. I take seriously Janja Lalich's (2001) warnings about reflexivity bias when someone studies the group of which he or she was formerly a member. Lalich argues that former members have an advantage in knowing the language of the group, but they must be open about their former membership and experiences and use rigorous research methods, especially triangulation of sources, to prevent their own biases from entering the research. I have taken all these precautions for this study.

I went through the exit process and developed my own perspective on the issues that shaped my own experiences. At the same time, when I began this research, I did not have an agenda, and I have strived to allow the evidence to lead wherever it may. The fact that I grew up ultra-Orthodox and exited helped, in the sense that it made the interviewees feel a connection with me that encouraged them to join my study and to speak freely without needing to translate the Yiddish and Hebrew words, ideas, and sources in their natural speech.

Nonetheless, there are possible drawbacks to studying something that one is very close to personally. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed, "The stranger often learns important truths in the home of his host that the latter would perhaps conceal from a friend; with a stranger one is relieved of obligatory silence; one does not fear his indiscretion because he is passing through" (2000, 14).

Although I found the interviewees quite open and willing to share their experiences, only the Satmars, who knew that I did not come from or know many people inside their community, felt comfortable speaking to me about their own sexual abuse inside their community. (There was one Lubavitch exception to this.) It is possible that few of the Lubavitchers had been abused, but it is also possible that their silence on this sensitive subject may have been in accordance with Tocqueville's observation. Indeed, some of the Satmars saw me as an outsider to their world and were, for example, completely surprised that I spoke Yiddish fluently. Several of them exclaimed, "Lubavitchers know Yiddish?! I never knew that!"

The Language of Exiting

As noted previously, scholars use many different terms to refer to the process of leaving a religious tradition, including "apostasy," "disaffiliation," "disidentification," "leaving," and "exiting"; I use the term "exiting" because it is value neutral and reflects an ongoing process. Within the ultra-Orthodox community there are several phrases in use to refer to exiting the religious community. One of the most popular is to go "off the *derech*," off the path,

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often referred to by community members as being OTD. This expression is certainly not neutral, since it assumes that there is a single path and those who deviate from it are off that path, and it negatively judges those who do so. Even though this phrase is problematic, some within the exiter community use it to refer to themselves, although others reject its use. One Satmar interviewee told me that for a long time he was not sure what OTD meant; he thought it stood for "out the door."

Inside the Lubavitch and Satmar communities, exiters are described with various epithets. There are several terms popular among Satmars for exiters: *shaygets* (a derogatory term for a non-Jew), *farforin* (a person who has veered off), and *mishches* (a person who is spoiled or rotten). Lubavitchers often call exiters "bums." Lubavitchers also often describe exiters as "going *frai*," a Yiddish word derived from German, meaning "free." This phrase may sound less judgmental, or possibly even value neutral, until the true meaning of the word "free" in this context is understood. "Free" is not associated with a free spirit or free as a bird but rather with someone who is free from "the yoke of the sovereignty of heaven" (*oil malchus shamayim*). The person exiting is devoid of the constraining force of Jewish law and tradition and is as depraved as an animal wholly at the mercy of its natural passions.[5]

Although the phrases "off the *derech*" and "going *frai*" have achieved a certain amount of popularity, even among exiters themselves, and thus lost some of their opprobrium—similar to how the terms "Puritan" and "Quaker" have entered mainstream use and lost much of their original sting—I refrain from using them except when quoting from interviewees or the work of other scholars who use the terms.

There are other terms in use that should similarly be eschewed in academic writing about this population. The Hebrew term *yotzim leshe'iela*, "leaving to question," used widely in Israel to describe Jewish religious exiting (riffing on the traditional term *chozrim bi-t'shuva*, "returning in repentance," which describes those who become religious) is never used in Lubavitch or Satmar in America, and it is undesirable from an academic perspective since it places all the focus on questions and thinking. The terms "ex" or "former" are likewise unsuitable, since they imply that the separation is complete and final, an implication this book challenges. "Exiters," al-

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5. This meaning of freedom based on religious constraint recalls the Puritan leader John Winthrop's contrast between two kinds of liberty: "There is a liberty of corrupt nature, which is affected both by men and beasts, to do what they list; and this liberty is inconsistent with authority, impatient of all restraint. . . . 'Tis the grand enemy of truth and peace, and all the ordinances of God are bent against it. But there is a civil, a moral, a federal liberty, which is the proper end and object of authority; it is a liberty for that only which is just and good; for this liberty you are to stand with the hazards of your very lives" (quoted in Mather 1820, 116–117).

though somewhat clunky, may be the preferred term because it is value neutral and leaves open the question of when they exited and whether they exited completely.[6]

It is important also to distinguish these interviewees, who are genuine religious exiters, from rebellious teens, often referred to in the Orthodox world as "at-risk" teens and conflated with exiters. Although some of those teens may decide eventually to leave the community for good, many of them end up returning once they have had time to consider their situation. Almost none of the interviewees in this study are in their teens (the average age is twenty-five), and they have thus had many years to consider returning to the community but have not done so.

Similarly, the exiters in this study are distinct from both members of the ultra-Orthodox community who live slightly "modern" lives while still considering themselves full members of their community and those members of the ultra-Orthodox community who are secretly irreligious and are the focus of Hella Winston's (2005, 2006) work. Like rebellious teens, members of those populations might eventually actually exit publicly, but it is much more likely that most of them will not because of the high costs involved. As William Shaffir (1998) observed, many think about exiting but few do.

Concerning language and terminology, throughout this study, individuals who grew up Satmar or Lubavitch are referred to as "Satmar interviewees" and "Lubavitch interviewees," respectively, even though they may no longer identify themselves with their community of origin. This was done to avoid the need to resort to a different term that would either be cumbersome or inappropriately binary, such as "former Lubavitcher" or "interviewee who was raised Lubavitch." In fact, however, some interviewees still refer to themselves as Lubavitch or Satmar, even while talking about their exit process.

In regard to non-English usages in this study, throughout the book there are quotations that include Yiddish, Hebrew, and Aramaic words, which I explain in brackets in the text. These are not necessarily exact translations but rather English renderings intended to assist the reader who is unfamiliar with these terms and concepts. One of the difficulties with these translations is that certain words are used, often by the same individual, to refer to different things.

For example, the term *frum* can mean "religious," "pious," "Orthodox," or "ultra-Orthodox." I provide the most appropriate meaning based on the

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6. Fishel Schneerson (1922), a relative of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who became a physician and professor of psychology in Europe before World War II, wrote a semibiographical novel titled *Chaim Gravitzer* about a Lubavitch man who struggles with his faith. The author refers to his protagonist as "the fallen *Hasid*." However, I have never heard anyone use this appellation to describe contemporary exiters, and I am not sure if it was a common one at that time or merely the author's own literary flourish.

context. Transliterations always reflect the usage of the individual being quoted or, in my own descriptions of the community, the common usage of that community. Yiddish and Hebrew are pronounced differently in different communities—the Satmar community, which derives from Hungary, pronounces Yiddish and Hebrew differently than the Lubavitch community, which derives from Russia—and more progressive Jewish communities today often adopt an Americanized Israeli-Sephardic pronunciation. An individual may even vacillate between two different pronunciations, which is reflected as well in my transliterations. While I do not focus on this feature of their speech, those familiar with different pronunciations may note this aspect of liminality in the speech patterns of the interviewees.

The term "post-exit" is sometimes used. It does not refer to the end of a process but rather to the initiation of the visible stages of the process of exiting—the point at which an individual has made a visible break with his or her community of origin.

Typologies of Exiters

All the interviewees exhibit a range of degrees to which they have actually replaced, adapted, or harmonized old communal goals and means with newfound personal goals and means. I divide them into three categories: trapped, hybrid, and disconnected.

Those exiters who are trapped appear to be and believe themselves for the most part to be functioning members of secular society, albeit facing some challenges. On closer analysis, however, they are unable to substantially replace the goals and means of their community, despite having exited. Rather, they feel they are stuck, living in a no-man's-land, as it were, uncomfortable and constantly struggling with the alternative goals and means that they find in the outside world. In other words, they either retain elements of the means and goals from their original community or struggle to adopt new ones. Trapped exiters carry over many aspects of their upbringing, but the key factor in this classification is not the number of those holdovers but the level of doubt and uncertainty that they inspire.

Exiters who are hybrids adopt new goals and means while simultaneously incorporating a limited amount of their former community's means and/or goals into their new lives.[7] Again, while hybrids tend to carry over less from their former communities, the key factor in determining whether

7. Naomi Ragen (2013), in her recent novel *The Sisters Weiss*, dramatizes the concept of a hybrid exiter in the character of Rivka, who runs away from her ultra-Orthodox upbringing and promptly abandons almost all Jewish observances. Over the next three years, as a single parent, she realizes that there were many Jewish practices, such as keeping kosher and observing the Sabbath and Jewish festivals, that she cherishes. She reinstitutes them for her sake and for the education of her young son.

they are hybrid or trapped is how well-adjusted they are in their new lives. For instance, their classification does not depend on whether they still read the ultra-Orthodox press or visit their old neighborhood but on what effect such actions have on their lives. Hybrids may be curious to read the ultra-Orthodox press and may enjoy visiting friends or family still in the community. But trapped exiters feel a consuming need to keep up with all the goings on in the ultra-Orthodox world, and visits to the community can leave them in tremendous pain, tearing open deep wounds and causing them to relive their earlier internal debates and religious doubts.

Thus, for example, numerous people have managed to use aspects of their former life, potentially aspects they feel deeply attached to, as a way of making a living, such as a journalist who writes about his old community or someone who takes his rabbinic ordination and becomes a rabbi in a more liberal denomination of Judaism. These individuals have managed to take a part of their former life and use it constructively to assist them in their new life, and these continued attachments are not disturbing or anxiety inducing. Thus, they are hybrids. Hybrid exiters successfully incorporate aspects of their old lives into their new lives. A trapped exiter, by contrast, may find it too emotionally or psychologically unsettling to use his rabbinic ordination to work in a liberal synagogue.

Exiters who are disconnected appear on the surface to have replaced all of the goals and means of their former community with new ones, without any residual effects. On closer analysis, however, they still struggle with their attraction to the old goals and means. Disconnection may be thought of as a kind of "reaction formation" (Freud [1905] 1962, 44–45), which takes the appearance of complete separation while inspiring significant preoccupation with their upbringing. Although the hybrids may visibly incorporate aspects of their upbringing into their new life, this plays a smaller role and is less mentally consuming than the role that the community plays in the life of disconnected people who actively resist their upbringing and repress feelings and behaviors that express a connection to it. Disconnection, my research shows, is more taxing to maintain.

Within these three subcategories of exiters, there inevitably are further gradations. Among trapped and disconnected exiters, gradations are based on two factors: the exiter's self-awareness and the exiter's ability to control or change his or her situation. These do not necessarily go hand in hand. Among hybrids, gradations relate to how well-adjusted the exiter is and, on a more superficial level, the frequency of residual effects from the former communities incorporated into his or her new life; again, these two do not necessarily go hand in hand.

Since this study does not include longitudinal data, it is impossible to determine whether the categories of "trapped," "hybrid," and "disconnected" represent types of exiters or stages that exiters go through. In other words, it

is impossible to address whether exiters move from one of these to another over time or whether these are essential types of exiters. Thus, these categories are presented here as "processes" or "modes of being," ways that exiters make sense of their experiences and handle the contradictions they contain rather than as types or stages. It is possible that particular exiters move from one to another, and it is also possible that they stay where they are, but the data can describe only where they are currently.

The vast majority are best described as hybrids. Several are best described as trapped, and several as disconnected. There are two methodological reasons that disconnected exiters are not well represented in my sample. First, twenty-four interviewees were recruited through Footsteps, a New York–based nonprofit organization that promotes the healthy engagement with one's past that is characteristic of hybrids rather than disconnected exiters. Second, disconnected exiters tend to cut ties to the very networks that allowed me access to a sample of exiters. Furthermore, part of their disconnection may be a disinclination to discuss their past.

There are also two possible reasons that trapped exiters may be underrepresented in my sample. First, though their ties to their former community tend to be stronger than those of hybrids, they may experience those ties both as more important to them and at greater risk of being lost. Therefore, they have a heightened fear of exposure through participation in a study of exiters. I encountered such fear several times while speaking with potential interviewees. Second, trapped exiters experience considerable suffering from being trapped. They know that an interview is not therapy, and they do not wish to talk about their suffering with someone who, from their perspective, is ill equipped to handle such a conversation. I also encountered this concern while speaking with potential interviewees.

I use the term "liminality" to refer to the position of all interviewees (i.e., "between two worlds" and not completely a part of either), whereas I use the term "hybrid" to refer to a subset of interviewees. Furthermore, the term "hybrid" is used to refer to interviewees who employ a particular approach for coping with their liminality (i.e., they incorporate elements of their upbringing with elements from the outside world). Chapter 5 explores the strategies that hybrids use.

Background

The Lubavitch and Satmar Communities

Ultra-Orthodox Judaism is composed of numerous communities, often profoundly different from one another. The most basic division among these communities is between Hasidic and non-Hasidic groups. This book deals with the Lubavitch and Satmar communities, both of which belong to the

Hasidic movement. Lubavitch, also known as Chabad,[8] and Satmar are two of the largest Hasidic communities, each with its own school systems, summer camps, synagogues, charitable organizations, publishing houses, kosher-certification organizations, and other community institutions, as well as community-mandated distinct dress codes and rigidly defined ways of life. Since there is no official membership roster or census, the precise numbers of Lubavitchers and Satmars throughout the world are unknown, but according to Marcin Wodzinski (2018, 198–199), on the basis of his analysis of the respective community phone books and an estimate that the average size of a Hasidic household is 5.5 persons, there are 16,376 Lubavitch households (with roughly 90,068 people) and 26,078 Satmar households (with roughly 143,429 people).[9]

Hasidic communities observe the strictures of Jewish law (*halacha*) while also maintaining distinct Hasidic beliefs and rituals. Hasidic communities revere a leader called a "rebbe" who is believed to possess great spiritual powers. In addition to fulfilling all the Jewish commandments (*mitzvos*), the central practice of being a Hasid is connecting to the rebbe, following his every directive scrupulously, and studying his teachings diligently.[10] Hasidim believe that rebbes have unique spiritual powers that separate them from the rest of humanity (a textbook case of what Max Weber [1978] labeled "charisma") and that these powers give rebbes the ability to provide blessings for physical, financial, and spiritual well-being (see *Wonders and Miracles* 1993).[11]

Within Lubavitch it is believed that a rebbe is "the essence of God clothed in a body" (M. Schneerson [1950] 1991, 511). Some Lubavitchers took this to mean that the Rebbe (that is, the last Lubavitcher Rebbe, who died in 1994 and is commonly referred to simply as "the Rebbe") was in fact God, but this does not seem to have been the original intent of the Rebbe's words when he wrote them about his father-in-law and predecessor. Its meaning seems to be that all

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8. The term "Lubavitch," like the term "Satmar," refers to the city in Europe in which the community is understood to originate. "Chabad" is a transliteration of a Hebrew acronym *chochmah, binah, da'at*, which describes core values of the community. Lubavitch emissaries on college campuses and around the world commonly refer to their movement as "Chabad," but within the community itself, "Lubavitch" is the more common term in use. Occasionally the two terms are used together as "Chabad-Lubavitch."

9. Some scholars and journalists give much higher estimates for the number of Lubavitchers worldwide, but I believe these numbers are inflated. This may be due to the high visibility of Lubavitchers around the world, or the higher estimates may include those who attend Lubavitch synagogues and programs but are not actual members of the movement.

10. For an analysis of the status of the rebbe in Hasidic culture, see Green (1977); Dresner (1987); and Lamm (1999).

11. It is significant that contemporary Lubavitchers focus on the Rebbe's miraculous powers since historically miracles did not play a significant role in Lubavitch life. As Louis Jacobs notes, "It is . . . true that in some versions of Hasidism—Kotz and Habad [Lubavitch], for example—the miracles aspects of zaddikism [devotion to a saintly leader] are relegated to the background" (1990, 100).

humans have a spark of the divine inside them, but in the case of a rebbe this spark is not covered over by his physical existence. Maybe the best expression of how Lubavitchers feel about their Rebbe is that before his passing, and for a period afterward, many, if not all, believed he was the Messiah. Some continue to believe so to this day—more than two decades after his passing.[12]

One aspect of Lubavitch life that is not well known outside the community, and one that is shared with Satmar, is the ban on most secular pursuits, including secular books, television,[13] movies, and non-Hasidic music. This is not to say that all members of the community abide by such prohibitions. There are certainly some, if not many, in the community who quietly violate the rules and are still members in good standing. Nonetheless, the facts that there are rules against such behavior and that those who break the rules know that they are doing so influence the nature of the community.

Most interviewees grew up in homes that took these rules seriously, while several were raised in more permissive homes. However, even those raised in the permissive homes were well aware of the community's rules and the negative attitude toward secular pursuits embodied in these prohibitions.

The ban on secular pursuits includes discouraging Hasidic Jews from obtaining a secular education.[14] In practice, most elementary and high schools for girls do teach secular subjects such as English, mathematics, science, and social studies. However, many elementary and high schools for boys do not teach any of these subjects. The entire day is devoted to learning religious subjects, such as the Bible, the Talmud, Jewish law, and Jewish mysticism. In addition, yeshivas (rabbinical schools for men) and most seminaries (post–high school educational institutions for women) do not teach basic secular studies.

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12. For a discussion of Lubavitch Messianism, see Shaffir 1993; S. Heilman 1994; Elior 1998; Berger 2001; Schochet 2001; Student 2002; Dalfin 2002; C. Rapoport 2002; Singer 2003; Kravel-Tovi and Bilu 2008; Wolfson 2009; and Dein 2012. This is by no means a complete bibliography but includes Lubavitch as well as other Orthodox perspectives, along with Jewish mystical and sociological scholarship on the subject.

13. One example of the Lubavitcher Rebbe warning his followers of the dangers of television is the following: "Today through television one brings inside the home the church, the priest, and the cross, Heaven forbid" (M. Schneerson [1982] 2006, 460). The first Satmar Rebbe viewed television as "Satan's domain" (see Rabinowicz 2000, 218). For details of how some in the Satmar Hasidic community of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, circumvented their community's ban on television, see Mintz 1994, 182–183.

14. Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein (2014) argue that after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 c.e. the Jewish religion emphasized literacy, the reading of the Torah, and prayers, so Jews invested in literacy, which was expensive, and this literacy allowed them to obtain higher-paying urban jobs and move away from farming. If this argument is true, it is ironic that today in ultra-Orthodox communities, as a result of religious convictions opposing secular studies, they are unprepared to compete in the job market and often suffer economically.

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Furthermore, even when secular subjects are taught in elementary and high school, teachers and parents often make it clear to students that such subjects are less important than religious ones. As a matter of principle, the Lubavitcher Rebbe was staunchly opposed to his followers attending university. This policy of opposition to secular education had a direct influence on the interviewees' knowledge of secular studies and hence their ability once they exited the community to attend college and pursue successful careers.

In most Satmar schools, both girls and boys ostensibly receive rudimentary instruction in secular subjects a few hours per day, but, generally speaking, it is completely ineffective. There is also a total lack of engagement in Satmar schools with aspects of life that are deemed secular. As one Satmar Hasid writing under the nom de plume Katla Kanya (the harvester of reeds, a rabbinic appellation connoting the everyman) lamented,

> What we forget is that when we speak about children not learning secular studies, this really means that entire subjects are not taught to them at all. Zero. Nada. I am referring to those sorts of subjects and activities that are learned and taught in normal schools and that are a fundamental aspect of elementary school training, even though they are not taught out of a textbook. I mean such things as shapes, colors, human anatomy, health, hygiene, germs, allergies, how to brush your teeth, communicating with others, the economy, the environment, sports, painting, cooking, baking, analyzing a picture, visiting museums and other interesting places, and other similar activities that young children learn and thereby broaden their minds through play and activities. (2018, 32–33)[15]

Several interviewees reported that their secular classes were "a complete joke," a time to unwind from the stressful day of religious instruction, and it seems that parents and administrators are aware of this situation and do nothing to improve it. This view is supported by the experience of Gerry Albarelli, a non-Jewish teacher who taught secular studies in Satmar for five years: "English [studies] was seen as a threat and therefore dismissed as a waste of time. Boys may have been told to respect their English teachers, but it was also conveyed to them at home and by the rabbis that the English teachers were not quite worthy of respect" (2000, 35).

The secular education provided in Hasidic schools is so poor that a New York–based grassroots organization called Young Advocates for Fair Education (YAFFED) is campaigning to raise the educational standards of these schools and is even pursuing legal action against the state agencies responsible

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15. I thank my brother, Rabbi Yossi Newfield, for bringing this source to my attention and for translating it.

for overseeing nonpublic schools for failing to ensure that these schools provide the legally required "substantially equivalent" education offered in public schools (see Partlan et al. 2017, 7). YAFFED has composed a list of thirty-nine ultra-Orthodox schools in Brooklyn that are the worst offenders. Four Lubavitch schools are on the list, including Educational Institute Oholei Torah, the flagship Lubavitch boys school in Crown Heights, and eight Satmar schools, six of which are named the United Talmudical Academy Torah V'Yirah, located in the Williamsburg and Borough Park sections of Brooklyn (73–74). Many interviewees are the products of these schools.

YAFFED's activities have stirred up a great deal of opposition within these communities, as can be seen in the more than sixty comments on a Lubavitch website, *COLlive.com*, responding to a news article about YAFFED's activities. The comments are highly instructive in terms of the derision some members of the community feel toward secular education as well as the fear it arouses in them. For example, numerous Lubavitchers, whose ancestors emigrated from the Soviet Union and who were raised on stories of the evils of communism, implausibly associated YAFFED with the Yevsektzia, the Jewish Sections of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, remembered for trying to forcefully destroy all the institutions of organized Jewish life in the Soviet Union.[16]

These policies discouraging secular education often lead to low economic attainment and sometimes poverty. For example, as the journalist Sam Roberts (2011) reported, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Kiryas Joel, one of the two main locations of the Satmar community, has the highest percentage of poverty among the thirty-seven hundred villages, towns, or cities in the United States that have more than ten thousand people.[17]

Global Lubavitch and Shtetl Satmar

As Wright (1984) points out, the nature of the community one is exiting and the relationship it has to the broader society have a profound effect on the exit process itself. Although it is beyond the scope of this work to give a de-

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16. As one Lubavitcher commented on the *COLlive* website, "Education???? People, do you realize that our forefathers in Russia went on real Messirus Nefesh [self-sacrifice] to be spared from a few hours of secular education? The public education system needs to be examined for producing a generation of savages who have no respect for human life. I can't believe people are falling for this Yevsektzia Yaffed!!" (Anonymous 2015). For a detailed analysis of the history of the Yevsektzia, see Gitelman 1972.

17. These statistics are based on per capita income. Given that Hasidim tend to have very large families, larger incomes appear far smaller. As Frieda Vizel (2018) has argued and many Hasidim have asserted in private conversation, this statistic is questionable because it relies on Hasidim's self-reported income, and informal Hasidic social networks allow them to flourish economically despite their lack of secular education. Further study is needed to verify the impact of the lack of secular education on Hasidic household incomes.

tailed analysis comparing these two communities, I briefly note several significant areas of difference. This aids in explaining why the two communities respond somewhat differently to exiters. In many ways the two are very similar: They are both Hasidic and believe in the essential importance of a rebbe for their spiritual fulfillment; they both place great stress on the importance of religious conformity for spiritual fulfillment and community acceptance; and they both minimize secular educational and recreational pursuits. Nonetheless, there are significant differences.

Lubavitch and Satmar both mandate explicit codes of "modest" dress for both men and women, although the Satmar requirements are significantly more extensive and restrictive. Men in both communities are required to wear a yarmulke at all times, as well as ritual fringes (tzitzis). They also tend to wear conservative clothes, such as white dress shirts and dark slacks, rather than jeans and T-shirts. Furthermore, the men in these communities are prohibited from shaving or even trimming their beards.[18] Lubavitch men wear black fedoras and dark sport coats when in public; Satmar men similarly wear distinctive hats and long, black coats. Women in both communities are prohibited from wearing pants, skirts above the knees, sleeves that are short enough to reveal the elbows, and blouses that expose the collarbone. Married women are required to cover their heads with a *sheitel*.

Satmar has many more rules. In addition to these general requirements, Satmar demands that girls and women wear only dark, usually gray or black, clothing, well tailored but never tight fitting. Sheer or clinging fabrics are prohibited. Women are also required to wear thick, opaque, seamed stockings (known as Palm stockings).[19] Girls and single women wear short hairstyles. Married women are required to shave their heads after their wedding and wear not only a wig but also a hat or some other kind of covering on top of it. The Satmar community of Kiryas Joel banned girls from wearing makeup, even at weddings, on pain of being expelled from school (see Rosenberg 2014 for a reproduction of the public notice of this ban).[20]

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18. For an extensive discussion of the Jewish legal requirement for men to maintain a full beard and for its mystical significance and its association with divine blessings, see Wiener 2006.

19. According to Dovid Meisels (2011), a committed Satmar Hasid, Reb Yoel Teitelbaum was personally involved in designing the stockings to ensure that they were completely opaque. Reb Yoel personally tested the potential fabrics by placing them on his arm and stretching them to see if the hair on his arm was visible. He settled on a fabric that was ninety denier. ("Reb" is a colloquial Yiddish diminutive honorific for rabbi.)

20. From 2004 to 2016, Shmarya Rosenberg published FailedMessiah.com, a website that focused on scandals and alleged wrongdoings within ultra-Orthodox communities. I use this website as a reference several times in this book, but only for its digital presentation of primary sources that are not otherwise easily accessible, such as scanned versions of a local Yiddish newspaper or of a leaflet distributed in the community. These references are not meant to refer to his comments or analysis but to the sources alone.

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Both communities maintain strict gender segregation, but Satmar's is much more severe. Both communities separate boys and girls and men and women in schools, summer camps, and prayer services. Men and women are forbidden to socialize in public or at home. Even casual conversation between the sexes is strongly discouraged. But Satmar goes further. For example, the Central Rabbinical Congress of the United States and Canada (CRC), a rabbinic organization founded by Reb Yoel Teitelbaum, the first Satmar Rebbe, and largely run by Satmars today, issued a ruling that all buses used by community members must be gender segregated with men on one side and women on the other with a divider (*mechitza*) between them; if that is not possible, the men should sit in the front, and the women, in the back.

The additional stringency on the part of Satmar with regard to the mixing of the sexes can also be seen in the rules for dating in both communities. Lubavitch permits young men and women to date for a brief period of time, usually a few weeks to a few months before getting engaged, going out together in public areas such as hotel lobbies or bowling alleys; all physical contact is strictly forbidden, but the prospective couple is encouraged to talk and spend time together. In Satmar the prospective bride and groom meet once, perhaps twice, in the home of one of their parents, for an hour or so of "private" conversation, with the parents in the other room waiting for the good news that "It's a match!"[21]

A similar reflection of Satmar's pattern of greater restrictiveness can be seen in the curriculum of religious instruction of girls at the community-run schools. Although Lubavitch girls do not study the same classical rabbinic source, the Talmud, that boys do, the girls are taught a strong curriculum of Bible, Hasidic philosophy, Jewish law, and some rabbinic texts, because the Lubavitcher Rebbe believed it was important to teach these subjects to girls.

In Satmar, the girls are taught far less. They are not given an actual Bible in Hebrew and learn instead from photocopies of Yiddish paraphrases of the Bible. They also spend a great deal of time learning how to cook and sew. This discrepancy in female education is based on the different beliefs of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and Reb Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar regarding teaching Judaism to girls. The Lubavitcher Rebbe believed that it was essential for women to have a strong Jewish education to fulfill their roles as homemakers, teachers of young children, and future emissaries throughout the world dedicated to Jewish outreach. Reb Yoel Teitelbaum believed it was very dangerous to teach girls Torah and that the Torah needed to be protected from them (see Fuchs 2014).

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21. According to Meisels, Reb Yoel Teitelbaum was opposed to "the *chosson* [groom] spend[ing] time with the *kallah* [bride] before and after the engagement" (2011, 364).