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*Degrees of Separation: Identity Formation while Leaving  
Ultra-Orthodox Judaism* by Schneur Zalman Newfield (review)

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about Christian Spaniards assuming newly discovered Jewish and converso roots, the art and identity of the renowned German artist Wolf Vostell who joined together the Holocaust with the traumas of Spanish Jews, and Spanish artist Daniel Quintero's portraits that trace Sepharad.

There are many reasons the authors feature cultural expression and especially scholarship about post-Holocaust heritagization throughout the book. Absence (of Jews or their material remnants), the commodification of memory, and muse-umization are some salient parallels between the story of a Spain vacated of its Jews and Jewishness and the aftermath of genocide in Europe. What also makes this referencing necessary is the relative lack of research on the current recovery of Jewish Spain until now, with such key exceptions as Tabea Linhard's scholarship. *The Memory Work of Jewish Spain* does more than fill a crucial gap. It is a breakthrough in both Spanish and Jewish studies, modeling new paths in memory and heritage studies with its thorough and illuminating assessment of Spain's current engagement with its Jewish past.

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Schneur Zalman Newfield. *Degrees of Separation: Identity Formation while Leaving Ultra-Orthodox Judaism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020. 210 pp.

The title of Schneur Zalman Newfield's text, *Degrees of Separation: Identity Formation while Leaving Ultra-Orthodox Judaism*, speaks to the nuance and subtlety with which he explores his subject matter. Newfield identifies and analyzes the many features and facets that inform "exit narratives," the term he offers to describe the process of departure from the ultra-Orthodox community in which one has been raised. The phrase "exit narratives" is one that he applies bi-directionally—as a description of the action according to those who remain in the community, and also as the recounting narrated by the "exiters" themselves.

Newfield's book focuses on the narratives of seventy-four exiters from the two largest ultra-Orthodox communities, Lubavitch and Satmar. Both communities are Hasidic; the leadership of both centers on a revered single figurehead, a "rebbe"; both adhere to strict definitions of religious conformity, and both minimize contact with the secular world. Important differences separate these two communities, and Newfield takes care to enumerate them: the Satmar community has more rules governing modest and appropriate dress, especially for women and girls; education for girls is more restrictive; gender segregation is more extreme; and the match-making process that leads to marriage is more tightly controlled and on a more compressed schedule. These differences—and similarities—lead to interesting and telling overlaps and distinctions in exit narratives and community explanation and justification.

## Book Reviews

Importantly, the author was himself raised in the Lubavitch community, learned to read English by himself, and eventually enrolled in Brooklyn College, where he moved away from the practices of the community in which he had been raised. The great advantage of this personal background is that it helps Newfield gain the trust of his subjects. His familiarity with Yiddish, his firsthand experience as an insider within an ultra-Orthodox community, and his own identity as an “exiter,” offer his interviewees a sense of ease and possibly gain him greater access to more people and more subject areas. To his credit, Newfield explicitly acknowledges the challenge that this familiarity also presents: that personal biases can be inadvertently intertwined with and influence scholarly analysis. Newfield identifies this danger and stays aware of it; I believe he fully succeeds in avoiding any pitfalls that might be associated with it.

*Degrees of Separation* fills a significant scholarly gap by researching and analyzing the “exit process for those exiting ultra-Orthodoxy” (4). There has been growing interest in the topic, in large part fed by essays published in journalistic venues, online, and in popular presses, and also because of hit miniseries such as Netflix’s *Unorthodox*. Scholarship studying the phenomenon of leave-taking, however, has lagged. One of Newfield’s great contributions to the broader field is his carefully worked-out examination of the “patterns among the experiences of exiters, including the ways that the old life continues within the new” (5). Departure and reinvention from the Satmar and Lubavitch communities demand a transformation that is far more encompassing than suggested by a more typical tale of lapsed religious practice, or an anticonversion narrative.

In the first chapter of the volume, Newfield identifies three types of exiters, those who feel trapped, “unable to substantially replace the goals and means of their community, despite having exited” (12); those who are hybrid, who “adopt new goals and means while simultaneously incorporating a limited amount of their former community’s means and/or goals into their new lives” (12); and those who are disconnected, who seemingly have “replaced all the goals and means of their former community with new ones” but who in fact struggle to maintain that perception (13). *Degrees of Separation* concentrates on the sustained sense of in-betweenness that exiters experience, which is defined by the influence and incorporation of traits and practices from their upbringing that influence their post-Orthodox lives.

The volume offers readers and scholars a great deal; Newfield’s richly detailed interviews with a substantial number of exiters lend depth and strength to his analysis of the patterns of departure. The book’s greatest strength, however, is revealed in its final two chapters: chapter 4, entitled “Habits of Action and Habits of Thought” and chapter 5, “Strategies for Managing Liminality.” Rejecting earlier claims that leaving a religious community is a cut-and-dry transition from one state to another, Newfield makes a powerful case for “liminality” (100), or the retention of significant and persistent habits and ways of thinking that “demonstrate continuity with their religious upbringing” even as exiters no longer identify as members of their native community. These habits often present themselves around food and kashrut; *shukling* or swaying while reading; adhering to ritually informed practices while getting dressed or marking Shabbat as a special day. In the final

chapter of the volume, Newfield considers the strategies that exiters invoke to manage their liminality in maintaining relationships with family members who remain in the ultra-Orthodox community. Two of the most complex strategies involve “a conspiracy of silence,” in which exiters, and often their families, deliberately avoid any discussion of changes in practice or belief systems; and “drawing lines in the sand,” moments when there are explicit negotiations about issues that either side determines to be nonnegotiable, such as marrying a non-Jew. In these two chapters, the project’s originality, impact, and sense of purpose solidifies.

Some areas need more attention in the volume. The most significant of them is the role of gender—how it informs responses to the questions posed by Newfield to his subjects and, indeed, more broadly, how gender plays in the exiting experience overall. Despite this lacuna, the book offers a persuasive and significant interpretation of an increasingly visible phenomenon. Newfield’s overall argument is elegant, powerful, and persuasive: no linear model of religious exiting exists. His research uncovers patterns, gestures, and habits that define and mark shifts away from ultra-Orthodoxy even as they illuminate forms of recovering and maintaining earlier practices.

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Ayala Fader. *Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age*. Princeton Studies in Culture and Technology. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. 270 pp.

In her compelling ethnography, *Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age*, Ayala Fader shines light on the insular world of ultra-Orthodoxy as it navigates challenges sparked by the ubiquity of the Internet in twenty-first-century life. Fader’s analysis unfolds on two fronts. Through deeply personal interviews she reveals the complex stories of individuals whose lives are upended by fervent religious doubt, leading them to find community and self-expression in a digitally mediated online world. In parallel, Fader also voices the perspective of the religious leaders and therapists charged with counseling those in doubt and who uphold the notion that the Internet is a moral threat that must be curtailed to preserve the sanctity of the Jewish soul.

Unlike Jewish skeptics of any previous generation, the “double lifers” at the center of Fader’s work have the Internet—a virtual platform that is at once private and uniquely public—to voice their doubt, externalize it, and pursue answers to their fundamental questions. By connecting anonymously with others, those struggling with doubt create an alternative, digital public that extends well beyond the confines of the ultra-Orthodox communities in which they live. This parallel world, where religious doubt is facilitated by and expanded through technology,