"I Am Not a Palatable Jew":
Jewish Continuity, Identity, and Inheritance Across Generations

"I Am Not a Palatable Jew": Jewish Continuity, Identity, and Inheritance Across Generations

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Dedication:

This thesis is dedicated to the brilliant and resilient Jewish people who came before me and to those who will come after. Most especially, it is dedicated to my grandparents, my Baba, Ziada, Bubby, and Zaidy. You fought so hard for me to be able to write these words. It is not lost on me what a privilege it is that I am proudly Jewish in university or even Jewish in university at all. You fought not only for survival, but also to carry and pass on joy. In moments when it might have seemed easier and definitely safer to hide your Jewishness, you chose instead to live it openly, to teach us how to love our community, honour our history, and carry forward our traditions. I do not have words big enough to capture how proud I am to be your granddaughter, or how deeply I carry your strength with me every single day. I hope this thesis serves, in some small way, to honour all you have given to our family and community.

Table of Contents

Abstract:

This thesis explores Jewish continuity, identity, and inheritance through intergenerational storytelling, ritual practice, and community-based research. Grounded in my own positionality as a Jewish disabled woman and granddaughter of survivors, the work asks: *What does it mean to continue?* How is Jewish knowledge transmitted, embodied, refused, and reimagined across generations within the context of structural antisemitism, diasporic identity, and colonial modernity?

Using a braided theoretical framework that brings Jewish epistemologies into dialogue with Critical Race Theory, decolonial thought, and interpretive phenomenology, this study engages Jewish practices such as Shabbat, challah baking, and Havdalah as both cultural rituals and epistemological methods. Data was gathered through community-based research with members of my own Jewish community, where intergenerational participants shared stories, memories, and reflections on Jewish identity, grief, and continuity.

Findings highlight the persistence of fragmented inheritance, the ongoing negotiation of Jewish identity within and against antisemitic structures, and the centrality of embodied ritual and relational care in sustaining cultural transmission. Themes of refusal, improvisation, and joy emerged alongside grief and loss, underscoring that Jewish continuity is not only survival but an active, creative, and insurgent practice.

This thesis argues that Jewish epistemologies, embodied, dialogical, diasporic, and recursive, offer not only a means of cultural survival but also a methodological intervention for social work and allied fields. By treating memory as responsibility, ritual as theory in motion, and community as co-keeper of knowledge, the work insists that Jewish continuity matters: as love, as refusal, and as a practice of carrying forward futures that honour both rupture and regeneration.

Key words: Jewish continuity; Jewish community; diaspora; intergenerational; embodiment; antisemitism

Prologue: I Bring All of Myself Here

I bring all of myself to this work. Woven through memory, shaped by grief, held together by quiet pride. There are contradictions I carry deep in my body, and questions I still don't have language for. This thesis is not simply an academic document; it is a place of reckoning, a gesture of return, and a commitment to responsibility. I do not arrive here as an outsider peering in. I come from within, from the breath and ache of a people who have endured the unspeakable and who still insist on tenderness and presence. A people who grieve in rhythm, who build in exile, who transform rupture into ritual and celebration, and who continue to make sacred what the world so often tries to render small.

I was raised in the Ottawa Jewish community, a community that is numerically small but relationally expansive. A place where people show up not out of obligation, but out of knowing that we are each other's archive. We are each other's home. I have grown up braided into its rhythms: Hebrew schools and community centres, Shabbat tables filled with laughter and contradiction, the scent of matzah ball soup wafting from a kitchen. My summers were shaped by day camps where Jewish identity was sung into our lungs, my teenage years shaped by working with elders who passed on their stories through gesture and silence. I have mourned alongside others in community where silence said more than language ever could. The traditions and tensions I inherited from these spaces are not accessories to who I am. They are the infrastructure. They taught me what it means to be in community, to be accountable, to bear memory not as burden, but as devotion.

This community raised me not just in the tradition of law and learning, but in the tradition of care and questioning. I was taught that knowledge is not neutral, it is embodied, situated, contested, and alive. I was taught that memory is not just something you preserve, it is something you practice and live, again and again, across generations and time.

I am a Jewish woman. A Jewish disabled woman. A granddaughter of survivors of the Shoah, of expulsion and displacement, of the kinds of systemic erasures designed to unmake people. I carry stories I did not live but that live through me. Stories told and untold. Stories passed down in fragments, in sighs, in mitzvah. Stories half-swallowed in pauses and silences. I come from people who were not supposed to have descendants. And yet here I am writing, learning, asking questions in a language that, at various points in history, has been banned, exiled, or nearly forgotten. This is a special honour, and it is often paralyzing. I am reminded that I am here because others could not be… because others made sure that I could be.

This work is not abstract. It is not detached theory. It is personal. It is, at once, painful and deeply joyful. This thesis emerged in many ways more out of fear than pride. I have sat across from my grandparents trying to explain this project, only to watch their brows furrow with concern, their eyes grow heavy. I have heard them say, *Be careful. It is a beautiful thing that you are proudly Jewish, but be careful.* There is love in their caution. There is grief in their warning. There is

history behind their voices. And I carry that, too. To write about Jewish futures, I must speak honestly about the Jewish present and about the violences, both subtle and explicit, that seek to unravel that future before it can be imagined.

Antisemitism is not theoretical in my life. It is real. It is intimate. It is persistent. It is bomb threats at the Jewish Community Center where I worked. It is swastikas scrawled on the door of my family home. It is a continuous news feed of violent assaults across the globe. It is the moment I name my Jewishness in an academic space and watch the air shift, watch people wait suspiciously for me to say what will confirm their worst assumptions. It is being asked to prove my morality, my politics, and my grief. It is being treated as suspect in classrooms and workplaces and asked to justify not just my ideas, but my presence. It is a lifetime of being told I'm "too sensitive," of being present with folks who wrap their dismissal in politeness: "*They didn't mean it that way." "Don't take it personally." "Don't make it about you."* These adaptations, these survival instincts have been necessary, but they do not serve me or my community. They make me small. And I am descended from people who refused to be small.

My ancestors did not survive by apologizing for their existence. They did not whisper their prayers in secret only for me to mute my voice now. And yet, I am often aware, painfully aware, that my voice is being measured. That every word I write in this thesis might be weaponized, misunderstood, or twisted into justification for the belief that my community is less deserving of care, less entitled to safety, less human. I write knowing that in some rooms, Jewish grief is suspect. I write knowing that I am expected to speak with calculated precision, to avoid upsetting a delicate balance that has already been rigged against Jewish identity. I have written this thesis under the heavy awareness that the worthiness of my community is still up for debate.

This thesis has been one of the hardest undertakings of my life, not only because of its academic demands, but because of what it has asked of me emotionally, spiritually, and ethically. It has required me to be close to the grief of my people and the pain in my own body. To sit with stories that crack us open. To translate sacred, complex, and deeply lived experiences into a language that often feels too narrow to hold them. I have consistently grappled with whether this kind of translation is safe, whether it risks betraying the depth of what was shared with me. So much of what I've been taught in academic spaces feels extractive or violent. To turn community care into "data," to render ritual into "themes," feels, at times, like flattening something that should remain alive. Make palatable what has kept us alive. That discomfort has never left me.

It is for this reason that I have written this thesis in a tone that is intentionally whole and embodied not to soften the pain, but to honour its full weight. To write not just *about* my community, but *with* and *from* it. To allow the cadence of mitzvah, the spiral of memory, and the breath of storytelling to shape the text. I did not and in many ways still do not feel ready for what this work has asked of me. But the people who shared their stories, who braided challah, who lit candles, who sang niggunim, remind me that Jewish knowledge is not only found in books. It lives in bodies, in breath, in rupture, in presence. They reminded me, and I hope will remind you,

that we come from a tradition that does not separate knowing from feeling, or story from question. That is the tradition this work is rooted in.

To speak of Jewish continuity without naming antisemitism would be dishonest. But to speak only of our pain would be another kind of violence. We are not only our wounds. Our deaths are not what make us worthy. Our lives are. Jewish joy, Jewish creativity, Jewish contradiction, Jewish resistance… these are not footnotes. They are the center.

This thesis is, above all, a love letter to the Jewish community that raised me. A community that taught me how to ask hard questions and how to hold contradictions with tenderness. A community that believes in memory as responsibility. Research is so often extractive, built on taking from communities rather than being accountable to them. I refuse to see my community through that lens. This thesis is not an external study; it is not about observation or distance. It is, at its core, a form of offering. A way of giving back to the people and traditions that have shaped me. What has guided me through this year is the notion that this project can nourish rather than deplete. This project allowed me to gather my community, to feed them a Shabbat meal, and to call that research. In this way, the work is not only *for* my community, it is *of* it.

Through this process, I've learned that futurity is inseparable from responsibility. This thesis is how I say thank you. It is how I mourn. It is how I resist. It is how I remain in relationship with those who came before me, and with those who will come after. It is how I carry forward the stories that carried me here.

Situated Knowledge, Diasporic Continuity, and the Ethics of Being With

I hope you will read this writing from a space of tension and promise: the place between rupture and mitzvah, between memory and futurity, between personal grief and collective imagining. It is not only a study of intergenerational storytelling and cultural transmission, but a practice of Jewish continuity, one that resists nostalgia in favour of relation, that treats memory as an act of responsibility rather than simple preservation. This research is grounded in the belief that to ask how Jewish knowledge is held, transformed, and transmitted is to ask how a people survive without surrendering themselves, how they remember without becoming frozen in the past, how they dream without forgetting what has already been lost, and how they truly live.

At its heart, this thesis asks: what does it mean to continue? How is Jewish knowledge held, inherited, transformed, and refused in a world shaped by structural antisemitism, epistemic injustice, and the ongoing logics of colonial modernity? How might rituals like Shabbat and acts of intergenerational storytelling function not merely as cultural traditions, but as theoretical, ethical, and political practices? What happens when we centre Jewish ways of knowing in the realm of research, not as objects of inquiry, but as epistemic and methodological grounds? This study turns toward Jewish tradition as a form of knowledge in motion. Shabbat, Havdalah, challah baking, and storytelling are examined as living technologies of memory and care, what Ursula Franklin (1990, 2014) describes as "holistic technologies": systems and practices shaped not only by their function, but by their embedded values and relationships.

This work also emerges from and contributes to the field of social work, which is deeply implicated in questions of relational responsibility, collective care, and the ethical transmission of knowledge. Social work, particularly in its community-based and critical forms, asks us to consider how we support lives lived, how we honour intergenerational experience, and how we resist systems of disappearance and erasure. This thesis offers Jewish cultural practice as a methodological intervention, an offering of embodied, diasporic approaches to care, knowledge, and continuity.

First, I must thank deeply and completely my community, the truly incredible participants in this study for welcoming me and each other into their stories. Stories are sacred and hold enormous weight; they are offerings of self, memory, and hope. To be invited into such intimate, vulnerable, and powerful spaces of remembering is an immense privilege. Each participant brought their words, laughter, hesitations, songs, and silences. Their willingness to engage across generations, to wrestle with complexity, and to show up with honesty and care formed the very heart of this project. This thesis would not exist without their wisdom, generosity, and courage. I carry their words with reverence and gratitude.

The participants in this project were not distant; they are mine and each other's community. Many of us have shared Shabbat meals long before the first recording of this project. Some are

elders who taught me and other participants as children; others are peers and friends. This is fundamental to the nature of this research. The relationships did not begin with the research, and they will not end with it. This work is embedded in what Miranda Fricker (2007) would describe as epistemic trust, and is grounded in forms of relationality described across Indigenous, Black feminist, and diasporic scholarship. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) emphasizes that within Indigenous epistemologies, knowledge is not abstracted from the people or lands it emerges from, but is transmitted through reciprocal, intergenerational, and land-based relationships of care and responsibility. Similarly, Christina Sharpe (2016) writes about "living in the wake" as a way of describing how Black communities forge kinship and care through shared memory, grief, and collective resistance in the aftermath of historical rupture. In diasporic contexts, particularly among communities marked by displacement and loss, scholars such as Marianne Hirsch (2008) describe postmemory as a mode of relation in which the knowledge and lived experiences of previous generations are transmitted affectively and imaginatively, becoming central to identity and community. These frameworks insist that knowledge and relationality cannot be disentangled, that community itself is an epistemological condition. The relations at the heart of this project are therefore not simply contextual, they are methodological, ontological, and ethical.

Working in such close proximity to one's own community requires deep discernment. In research contexts, insider/outsider positionality is framed as a binary, fixed and oppositional. But this framing does not reflect my experience. To accept such a binary is to accept a form of inevitable distance from one's community, a fatalism that mirrors colonial understandings of relationship and care: hierarchical, extractive, and detached. In contrast, my relationship to the Jewish community, and to Jewish notions of care and social work is far less linear. It is more akin to a spiral: always circling back, always arriving differently, always entangled. I will not view my community through the static lens of "insider" or "outsider." Instead, I return to community again and again, in different ways, at different times, carrying different questions. I will not consent to a framing that renders me distant from a community that has formed me through its histories, rituals, ruptures, and joys.

Power does not disappear simply because we share community; it circulates in how we represent, interpret, and frame each other. Rather than situating myself at the threshold of insider/outsider, I commit to an ethic of relationality grounded in the rhythms, responsibilities, and deep knowledges of Jewish communal life. As a researcher, I hold power, and I have sought to engage that power with care and accountability: through participatory design, through sharing drafts and collaborating in analysis, and through inviting feedback and correction. This accountability is rooted in a long-term relational commitment that exceeds far beyond the boundaries of an MSW thesis. The participants in this study are not subjects; they are co-keepers of tradition, co-theorists in practice, and my community. Their presence in this work is grounded in past Shabbat meals and will live into future ones. As Cutcha Risling Baldy (2015) and Tuck and Yang (2014)

remind us, ethical relational research is not extractive; it emerges from reciprocity. This thesis was not a temporary encounter, but a moment in a much longer arc of community connection.

No exploration of cultural continuity can be ethically undertaken without grounding itself in place. This research was conducted from McMaster University in Hamilton, on the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and in the Ottawa Jewish community, on the unceded lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe peoples (Anishinabewaki and Omamiwininiwag). These lands are governed by treaties that have been broken, denied, or ignored, and the knowledge systems that have emerged from them have long been targeted for erasure. To engage in research on these lands is to reckon with the violence and legacy of ongoing colonialism. Decolonization is not a metaphor. It is a material, political, and spiritual project that cannot be reduced to symbolic gestures or abstract acknowledgements (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

This project therefore begins with a commitment to place, as more than geography, as relational context. Place, in this thesis moves beyond a passive backdrop and exists as an active participant in knowledge production. Research conducted on Indigenous land must acknowledge that place is storied, sovereign, and already saturated with meaning. Indigenous scholars such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) emphasize that place-based knowledge is not just about physical territory, but about relationships of care, governance, memory, and reciprocity. For diasporic peoples like the Jewish community, this presents both an ethical tension and an invitation.

Jewish life, too, is profoundly place-based. Though shaped by exile and displacement, Jewish tradition is grounded in land-based traditions and spatial memory: prayers face Jerusalem, agricultural cycles determine holidays, plants found only in one part of the world are held as symbolic or sacred, and mourning practices are tied to time and terrain. As Daniel Boyarin (1996) and Ella Shohat (1999) have argued, Jewish diasporic identity is marked by both dislocation and rootedness, a paradox that generates rich, complex epistemologies. Jewish communities carry memory that often layers new homes with echoes of lost ones. This is seen in languages that combine Hebrew with German, Arabic, or Spanish and it is seen in traditional foods that emerge from diasporic place and experience (bagels, sfinge, cholent/chamin/dafina, etc.). Diaspora, in this sense, is not a lack of place, but a different kind of relationship to place; one shaped by loss, longing, adaptation, and ritual repetition.

This layered positionality must be navigated with care. To be Jewish on Indigenous land is to be both marginalized and implicated. This is not a binary to be resolved, but a responsibility to be held with integrity. The concept of the "race to innocence," articulated by Sherene Razack (1998), describes the tendency among marginalized groups to operationalize oppression to exempt themselves from complicity. This project makes great effort to refuse participation in that race. Instead, it situates Jewish diasporic identity within the entangled structures of colonialism, recognizing that trauma does not negate present responsibility. Being a diasporic person on

stolen land requires both mourning our own displacements and committing to Indigenous sovereignty in the present.

In this context, I turn to what Laura Ellingson (2017) and Christina Cedillo (2018, 2022) describe as *critical embodiment*: an approach to research that foregrounds the body as a site of meaning, memory, and relation. Critical embodiment challenges the presumed neutrality of the researcher, insisting instead that all knowledge is situated and felt, that analysis is always filtered through flesh. Cedillo emphasizes that embodiment must not only acknowledge bodily difference, but also interrogate the structural conditions that determine whose bodies are recognized as legitimate knowers. Embodiment, in this sense, is always political and shaped by colonialism, racism, ableism, and other intersecting structures of domination. This project embraces critical embodiment as an ethical imperative. It asks: How does knowledge move through the body? What stories are stored in gesture, scent, silence, and ritual? What is lost when theory is severed from breath?

Stephanie Kerschbaum's (2015) concept of *anecdotal relations* deepens this embodied inquiry by highlighting storytelling as a methodology of relation. Often dismissed as peripheral or overly personal, anecdotes in fact serve as sites of epistemological exchange, inviting connection, disorientation, recognition, and refusal. Kerschbaum reminds us that embodied knowledge is not only expressed through story but constituted through it, stories are how we come to know in relation. In the context of this project, the stories shared over Shabbat meals, chavruta conversations, and ritual pauses enact a mode of knowing that is affective, situated, and alive.

As a Jewish disabled woman, I cannot disembody myself in this work. My positionality is an embedded aspect of this work. I bring with me my memories of the smells of traditional food, the presence of family and community, and every shabbat candle lighting I engaged in through this process. Disability, as Christina Cedillo (2018), Stephanie Kerschbaum (2015), and Julia Watts Belser (2023) remind us, is not only a site of exclusion but also a powerful location for knowledge production. Disabled embodiment disrupts normative timelines, challenges dominant conceptions of presence and participation, and insists on slowness, access, and relation. As Watts Belser writes, disabled wisdom emerges in the spaces where we rest, refuse, adapt, and care. In that spirit, this thesis takes up critical embodiment as more than a metaphor, but as a method. As a way of honouring how knowledge lives in the body, particularly in bodies that have been marked as deviant or disposable.

I carry the intergenerational stories of my people. I carry celebration, and I carry the contradictions of my Jewish identity. This project is built from those tensions. This work is rooted in a braided theoretical and methodological framework that draws together Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), Jewish epistemologies, diasporic identity (Am Yisrael) (Hirsch, 2008; Plaskow, 1990; Lappe, 2013), and Shabbat as radical intentional rest (Watts Belser, 2017). These frameworks are themselves rooted in Jewish ways of knowing - dialogic, embodied, recursive, and inherently political. The concept of "braiding," both metaphorical and

literal, captures the intertwined nature of this approach. As with challah braided before Shabbat, candles braided for Havdalah, and the braiding of strings for a tallit meaning here is forged through relation, memory, rhythm, responsibility, and rupture.

The methodology of this research mirrors its theoretical commitments. This project was conducted using Community-Based Research (CBR) and interpretive phenomenology, grounded in relationships with Jewish community members across generations. The gatherings of community, you will see, are enactments of Jewish epistemology and continuity.

This thesis ultimately argues that to center Jewish continuity is to insist that Jewish life in its multiplicity, vulnerability, and resilience matters. That our mitzvot, stories, and bodies carry deep and ancient knowledge. That our grief is not a justification for harm, nor a disqualifier from care. That we can show up relationally in community, with both humility and clarity.

What follows is an attempt to hold that complexity with care. To honour the people who shared their stories with me as co-keepers of a living archive. To write from within the folds of diasporic memory, from within the breath of Shabbat songs, from within the tremble of intergenerational reckoning. The chapters will trace the theoretical foundations, methodological approaches, and thematic insights emerging from this intergenerational community-based research. They engage ritual, memory, grief, care, and futurity through embodied, diasporic Jewish lenses. Interwoven throughout the thesis are poems, my own reflections and reckonings. These poems are how I hold the weight of this deeply personal work. They enact what this research seeks to hold: the nonlinear, embodied, ancestral, and affective dimensions of Jewish intergenerational memory. The poems are how I come to understand, how I hold what was shared, and how I resist the pull to abstract what is at its core profoundly personal and collective.

Ultimately, this thesis is a contribution to Jewish studies and social work research, but more importantly to the broader conversation about what it means to inherit, to resist disappearance, and to co-create futures. It does not aim to explain Jewish continuity as an object of study, but to practice it as a sacred, insurgent act. It is written with the breath of those who came before, and in the hope that what is carried forward will be not only remembered, but lived.

Poetic Reflection #1: On Language, Longing, and Listening

The way I approach reflexivity in this process exists as a conversation between voices ancestral, communal, and theoretical. As a spoken word poet, I have relied on poetry throughout my life as a methodology of reflexivity, a mode of witnessing, and a practice of returning to what matters. Throughout this work, poetry is present as an interpretive companion: sometimes emerging from fieldnotes or journaling, sometimes arriving whole after an interview, sometimes taking shape in the margins of transcripts. In all its forms, it has helped me understand and hold the stories shared, the responsibilities of this research, and the histories, both personal and collective that pulse underneath every page.

For me, poetry is not separate from scholarship. It is a way of thinking, of listening, of holding contradictions, of returning to a question that has no single answer. As I wrote, I found myself in dialogue not only with participants, scholars, and mentors, but also with my own longing, grief, and hope especially as they relate to Jewish memory, loss, and cultural continuity. I often turn to poetry and journaling as a form of reflexive practice, not to distance myself from the research, but to come closer to its truths.

The following poem, *Andromeda's Story*, was written early in the research process and became a touchstone for me. It holds many of the themes that guide this work: intergenerational memory, the persistence of story across time and silence, the ache of loss, and the radical endurance of cultural foundations. It is both an offering and a reflection. It appears here as the first of several poetic interludes throughout this thesis, each serving as a moment of pause, reflection, or deepened entry into the themes of legacy, longing, and collective memory.

Andromeda's Story

Andromeda's light is two and a half billion years old
With one trillion stars in her galaxy, hers is the oldest story you can read with your naked eye.

I love stories.
I listen whenever I can.

My people are built from stories.
Stone palaces made from histories shared over Shabbat meals.
We build sturdy foundations.
Our stories could hold up a universe.
They do.

I don't remember how old I was when I stopped knowing how to speak Hebrew.
Understanding, but unable to lay stone words for our palace.
Retelling stories in a language that doesn't have the words for our foundations.
I think there may be cracks in our palace because of me.

But stories are stubborn that way…
They find their way through mortar and time,
Seeping through cracks as light does
My grandmother's prayers still echo in the spaces between the syllables I forget.
My lips still know the shape of the blessings even as my tongue forgets the tune.
Sometimes I dream in languages I never mastered.
I wake up with melodies stuck in my throat…
Not quite song, not quite silence

Andromeda's light keeps arriving.
So do the stories.
A slow pilgrimage, crossing this void to find us.

Time is different in Jewish tradition.
Forever malleable and never linear.

Maybe memory is starlight,
What's gone still glows,
Still guides,
Still matters,

I'll keep listening.
I'll build with what I have…
I will dream in my ancestors' tongue even when the melodies get stuck in my throat.
I am fluent in the language of longing.

The palace is still standing.
Maybe that's enough.
Maybe… maybe that's everything.

Let this reflection be a kind of overture: an invitation into a moment that listens not only with the mind, but also with the body, the past, and the possibility of what still glows.

Jewish Knowledge, Memory, and Relational Inheritance: A Review of Literature, Stories, and Teachings

Braided Lineages, Situated Continuity, and Relational Inheritance

This thesis takes up Jewish knowledge as method and presence to be practiced. It asks: How is Jewish knowledge transmitted, embodied, and reinterpreted across generations, particularly through ritual, storytelling, and relational practice? It further explores: What does it mean to theorize Jewish continuity as a recursive, decolonial, and relational praxis rooted in memory, refusal, and regeneration? Finally, it considers: How might Jewish epistemologies shaped by diaspora, structural antisemitism, and embodied ritual function as methodological interventions against erasure, and as speculative ground for futurity?

This literature review responds to these questions and approach by situating itself within Jewish and decolonial epistemological traditions. It emerges from a place of diasporic, embodied, and situated knowledge. It does not aim to map an objective field, but rather to braid together epistemic lineages carried through text, ritual, oral tradition, and lived experience. Grounded in Jewish community and tethered to ancestral and intergenerational memory, this review begins not in neutrality, but in relation. In doing so, it models a social work perspective that centers relationality, ethical responsibility, and collective care, recognizing that knowledge and intervention are inseparable from the communities and lives they aim to serve.

To hold these questions, this review traces five braided threads:
1. Diaspora and Jewish time as epistemic frameworks;
2. Ritual, memory, and intergenerational transmission as embodied theory;
3. Structural antisemitism and racialization through the lens of Judeo-pessimism;
4. Jewish learning as a decolonial and relational method;
5. Futurity and regeneration as covenantal and imaginative obligations.

This structure follows what Tynan and Bishop (2023) describe as a relational approach to literature, one that does not seek to fill gaps or occupy niches, but to honour silences and attend to inherited responsibility. It is not exhaustive. It is braided.

This work is situated within a broader orientation to critical theory, which insists that knowledge is never neutral but is always shaped by structures of power, domination, and resistance (Horkheimer, 1982; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Critical theory provides a lens for interrogating how social categories such as race, religion, and ethnicity are produced through historical and institutional forces, and for identifying how these constructions uphold systemic inequities. It foregrounds the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups as indispensable sources of insight, recognizing that epistemic authority is distributed unevenly across lines of power. In this thesis, the diasporic and intergenerational character of Jewish knowledge is understood through such a lens: as not only cultural or spiritual inheritance, but as theory born in relation to rupture, exclusion, and survival. Before applying specific strands of theory such as critical race theory, decolonial thought, and Judeo-pessimism, this grounding in

critical theory establishes the premise that Jewish epistemologies are themselves rigorous interventions that unsettle dominant narratives and resist assimilation into universalist frames. Orienting the project within critical theory also ties it directly to the field of social work. Social work as a discipline and practice (in its best form) is centrally concerned with confronting systemic oppression, amplifying marginalized voices, and building practices of care and justice in the face of structural inequity. By engaging Jewish epistemologies as critical, relational, and decolonial, this thesis extends social work's ethical commitments to cultural specificity and epistemic justice. It resists the reduction of Jewish life to either pathology or resilience and instead affirms Jewish continuity as a generative framework for relational care, memory, and survival. In this way, Jewish knowledge becomes not only an object of study but a methodological resource for social work itself: offering practices of intergenerational transmission, communal responsibility, and sacred interruption that align with the profession's aims of fostering dignity, collective flourishing, and transformative justice.

Jewish tradition understands knowledge as inseparable from lived practice and relational engagement, with *halakha* (the way of…), *midrash* (interpretive story), and *dor l'dor* (generation to generation) serving as dynamic technologies of continuity that transmit wisdom across generations (Plaskow, 1991; Ochs, 2003; Roskies, 1999). These epistemologies generate truth dialogically through argument, story, shared breath, and embodied practice resisting linear, individualistic, and abstract modes of Western knowledge. They flourish instead in study circles, kitchens, summer camps, gravesides, in traditions like chavruta and Shabbat, and concepts like postmemory (Belser, 2023; Boyarin, 1990; Handelman, 1982; Hirsch, 1997; Smith et al., 2009). This review insists on a scholarship grounded in embodiment, community, and rupture. It recognizes antisemitism not as a misunderstanding, but as a structural logic (Magid, 2021; Nirenberg, 2013). It affirms that Jewish survival is not granted but practiced; that continuity is a relational labour. It traces how Jewish thought, formed in diaspora and sharpened through precarity, has developed tools to endure, to interpret, to reimagine, and to rest. To engage with these living technologies is to participate in Jewish continuity by enacting it. This is not a retreat into tradition, nor a naive gesture toward resilience. It is an ethical act of remembering forward.

Part I: Diaspora as Epistemology: Jewish Identity, Belonging, and Temporality

Rethinking Jewish Identity

Jewish identity inherently resists Western modes of categorization. It does not fit cleanly within the Enlightenment frameworks of religion, ethnicity, or nation; it is at once communal and theological, embodied and textual, diasporic and covenantal. Scholars such as Leora Batnitzky (2011) and Daniel Boyarin (1999, 2004) argue that even the very term *Judaism*, as a designation of religion, is a product of Christian Enlightenment violence. This framework privatizes tradition, separates so-called 'faith' from ways of being, and renders practice apolitical, such that Judaism becomes legible only when stripped of its embodied, collective, and halakhic nature. Boyarin's work in *Carnal Israel* and *Border Lines*, along with Carroll's (2002) *Constantine's Sword*, further deconstructs the binary between religion and ethnicity by tracing how early Christian theologians positioned Judaism as law-bound, fleshly, and particular. In this construction, Jewish identity was cut apart to fabricate a singular category of religious identity,

then cast as the antithesis of the universal, spiritual, and divinely good Christian subject. These epistemological constructions laid the groundwork for both religious and secular forms of antisemitism. As Gil Anidjar (2002) further emphasizes, even the name *Judaism* is itself a Hellenistic abstraction, flattening the lived, ancestral, and relational name *Yehudim* (the people of Yehudah/from the land of Judeah) into a doctrinal system, one that erases the integral peoplehood at the core of Jewish identity.

The concept of *Am Yisrael* (the Jewish people/Jewish peoplehood) restores this dimension by affirming Jewish identity as a collective, covenantal, and diasporic belonging that transcends narrow religious or ethnic classifications. *Am Yisrael* names a people bound through shared memory, practice, and responsibility. This is not to be confused with *Medinat Yisrael* (state of Israel) or *Eretz Yisrael* (land of Israel). *Am Yisrael* invokes a diasporic kinship rooted in tradition, collective care, and mutual obligation across generations. As Batnitzky (2011) notes, the notion of *Am Yisrael* challenges Enlightenment efforts to privatize Jewish identity by maintaining the political and communal character of Jewish life. Judith Plaskow (1991) similarly emphasizes that Jewish peoplehood is enacted through ritual, narrative, and collective memory, rather than reducible to theological belief. For Tamar Ross (2004), *Am Yisrael* is not simply a historical remnant but an evolving moral and spiritual body that transmits sacred responsibility across time. Framing Jewish identity through *Am Yisrael* resists nationalist and assimilationist paradigms alike, insisting on an intergenerational, transhistorical ethic of relation.

To reclaim Jewish identity, then, requires moving beyond colonially imposed categories. *Diaspora*, a term created to refer to the experiences of the Jewish people (Clifford, 1994), is viewed in a multitude of ways across Jewish community. Jonathan Boyarin (1996) and Ella Shohat (1999, 2006) offer frameworks for thinking *with* diaspora not singularly as exile, but as a creative, generative epistemology. Shohat, writing from her perspective as an Iraqi Jewish woman, critiques the erasure of non-Ashkenazi diasporic identities in Eurocentric discourse. For her, diaspora is not only displacement but a condition of multiplicity, where Jewishness is maintained through interdependence, memory, and adaptation.

Diasporic Time and Ritual as Resistance

Diaspora also reshapes how time is understood. Jewish temporality pushes back against the linear model of Western history. Barbara Myerhoff (1978), in her ethnographic work with older Jewish adults in California, describes Jewish time as spiral-shaped, looping past and future through ritual return. Abraham Joshua Heschel (1951) calls Shabbat "a palace in time," a sacred interruption in the weekly flow of work and production. Walter Benjamin (1940) offers a similar image in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where the metaphorical angel of history is blown backward into the future, witnessing catastrophe even as he moves through it. Jewish temporality, in this view insists that to move forward is not to abandon the past, but to carry, embody, and actively experience/reexperience it.

This cyclical temporality manifests not only in writing but in ethics and land-based practice. Shabbat offers a potent example of this refusal. Julia Watts Belser (2017, 2023) frames Shabbat

as resistance. In a world that demands productivity, speed, and performance, Shabbat insists on sacred intentional uselessness. It creates space for presence, pleasure, and interdependence, refusing urgency. Belser's work places Shabbat alongside disability justice principles of pacing, access, and care, arguing that these practices offer spiritual sustenance and political resistance to capitalist temporality.

Shmita, the sabbatical year, expands this ethic. Every seventh year, land must rest, debts are released, and hierarchies are reconfigured (Berman, 2011; Davis, 2022). This is not only an ecological or economic framework; it is a radical invitation to unlearn accumulation and individualism. This moves in conversation with what Christina Sharpe (2016) describes as "wake work." Sharpe's work, specifically referring to the experience of Blackness in the 21st century, is an ethical orientation to history that honours loss without reinscribing its violence. While distinct in origin and meaning, Jewish practices like *Shabbat* and *Shmita* resonate with this ethic: they are technologies of refusal rooted in relationality and repair.

These temporal logics are oriented toward equity and mutual care. In doing so, they reclaim diasporic knowledge as valid, sacred, and enduring (Myerhoff, 1978). This research takes up Jewish temporality as a methodological and ethical orientation. Through tradition-centered data collection and cyclical interpretive analysis, the project engages Jewish time, especially as enacted through Shabbat and *dor l'dor*, as a structure for knowledge-making and relational accountability. In this way, Jewish temporality shapes what is studied, and *how* it is studied, refusing urgency, honouring presence, and making space for rest, interruption, and return as integral to the research process itself.

Part II: Ritual, Memory, and Intergenerational Transmission: Jewish Practices as Embodied Epistemologies

If diaspora is an epistemology and Jewish time a sacred spiral, then *mitzvah* is the archive through which this knowledge lives. The word *mitzvah*, often translated as "commandment," more fully connotes a relational imperative: an action that binds the individual to community, history, and the divine. As Tamar El-Or (1994) and Danya Ruttenberg (2022) argue, *mitzvot* (plural of mitzvah) are not merely legal obligations but embodied acts of continuity that transmit ethical and spiritual meaning across generations. They function as performative archives: repositories of memory and responsibility enacted through daily life.

Jewish cultural transmission has never relied solely on text; it is encoded in gesture, rhythm, food, silence, and song. Practices such as lighting candles, braiding challah, or reciting blessings are theory in motion (Ochs, 2003; Wolfson, 1994). These embodied rituals preserve communal memory and transmit an ontology of presence, belonging, and obligation that exceeds the written word. In this light, *mitzvah* becomes a dynamic, iterative method of remembering. Each act of ritual is a form of interpretive practice: situated, relational, and responsive. These embodied enactments hold and transmit diasporic Jewish knowledge by engaging it anew each time, in rhythm with community and context.

Postmemory and Embodied Archive

Marianne Hirsch's (1997, 2008) concept of *postmemory* describes how trauma, identity, and belonging are transmitted across generations through embodied, affective, and imaginative forms rather than direct experience. Initially developed to capture the experiences of children of Holocaust survivors, it extends to broader diasporic contexts, highlighting how family photographs, ritual objects, fragmented stories, and gestures create an "imaginative investment" in a past that is not one's own but still shapes one's present (Hirsch, 2008). This is echoed in Michael Rothberg's (2009) notion of *multidirectional memory*, which emphasizes how memory practices move across temporal and communal boundaries, enabling relational solidarity without collapsing distinct historical experiences.

Vanessa Ochs (2003) builds on this idea through her work on Jewish ritual as *lived theology*, arguing that everyday practices (braiding challah, lighting candles, reciting blessings) are not only cultural traditions but epistemological acts. These rituals teach, transmit, and inscribe memory in the body. A child asking the Four Questions at Passover, for example, is participating in tradition but also engaging in an intergenerational pedagogy that invites curiosity, storytelling, and reciprocal transmission. Similarly, Ron Wolfson (2013) describes the Shabbat dinner table as a microcosm of Jewish learning: where memory is passed through stories but also through tone, timing, interruption, and embodied presence.

Rituals like Havdalah, marking the departure of Shabbat through flame, wine, spice, and song epitomize the multisensory and embodied nature of Jewish epistemologies. Taste, scent, touch, and melody activate memory in ways that resist the idea of a mind-body split. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) asserts in an Indigenous context, song, dance, and breath are not pre-theoretical expressions but forms of knowing. In a similar vein, Elliot Wolfson (1994) and Susan Handelman (1982) highlight how Jewish mystical and Talmudic traditions emphasize orality, repetition, and the sensory as legitimate, and even primary, sites of knowledge-making central to how Jewish communities remember, teach, and remain.

Relational Time and Intergenerational Responsibility

Jewish intergenerationality is structured by the principle of *dor l'dor* (generation to generation). As David Roskies (1999) argues, Jewish memory is never passive, it is constructed, curated, and re-performed in each generation. It is a verb, not a noun. And it is enacted as much in kitchens and summer camps as in classrooms or synagogues. As discussed earlier, Jewish time moves in a spiral. Jewish historical consciousness frames remembrance not as nostalgia but as covenantal responsibility: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1982) emphasizes that memory of suffering is an ethical and theological imperative tethered to action. Holocaust survivor and philosopher Emmanuel Levinas similarly describes memory as an ethical responsibility, demanding attentiveness, care, and relation rather than withdrawal or vengeance (Levinas, 1969, 1990). He describes Jewish time as "existing in a different realm," not governed by traditional cycles but rooted in eternal presence through remembrance. For Levinas and Yerushalmi, *Zachor* (to remember) is not passive recall but an ethical imperative: to preserve the present and orient

toward the future through active responsibility. Responsibility, in Levinas' thought, arises outside of history, unfolding in a space-less temporality shaped by memory. In this way, *Zachor* is both a temporal and moral command, calling for *active action and care*.

This relational and sensory approach to memory transmission underscores a distinct Jewish epistemology: one that holds body, ritual, text, and community in dynamic tension. These practices enact what Daniel Boyarin (1996) calls "diasporic hermeneutics," a way of learning that is recursive, embodied, and deeply tied to both rupture and return. In this context, memory is the preservation of what was and an invitation to inhabit and reimagine what might be, together.

Jewish summer camps in North America exemplify joyful, active cultural transmission, where tradition is embodied through song, play, ritual, and communal practice rather than confined to study or history books (Fox, 2023). Post WWII camps served as experimental spaces where Jewish identity could be enacted, often privileging experiential pedagogy over formal religious instruction fostering cultural fluency but also deep affective belonging, resilience, and a sense of collective responsibility. Drawing on John Dewey's theory of experiential education, Fox highlights how these immersive environments created living laboratories for Jewish continuity, showing that Jewish knowledge is not simply learned from books, but lived, performed, and transmitted through shared, embodied experience; an approach that extends far beyond the summer camp setting itself.

This approach is methodologically aligned with interpretive phenomenology, which holds that meaning is generated through lived experience, situated context, and relational interpretation (van Manen, 1997; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Interpretive phenomenology affirms that knowledge emerges from the lifeworld, the embodied world of perception, sensation, and encounter. Practices like lighting Shabbat candles or engaging in chavruta are ways of knowing that are only intelligible through lived experience. In this light, Jewish pedagogy and memory transmission are phenomenological enactments of care, belonging, and sacred obligation.

Women have historically acted as vital stewards of Jewish knowledge, transmitting law, ethics, and cultural practice through embodied, relational, and often oral means such as caregiving, cooking, storytelling, and communal leadership, a form of "women's Torah" (Meyers, 1991). Although often devalued by male-centered halakhic and academic frameworks (Plaskow, 1990; Ochs, 2003), this labour, visible in the tending of grief, celebration, and intergenerational care (Ruttenberg, 2022) and studied ethnographically in Haredi contexts (El-Or, 1994), sustains Jewish identity across generations, embedding continuity in inherited gestures, rhythms, and everyday practices that pass between women, elders, and children.

Critically, these practices are not only preservational, they are political. As Saidiya Hartman (2008) describes in her notion of "critical fabulation," communities who have experienced systemic violence often must reconstruct history through imagination, memory, and relational creativity. While Hartman specifically addresses the erasures within historical archives, particularly those concerning the lives of enslaved people, their work also offers a framework for understanding the way communities fill in absences and silences in traditional knowledge

systems where ideas have been lost or stolen through violence (Rijks, 2024). Jewish rituals, particularly in diaspora, function in a similar way. They do not simply commemorate the past; they perform it, interrogate it, and reconfigure it in the present.

The following work is shaped by *dor l'dor* as a praxis: knowledge lives in relation, and relation lives in rhythm. To engage with Jewish ritual, then, is to theorize with the body and with the breath, as well as with the mind.

Part III: Structural Antisemitism and the Limits of Humanist Inclusion: Judeo-Pessimism, Racialization, and the Paradox of Proximity

Conceptualizing and Making Sense of Antisemitism

Jewish identity has long occupied a paradoxical position within Western political and theological discourse. Both central and subversive, over-assimilated and dangerously alien, the 'Jew' functions as a floating signifier for societal anxiety. Humanist thought often frames antisemitism as a remediable prejudice, a relic of medieval superstition or extremist ideology to be countered through tolerance, education, or inclusion. Yet this perspective risks oversimplifying antisemitism, obscuring its persistent structural and civilizational dimensions.

Shaul Magid's (2021) Judeo-pessimist theory offers a deeper lens. Magid contends that antisemitism is not merely a remediable prejudice but a foundational architecture, wherein Jewish identity functions as a necessary foil to the coherence of Western modernity. In this view, Jewishness is constitutively Other, destabilizing liberal inclusion by defying normative categories of race, religion, and nationhood. This resonates with Frank Wilderson III's (2020) framing of anti-Blackness as foundational rather than historical: structural violence shapes the very conditions of possibility for the targeted group, rather than being an episodic injustice.

Jewish people have historically occupied an ambivalent racial position, neither fully inside nor entirely outside whiteness. Jonathan Karp (2008) observes that Jewish people have been cast alternately as "honorary whites" or as racial outsiders, depending on political context. This conditional belonging, what Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (2007) terms "conditional whiteness," renders Jewish identity hyper-visible in moments of crisis and simultaneously fragile, always subject to revocation. Zygmunt Bauman's (1991) concept of allosemitism captures this instability: Jewish people are imagined as both "too much" and "not enough," assimilated yet perpetually suspect. These tensions produce familiar antisemitic tropes, from dual-loyalty citizens to globalist conspirators, which adapt across political ideologies and historical moments.

Philosophical and sociological accounts further illuminate the mechanisms of antisemitism. Jean-Paul Sartre (1946) suggested that antisemitism is not a response to who Jewish people are, but rather a projection of the antisemite's own needs and fears, an "anti-Semitism of the imagination." While Sartre's intervention was notable for its perceived postwar solidarity, his analysis draws substantial critique. As Dror Yinon (2020) argues, Sartre's existentialist framework overgeneralizes antisemitism as a manifestation of inauthenticity, reducing a violent social phenomenon to a personal failure of bad faith. Moreover, Sartre's effort to categorize

Jewish people as either "authentic" or "inauthentic," a binary that arises from his philosophical commitments rather than from lived Jewish experience, reflects the limits of theorizing Jewish identity from outside it. His position again problematically situates Jewishness as a construct of the Christian imagination. David Nirenberg (2013) situates antisemitism in a cultural grammar, where Jewishness becomes a vessel for societal anxieties about power, disorder, and identity, frequently independent of actual Jewish actions. Bauman (1989) similarly emphasizes how modernity produces "strangers" as a social necessity, casting Jewish people historically as prototypical outsiders. These frameworks collectively show that antisemitism operates through a persistent oscillation between visibility and erasure, indispensability and scapegoating.

Framings within Jewish tradition have often mirrored the structural logics of exclusion and marginalization, albeit cast in metaphysical rather than political terms. The rabbinic phrase Esav sonei l'Yaakov ("Esav hates Yaakov"), has long been interpreted by traditional commentators as an ontological truth: that antisemitism is inevitable, a primordial hatred not born of Jewish action but of Jewish existence itself (Bereshit Rabbah 65:21; Rashi on Genesis 33:4). This view is further reinforced by a well-known midrashic teaching that draws a wordplay between Sinai (the site of the giving of Torah) and sin'ah (hatred), suggesting that the giving of Torah not only conferred sacred responsibility but also marked Jewish people as eternal targets of hate (Shabbat 89a). In this reading, Jewish identity becomes a burden as much as a blessing: the source of both distinction and danger. Such interpretations reflect a diasporic epistemology shaped by centuries of exile, persecution, and survival. As scholars like Leora Batnitzky (2011) and David Biale (2007) have shown, Jewish identity has often been forged not only through halakhic or ritual continuity but also through narrative responses to marginalization. While these interpretations risk reinforcing fatalism, they also assert continuity and moral coherence in the face of generational trauma (Boyarin, 1997; Kepnes, 2007).

Magid (2021) does not present Judeo-pessimism as a prescriptive theology, but rather as an inherited ontology, a way of naming the historical and structural conditions under which Jewish existence unfolds. In taking this stance seriously, Judeo-pessimism critiques humanist or more centrist liberal paradigms that place faith in education, interfaith dialogue, or state protection as primary strategies for combating antisemitism. Such approaches, Magid argues, often demand that Jewish people become legible through the logics of whiteness, Christian frameworks, or exceptional suffering. This demand requires Jewish identity to be either assimilated into dominant racial and religious categories or instrumentalized through trauma (Magid, 2021; Boyarin, 1997; Fagenblat, 2010). These frameworks do not so much ensure safety as foreclose the possibility of Jewish continuity on Jewish terms. They relegate antisemitism to a past presumed overcome, even as its structural logics remain intact and adaptive (Leeds, 2023; Ferber, 2012).

At the same time, the diagnosis of precarity carries challenges. If antisemitism is inevitable and Jewish visibility inherently dangerous, how does one imagine life beyond survival? How can joy, relation, and futurity be enacted in such conditions? Here, the intersection of Judeo-pessimism,

Afropessimism, and ethical Jewish thought suggests that acknowledging structural violence is not an invitation to despair but a prerequisite for generative action. As Saidiya Hartman (2008) reminds us, "the past is not yet done with us." Hope and continuity are not achieved through forgetting harm, but through encountering it with intentionality, ethical commitment, and imagination.

Applying Critical Race Theory

Jewish identity's unstable positioning is well-articulated within the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which foregrounds race as a social construct shaped by historical, legal, and institutional power (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT reveals how racial categories are deployed strategically to uphold dominance, and how groups may be incorporated or excluded depending on sociopolitical context. The case of Ashkenazi Jewish people, conditionally included within whiteness yet persistently racialized as foreign or conspiratorial, exemplifies how power manipulates racial boundaries to serve dominant logics.

Importantly, this racial ambiguity does not affect all Jewish people equally. Black, Sephardi, Mizrahi, and other Jewish people of colour, as well as those who are visibly Jewish have never had the same access to conditional whiteness as many Ashkenazi Jewish people in certain contexts. Their experiences of exclusion, both within and beyond Jewish communities, expose the limitations of frameworks that equate Jewish identity solely with whiteness or reduce antisemitism to race-based exclusion (Crane, 2011; Shohat, 1999; Behar, 2007; Belzer, 2021). Ella Shohat (1999) critiques the Eurocentric bias of dominant Jewish narratives that marginalize Mizrahi histories and reproduce colonial hierarchies, while Ariel Samson (2021) and Michael Twitty (2017) highlight how Black Jewish experiences challenge such exclusions by destabilizing monolithic constructions of Jewishness and asserting intersectional, diasporic realities.

This raises an important tension within the act of resisting categorization in a theoretical identity context while also attending to the violence of imposed categories in a practical lived context. To speak of Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, Sephardic, or Black Jewish identity is to invoke constructs that are themselves shaped by colonial, racial, and geopolitical histories. Yet, as Edward Said (1993) reminds us through his theory of contrapuntal reading (the process of interpreting colonial texts, considering the perspectives of both the colonizer and the colonized), such categories can be held in critical tension, attuned to both their historical construction and their strategic necessity. They are used here not to essentialize identity, but to expose and interrogate the uneven distribution of power within and around Jewish communities. In a contrapuntal mode, the naming of categories functions as a double gesture: it reveals how race, geography, and visibility operate within the Jewish diaspora, even as it resists the reduction of Jewishness to any singular frame.

In this writing the paradox is not resolved but inhabited. Jewish identity is treated as a relational and contingent formation produced across difference, rupture, and memory. The invocation of subcategories within the broader resistant category of Am Yisrael (Jewish peoplehood) reflects a methodological commitment to both nuance and solidarity. This is a central concern to the

epistemological grounding of this work, which seeks to honour the diasporic and polyvocal realities of Jewish continuity.

Critical Race Theory's emphasis on counter storytelling, the practice of surfacing marginalized narratives to challenge dominant discourse, resonates deeply with Jewish diasporic traditions of *midrash*, postmemory, and embodied ritual memory while creating a framework to create new more grounded narratives on Jewish identity and positionality. As originally theorized by Delgado (1989, 1995), counterstory functions not merely as narrative correction but as a method of epistemic resistance, one that foregrounds experiential knowledge to contest universalist and racialized truth-claims. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) develop this further, describing counterstories as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging dominant cultural narratives," particularly in education and law. These narratives are vehicles for community healing, survival, and meaning-making.

Jewish memory practices carried in song, gesture, silence, interruption, and ritual return align with this tradition. Like *midrash*, which reimagines and interrogates sacred texts in response to historical rupture, counterstory offers a method of reclaiming voice through dialogic, relational storytelling. Hooks (1989) describes the liberatory power of speaking from the margins to transform the terms of discourse itself. Similarly, Collins (2000) frames Black feminist epistemology as rooted in personal narrative, ethics of care, and lived experience, elements also central to diasporic Jewish knowing.

Counterstory also bears deep resonance with what Anzaldúa (1987) calls *autohistoria-teoría*, a genre of writing that blends lived story and theoretical reflection, emerging from borderlands subjectivity. Minich (2016) connects this to disability counterstories that challenge ableist epistemologies by foregrounding embodied difference. Tuck and Reviere (2021) build on Indigenous traditions to describe counterstory as refusal and resurgence: a form of story that does not seek recognition within colonial frameworks, but to reclaim narrative sovereignty. These approaches all insist that marginalized knowledges constitute robust, relational, and situated epistemologies.

In this light, Jewish epistemologies, formed in diaspora and carried through rupture, participate in this broader lineage of counterstory as both method and meaning making. The recursive, polyvocal traditions of interpretation, the ethical demand of *zachor* (to remember), and the practice of intergenerational storytelling function as cultural inheritance and insurgent epistemic acts. They assert, as Fricker (2007) contends, the right of marginalized communities to be recognized as knowers.

Crash Theory and Moving Forward Jewishly:

Within Jewish thought, Rabbi Benay Lappe's (2013) *Crash Theory* offers a powerful framework to begin building future. A "crash," in her formulation, is what happens when the master narrative no longer makes sense. Jewish history is filled with such crashes: the destruction of the Temples, the exile from Spain, the Shoah, etc. Each time, Jewish communities have had three options: cling to the old story, abandon it entirely, or remake it. Lappe argues that the third path,

creative and lived reinterpretation, is what has sustained Jewish identity for millennia. Change is not betrayal; it is covenantal.

Jewish knowledge and lessons are often derived from stories like fables. This ethic of rupture and return is exemplified in a story from the Talmud (Menachot 29b), where Moses is transported forward in time to Rabbi Akiva's classroom and cannot recognize the Torah being taught. Moses is distressed until God assures him, "This, too, is Torah." The tradition has evolved beyond recognition, and yet it remains validly and profoundly Jewish. This story, like Crash Theory itself, affirms the possibility of transformation grounded in relation and collective growth.

The Talmudic story of *Lo BaShamayim Hi* ("It is not in heaven") from *Bava Metzia* 59b powerfully affirms the idea that authority over Torah rests not with divine intervention, but within the moral discernment of communities. In this narrative, even a heavenly voice is overruled by the interpretation of people, reinforcing a foundational principle of Jewish epistemology: that learning is ongoing, situated, and dialogical. As Susan Handelman (1982) and David Weiss Halivni (1985) argue, this story exemplifies the centrality of *machloket* (dispute) and interpretive multiplicity in Jewish tradition. Practices like *chavruta* study and *midrash* embody this ethic, learning that is always relational, argued, and alive. Knowledge in this framework is not fixed but forged in encounter, tension, listening, and imagination.

This insistence on human responsibility and interpretive engagement provides a theological stance and a methodological stance. As Eliezer Berkovits (1974) and Moshe Halbertal (1997) note, the authority of the community to shape Torah meaning affirms the role of halakhic and moral reasoning in changing times. It also gestures toward a broader logic of Jewish survival: a recursive, dialogical refusal to disappear. Against erasure and silence, *Lo BaShamayim Hi* insists that presence: argumentative, ethical, and situated is itself a sacred act.

Confronting structural antisemitism requires more than inclusion, it calls for a reorientation toward covenantal responsibility, diasporic memory, and relational refusal. Rather than seeking safety through assimilation, Jewish continuity emerges through traditions that sustain meaning and accountability in the face of persistent erasure.

Part IV: Jewish Knowledge as Decolonial Method: Ritual, Relationality, and Refusal

Jewish Learning as Relational Epistemology

To call Jewish knowledge decolonial is not to appropriate Indigenous scholarship, but to acknowledge that Jewish epistemologies, especially in diaspora, already unsettle the logics of Western modernity that underwrite colonization and assimilation. Rooted in relational, embodied, and recursive practices, Jewish ways of knowing resonate with Indigenous and decolonial traditions; the task is not to insert Jewishness into these discourses, but to name what is already present. A growing body of literature in Indigenous research methodologies, by scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), Shawn Wilson (2008), and Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012), have emphasized the need to move beyond extractive, individualistic, and

linear models of research. In their place, they call for relational accountability, embodied participation, and epistemic justice. These frameworks challenge the authority of the detached observer, the primacy of written text, and the myth of objectivity. In this light, Jewish ways of learning such as *chavruta* (group study), *halakha* (communal ethical process), *midrash* (interpretive expansion), and *dor l'dor* (generational transmission), are valuable research methodologies.

Community-Based Research (CBR) models similarly challenge extractive academic paradigms by positioning community members as co-creators of knowledge, affirming that research must be accountable to those it engages (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). CBR emphasizes long-term relationships, collective benefit, and iterative learning, principles that align deeply with Jewish epistemologies that view knowledge as emerging from shared interpretation, ritual continuity, and communal obligation. Like the dialogic process of chavruta or the intergenerational trust embedded in dor l'dor, CBR holds that meaning is not imposed but cultivated through situated, reciprocal engagement. In this framework, research is a process that honours presence, memory, and collective stewardship.

The chavruta model, as Daniel Boyarin (1993) describes, is a dialogic practice in which learners study together through interrogation, debate, and shared interpretation. Unlike seminar models premised on competition or individual mastery, chavruta emphasizes mutual accountability, humility, and relationality, producing knowledge through friction. This relational and non-hierarchical stance resonates with the rabbinic principle of *Lo BaShamayim Hi* ("It is not in heaven"), in which the rabbis famously reject a divine voice in a legal debate, insisting that Torah is to be interpreted through human encounter, disagreement, and communal responsibility (Bava Metzia 59b). The narrative's radical claim is that authority does not descend from above but is generated within the lived practices of a community.

Read as an epistemological intervention, *Lo BaShamayim Hi* parallels what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016) terms an "ecology of knowledges," a framework that challenges the supremacy of Western epistemology by affirming diverse, embodied, and place-based ways of knowing. Within the broader current of epistemologies of the South, Santos, Walter Mignolo (2011), Catherine Walsh (2007), and Arturo Escobar (2018) highlight that epistemic justice requires more than including marginalized voices in dominant systems, it demands a rethinking of how knowledge itself is conceptualized, validated, and transmitted. Their work foregrounds the violence of epistemicide, the colonial erasure of non-Western traditions through missionization and institutional power, and calls for the resurgence of communal, affective, spiritual, and memory-based knowledges rooted in the lifeworlds of colonized and diasporic peoples.

In this light, Jewish hermeneutic traditions, whether in chavruta, midrashic interpretation, or halakhic deliberation mirror key principles of epistemologies of the South. They refuse singular truths, instead cultivating polyvocality. Mignolo (2011) describes such practices as "border thinking," knowledge produced from the underside of modernity that makes space for contradiction, memory, and refusal. Escobar (2018) likewise calls for relational ontologies and

pluriversal thinking as correctives to extractive and objectivist models of knowledge, offering alternative visions of world-making grounded in community and care.

Jewish diasporic learning, itself shaped by exile, marginalization, and intergenerational memory, aligns with this pluriversal call. As decolonial feminist scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Sylvia Wynter (2003) emphasize, reclaiming epistemologies rooted in lived experience and ancestral inheritance is not merely nostalgic but insurgent. When Jewish ritual study privileges dialogue over decree, when communal interpretation overrides external proclamation or power, it enacts what Mignolo (2011) terms "epistemic disobedience," a refusal of imperial logics of knowledge. In both Jewish epistemologies and epistemologies of the South, knowledge emerges as plural, iterative, embodied, and accountable to the people who live it, always oriented toward justice, continuity, and survival.

These commitments resonate with Tuck and Yang's (2014) notion of "desire-based research," which foregrounds creativity, resistance, and community survival rather than damage. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) likewise affirms that theory emerges through lived practice, whether in Nishnaabeg land-based, ceremonial, and musical traditions or, similarly, in the evolution of Jewish halakha as a communal, practice-rooted conversation.

Memory, Ritual, and Refusal as Method

Memory practices in Jewish life also resonate with these relational methods. Hirsch's (2008) *postmemory* is an intergenerational pedagogy that shows how story, gesture, and silence can be knowledge carriers. Vanessa Ochs (2003) affirms this through her work on "new Jewish rituals," which are not innovations in a western sense, but reconfigurations of ancestral memory through contemporary needs. In both cases, the work of remembering is also the work of imagining.

Refusal is a central tactic in decolonial and Indigenous methodologies. Audra Simpson (2014) defines refusal not as negation, but as sovereignty; the decision not to be translated, extracted, or consumed. Eve Tuck's (2009) call for research that does not reinscribe pain or treat communities as broken also resonates in Jewish contexts. Jewish ritual, when practiced without demand for rational explanation or legibility, is a form of refusal. The decision to light candles on Friday night, to avoid work on Shabbat, or to hold silence during *Yizkor*, are practices that refuse the terms of capitalist time, Enlightenment logic, and constrained Western ideologies.

As discussed earlier Julia Watts Belser (2017) brings this into powerful relief by linking Shabbat to disability justice and radical notions of rest. For her, Shabbat is not a metaphor for resistance; it is its enactment. It speaks in a different register to what Christina Sharpe (2016) calls "living in the wake," an ethics of being in time shaped by the enduring aftermath of catastrophe. For Sharpe, the Wake refers to the ongoing presence of loss in the black community in the afterlife of slavery, and she calls for a way of living that neither disavows this grief nor reduces it to spectacle. Instead, it demands an orientation to time that is nonlinear, saturated with memory, and bound up with care, mourning, and relation.

In this context the Wake becomes a resonant framework for understanding Jewish temporality and the intergenerational weight of rupture. Like Sharpe's Wake, Jewish time holds catastrophe without collapsing into despair. Shabbat, in this frame, is both methodology and theory: a recursive, embodied practice that interrupts dominant time and makes space for grief, pleasure, obligation, and communal presence. It does not seek to escape the rhythms of loss but insists on continuity through relation, ritual, and rest. In this way, the Wake and Shabbat both illuminate how memory, mourning, and refusal live on in embodied, collective practice and how temporal interruption can itself be a form of epistemic and ethical resistance.

Midrash, Multiplicity, and Decolonial Interpretation

Jewish epistemologies are fundamentally dialogic, embracing interpretive multiplicity and the generative friction between divergent readings (Boyarin, 1990; Halbertal, 1997). The tradition of midrash exemplifies this stance: rather than seeking closure, it thrives on polyvocality and treats absence, rupture, and contradiction as meaningful. In this sense, it resonates with Saidiya Hartman's (2008) "critical fabulation," which acknowledges the limits of the historical record and insists on imagination as a legitimate mode of truth-seeking. Both midrash and critical fabulation resist erasure by refusing fixed meaning and by holding what is unsaid with as much care as what is spoken.

This alignment suggests the contours of a decolonial Jewish methodology, one that honours multiplicity, rupture, and imagination as valid sites of knowledge. As Handelman (1982) notes, rabbinic hermeneutics disrupt the binaries of Western philosophy, offering an interpretive stance that is recursive, embodied, and relational. Boyarin (1996) frames rabbinic learning as a diasporic hermeneutic, capable of holding contradiction without collapse and weaving together divergent interpretations. Such approaches refuse to separate reason from story, history from speculation, or knowledge from community, thereby modeling inquiry accountable to those silenced or marginalized in dominant narratives (Weiman-Kelman, 2018).

This thesis operationalizes midrash as both ethical stance and methodological scaffolding, treating participant narratives as intertextual contributions held in dynamic relation through thematic braiding, recursive return, and dialogic interpretation. Together with critical fabulation, this approach embraces silence, contradiction, and deviation as epistemic sites, grounding an imaginative, relational analytic practice attentive to rupture. As Tynan and Bishop (2023) write, "we inherit not only texts but silences." This literature review, and the thesis it precedes, does not seek to "occupy a niche," but to honour its obligations to participants, ancestors, future generations, and to the braided lineages of Jewish thought by treating storytelling, rupture, and ambiguity as epistemic ground. Jewish knowledge is decolonial not by imitation, but by affirming rhythm, memory, relation, and refusal as rigorous ways of knowing, rejecting linearity and coherence in favour of rest, contradiction, and reinterpretation as conditions of continuity and survival.

Part V: Toward Jewish Futures and the Ethics of Continuity

Jewish continuity, in the wake of rupture, is not mere survival but an ethical and generative undertaking. It resists nostalgic return, instead assembling futures through memory, ritual, and study. Rabbinic practices such as *midrash* and *chavruta* exemplify this recursive, dialogic mode of learning that embraces multiplicity and reinterpretation. Similarly, Rabbi Benay Lappe's Crash Theory reframes rupture as inevitable and insists that continuity is sustained through adaptation: "this too is Torah."

This framing holds productive tension with Judeo-pessimism, which sees antisemitism as an enduring structure of modernity. While Judeo-pessimism risks reducing Jewish life to perpetual precarity, Crash Theory foregrounds resilience through relational practice. Rituals like Shabbat and Shmita embody this ethic, interrupting capitalist logics through rest, redistribution, and ecological renewal. These practices resonate with decolonial and disability justice frameworks in their refusals of mastery and their commitments to relation, rhythm, and regeneration.

Continuity must therefore be re-theorized not as stability or replication, but as relational fidelity: a responsibility to carry rupture without erasing it. Jewish memory, as Roskies (1999) emphasizes, is active and re-performed, while Levinas (1969, 1990) insists it entails ethical responsibility to the other. In Benjamin's (1940) terms, continuity faces history's wreckage even as it is propelled forward. Continuity cannot guarantee safety, but it offers a shared way of moving together, even through collapse.

Inheriting Forward: Jewish Knowledge in Motion

Taken together, these literatures affirm that Jewish knowledge is not ancillary to theory but theory itself: a rigorous, relational epistemology rooted in embodied practice, intergenerational memory, communal responsibility, and sacred time. From rabbinic multiplicity to ritual repetition, from diaspora as condition to rest as refusal, Jewish thought offers methodologies that unsettle Western norms by troubling linearity, resisting universality, and holding contradiction as fullness rather than failure.

Across textual, oral, embodied, and inherited sources, a pattern emerges: memory as pedagogy, rest as resistance, and continuity as covenantal care… made and remade rather than given. Jewish epistemologies privilege integrity over coherence, sustaining grief and joy, rupture and regeneration, as simultaneous truths. They resist erasure through ritual, rhythm, refusal, and responsibility.

This review has not sought closure but attunement, braiding diasporic scholarship, decolonial theory, Jewish tradition, and communal praxis into a way of knowing already in motion. What moves forward are not conclusions but commitments: to community, interpretation, memory, and the ongoing, unfinished work of continuity.

Threads That Guide: Braiding a Theoretical Framework

Braided Jewish Theory and the Insistence on Cultural Continuity

This study is grounded in a braided, diasporic theoretical framework that draws together four deeply interwoven epistemic strands: (1) **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**, (2) **Jewish Epistemologies**, (3) **Am Yisrael** (Jewish peoplehood as relational identity), and (4) **Shabbat** (as radical, embodied, decolonial rest and relational time). The Jewish knowledges within this braided framework are not discrete theoretical lenses or imported frameworks; they are modes of knowing - living, breathing, contested, and practiced, that have developed over thousands of years in response to exile, rupture, resistance, and sacred memory. To name them as theoretical is to insist that they are more than tradition; they are theory-making forms in their own right, deeply interwoven with survival, obligation, and transformation.

The concept of a braided methodology is itself a Jewish epistemic metaphor. The braiding of challah before Shabbat, the interweaving of memory and mitzvah, the interpretive threads of Talmudic argument. Each gesture affirms that meaning is not made in linear strands but through the thick, relational entanglements of voice, time, and responsibility. In this sense, this framework enacts what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) calls "constellations of co-resistance." It draws from Indigenous and decolonial scholarship (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008), not as a comparative frame but as an assertion of kinship, epistemological and political, with other peoples whose ways of knowing have been devalued, silenced, or erased by colonial modernity.

This framework insists on epistemic justice, not merely as inclusion of Jewish content, but as an ontological and ethical orientation. Jewish knowledge, like all knowledge systems in part shaped in relation to trauma and continuity, is not neutral. It is relational, embodied, and oriented toward the collective, toward care, toward sacred memory, and toward the survival of peoplehood across rupture. As Fook (2002) writes about critical reflexivity in research, such knowledge systems invite not only analysis but self-examination and ethical accountability. Jewish epistemologies, similarly, are deeply reflexive practices: to know is to remember, to argue, and to care.

What follows is an extended articulation of each of the four braided strands of this theoretical framework, grounded in and infused with the lived textures and rhythms of Jewish epistemic life.

Critical Race Theory: Naming Erasure and Centering Counterstory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers an essential analytic for understanding how Jewish people have been repeatedly rendered unintelligible, flattened, and excluded within racial, legal, and epistemic structures. CRT, as articulated by Crenshaw, Bell, Delgado, and Stefancic, insists that racism is not an aberration but an ordinary and systemic feature of Western institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). While CRT was developed in legal scholarship, it has since been expanded across disciplines to interrogate how knowledge, identity, and power are co-constructed.

Jewish racialization has historically been shifting and context-specific: from medieval Christian constructions of the 'Jew' as eternal heretic, to 19th- and 20th-century pseudoscientific racism, to contemporary antisemitic tropes that both over-assimilate and scapegoat Jewish people (Shohat, 1999; Berenbaum, 2022). The dominant narrative today recodes Jewishness as purely religious and either entirely non-white or synonymous with whiteness (depending where one is viewing Jewish identity from). This obscures Jewish identity's diasporic, ethnic, and racialized components. Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, especially testimonial injustice, is particularly relevant here. Jewish accounts of oppression, whether through memory of pogrom, Holocaust, or exclusion from justice movements, are often dismissed or discredited. Jewish experience and story can be dismissed as fabricated or exaggerated, sanitized to fit a particular historical narrative.

CRT enables an analytic of conditional whiteness (Brodkin, 1998). Many Ashkenazi Jewish people who are phenotypically white can benefit from the privilege of conditional whiteness, but that access is precarious and historically contingent. As Drenzer (2025) argues, this conditionality does not negate racialization but complicates it. Jewish positionality must be understood as a liminal space within racial hierarchies, a space that can collapse or shift under political and social pressure.

Counterstorytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) is a core method within CRT and one deeply aligned with Jewish textual practices. Jewish survival has always been shaped by counterstory: Midrashic retellings, subversive commentary, oral transmission of trauma and resistance, and Talmudic voices that preserve dissent. These narratives are not only historical records, they are theory. They interpret, intervene, and insist on the right to memory.

By integrating CRT, this framework not only analyzes systems of erasure, it foregrounds Jewish ways of knowing as sites of theoretical production. It resists the demand for Jewish people to simplify, assimilate, or explain. Instead, it centers multiplicity, contradiction, and the epistemic power of survival.

Jewish Epistemologies: Lo Ba'Shamayim Hi, Chavruta, and the Ethics of Dialogue

Jewish epistemologies insist that knowledge is not given but forged in community. The concept of Lo Ba'Shamayim Hi ("It is not in Heaven") from Bava Metzia 59b tells the story of a rabbinic debate where divine intervention is explicitly rejected. God speaks, and the rabbis refuse, asserting that Torah belongs to the people and is shaped by their interpretive labour. This narrative elevates debate, relationality, and collective argumentation as sacred acts of knowledge-making.

The Talmud is a central text of Rabbinic Judaism, comprising centuries of legal debate, ethical reflection, and narrative interpretation. Its structure preserves disagreement and polyvocality, offering a living archive of Jewish thought and communal struggle. Within this study, the Talmud

models an epistemology where contradiction is generative, and where interpretation is a sacred act of communal responsibility.

Jewish study is not only dialogical; it is built on chavruta: group learning rooted in disagreement, intimacy, and care. This pedagogy values friction. The Talmud does not smooth contradictions; it preserves them. It does not seek final answers but endless inquiry. Goulden (2021) and Schwarz & Bekerman (2021) emphasize that chavruta is not just about interpretation, it is about trust, the co-construction of knowledge through shared time, and mutual respect.

In this study, Jewish epistemology is not only a theoretical lens, it is the form of analysis itself. The interviews and intergenerational exchanges mirror chavruta structure. Meaning arises through interruption, repetition, and divergence. Memory is co-created, not extracted. This is not merely methodological; it is ontological. It posits that Jewish being, Jewish life, is fundamentally shaped by the ways we remember, interpret, and transmit in relation.

Jewish knowledge is also sensory and embodied. As Boyarin (2018) and Fishbane (2018) write, Jewish learning lives in gesture, song, taste, ritual, and repetition. The blessing over bread, the call-and-response of Kiddush, the embodied choreography of lighting candles, each moment is a portal of knowing. This is knowledge that resides in the body, not the abstract. It is learned through muscle memory, family tension, and inherited rhythm.

This epistemology values what Dolgopolski (2024) calls the "meta-philosophical": the learning that emerges in the process of thinking, not only in its conclusion. In this way, Jewish knowledge is deeply aligned with feminist, Indigenous, and decolonial theories that emphasize knowing as an unfolding relation rather than a fixed object.

Am Yisrael: Diasporic Peoplehood as Theoretical Praxis

Am Yisrael (the Jewish people/Jewish peoplehood) is more than a community; it is an epistemic and ontological commitment to mutual care across difference, distance, and rupture. Am Yisrael is a diasporic entanglement of memory, covenant, and intergenerational responsibility. It is not reducible to Medinat Yisrael (the modern state of Israel) or Eretz Yisrael (the land); rather, Am Yisrael reflects a sacred, covenantal understanding of peoplehood defined by memory, obligation, and mutual care (Raviv, 2015; Harman & Bayme, 2008).

This theoretical strand resists neoliberal constructions of identity as personal, privatized, or transactional. Instead, it affirms that identity is forged in memory, obligation, and cultural responsibility. Hall's (1990) concept of identity as "narrative of the self" is reframed here as "narrative of the people."

The ethics of Am Yisrael are enacted through Jewish lifeways: tzedakah, mourning rituals (shiva, shloshim, yahrzeit, etc.), simcha (celebration), oral family history, gemilut chasadim (acts of loving kindness), and the embodied remembrance of ancestral trauma, brilliance, and survival. These are not customs, they are pedagogies. They are how knowledge is held and passed.

Gardner (2017) and Goldin (2006) explore how such practices transmit identity not through doctrine but through action.

Am Yisrael is also a refusal: a refusal to let go of each other, a refusal to collapse into individualism, a refusal to forget. In this study, participants are understood not as isolated informants but as members of Am Yisrael, engaged in the sacred work of cultural transmission. Their memories, questions, and even silences become part of a collective archive of past, present, and future.

Shabbat: Radical Rest and the Refusal of Empire

Shabbat is a spiritual technology of resistance. It interrupts the temporal logics of capitalism, productivity, and colonial order by asserting sacred time. It says: *The rhythms of the "productive world" do not own you. Your worth is not measured in output.* Watts-Belser (2024), Hersey (2022), and Sharpe (2016) all articulate the radical potential of rest as reclamation. In Jewish thought, this is not new it is ancient.

Shabbat reframes time itself. It is not linear but spiral, relational, and sacred. It begins with light and ends with separation (Havdalah). It is marked by pause, taste, song, and slowness. Shabbat is a space where Jewish knowledge is enacted and memory becomes tactile. As Dawn (1989) and Goodman (2022) argue, this is not leisure, it is pedagogy. It is embodied cultural transmission in real time. The smell of spices at Havdalah, the harmonies of zemirot, the tactile ritual of braiding the challah, these are forms of knowing that cannot be transcribed but are deeply held. They are epistemic and affective bridges across generations, borders, and histories.

To theorize Shabbat is to affirm that cultural survival requires more than resilience; it requires rest. It requires stopping long enough to feel what is being lost and what must be held. In this study, Shabbat informs the rhythm of inquiry and analysis. It offers a model of gathering, of presence, and of ancient temporal refusal.

Shabbat asserts a counter-world within the present (Heschel, 1951), a foretaste of liberation that insists on the primacy of being over doing. Abraham Joshua Heschel described Shabbat as "a palace in time," a sacred architecture that affirms rest not as escape but as essential encounter. Shabbat is an interruption that functions as critique. As Naomi Klein (2007) argues, disaster capitalism thrives on shock and speed. Shabbat, in contrast, teaches slow presence and care. Judith Butler (2004) has spoken of grievability and mourning as political acts; similarly, Shabbat invites us to feel, to grieve, to gather, and to delight in what is past, present, and future.

In the Black feminist lineage of rest theory, Hersey (2022) names rest as reparative, spiritual, and insurgent; a refusal to be consumed by the machine of extraction. Sharpe's (2016) call for "wake work" resonates with Shabbat's call to Zachor (remember) and to Shamor (guard), a dual consciousness that holds memory and refusal at once. Watts-Belser (2024) expands this praxis to crip time, emphasizing that rest is not absence but presence, not unproductivity but possibility.

Within diasporic Jewish life, Shabbat enacts communal temporality. It is not privatized retreat, but collective reorientation. It is slow, shared, cyclical time; what Potek (2021) calls "ritualized refusal" and what Benjamin (2019) frames as "critical fabulation." This is a temporal reclamation of future and past at once. To rest on Shabbat is to exit the empire's clock and enter a different cosmology, one where liberation begins with stopping.

Thus, Shabbat is not only theological or halakhic, it is theoretical. It is a diasporic method of care, a cultural and political logic of refusal, remembrance, and rest. It holds space for grief and joy, rupture and repair, exile and return all within the sacred frame of one day each week.

Makom for Interpretation: Implications for Analysis and Relational Sense-Making

In Hebrew, *makom* means "place," in Jewish tradition it can also refer to something more sacred. In this spirit, this section does not offer "implications" in the abstract but rather a sacred place, *makom*, to pause and consider how this braided theoretical framework shapes the interpretive practices of the study. Analysis, in this context, is not a separate phase of research but a continuation of its ethical and epistemic commitments.

First, the insistence on Jewish epistemologies as valid and sufficient means that data is understood not solely through coding or thematic categorization, but through intertextual dialogue. This mirrors chavruta, the stories shared by participants are placed into conversation with each other, with ancestral texts, and with the embodied ritual knowledge that frames them. As Wilson (2008) notes, relational accountability in Indigenous research includes being in relationship with ideas, not just people. Jewish learning affirms this: our interpretations are never singular, they are layered with generations.

Second, the prioritization of counterstory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and testimonial resistance (Fricker, 2007) requires a shift in analytical posture. Participant narratives are not data to be dissected but sacred texts to be received with *kavod* (honour) and *kavanah* (intention). In keeping with Talmudic traditions, contradictions are not reconciled but preserved. The analysis, therefore, values multiplicity and intentionally resists closure.

Third, Shabbat as temporal theory reminds us that slowness is an analytic tool. Rather than rushing to interpret, this framework invites a Shabbat rhythm: reading stories aloud multiple times, allowing emotional response to emerge, marking what is forgotten as much as what is remembered. As Hersey (2022) and Sharpe (2016) suggest, rest and refusal are analytical practices too. Analysis that arises from this posture is spacious, attuned, and ethically accountable.

Fourth, Am Yisrael reframes the analytic process as a communal act. Participants are not "objects" of analysis but partners in the unfolding of shared meaning. As Gardner (2017) and Goldin (2006) argue, Jewish knowledge is generated in relational space over meals, in mourning, and during ritual, not in sterile detachment. Analysis therefore becomes a form of communal

memory work. It asks: What are we preserving together? What wounds are we honouring? What futures are we invoking?

Finally, the implications for interpretation extend beyond the academic. As Smith (1999) and Simpson (2017) remind us, decolonial research must serve community, not just discourse. In this study, analysis is an act of stewardship: to protect memory, uplift voice, and resist disappearance. It is a way of saying: we heard you. We carry your stories not as findings, but as offerings.

Thus, *makom for interpretation* is not an afterthought, it is the continuation of the promise in the framework. It honours story as sacred, disagreement as generative, and relationality as central to all meaning-making. It does not seek to tame complexity but to live beside and within it. It asks not only what the data means, but what it demands of us.

Hesitations, Fragilities, and Sacred Boundaries: Considering the Edges of This Framework

Jewish tradition teaches us to mark the edges: the *eruv* that delineates boundaries for Shabbat, the margins of the Talmud page where commentary exists around core text, etc. In that spirit, this section names not limitations as lack, but sacred boundaries and necessary considerations. These are the hesitations and fragilities that accompany the use of a braided Jewish theoretical framework in research.

First, this framework is majority situated in Ashkenazi diasporic experience, particularly shaped by these diasporic contexts. While it draws on pan-Jewish texts and principles, such as *Am Yisrael* and *Shabbat*, it cannot speak for the full range of Jewish positionalities. Sephardi, Mizrahi, Ethiopian, and other non-Ashkenazi traditions of knowledge, while present here and resonant, as a result of the size and makeup of the Ottawa Jewish community are not sufficiently represented in the voices uplifted in this project. As El-Or (2006) and Shohat (1999) remind us, Ashkenormativity in academic and communal life can erase intra-Jewish difference and reproduce epistemic hierarchies. It is important to understand the breadth of Jewish knowledge and experience, what is discussed here is a particular interpretation.

Second, while this framework is rooted in Jewish relational and ritual epistemologies, it draws significant inspiration from Indigenous and Black decolonial theorists (e.g., Wilson, 2008; Simpson, 2017; Smith, 1999; Sharpe, 2016; Hersey, 2022). The deep kinship between these paradigms must be held with care, ensuring that borrowing does not become appropriation. As Tuck and Yang (2012) caution, settler moves to innocence can occur when marginalized communities claim decoloniality without confronting their own complicities. As Jewish people living on colonized land, our resistance must include attention to our own entanglements in settler colonialism.

Third, there is a tension between what is viewed as sacred and what is viewed as legible. Jewish epistemologies, especially those enacted through mitzvah, melody, and memory do not always translate cleanly into the language of academic theory. These ways of knowing are often nonlinear, embodied, and affective; they emerge in the pause before a blessing, the shared silence

of mourning, or the inherited rhythm of gesture at a Shabbat table. How do we account for these ephemeral forms of knowledge in scholarly writing? What gets lost in translation when we try to render sacred practice into analytic clarity? What parts of our frameworks are flattened, reduced, or lost when made "readable" in academic terms?

This work draws from scholars like Boyarin (2018) and Dolgopolski (2024), who argue that Talmudic thought fundamentally disrupts Western logics of clarity, linearity, and coherence. The Talmud's refusal of resolution, its embrace of contradiction and polyvocality, poses a challenge to academic conventions that prioritize synthesis and conclusion. And yet the risk remains: that by framing these epistemologies as "theory," we may inadvertently instrumentalize them, treating sacred traditions as methodological tools rather than inheritances. There is a fragility in translating what is deeply intimate, relational, and communal into academic discourse, and with it a responsibility to ensure that theory does not sever itself from practice and realities of Jewish life.

Fourth, there is a risk of romanticization. This framework celebrates Jewish survivance, relationality, and interpretive tradition but these are not always experienced as nourishing. For some participants, Jewish community has also been a site of harm: through racism, ableism, homophobia, or exclusion. As Lander (2021) and Tsabary (2020) note, communal epistemologies are shaped by both trauma and triumph. Thus, any analysis of *Am Yisrael* or Jewish memory must hold pain and ambivalence alongside joy and continuity.

Finally, there is the fragility of working with stories, particularly those offered by elders, as theoretical material. These stories are not "data." They are sacred, living inheritances. Their meanings shift over time. Their tellings may carry grief, nostalgia, or deep ambivalence. As Smith (1999) asserts, Indigenous and decolonial research must prioritize care over consumption. In this study, analysis is shaped by Jewish principles of *kavod* (honour), *emet* (truth), and *chesed* (loving-kindness), recognizing that every story is a world, and every participant a teacher.

This section then is not a disclaimer but a boundary marker. It reminds us that even sacred structures have thresholds. That the work of Jewish theorizing must remain unfinished, ethically accountable, and held in tension. That fragility is not a flaw, it is a sign that the work is alive and evolving.

Theory as Covenant, Resistance, and Return

These four braided frameworks: Critical Race Theory, Jewish epistemologies, Am Yisrael, and Shabbat do not simply underpin this study; they are the study. They are not supplemental scaffolds to be applied after the fact, but foundational commitments from which the research emerges. Together, they form a theoretical covenant: not a contract, but a sacred relational promise, a binding of memory, accountability, and presence across generations.

This is a promise rooted in a resistance to the epistemic erasures that mark both academic discourse and communal forgetting. Critical Race Theory confronts the structural conditions that

attempt to render Jewish identity incoherent, illegible, or hypervisible in harmful ways. It names the racialization and erasure of Jewish people as part of a broader project of white supremacy and colonialism. A CRT framework insists that Jewish identity cannot be understood outside of these systems, and Jewish memory cannot be honoured without naming the forces that threaten its survival.

Jewish epistemologies, grounded in dialogical study, embodied ritual, and intergenerational transmission, offer a different kind of authority: one that values ambiguity, contradiction, and relationship over certainty or linearity. They teach us that wisdom lives not only in texts, but in the ways we argue, sing, and gather. They remind us that theory is not something that lives in the mind alone, it is practiced in kitchens, at gravesides, and around Shabbat tables.

Am Yisrael reframes the very question of "who knows" by repositioning the self within a people. It resists the individualization of identity and instead affirms knowledge as a shared inheritance that is fragile, collective, and carried. It insists that to be Jewish is not just to feel something, or to believe something, but to *hold* something: a bundle of obligations, a lineage of voices, a living archive of rupture and continuity. In a neoliberal world that fragments and isolates, Am Yisrael is a theoretical intervention in favour of interdependence.

Shabbat, finally, is not merely the temporal backdrop for this study. It is a theoretical orientation to time itself. Shabbat models what Christina Sharpe (2016) calls "wake work," the creation of space for grief, reflection, and collective presence in the aftermath of violence. It embodies what Tricia Hersey (2022) calls "rest as resistance." It is a refusal to be consumed by urgency. A refusal to collapse memory into utility. A refusal to let time belong only to empire. Shabbat makes time for return, for memory, for slowness, and for presence.

Taken together, these frameworks form a deeply embodied, diasporic, and insurgent theory. They say: we do not forget. We do not analyze from above. We do not sever our selves from our stories. This is not a neutral framework. It is loving, grieving, intergenerational, and diasporic. It is a covenant with those who came before, and a commitment to those yet to come.

This theoretical framework rooted in ancient Jewish knowledge insists that to theorize is not to extract, but to carry. Not to resolve, but to remain. Not to master, but to return.

Braiding the Threads: A Promise of Theory and Continuity

Throughout this framework, the metaphor of braiding has served as both a visual and conceptual guide. What is braided here is:

1. **Critical Race Theory**, which provides a structural analysis of erasure and racialization.

2. **Jewish Epistemologies**, which assert dialogical, embodied, and intergenerational knowledge-making.

3. **Am Yisrael**, which positions Jewish identity as a communal, diasporic, and ontological practice.

4. **Shabbat**, which offers a radical reorientation to time, memory, and collective presence.

Each of these strands is a site of theory, memory, and resistance. They are not supplemental tools overlaid onto the research, they are its ethical and interpretive foundation. They braid together not in uniform symmetry, but in living tension: critique and care, memory and rupture, slowness and urgency.

The visual illustration of this braid offers a concrete image of the intertwined commitments that shape this work. It resembles the braiding of challah or the ends of strings of a tallit. It pulls from pages of Talmud where voices wrap around each other in concentric layers. What is most important is the relational logic: nothing in this framework stands alone.

This is theory as a sacred promise to remember, to remain accountable, and to resist erasure through the act of interwoven knowledge. It is a diasporic methodology rooted in survival, obligation, and collective return.

Braided Methodologies: Researching Jewishly

Braided Jewish Methodologies as Insurgent Research

This research is not built upon a scaffold of neutrality. It is braided like challah on a Thursday afternoon from strands of memory, rupture, care, and inheritance. It emerges from within a diasporic Jewish community shaped by histories of marginalization, assimilation, and resistance. In this context, methodology is not separable from ritual; it *is* ritual. Method becomes story, scent, song, and sacred pause, embodied practices of knowing and remembering.

Drawing on Carranza's (2024) articulation of insurgent data collection, this study refuses the colonial logics of neutrality, detachment, and universalism that have long shaped Western academic paradigms. Carranza describes insurgent methodology as one that "takes up space, speaks back, and refuses containment," foregrounding relationality, embodiment, and memory as critical sites of knowledge. This refusal resonates with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999, 2012) critique of research as a tool of imperialism and her call for methodologies rooted in respect, reciprocity, and relational accountability. Similarly, Kovach (2009) emphasizes that Indigenous methodologies are not only about who is researched but about how knowledge is generated through story, community connection, and epistemic humility. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) further underscores that decolonial inquiry must remain grounded in specific cultural worlds and committed to the resurgence of community-based knowledge systems. Guided by these scholars, this project's methodology orients away from neutrality and toward an ethical, situated act of remembrance, an insurgent practice privileging relationship, ritual, and refusal over abstraction and extractivism. In this orientation, it also aligns with critical social work research, which continually grapples with tensions between neutrality and advocacy, knowledge extraction and relational care. Rather than positioning social work as a detached observer, this study insists on social work as a practice of accountability. This braided methodology brings together three interwoven threads: Community-Based Research (CBR) (Israel et al., 1998; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010), interpretive phenomenology (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 2016), and Jewish epistemologies. Each strand reinforces the others, forming a relational approach grounded in lived experience and Jewish meaning-making. CBR centers the expertise, priorities, and participation of community members, positioning them as co-researchers and knowledge-holders rather than objects of study (Israel et al., 1998; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010), and here it was enacted as a relational and spiritual commitment through shared meals, intergenerational storytelling, and trust cultivated over time. Interpretive phenomenology, as articulated by van Manen (2016) and Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), complements this orientation by emphasizing lived experience, embodiment, and meaning-making in context, privileging relational specificity and affective presence over generalization. Grounded in these approaches, Jewish epistemologies further shape the study through practices of *Am Yisrael* (Batnitzky, 2011; Plaskow, 1991), including *chavruta* (dialogic study) (Hartman, 2007), *dor l'dor* storytelling (Zornberg, 2009), embodied mitzvot, and ritual time such as Shabbat. Within this

framework, Shabbat dinners, challah baking, and Havdalah were not merely contextual supplements but epistemological sites, what Tuck and McKenzie (2015) describe as "place-based sites of knowledge production," where wisdom was transmitted through presence, memory, and shared breath. Each methodological strand deepens and supports the others. Together, they move in concordance, resonating with one another rather than collapsing into sameness. Concordance, as described by Greene (2007) and echoed in Kovach's (2009) discussion of relational accountability, emphasizes harmony across difference, threads that retain their specificity while creating coherence in relation. These strands of inquiry work together in harmony without needing to collapse into sameness. This braided insurgent research practice is thus not a singular method but a concordant one, resisting extractive forms of inquiry and instead holding space for communal healing, intergenerational witnessing, and joy. As Kovach (2009) argues, story and community are not merely data, they are sacred forms of relational accountability.

Ultimately, this methodology was born from a desire to honour Jewish communal stories as sacred inheritances. It enacts what Smith (2012) describes as *research as ceremony*, a practice that upholds dignity, reciprocity, and cultural meaning. Every conversation within this project was approached like a Shabbat table, where memory, grief, and hope are interwoven like strands of dough in our hands. And like challah, this knowledge is meant to be shared.

Returning to Community Knowledge: Jewish Epistemology as Decolonial Method

To braid Jewish epistemologies into the methodology of this study is an act of return. A return to knowledge that was always there, held in kitchens and sanctuaries, hummed through lullabies, whispered in grief, and sung in joy. To draw on Jewish ways of knowing is a decolonial refusal to accept that valid knowledge must be neutral, objective, or abstract. A refusal to forget and a refusal to be forgotten.

Decolonial scholars have long called for methods that center Indigenous, community-rooted, and spiritually grounded forms of knowing. Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that research itself has been a tool of imperialism, often extracting knowledge from colonized peoples and severing it from its source (Smith, 1999). This severing is acutely relevant in Jewish contexts, where songs, foods, rituals, and frameworks such as Shabbat, Shmita, klezmer music, or even ethical principles like tikkun olam are lifted from Jewish communal life and repurposed as universal, decontextualized artifacts. Decolonial research, in contrast, requires a radical reorientation: it "comes back" to the community, not only to give back, but to begin there and to remember that the community was always the first site of knowledge. In this study, that principle is enacted by designing every stage of the research within Jewish communal spaces, rituals, and relationships ensuring that knowledge is generated, interpreted, and held within the same community that lives it. This work is guided by communal rhythms, allowing Jewish time and practice to shape how knowledge is created and mobilized. Care is enacted in culturally resonant ways, drawing on conversational styles rooted in Jewish communal life and grounded in traditions of multiplicity, questioning, and mutual support. Returning to the community is not limited to sharing results but

involves ongoing check-ins to orient toward safety, honouring participants as *shomrei zikaron* (memory keepers), and making choices anchored in a distinctly Jewish guiding ethic.

In this research, Jewish epistemology's mitzvot, temporality, and ethics of memory and care are "gestures of refusal" as Tuck and Yang articulate. They insist on the sacredness of relationship and the particularity of context. As Shah and Tuck argue, decoloniality is not only about who is being studied but how and why knowledge is being pursued at all. This study aligns with those principles not by mimicking Indigenous method, but by drawing from the Jewish cultural archive in similarly sovereign ways.

Jewish epistemologies such as *machloket l'shem shamayim* (sacred disagreement) and *chavruta* (dialogic study) position learning as inherently relational, embedding a political stance that resists colonial logics of certainty, closure, and hierarchy. Knowledge in this tradition unfolds through layered commentary, embodied repetition, and intergenerational storytelling, aligning with what decolonial theorists term "horizonal methodologies" that privilege relational accountability and co-creation (Coulthard, 2014). What renders this approach decolonial is not only its cultural rootedness but its refusal to universalize and its insistence on situated, ancestral practice. As Simpson (2017) argues, such reclamation is a return to ourselves, countering colonial severance. Within this frame, Jewish practices, whether Shabbat, naming, or storytelling, are not supplementary rituals but epistemic interventions: theory, resistance, and future-making. This resonates with Kovach's (2009) articulation of Indigenous methodologies as "coming full circle," where research accountability lies with community rather than the academy. In this study, Jewish epistemology reclaims its own authority, recognizing ritual, blessing, and memory as legitimate forms of knowledge alongside transcript and fieldnote.

Such a position challenges the imperial nature of research itself, what Gloria Swain (2018) terms "emotional imperialism," the expectation that marginalized communities share pain in formats legible to dominant frameworks. This research refuses that expectation offering care, trust, and mitzvah in its place. Privileging communal knowledge over institutional approval, it is grounded in what Shah and Tuck (2021) call "place-thought," where knowledge is inseparable from people, practices, and land. Within this study, that commitment is enacted through Jewish ritual, memory, and relationship as primary sites of inquiry, honouring the diasporic Jewish connection to land as both physical and remembered, ancestral and lived. Knowledge emerges in spaces where praying toward Jerusalem, celebrating harvest festivals tied to another climate, or cherishing the symbolic resonance of olives and figs embody a layered sense of place. Here, home may be a land longed for, a Shabbat table, a familiar song, or a treasured story, each sustaining connection across geographies through tradition. To return to Jewish community knowledge as methodology is therefore not nostalgia but insurgency (Carranza, 2024): a deliberate, tender, resistant practice, like Havdalah itself, woven of memory, embodiment, and return. It is a coming back to what was already ours.

Method as Healing: Memory Work, Care Work

In Jewish life, memory is not passive recollection but a sacred imperative: *zakhor* ("remember") and *yizkor* ("may we remember") are embodied, moral acts that call forth responsibility, mourning, and action (Yerushalmi, 1982). Memory within this framework is inseparable from ethical accountability to ancestors, to community, and to the future, and unfolds not in linear time but in cyclical, dialogical rhythms enacted through mitzvah, text, and storytelling (Boyarin, 1994; Yerushalmi, 1982). *Am Yisrael*, the collective Jewish people, weaves grief and resilience, personal narrative and collective obligation into an ongoing tapestry of meaning. In this study, remembering is not a data collection technique but a sacred relational offering shaped by this epistemological and ethical lens. As *Shomrei Zikronim*, participants' stories carry traces of rupture and renewal, silence and song, pain and perseverance, narratives that arrive in fragments, gestures, pauses, and shared glances. As Benjamin (1968) observes, the storyteller does not simply convey facts but transmits wisdom through the residue of lived experience. This methodology holds space for that residue, the unspeakable and incomplete, recognizing that meaning often resides in affective, relational, and embodied forms of knowing (Coady, 2010; Rossiter, 2005). In social work, as in this research, silences, gestures, and fragments hold as much significance as words, demanding attentiveness as a form of ethical, culturally responsive engagement.

The nature of a decolonial research methodology is that it is communally situated and thus already trauma informed. This means that a trauma-informed research design, here, goes beyond accessible documents or procedural ethics. It resists urgency (Brown, 2021) and embraces the slow unfolding of stories that may surface only through relational trust. Healing-centered approaches, as Ginwright (2018) describes, prioritize relational safety, dignity, and wholeness rather than framing participants through deficit or pathology, and in this study such care is embedded in ritual time, shared meals, co-created rhythms, and flexibility to follow participants' pacing. Community itself becomes an active force of care, where participants bear witness to one another with presence and warmth, enacting the Jewish ethical imperative of mutual responsibility and the sacredness of collective care. Relational safety here is not treated as an outcome but as a guiding ethic, scaffolded by trusted partnerships, culturally meaningful rituals, and familiar spaces (Tuck & Yang, 2014; Kovach, 2009). Grief at the table is welcomed as an honoured guest, laughter is received as resilience and resistance, and joy, as Lorde (1988) reminds us, is held as political survival. Silence, too, is epistemically significant: in Jewish tradition it has long served as a conduit of memory and resistance (Zornberg, 2001), and within this methodology a memory surfacing through a bodily gesture or a lingering presence after Havdalah is understood as meaningful. These fragments and gestures are, as Visweswaran (1994) writes, "partial truths" rich, affective, and embodied modes of knowing.

This research does not seek to extract stories of survival; it seeks to hold them with reverence. It listens not only to what is said, but also to what trembles beneath the surface. Jewish storytelling rarely follows chronological order; stories are woven around ritual, loss, and mitzvah and are

told in fragments, blessings, food, and melody. They arise from kitchens as much as from books; they are handed down *dor l'dor* (generation to generation) (Heschel, 1955; Boyarin, 1996).

Returning to the Braid: Knowledge and Communal Weaving

Interpretive phenomenology deepens this commitment to recognizing 'partial truths' by attuning to lived experience and embodied meaning-making (van Manen, 2016; Smith et al., 2009). It allows for deep listening to how memory moves through breath, silence, and gesture, without demanding coherence or closure. Community-Based Research (CBR) grounds this work in relational accountability, co-creation, and the ethical imperative to center community priorities and care (Israel et al., 1998; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010).

The Shabbat table becomes a sacred site of inquiry, a beit midrash (house of learning) of memory, where grief and joy are welcomed as co-travelers. In Jewish life, wholeness is not found in the erasure of pain but in the capacity to hold contradiction, where sorrow and celebration coexist as truths that do not cancel each other out (Barenblat, 2017). Healing in this context is not clinical but cultural, spiritual, and intergenerational, finding its rhythm in community. To research within Jewish community, then, is to recognize that care and knowledge are inseparable. As Kleinman (2008) reminds us, care is a moral practice, one that gives form to suffering and resilience through relationship. Acts of chesed (lovingkindness), shared mitzvah, and collective memory are not merely the backdrop but the very substance of knowledge creation. This research is not passive cultural preservation; it is embodied, active practice; healing that unfolds *dor l'dor* (generation to generation).

Mitzvah as Epistemology: Shabbat as Method

In this study, Shabbat is not merely a contextual backdrop but a central methodological framework, shaping the structure, pace, and embodied logic of the research process—from Thursday evening challah baking with younger participants, to Friday night candle lighting and shared dinner, to Saturday night Havdalah in the closing circle. Rather than treating Jewish rituals as objects of cultural analysis, this study positions mitzvah as the means of inquiry: Shabbat functions as framework, lens, and terrain upon which knowledge unfolds (Orlov, 2021). Engaging in practices such as baking challah, lighting candles, singing *zmirot*, and smelling the *besamim* during Havdalah facilitates shared memory, communal time-marking, and the transmission of generational experiences, conveying knowledge that transcends textual documentation (Karabelnicoff, 2025). These mitzvot enact what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes as "generative refusal," resisting assimilation into Western temporality and abstraction, while Shabbat rest embodies Tricia Hersey's notion of radical, intentional rest as a form of resistance and remembrance. This deliberate deceleration fosters presence, reflection, and relational connection, challenging the urgency often imposed by research and reaffirming Jewish epistemology as oral, embodied, and ancestral. By structuring the study around Shabbat, the research honours tradition as living methodology, positioning Shabbat as both a means of memory and continuity. The study does not merely replicate these traditions; it humbly and

entirely joins in them. What follows describes how these commitments were carried into practice. The next section traces the ways this methodology unfolded in real time: through recruitment, chavruta, and mitzvah, showing how Shabbat was not only a framework in theory but a lived method of research.

Living the Method: How the Research Unfolded

In keeping with the commitments of this thesis, the account of how this research unfolded will not be offered as a flattened, surface-level record of actions. Every choice was made with intention, rooted in Jewish ways of knowing and being. Recruitment was never only recruitment; naming was more than anonymization; each gathering was far more than prompts followed by conversation. To strip these moments from their context and render them as a procedural checklist would not only diminish them, but also obscure the situated, relational, and embodied nature of this work. For this reason, the methodology that follows may look different from what is typical in social work. Here, process is told as story because in Jewish tradition, stories are among our most enduring and resonant ways of teaching, learning, and transmitting knowledge.

Embodied Approaches to Participant Recruitment

Recruitment for this study began with purposive sampling, seeking between three and five Jewish older adults (aged 67+) and three to five Jewish younger adults (aged 19–30) living in Ottawa. Eligibility criteria included self-identification as Jewish (by practice, culture, heritage, or affiliation), residence in Ottawa, comfort with English-language conversation, and openness to discussing intergenerational Jewish life. Ethical approval was obtained through the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB), with an approved amendment to include a participatory analysis session, ensuring that interpretation remained accountable to and co-constructed with participants.

Initial recruitment was facilitated by community partners such as the Soloway Jewish Community Centre (JCC), AJA 50+, Khilat Beit Israel (KBI), and Chabad on Campus at Carleton University and the University of Ottawa. The physical locations for gathering were chosen intentionally for their familiarity and accessibility within the Ottawa Jewish community. The Chabad House was selected for the challah bake because it was a familiar and welcoming space for many younger Jewish adults in the city. The JCC was chosen for its safety and perceived neutrality in the Jewish community, providing a comfortable, safe, and accessible location that would not privilege one denomination or affiliation over another. Synagogues were deliberately avoided as primary venues to reduce the possibility of alienating participants who might feel unwelcome or out of place in religious or specific congregational settings.

Recruitment materials, both written invitations and oral conversations, were shaped to ensure participation was voluntary, informed, and flexible. Each prospective participant took part in an initial conversation to confirm eligibility, express accessibility needs, and co-create a safer and affirming space for participation.

While recruitment began purposively, it naturally evolved into a snowball process: participants referred friends, elders invited partners, and trust moved through word-of-mouth rather than institutional gatekeeping. This approach ultimately resulted in a group diverse across Jewish affiliations, geographic origins, ritual practices, and family migration stories.

The Ottawa Jewish community is small, and it was anticipated that I would likely know participants from other aspects of communal life, and that participants might also know one another. These existing connections were held with openness and mutual consent, guided by relational ethics present in both social work practice and Jewish communal values (Kovach, 2009; Kleinman, 2008).

Participant recruitment in this study was an ethical and relational practice, rooted in Community-Based Research (CBR) and framed by insurgent research methods (Carranza, 2024). The age groupings were chosen for their symbolic positions within the intergenerational arc of Jewish continuity: younger participants navigating the active tensions of identity formation and inherited memory; older participants carrying lived legacies of adaptation, tradition, and rupture. This approach was guided by the concept of *dor l'dor* (from generation to generation), an epistemological framework for understanding how Jewish knowledge and resilience are transmitted (Zornberg, 2009; Boyarin, 1994).

Beyond meeting eligibility criteria, what was sought was resonance, a willingness to enter into a relational space of shared memory, vulnerability, and meaning-making. This organic recruitment process reflects Jewish epistemologies of relationship, care, and mutuality (Hartman, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2014). This mosaic of Jewish life was not incidental but central: Jewishness, as this research affirms, is plural, diasporic, and contested (Simpson, 2017; Heschel, 1955). Each participant's experience was treated as sacred, specific, and deeply situated.

Data Collection as Mitzvah:

In this study, data collection was designed rooted in Jewish ways of knowing, relational accountability, and epistemological presence. Method, here, was inseparable from ritual. This reflects both the *braided methodology* (community-based research, interpretive phenomenology, and Jewish epistemologies) and the decolonial refusal of methodological disembodiment (Smith, 2012; Carranza, 2024). Each stage of data collection: *challah baking*, *Shabbat dinner*, and *Havdalah*, was conceived not as an isolated "event" but as part of an arc, grounded in the temporality of Shabbat and guided by the logics of *Am Yisrael* (Jewish peoplehood) and *dor l'dor* (generation to generation).

These gatherings enacted what Tuck and McKenzie (2015) describe as *place-based sites of knowledge production*, where knowledge does not emerge from abstraction but from presence, story, breath, and communal time. Orlov (2021) similarly argues that in Jewish traditions, epistemology is not merely textual but embodied through sensory ritual, sacred time, and shared action. The use of Shabbat as the organizing structure of data collection reflects this logic: Shabbat was not the backdrop of research, but its very method, inviting both participants and the researcher into a slowed, reflective rhythm that disrupted capitalist, extractive, and colonial patterns of inquiry (Hersey, 2022; Simpson, 2017).

Each component of the Shabbat cycle, beginning with *challah baking* and culminating in *Havdalah*, was intentionally designed to foster Jewish culturally meaningful dialogue, intergenerational trust, and layered memory-sharing. These gatherings were supported with Jewish community centered trauma-informed care practices (Ginwright, 2018) and prioritized accessibility, participant pacing, and collective/individual safety.

Challah Bake: Embodied Preparation and Ritual Trust

The first gathering was a communal *challah bake* held on a Thursday evening, exclusively for younger adult participants (ages 19–30). While this event initiated the formal research process, it simultaneously grounded it in *ritual preparation*. In Jewish tradition, the baking of *challah* on Thursdays or Fridays is its own mitzvah, a way of holding time in our hands, of weaving nourishment, both physical and spiritual, into the days that lead to rest (Karabelnicoff, 2025). The braided dough, formed through hands, time, and memory served not just as food but as metaphor: a symbol of interconnectedness, cyclical return, and layered lineage. The dough was braided slowly, each strand pulled and turned by hands as the room fills with the scent of something ancient and familiar. This bread was not only for eating; it was a reminder of how lives, memories, and lineages twist together, rise together, and return to one another.

In the context of this study, the *challah bake* functioned as a relational warm-up and a trust-building mitzvah. It created a sensory-rich, informal environment where younger participants could begin sharing stories, hesitations, and memories in a low-pressure, culturally familiar setting framed by flour dusted laughter that follows. Guided prompts were available but not imposed; the conversation flowed according to participant comfort and direction, affirming autonomy and resisting scripted extractive interviews. This gathering was audio-recorded with oral and signed consent and accompanied by detailed fieldnotes and reflexive journaling, capturing not only the spoken word but also the smell of rising yeast, the feeling of flour-dusted hands, and the laughter/silence/pause, what van Manen (2016) might call "felt meaning."

Figure 1: Challah Bake Room Set Up

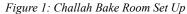*Figure 2: Baked Challah*

Participants were invited to reflect on their Jewish upbringing, their relationships to tradition, and their hopes and fears for entering intergenerational dialogue. This space was speaking both to connection and to a sense of loss or distance from ritual practice, which made the act of baking challah together both novel and grounding. The gathering became what Simpson (2011)

calls a "generative refusal," a refusal of isolation and shame, and a co-created moment of ritual reinvention.

Shabbat Dinner: Beit Midrash of Memory

The heart of the study was a Friday night *Shabbat dinner* where older (67+) and younger (19–30) Jewish participants came to the same table. The room carried the warmth of arrival: the scent of food already on the table, the hum of voices greeting one another, and the flicker of candlelight marking the shift from weekday to sacred time. This meal was not a symbolic nod to tradition; it was the epistemic engine of the study, the place where memory and joy could be exchanged in the cadences of story, question, and contradiction (Hartman, 2007; Boyarin, 1994). The Shabbat table here was a *beit midrash*, a house of learning, where learning happened in the space between voices, in the weaving of gestures, glances, and pauses

Younger participants entered into this space already holding the conversations of challah baked the night before, offering a tactile thread of continuity between gatherings. The challah, made by the younger adults, became a literal and symbolic offering to the community, modeling care, preparation, and intergenerational presence. The challah used at shabbat dinner was the challah baked by the younger adults. Blessings are recited over candles, grape juice, and bread, anchoring the evening in mitzvah and ritual rhythm.

The meal unfolded slowly, as Shabbat meals do. Open-ended conversation prompts were gently offered to be picked up or left alone. Themes of cultural continuity, intergenerational resilience, joy, rupture, and future-building surfaced naturally. Talk moved as in *chavruta* learning together, dialogue that unfolds through mutual curiosity, disagreement, and shared inquiry (Hartman, 2007).

Figure 4: Shabbat Table

Figure 3: Shabbat Candles

Crucially, no audio recordings were made during this dinner, honoring both halachic tradition and the epistemological perspective that not all knowledge must be captured to be valid. This methodological decision draws from Jewish ways of knowing as well as the insights of Tuck and Yang (2014) and Visweswaran (1994), who emphasize that some truths are inherently relational,

partial, and affective, and that attempts to "capture" them through academic technologies risk diminishing or violating their essence. Choosing not to audio-record Shabbat dinners represents a deliberate commitment to respecting longstanding traditions. Certain knowledge is embodied, expressed through bodily gestures, relational rhythms, and shared communal experience rather than fixed in recorded form. Instead, post-Shabbat fieldnotes and participant reflections were collected. Participants later can share additional memories and meaning that had surface after the meal, demonstrating that knowledge often arrives in its own time, not on the researcher's recorded schedule.

Presence itself becomes data. As Orlov (2021) argues, Jewish knowledge is enacted through *touch, sound, breath, and absence*. These elements, that can so easily be ignored, are treated as sacred within this study. Facilitated by the relational pause and temporality of Shabbat.

Havdalah: Ritual Reflection and Re-entry

The final gathering took place on a Saturday night, in the soft threshold where Shabbat meets the week. Havdalah, meaning "separation," is the ritual that closes Shabbat, but its work is more than ending. It is a weaving: carrying forward what was felt, learned, and shared into the days ahead. The room held that liminal quality, the bittersweet pull of leaving sacred time and the quiet anticipation of what comes next. Havdalah is a ritual of the senses. The sharp sweetness of *besamim* (cloves, cinnamon, star anise, etc.) passed from hand to hand, drawing each person in to breathe deeply. The braided candle burning, its warm light reflecting off hands held up to feel its heat. Wine or grape juice tasted, song rising and falling. This is a mitzvah that speaks to the whole body, imprinting memory not through instruction but through touch, scent, taste, and sound. In this way, Havdalah echoed the epistemic grounding of the study: that knowing is not abstracted from life but held in the body, felt before it is named (van Manen, 2016; Hersey, 2022).Unlike the Shabbat dinner, the Havdalah gathering was audio-recorded.. Words shared here could be returned to later alongside fieldnotes, tracing the verbal contours of what the weekend had held. Participants reflected on the arc of Shabbat, the entry through preparation at the challah bake, the dwelling in sacred time at the Friday night table, and this moment of parting. Reflections moved between joy and grief, between hope for continuity and awareness of rupture, often holding both at once. Rather than "collecting" stories as isolated accounts, these stories and conversations are interconnected and emerge in ritual time, relational space, and community rhythm. In this way, data collection is *mitzvah*, a practice of witnessing, care, and epistemic justice.

Following Havdalah participants were gifted thank you Shabbat and Havdalah kit. This particular thank you gift was intentionally chosen to continue in their own homes and lives, the preservation and renewal of embodied Jewish practice they spoke of throughout the weekend. . In this way, the research did not simply end; it moved outward, braided into the lives of those who had shared in it.

Figure 5: Havdalah Table

Figure 6: Thank you gift

Individual Interviews and Written Reflections

Alongside the shared gatherings, participants were invited to offer individual reflections, through one-on-one conversations or written narratives. These parallel paths made space for the plurality of Jewish storytelling, for the quieter currents and layered truths that sometimes rest beneath the surface of communal talk (Benjamin, 1968; Boyarin, 1996).

The interviews were unhurried, shaped by the pace of relationship. They became spaces to linger with what had surfaced over Shabbat: the moments of rupture, the inheritances carried forward, the silences that spoke, and the choices that shaped Jewish life in the present. In these conversations, fragments of memory found room to breathe: a single story told in detail, an unspoken feeling finally named, or a question left open. Written reflections offered a different kind of spaciousness. This form welcomed those whose knowledge-making is contemplative, internal, or rooted in other ways of holding and expressing thought.

Across all forms, participants held full agency over what they shared. Prompts were there, but only as gentle invitations. They could be ignored, reshaped, or followed in unexpected directions. Responses could be revised, withheld, or withdrawn altogether. In this way, consent was not a moment at the start of participation but a living practice, resisting extraction and affirming that each person's story remained their own (Smith, 1999; Brown, 2021).

Transcription, Anonymization, and Naming as Resistance

All recorded conversations (excluding Shabbat dinner) were transcribed verbatim, including pauses, laughter, sighs, and collective silences, nonverbal data in this study is epistemically central. Transcription was followed by holistic, immersive reading to develop a felt sense of the data before any formal coding began.

Data were stored securely, with transcripts and fieldnotes kept in password protected files accessible only to myself (the researcher). Identifying details (ex: synagogue affiliation, school attendance, etc.) were redacted, especially given the small size and interconnectedness of the Ottawa Jewish community.In a deliberate refusal of decontextualizing anonymization, participants are given pseudonyms drawn from traditional Jewish names, collaboratively selected to reflect each participant's story, presence, and contribution. Names such as Eber, Eitan, Gila, and Bina are chosen not to erase identity but to affirm it, echoing the belief that names are data, inheritance, and dignity (Beider, 2012; Farkas, 2009; Assaf, 2016).

Carrying Names, Carrying Memory: Naming as Resistance

In this study, participants are not anonymized through alphanumeric codes. They are given *Jewish* names. Names that echo with memory, tradition, and lineage. Names that have been whispered at Simchat Bat/Ben (baby namings), carved into headstones, and lovingly recalled during Yizkor services.

To name someone within a Jewish framework is to root them in a communal history. Names are not placeholders, they are inheritances (Beider, 2012; Assaf, 2016). In this research, assigning Jewish pseudonyms was not a neutral act, it was an act of cultural resistance. Throughout history, Jewish names have been erased, changed, and lost. At Ellis Island, in the Shoah (holocaust), in forced hiding, in state documents that could not accommodate the rhythms of Hebrew, Yiddish, or Ladino (Ravvin, 1997; Farkas, 2012; Farkas, 2009). To restore those names, even symbolically and avoid mirroring this erasure through the anonymizing process, traditional Jewish names are used to refer to participants. To restore them here, even symbolically, is a refusal. It is a way of saying: our names matter, our names carry our histories, our names *are* data.

Each participant's chosen or given pseudonym reflected something essential, an ancestral echo, a linguistic root, a spiritual continuity. This is not about protecting identity alone; it is about asserting identity. Naming in this research is a form of data sovereignty (Hummel et al., 2021), an assertion that Jewish lives and lineages will not be reduced to "Participant A" or "Subject 3."

In doing so, the research disrupts Western norms of de-identification that strip away meaning. Instead, it reclaims naming as a method of dignity, specificity, and honour. Every pseudonym becomes part of the tapestry and a thread of the story. In this, naming becomes a poignant refusal to be reduced, numbered, or erased.

In Table 1 you will find the chosen names for each participant, their symbolism and meanings, and reason for the name. Each name was chosen collaboratively with participants highlighting how they felt they were present in our conversations.

Table 1: Participant Naming

Name	Symbolism (Behind the Name, 2025)	Reason for Choice
עֵבֶר (Eber)	Eber means "to cross over" and symbolizes movement, resilience, and journey. This name carries the legacy of those who wandered with purpose, holding onto identity across generations and lands.	This name was chosen for its deep connection to this participant's migration story. Eber carries a legacy woven with vivid, meaningful memories of the journey from Egypt to Canada.
אֵיתָן (Eitan)	Eitan means "steadfast," "strong," or "enduring." It symbolizes unshakable strength, resilience, and a steady presence that holds firm through challenge and change. This name evokes a sense of rootedness and reliability, a person who stands grounded in their values and offers strength to those around them.	This name was chosen to honour the strength with which this participant stands in their Judaism and Jewish values. Eitan shares experiences of Jewish joy and experiences of antisemitism/communal loss with unshakable certainty in their identity, a powerful reminder to younger participants of what it can mean to be unapologetically and proudly Jewish.
אֵילָה (Eila)	Eila means "oak tree," symbolizing strength, rootedness, and quiet resilience. Like a tree that offers shelter and stability, Eila evokes the presence of someone who is a safe place, protective, grounded, and unwavering in their care.	This name was chosen to honour this participant's deep connection to family as a core expression of their Jewish identity. They see tradition as a way of nurturing mutual care with family and community more broadly. Tradition is thus viewed as expressions of shelter and support.
גִּילָה (Gila)	Gila comes from the Hebrew root *gil* (ג-י-ל), meaning "joy" or "rejoicing," and symbolizes a vibrant, wholehearted celebration of life. It reflects a resilient joy that can exist alongside sorrow; a radiant presence that uplifts, honours beauty, and embraces community with openness.	This name was chosen to reflect this participant's commitment to honouring the legacy of joy within the Jewish community. Their ability to recognize and celebrate the beauty in each participant's relationship with Jewish tradition created space for all experiences. Her presence was a profound, complex form of Jewish joy.
בִּינָה (Bina)	Bina means "understanding" or "insight." It is more than intellectual knowledge, it's a deep, intuitive kind of wisdom, the ability to perceive	This name was chosen to reflect this participant's thoughtful engagement with the tensions and complexities of Jewish identity and experience. They approached their own and others'

	connections, hold complexity, and discern meaning beneath the surface.	profound emotions with a wisdom rooted in nuance, never turning away from what is layered and deeply felt.
בְּחִירָה (Bechira)	Bechira means "one who chooses," symbolizing intentionality, agency, and the power of mindful decision-making. It reflects a life shaped by purpose, discernment, and a deep commitment to showing up with clarity and care.	This name was chosen to reflect this participant's strong sense of identity and presence. Growing up as the only Jewish person in their environment, their connection to the Jewish community is a conscious, ongoing choice, each action infused with deep intention and meaning.
יִצְחָק (Yitzchak)	Yitzchak means "laughter" and carries the emotional complexity of joy born from surprise, vulnerability, and wonder. It reflects a sacred kind of laughter, one that holds both disbelief and deep hope.	This name was chosen to honour the way this participant showed up for themselves and others in our space. Their humour brought a poignant, surprising joy. A comforting light that emerged even in the most difficult conversations and moments.
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (Yehoshua)	Yehoshua was a leader of the Jewish people known for his quiet strength and contemplative presence. He often stayed behind after moments of learning, embodying a deep yearning for presence and reflection; his name symbolizes a leadership rooted in humility and thoughtful pause.	This name was chosen to reflect this participant's presence in our Chavruta space, intentional in their quiet, and thoughtful in their contributions. They led by weaving ideas together, attuned to others, and grounded in a clear commitment to connection.
זַלְמֶן (Zalman)	Zalman is a Yiddish form of the Hebrew name Shlomo, meaning "peace." Rooted in Ashkenazi tradition, it carries a legacy of wisdom, calm strength, and a vision of peace as wholeness and harmony. The name evokes a grounded, thoughtful presence of someone shaped by generational memory, community, and healing.	This name was chosen to reflect this participant's thoughtful engagement with the future of the Jewish community. Their calm, reflective presence and ongoing questioning carried a deep sense of hope and care. Choosing a Yiddish name honours the way they hold tradition while envisioning what's to come.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Listening for Meaning

The analytic process in this study was grounded in *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA), as articulated by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), but it did not stand alone. Instead, it was braided with Community-Based Research (CBR) principles and Jewish epistemologies to form a methodology that was not only rigorous in its qualitative integrity but deeply attuned to memory, identity, and relational care. IPA, in its core philosophy, calls for an immersive and reflective engagement with participants' lived experiences, what van Manen (2016) calls "meaning-giving methods." In this study that meaning is also considered sacred, ancestral, and

affective. As such, data analysis was approached not as a clinical dissection of narrative but as a relational ceremony of listening, interpretation, negotiation, and witnessing.

IPA holds a double hermeneutic at its center: the participant is making sense of their experience, and the researcher is making sense of that sense-making (Smith et al., 2009). This recursive interpretive loop is especially resonant in Jewish traditions of *chavruta* (group learning) dialogue, where understanding arises not from conclusion but from layered questioning, sacred disagreement (*machloket l'shem shamayim*), and relational interpretation (Hartman, 2007; Zornberg, 2009). This makes IPA an ideal anchor point for analysis within a braided methodological framework that insists on epistemic justice, accountability, and interpretive generosity/malleability.

The data included verbatim transcripts of recorded conversations (except for Shabbat dinner), written/recorded reflections, detailed fieldnotes, and reflexive journals. Each piece was considered not just text but testimony, what Walter Benjamin (1968) calls the "residue of lived experience," rich with embodied and affective knowledge.

1. Immersive Reading and Reflexivity

The first phase of analysis involved repeated, immersive reading of all materials. This was not merely a step toward coding but a practice of *kavanah* (intentional presence), honouring the participants' stories as living texts. Each reading was accompanied by reflexive journaling, a process essential to both IPA and CBR (van Manen, 2016; Israel et al., 1998). Journals were used to document emotional reactions, tensions, positional reflections, and emergent insights, what Kleinman (2008) might describe as the moral life of the research encounter.

These journals also included poetry and other forms of reflective work, not as creative tangents but as necessary tools for meaning-making. In Jewish tradition, interpretation is a sacred act performed across generations through layered commentary, silence, metaphor, and embodied practices (Boyarin, 1994; Zornberg, 2009). Reflexivity in this study thus went beyond method and into sacred space: an ongoing process of returning, remembering, and re-attuning to both the data and my own ethical responsibilities as a Jewish researcher embedded within the community I am studying.

Silences, hesitations, and gestures were documented as carefully as speech. In keeping with phenomenological principles, meaning was understood to reside not only in explicit statements but in pauses, contradictions, and bodily resonance, what Visweswaran (1994) describes as "partial truths." These moments were not seen as incomplete but as affectively charged and epistemically rich.

2. Iterative Coding and Meaning-Making

The next phase involved iterative coding that progressed through three overlapping layers: descriptive, interpretive, and relational. In keeping with IPA, codes were not pre-determined but

arose organically from the data, evolving through cycles of close reading, re-reading, and reflection (Smith et al., 2009). In this study, coding is framed as an act of deep listening, rooted in the belief that participants' words carry sacred, communal, and historical weight.

- **Descriptive codes** captured key memories, metaphors, and moments. This is how participants described experiences of cultural continuity, ritual practice, imagined futures, loss, and resistance.

- **Interpretive codes** sought the underlying emotional and epistemological logics of these stories: What does "loss" mean in this context? How does memory operate in the absence of language or lineage? Etc.

- **Relational codes** attend to dynamics within group discussions, how meaning was co-constructed, challenged, or transformed in community. These interactions are understood as *chavruta* in action: dialogical learning where disagreement and affirmation produce layered understanding (Hartman, 2007).

- **Epistemological codes** were applied when participants invoked or embodied Jewish ways of knowing: recounting tradition, framing stories through Jewish or intergenerational logics, etc. This coding layer was especially critical given the study's commitment to honouring Jewish knowledge systems as legitimate and sovereign (Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2014).

This iterative process is not linear. Codes are revised, merged, and expanded as new insights emerge. Each round of coding is accompanied by re-immersion in the original material, a practice van Manen (2016) describes as "turning to the phenomenon," ensuring that interpretation remained close to lived experience.

Furthermore, codes are mapped visually using spiral diagrams (Figure 7), inspired by both the spiral temporality of Jewish time (Yerushalmi, 1982) and the circular movements of trauma-informed, healing-centered research (Ginwright, 2018). This mapping helps identify resonant thematic constellations rather than static categories.

3. Participatory Thematic Review (data analysis chavruta)

True to the principles of Community-Based Research, a participatory analysis phase was embedded into the interpretive process. Rather than closing the door after data collection, this phase marked a return, an opportunity to co-interpret, to remain accountable, and to hold space for multiple truths. Anonymized excerpts and emerging thematic threads were brought back to participants in a small group session held over Zoom. These gatherings were intentionally structured as conversational learning circles, drawing inspiration from *circulos de conversación* (Carranza, 2024), a Latinx insurgent method rooted in relational listening, and from Jewish models of *machloket l'shem shamayim* (disagreement for the sake of heaven) as an

epistemological commitment to pluralism, accountability, and sacred argumentation (Zornberg, 2009).

Participants were invited to:

- Identify which themes resonated with their own experience.

- Suggest additional themes or perspectives that may have been overlooked.

- Push back on interpretations they found flattening, incomplete, or inaccurate.

- Offer alternative framings that reflected their unique cultural, spiritual, or personal contexts.

Importantly, this phase is not reducible to the procedural academic practice of "member checking." It is not a final quality control step, but rather a reclamation of interpretive agency. Knowledge is not something extracted and then polished by the researcher; it is co-constructed through mutual trust, relational care, and ongoing conversation. In this space, participants are co-theorizers and *Shomrei zikronim* (keepers of knowledge), engaging actively in the meaning-making process. Their authority is centered. This approach reflects what Kovach (2009) calls "relational accountability," where validity is not granted by academic detachment but by responsibility to community, context, and kin.

By holding this phase as a *chavruta* (a dialogic and relational model of study) analysis becomes an ethical and situated encounter. Rather than seeking uniformity or finality, this method welcomes contradiction and incompleteness. Where disagreements emerge, they are not treated as deviations to be resolved, but as generative sites of layered meaning. As in Talmudic tradition, multivocality is not a flaw in reasoning but an archive of possibilities, a reminder that truth in Jewish epistemology is often held in tension.

In this way, participatory analysis becomes not just a method but a ritual of cultural and epistemic care. It enacts what Shah and Tuck (2021) describe as refusal to finalize participant meaning, resisting the academic desire to smooth over complexity. It affirms that meaning is emergent, relational, and incomplete on purpose. A data analysis *chavruta* in this study is where memory, disagreement, and interpretation spiral together toward something fuller than any singular person could hold.

4. Interpretation through Jewish Frameworks

The final phase of analysis involves interpreting themes through the culturally specific and spiritually grounded frameworks that shapes the entire study. This includes:

- **Shabbat as Resistance**: Understanding moments of rest, ritual, and communal presence as epistemological refusals of capitalist time, trauma urgency, and linear progress. Shabbat, in this context, becomes both a site of knowledge and a theory of cultural survival (Hersey, 2022; Karabelnicoff, 2025).

- **Am Yisrael as Collective Memory**: Situating individual narratives within a broader diasporic framework of communal identity, obligation, and continuity (Boyarin, 1994; Yerushalmi, 1982). Stories are interpreted not in isolation but as contributions to a living, collective archive of Jewish resilience, resistance, and transformation.

- **Mitzvah as Epistemology**: Treating acts of care, storytelling, ritual performance, and ethical obligation as valid and sacred ways of knowing. Knowledge did not need to be abstract to be true. It can be found in gesture, silence, conversation, and return (Simpson, 2017; Orlov, 2021).

This interpretive framework resists abstraction and instead embraced specificity. It refused to flatten Jewish experience into secular or universalist categories. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) asserts, decolonial research requires that knowledge systems be engaged on their own terms, with full respect for their cultural authority and meaning.

Themes, therefore, are not universal truths but living maps: multivocal, dialogical, and incomplete. They reflect not only what participants said but how they said it, where they said it, and what communal rhythms shaped their telling. In this way, the analysis becomes a form of collective memory work, where meaning is always situated, affective, and alive.

This braided analytic process does not seek finality, but continuity. It honours interpretation as an act of care, disagreement as an invitation to deeper knowing, and presence as its own form of data. In framing analysis through *chavruta* and holding space for layered meaning, this methodology affirms that knowledge emerges not from certainty, but from relationship, return, and the willingness to listen again. Each theme is not a conclusion, but a thread in an unfolding tapestry, a partial truth shaped by breath, memory, and community. What follows is not a summation, but a continuation: an offering of the meanings that took shape around shared tables, sacred pauses, and the stories that asked to be told.

Poetic Reflection #2: The Nature of Community Based Research

In The Shape Of Arrival
for those who show up without being asked

There is a way a table sets itself when enough people care to arrive hungry and full of stories.
A kind of choreography without rehearsal…
where each person brings a plate
someone forgets the words
and others remember them aloud

there is no invitation,
only timing
only how the door opens at just the moment you need it to
because a neighbour was passing by with a gift in their hands
and thought this belongs to more than just one person,

the music starts before the first note
in the rustle of coats in the entryway
in the clatter of too many hands reaching for the same spoon
in the slowed time while challah rises in warm quiet

sometimes
a stranger becomes familiar by the way they ask
"do you have somewhere to go for Shabbat?"
and sometimes a prayer is passed not through books,
but through the hands that made the meal

this is how belonging breathes,
not with blueprints or banners
but in the soft patterns of people carrying memory without knowing it,
folding themselves into each other's rhythms

there are no signs, just people.
People that arrive with intention
A hallway encounter that becomes a welcome
A recipe that becomes a ritual
A meal that becomes something else entirely
call it community
call it grace
I'll call it the way we remember what it means to hold each other in the ordinary sacredness of
showing up

The Nature of Community-Based Research

Community-based research (CBR) is often framed as a collaborative approach that aims to equitably involve all stakeholders in the research process. In its best and truest form, it emerges organically from within a community's existing rhythms, values, and networks. However, in academic contexts, CBR is frequently reduced to a checklist: recruit participants with the community, form an advisory group, disseminate findings locally, etc. While these are useful structural elements, they miss the deeper essence of what it means to engage in research that is actually *of, with,* and *for* community.

This section is a reflection on what unfolded when I let community-based research be guided not by institutional research frameworks but by the lived, relational heartbeat of my own community. The community I grew up in. The intergenerational Shabbat programming I facilitated, including a challah bake, Shabbat dinner, and Havdalah gathering, was not simply a series of events. It was a convergence of generosity, connection, tradition, and shared responsibility. It was a space where community didn't just participate in research, it *functioned* as research. This kind of connection can only emerge from a foundation of deep, longstanding trust. It is trust that has been nurtured over the course of 22 years through a lifetime of participating in, working alongside, and giving to/benefiting from this community. The mutual trust we hold mine in the community, and theirs in me is what made it possible for this project to unfold in the way it did. It wasn't just permitted; it was held, uplifted, and shaped by the relationships that have been cultivated over time.

The Shabbat dinner, for instance, came alive through a series of small but powerful gestures. Benchers, the small booklets used for shabbat songs or blessings after meals, were lent to me by a neighbour who by coincidence or serendipity was also someone I ended up delivering food to after a visit to an Ottawa kosher caterer, Creative Kosher. The owner, David Smith (a staple presence in the Ottawa Jewish community), had generously donated food for our Havdalah event. When I went to pick it up, we shared a warm conversation about our families and the future of his business as he approaches retirement. As I was leaving, I overheard that a Shabbat box had been ordered for my neighbour, and I offered to deliver it. This turned into me dropping off meals to multiple families in my neighbourhood. Each step felt not like a task but like being woven into a tapestry already in motion.

The challah bake similarly opened unexpected pathways. A participant arrived early and happened upon the Chabad rabbi. Within minutes, he had learned that she had nowhere to go for the Passover seders. He gave her his contact information and invited her to join the Chabad seders. This kind of spontaneous care rooted in mutual responsibility and hospitality was not something I planned for. It was something the community knew how to do, intuitively.

The Jewish Community Centre (JCC) donated the space for Shabbat and Havdalah, and community members stepped forward to help with outreach. Recruitment wasn't structured, nor was it targeted. It unfolded through networks of relationship, people inviting people they knew, who then invited others. What emerged was a kind of accidental snowball recruitment, organic and deeply reflective of how our community communicates and connects.

In these moments, I saw with clarity what community-based research *can* be when it is not imposed on a community to legitimize a project but grows from within it. There was no checklist for these moments. There was no form to fill out that captured the way the community supported itself and each other throughout the planning and execution of this project.

When we let community function as community, magic happens.

This project affirmed something I've long felt: that community-based research must reflect the values, rhythms, and social ecologies of the specific community it seeks to engage. In the Ottawa Jewish community, this looks like shared meals, neighbourly kindness, and a culture of mutual aid. It looks like food delivered with warmth, phone numbers exchanged between strangers, and a willingness to respond to each other's needs without hesitation.

The methodology, then, is not something superimposed from the outside. It is something revealed through practice, something embodied in how people show up for each other. In this light, community-based research becomes less about ticking boxes and more about building a project that lives within the heartbeat of the community itself.

"Miracles in Every Sense of the Word": Am Yisrael and What We Carry Forward

As emphasized throughout this thesis, Jewish knowledge is not fixed, singular, or objective. It is inherently dynamic, interpretive, and relational unfolding through dialogue, disagreement, and shared struggle rather than consensus or finality. This is especially important to hold in mind when engaging with the deeply situated, intergenerational Jewish experiences at the heart of these findings. The stories, conversations, and moments gathered here resist neat distillation; they cannot, and should not, be flattened into rigid themes or universal claims.

In alignment with critical social work literature, meaning making is understood as a process of "reading" (Fook, 2016; Mullaly & West, 2018), where any interpretation is one possible reading among many. Bringing this alongside Jewish epistemologies underscores that my discussion is not an authoritative truth, but a situated interpretation shaped by context, relationship, and standpoint. This iterative, dialogical analysis reflects critical social work's rejection of universalizing narratives and its commitment to reflexive, situated knowledge (Gray & Webb, 2013; Morley, 2016). Meaning here is not extracted from participants but co-constructed in ways that recognize and resist dominant power structures.

While the analysis rests on interpretive phenomenological coding and collective chavruta-based reflection, it does not speak with a singular voice. These findings reflect my interpretive lens as a researcher embedded in the community, alongside participants' insights, hesitations, and divergences. Jewish epistemologies insist truth is never located in one place or person. As the story of *Lo BaShamayim Hi* reminds us, even divine authority can be overruled by communal discernment. The findings that follow serve as both map and trace: marking the presence of something powerful without containing it fully.

I invite you to read with awareness of this multiplicity. Rather than seeking coherence or closure, hold open the tension, divergence, and resonance across voices. These stories speak to something shared without asserting a singular truth: collective longing, a set of refusals, a reimagining of Jewish continuity.

Braided Themes of Inheritance, Identity, and Resistance

This section begins the interpretive work of tracing the Challah Bake, Shabbat dinner, and Havdalah gathering. The thematic framework grounding this analysis was co-developed with participants, integrating interpretive phenomenology and chavruta-based dialogue. Together, we identified six core themes and twelve subthemes (detailed in Appendix A: Themes and Definitions) as shared language for holding contradictions, insights, and affective currents. These themes serve as scaffolding for an interpretation that remains open-ended, situated, and deeply entangled with embodied memory, ritual, and communal imagination.

In this chapter, participant voices are presented in their fullness, often moving across multiple codes and interpretive spaces. Rather than isolating or categorizing these moments, the analysis follows their complexity, attending to both what is said and the histories and commitments that animate each offering. This reflects a methodological commitment to context as much as content: to how Jewishness is remembered, reimagined, and enacted in lived relation.

The structure of this section mirrors the epistemologies that shape the project. It is organized by the movement of meaning between and across voices. What emerges are braided threads of inheritance, rupture, resistance, and reimagining collective efforts to hold Jewishness in and through precarity.

Interpretation here is not about resolution, but about staying with complexity. In these conversations, memory is more than recalled, it is performed and questioned; identity is formed in relation; and continuity is not assumed, it is laboured for, mourned, and imagined.

Figure 7 demonstrates the co-created thematic codes as conceptualized within Jewish ideas of time and relationality.

Figure 7: Co-Created Thematic Codes – Jewish Spiral Time/Relationality **Weaving the Threads: Collective Themes as Embodied Jewish Knowledge**

Central to this intergenerational memory project was a co-theorizing process in which participants themselves named, refined, and affirmed the themes that had emerged from their own stories and reflections. Rather than being extracted solely through researcher interpretation, these themes were generated collaboratively, through dialogue, listening, and mutual recognition.

Together, we arrived at six final thematic codes (Appendix A):

    i. **The Way of Jewish Survival: The Unwillingness to be Defeated**
   ii. **Nurturing the Collective: A Common History and the Way We Show Up**

iii. **Navigating Loss and Loneliness: The Experience of Ostracization as Jewish People**
iv. **Jewish Resistance: Accomplishing, Contributing, and Moving Forward**
v. **Jewish Culture: Teaching, Creating, and Passing Knowledge Generation to Generation (Dor L'Dor)**
vi. **Embodying Sacred Connection: Ritual, Chesed, and the Jewish Soul**

Additionally 13 subgroups were identified as threads that tie each of the 6 core themes together (Appendix A):

1. Ritual as Relational Knowledge
2. Fragmented Inheritance
3. Reclaiming Language and Diasporic Memory
4. Resisting the 'Palatable Jew'
5. Humour as Resistance and Survival
6. Burden of Representation
7. Cultural Continuity and Disruption
8. Intergenerational Responsibility
9. Rest and Refusal (Shabbat Politics)
10. Negotiating Jewish Identity in Public
11. Silence and Conditional Solidarity
12. Diasporic Belonging and Isolation
13. Jewish Joy and Improvisation

Each theme and thematic subgroup names something vital in its own right, yet their significance deepens in relation to one another. Together, they form a constellation of embodied Jewish knowledge. They describe Jewishness not as a fixed inheritance, but as an ongoing practice of becoming: survival grounded in daily acts of presence; collective responsibility that holds grief and joy together; resistance that generates rather than merely reacts; culture that is reinterpreted and reanimated in relationship; and sacred connection experienced through shared rhythms, gestures, and care.

The Way of Jewish Survival lives in quiet acts of insistence: subtle, persistent, deeply embodied. It is not always dramatic defiance, but the daily choice to remain: showing up to gatherings when unsure of one's place, lighting candles week after week, keeping the mezuzah on the door, wearing a kippa in public despite rising antisemitism. It moves through elders' stories of escape, the instinct to scan for exits in a synagogue, the carrying forward of traditions even when uncertain. As Bechira says, *"She [my grandmother] did. My mom does. I do. We don't call it that, but it's an emergency escape plan."* This vigilance, rooted in history and informed by trauma, is about staying ready, staying alive, keeping the choice to stay Jewish.

Survival is sustained through **Nurturing the Collective** the sense that Jewishness is not just practice or belief, but responsibility. Participants speak of ancestors, descendants, communities past and present. Gila calls it *"presence with ghosts and grandchildren at once."* Each act of showing up carries those who came before and those yet to be. Though the obligation can be heavy, care circulates. There is comfort in fear, space for complexity, grief and joy held in equal measure.

Navigating Loss and Loneliness threads through these stories: the absence of Jewish texts and traditions never learned, languages half-remembered, communities never found or long since lost. Being the only Jewish person in a school, a workplace, a town. Feeling too Jewish in some spaces, not Jewish enough in others. These fractures are legacies of forced assimilation, migration, violence, and dislocation. Yet even loneliness can open recognition. As Eila reflects,

> *"I didn't think I had anything to say, but when I sat down and everyone was telling stories about being alone in Jewishness, I thought… oh. That's me too. I just didn't know it counted."*

From this rupture grows **Jewish Resistance**: imaginative, embodied, everyday. Participants remember smells and songs and teach each other to braid challah. These are, in Sara Ahmed's (2019) words, "willful acts of staying," refusals to disappear or conform to sanitized versions of Jewishness. In the language of critical social work (Dominelli, 2002), they are political acts embedded in daily life.

Braided through this is **Jewish Culture**, not a relic kept in glass, but a living, breathing lineage. It is carried in gestures, recipes, laughter, and in a blessing re-learned with encouragement. It is, as Ochs (2003) writes, "ritual residue," and as Belser (2023) calls it, an "embodied archive," moving *dor l'dor* (generation to generation) through trust and relation.

At the heart is **Embodying Sacred Connection**. The spiritual for most participants rarely appears in formal prayer. For many participant it shows up in the small act of being Jewish/being in community, in lighting candles, humming melodies, sharing conversation in Jewish time. For Gila, candle lighting links her to *"every Jewish woman across time, lighting together."* Here, spirituality is tactile, affective, and collective. Fueled by community far more than divinity.

The subthemes add texture: *Ritual as Relational Knowledge* reflects the ways practices like challah baking and Shabbat become acts of intergenerational care and memory. *Fragmented Inheritance* and *Reclaiming Language and Diasporic Memory* name the ruptures in transmission and the longing to restore languages like Yiddish, Ladino, and other endangered threads of cultural connection. *Resisting the 'Palatable Jew'* critiques the demand for sanitized Jewishness, while *Humour as Resistance and Survival* uses wit and irony to resist erasure and maintain continuity. The *Burden of Representation* captures the strain of being the "only Jew" in a space, while *Cultural Continuity and Disruption* and *Intergenerational Responsibility* trace the push and pull between loss and preservation. *Rest and Refusal (Shabbat Politics)* reframes Shabbat as a radical slowdown in defiance of capitalist productivity. *Negotiating Jewish Identity in Public* and *Silence and Conditional Solidarity* reveal the constant calibrations of safety, visibility, and belonging in non-Jewish spaces. *Diasporic Belonging and Isolation* reflects the paradox of connection through distance, and *Jewish Joy and Improvisation* affirms the possibility of delight, even within rupture.

Together, these six core themes and their accompanying subgroups form not only a framework for analysis, but a cartography of Jewish life as it is felt, practiced, and co-created by the participants in this study. In what follows, each theme will be explored in depth through the stories, tensions, and resonances that brought it into being. Participant voices will remain at the center, offering layered, sometimes contradictory, but always deeply grounded accounts of what it means to live and make Jewish life now.

The "Good Jew/Bad Jew" Binary: Shame, Performance, and Relational Refusal

"I don't show up like I should," one participant noted during intake, a phrase echoed in various forms across the gatherings. In intake when asked, not a single participant self-identified as an "active member of the Jewish community" without qualification. Each description of participation came wrapped in apology: *"Only at holidays," "I never went to Hebrew school," "I'm not as present as I used to be."* This collective hesitation reflected more than personal modesty, it surfaced the presence of an internalized hierarchy of Jewishness.

Participants consistently described an unspoken and deeply felt metric of legitimacy, a binary that positioned Jewish belonging as something earned. There was a repeated articulation of the pressure to perform a particular kind of "Jewishness": knowledgeable, observant, apolitical, safe. These performances were often rooted in the unspoken binary of the "good Jew" and "bad Jew." The 'good Jew' knew the traditions, could speak Hebrew, held the 'correct' views about Israel, is ever present and available to community, represented the Jewish community well in non-Jewish spaces, etc. Falling short of these impossible to attain marks, even privately, left participants feeling ineligible or illegitimate.

> Zalman reflected, *"It's almost as though there is a self-imposed prerequisite to participate, like I need to be and do all these things to show up on Shabbat."*

Others connected this sense of inadequacy to interfaith family dynamics, geographic isolation, or having had Jewish learning withheld from them.

> Eber shared: *"I wasn't expected to go to Chaider or to go to a religious school. And it was only through family dinners and stuff like that that we knew it was Passover or we knew it was the religious event or that."*

These are testimonies of fragmented inheritance, narratives marked by shame, longing, and the ache of disconnection. This dynamic resonates with what Ahmed (2007) calls the "promise of conditional inclusion," where belonging is extended only if one softens or edits themselves to fit dominant norms. For many participants, especially in non-Jewish spaces, inclusion came at the cost of complexity; they felt they had to be legible, agreeable, and unthreatening in order to be accepted.

> *"Growing up in Ottawa,"* said Yitzchak, *"I was a lot of people's first Jew. So you have to represent the tribe well."*

Bina echoed: *"It's so much work. This burden of representing well, being the explainer, the ambassador, the not-too-political Jew is so exhausting and isolating."*

One of the most poignant expressions of the burden of explanation came from Bechira, who recalled being asked as a child, *"Jewish is a religion, how can you be Jewish and Polish?"* Her response, *"I just stopped answering. It's not my job to teach them at 8 years old,"* was not indifference, but a weary refusal of forced legibility. Her story echoed a broader frustration among participants who felt compelled to explain or defend their Jewishness in order to be safe, understood, or respectedEber, reflecting on his childhood fleeing Egypt, shared the cultural dissonance he experienced upon arriving in the United States:

> *"To say that I had a strong religious upbringing, it was not true. I didn't. I didn't. And yet the community of Jews that lived in Egypt were pretty close. But they didn't draw lines or barriers amongst themselves and the others. I was never taught as a child, 'don't play with this kid because he's this or he's that or he's not a Jew.' I came to North America and that's the climate I met with."*

His account speaks to a profound shift: from a relational and expansive experience of Jewishness to one constrained by judgment, division, and performance. This pressure extended far beyond explicitly Jewish spaces. Yitzchak explained how Jewish visibility itself could be weaponized or protective:

> *"Sometimes I'll just whip the magen david out of the shirt… my magen david screens for danger."*

The Star of David, in this account, became both a symbol and a gauge, a way of testing whether a space was safe, and of bracing for how Jewishness might be received. For participants like Yitzchak, visibility was never neutral. Too visibly Jewish, and one risked confrontation or alienation; not visibly Jewish enough, and one risked erasure, suspicion, or having their identity denied altogether.

Still, within this ambivalence, many participants described small acts of connection and resistance that became defiant forms of presence. Eila offered one of the most powerful statements of this kind:

> *"I do even a… stupid things like have a mezuzah on my front door... I said there's no way I take it down* [because of the danger of antisemitism]. *It's staying up. It's beautiful."*

For Eila holding on to fragments of tradition in the face of uncertainty was an act of defiance. Inherited gaps or fear did offered invitations to repair.

These moments were marked by a deliberate refusal to be erased. Participants' hesitation to claim belonging did not stem from apathy, it emerged from reverence. Their silence was not indifference, but a profound awareness of how much was at stake in "getting it right." The scrutiny they directed inward was pressure from the love felt for community, a desperate attempt

to honour what felt fragile and endangered. At times, participants recognized the harm this self-policing caused to others in the group and worked to affirm one another's presence, even as they continued to question the legitimacy of their own. The very tension between internal critique and communal affirmation revealed the depth of their commitment to one another.

> Zalman remarked, *"There's not one way. Maybe almost everything can be done a little differently depending who you are, I think."*

Eber an 85 year old man echoed Zalman's idea as the last words in the Havdalah gathering. Eber had spent time explaining how his experience of Judaism was impacted by safety and access and how this made him feel "out of step" with others experiences.

> Eber said: *"And I think we all contributed maybe differently in each case, but it was revealing for me and also an ability to put into words things that are very difficult to discuss because we all have a different view of what it is that makes us Jewish and at the end it's a good thing. To share and compare. Commit to continue doing what we're doing."*

This sentiment echoed across the gatherings as a reclamation of complexity. Participants were not seeking to dilute Jewishness but to return to it truly. Expanding Jewish legitimacy to include imperfection, rupture, and longing. Being a "good Jew," in this framing, did not mean palatability. It meant showing up with grief, with questions, with half-remembered prayers and braided memory. It meant making space for contradiction, for trembling hope, for rituals that were improvised or inherited in fragments. In these reflections, goodness was not defined by fluency or lineage, but by care, commitment, and the willingness to imagine a Jewish future that could be both safe and beautiful.

> *"I would like to put on the record that I am NOT a very palatable Jew"* said Yitzchak with deep pride.

Zalman said simply, ***"I am only ever Jewish. I am Jewish before I am anything else."*** What followed was less a conversation than a moment held in shared silence. Around the table, each of the four elders responded without words. Their affirmations were embodied: Eila and Gila smiled softly, Eitan clasped his hands together, and Eber exhaled deeply before nodding with unmistakable conviction. For the younger adults present, this was more than a statement of identity, it was a form of blessing. In that quiet moment, pride was made visible, and the elders glimpsed a future in which their Jewishness would continue and be cherished.

This refusal to accept externally imposed definitions of Jewishness reflects *The Way of Jewish Survival: The Unwillingness to be Defeated*, and signals *Jewish Resistance*, asserting identity on one's own terms despite external pressures to conform or erase difference.

Fragmented Inheritance and the Grief of What Wasn't Taught

The conversation around fragmented inheritance struck a deep chord with Eber, who voiced a sense of being out of step with the others in the room. He traced this dissonance to his early access to Jewish knowledge as a child and his current uncertainty about how to, in his words, *"lead Jewishly"* as an elder. The atmosphere shifted as Eber posed a painful but grounding question: *"What is it really we aim to preserve?"* His vulnerability opened space for tension, each participant held a different vision of what preservation meant. Yehoshua responded gently, *"I don't know that there is one way."* Eber, his voice laced with relief, echoed, *"I don't know either."* In that moment, comfort emerged not from certainty but from multiplicity. This was Jewish ways of knowing made tangible: embracing pluralism, holding contradiction, and resisting singular truths. In approaching Jewish identity Jewishly, participants experienced a rare sense of reassurance, safety, and calm; feelings often out of reach in the rigid or assimilative colonial frameworks participant navigate on a daily basis.

A recurring theme throughout the gatherings was the grief participants carried for the Jewish knowledge that had not been passed down, what Marianne Hirsch (2008) terms "postmemory" is the emotional inheritance of memory that is not one's own but is deeply felt. This grief manifested as sorrow and also as confusion, shame, and longing. Participants shared stories of rituals half-remembered, languages never learned, holidays vaguely celebrated. These absences were painful echoes of rupture.

> Bechira expressed this plainly: *"I was a child… I don't have a whole lot of memories of doing much of any traditions."*

Her tone was not indifferent, it was mournful. The sentiment was echoed by many.

> Bina, reflecting on her mother's conversion, said: *"Challah is traditionally a woman thing that I would learn… and my mom converted so she didn't have ancestors to pull from."*

The absence of ancestral instruction became a space of both grief and improvisation, a break in the chain of transmission that felt unjust and destabilizing while also generative.

This loss was deeply intergenerational.

> Zalman a 25 year old man shared: *"Shabbat is not as kept by me as it was by my grandparents... I don't know if it's lost yet... but also Shabbat is something that I want to keep."*

Here, he named a dual awareness: the ache of discontinuity, and the desire to reweave what had unraveled. This theme of tenuous continuity was central to many reflections. Even participants who had some exposure to Jewish tradition described moments of shame and uncertainty.

Gila a 67 year old woman described a deeply embodied memory of making a mistake during a tradition: *"I didn't know [I had] to be silent after washing, and I was so embarrassed. No one made me feel bad. It was just inside me. Like I had failed."*

Gila's experience reflects more than personal embarrassment, it embodies the effects of cultural amnesia (Connerton, 2009), the forgetting that emerges through forced assimilation, displacement, and the protective silences woven into communal survival. Her internalized sense of failure does not stem from individual inadequacy, but from a larger historical rupture, where knowledge was withheld or lost to shield communities from harm. This leaves descendants to carry both the absence and the misplaced responsibility for stolen stories and traditions.

And yet, participants found meaning in what remained. Jewishness persisted in fragments: the scent of challah, the cadence of a melody, the sensory imprint of Shabbat candles.

Bina noted, *"Even if I don't remember the prayers, I remember the tone."*

Eitan added, *"I feel like my subconscious knows more than I do."*

These comments evoke what Ochs (2003) calls "ritual residue," the way practices linger in the body even when formal knowledge has been disrupted. It is a sensory knowing, one that survives rupture.

During the Challah Bake, this form of memory was activated with joy and reverence. Participants shared stories of their bubbies' improvised cooking:

"Tablespoon? Bubby just went like that…" *"A pshhh of this."* Laughter erupted as everyone mimicked the sound. *"You know what it means. You know it intrinsically,"* Bina exclaimed.

This moment encapsulated what Julia Watts Belser (2023) refers to as "embodied archives," ways in which knowledge is carried in hands, in smell, and in rhythm.

In these stories, we see what Boyarin (1993) and Levinas (1969) emphasize: that Jewish knowledge is preserved through text as well as relation. Participants braided challah with ancestors in mind, even if those ancestors had not taught them how. They recited blessings imperfectly, haltingly, and still the moment was sacred. The grief of what wasn't taught was real, but so too was the beauty of what could be re-learned, shared, and made anew.

Ritual and Tradition as Relational Knowledge and Embodied Continuity

Across each of the gatherings, Jewish ritual emerged as a living, breathing medium of intergenerational care. Participants emphasized the sensory, affective, and improvisational dimensions of Jewish life, experiences that often bypassed formal instruction but nonetheless transmitted deep memory. Rather than rituals being handed down as scripts to memorize, they were remembered in the body, re-learned through proximity, and revived in community.

Zalman described it this way: *"It's that connection that has just been taught to you and you embodied it. And I really am grateful for that."*

Yitzchak elaborated on the importance of watching others: *"Like watching my dad make challah every week, but not being told to do it, you know? And now when I do it, it's like he's there in my hands."*

The gatherings themselves became sites of ritual pedagogy. From the smell of yeast during the Challah Bake to the communal silence before blessings, tradition and mitzvah functioned as what Belser (2023) calls "pedagogies of presence."

Bina a 22 year old woman while reflecting on her grandmother said: *"I can't imagine. Because so few people can speak Yiddish nowadays. So it's like having your first language disappear. We recognize what Yiddish sounds like, but could never speak it. It must almost be like being in a room surrounded by people who don't speak your language and only know it as a joke. It must be very lonely in a way."*

Her words speak to linguistic loss and to the emotional and relational dislocation that comes with it, a grief for something intimate that once structured identity, now reduced to caricature or nostalgia. This captures what Ochs (2003) terms *ritual residue*, a sensory trace that holds memory even when words are forgotten or misunderstood. In this case, the sounds of Yiddish still echo in the body and imagination, even as fluency disappears. The loneliness Bina names is not just about language, it is about the loss of access to a cultural intimacy, a way of being that once connected generations and now hovers just out of reach.

Participants invoked these moments of loss, joy, fear, and presence with deep reverence.

Eitan shared, *"Sometimes Jewish songs make me cry a little, especially when we sing all together. It reminds me of my Zaidy, even though I couldn't tell you the tune or where I heard it before."*

Gila added: *"I never used to do it [light candles], but now I make sure to every week. I don't think it's because of God. I think I do it because I feel present and connected. After my nephews died, this is how I feel connected to the legacy of Jewish women. Every Jewish woman lights candles together on Shabbat at the same time across history and in the future. It feels grounding."*

These acts of ritual participation were not oriented toward correctness but toward connection.

Rituals become tools for belonging. Vanessa Ochs (2003) reminds us that invented rituals emerge when traditional practices no longer meet communal needs. For many participants, the rituals they practiced were hybrids part inherited, part reimagined.

Yitzchak found joy in these improvisations: *"I'm so happy to be teaching someone how to braid challah!"* he exclaimed.

Performance or precision did not matter, this was about relationship.

These communal teachings reflect what Boyarin (1993) calls *chavruta*: the relational process of learning in dialogue, shaped by proximity, mutuality, and presence. Even mistakes became moments of invitation. During the Shabbat dinner, I misspoke a blessing and everyone laughed, not at me, but with me. The room softened. Then Eitan, a 69-year-old man, leaned toward me and said, *"That's ok, try again, you know it."* His voice carried both warmth and insistence that there be growth. That pause, small, almost imperceptible, was more than reassurance; it was an act of building and reaffirming. It said: you belong here, even when you stumble. This moment, like many others, revealed how ritual learning happened through care, presence, and connection.

These small moments were not marginal to Jewish life. They were the essence of it. They were how Jewishness continued to live: through relational improvisation, care, and presence rather than institutional fidelity.

Navigating Loss and Loneliness: The Experience of Ostracization as Jewish People

> Early on Zalman identified this immense loneliness he often felt in his Jewish identity. *"There this part of my identity that I feel that I cannot express because it's such a triggering topic [...] there's this like culture of silence Jewishness and I don't ever really know what to do or say to be actually safe"*

Participants reflected on growing up as the only, or one of very few, Jewish people in their schools, work places, towns, or other spaces. These stories were threaded with a sense of hypervisibility, where Jewishness was simultaneously invisible and overexposed. For many, being Jewish was not a private or assumed identity, but something constantly explained, defended, or misunderstood. Jewishness became something they were expected to soften. Yitzchak shared, *"Growing up in Ottawa I was a lot of people's first Jew. So you have to represent the tribe well"*. His words encapsulate what the theme *Burden of Representation* names as a relational strain: to be everyone's "Jewish reference point," regardless of one's actual knowledge, observance, or comfort level.

> Eila told a story of experiences at work *"I ran into a situation, I was working for a company, it was a small business and it was owned by an Iranian Jew and a man from Spain. And we came to the holidays, because he was born in Iran, his custom was to only take one day for each of the holidays, and I requested 2 days. I had one hell of a time trying to explain to the boss from Spain why I was taking two days off when his partner was only taking one day off."*

The emotional toll of constantly translating and defending one's Jewishness was captured succinctly by Bina: *"It's so much work."* For her, this "work" was about more than explanation, it was the exhausting labour of anticipating misrepresentation, managing others' projections, and navigating the risk of being misunderstood or dismissed. This strain became particularly acute in

conversations with non-Jewish people about Israel, where participants felt their identity was reduced to a political litmus test.

> Yitzchak described the weight of being seen as the singular representative: *"They're going to look at you and say, 'Jews? I know a Jew…' That's the one conversation they're going to have with a Jew is on this topic [Israel/Palestine]. Like if you're the one Jew, you know? That's what they're going to ask you about. There's a lot of weight on that."*

His words reflect the experience when complex identities are sanitized and reduced to moments or a harmful normative story.

> Bina deepened this reflection, naming the conditionality of being granted legitimacy: *"It's like how non-Jewish people will test if you're good enough to speak. Antisemitism will only matter if you're a perfect Jew and you're being shot. Anything less and you deserve it or you're weaponizing antisemitism."*

Her words are a sharp critique of the moral hoops Jewish people are often expected to jump through to be seen as worthy of care or protection, where empathy is rationed based on perceived moral purity, and existence itself is treated as suspect.

For some participants, visibility was accompanied by social pressure and entangled with questions of safety, legality, and belonging. Eber shared his experience of trying to seek asylum in the United States after fleeing Egypt:

> *"We spent a year in Philadelphia trying to get us described as displaced persons that couldn't go back. We claimed asylum. Didn't work out. So they threw us out—like Trump is throwing out immigrants. We were thrown out quickly from the US."*

His story revealed the deep precarity of Jewish displacement and displacement generally, how one can flee hate to be rendered unwanted elsewhere. Eber's account underscored how a marginalized identity marks you as disposable. The trauma of being denied safety repeated itself across generations and borders.

Participants described their experiences of hate in categories. There was a persistent discomfort navigating both conservative and progressive spaces, albeit in different registers. In conservative spaces, antisemitism often appeared in overt, recognizable forms. In progressive contexts, however, exclusion was frequently more subversive.

Eitan gave an example discussing an anti-Israel protest that took place on the Ottawa Jewish Community Campus (a campus with a Jewish school, daycare, community center, long term care home, and group home)

> *"They were protesting here just outside the long-term care home and the residents of Hillel Lodge were scared. They were absolutely scared because these guys are protesting*

and they are [holocaust] survivors and survivors of the worst antisemitism and they have dementia. Its scary for them. It's not activism the way they think."

Participants recognized the necessity in movements for social change and were also deeply troubled and upset that these were spaces that claimed inclusivity but routinely relegated Jewishness to the margins. Participants described feeling increasingly isolated and dismissed in the wake of October 7th, 2023 while recognizing this is not when these feelings began for them. Antisemitism, they noted, was not considered overt enough to be publicly named, and even when it was, Jewish people were treated as not morally deserving of safety.

> Bechira described how people around her navigated her Jewishness with caution: *"My friends have been, like, tiptoeing around that conversation [Israel] with me... 'I didn't want to bring it up with you because I knew you were Jewish.'"*

This "tiptoeing" was framed as a kind of moral protection, but it was experienced as erasure. Bechira went on to recount a moment when, after expressing her grief about the loss of life since October 7th, a friend responded: ***"I'm glad you have the right opinion. I was worried because, you know…"*** The sentence trailed off, but the implication was clear: Jewishness itself had marked her as suspect.

> Zalman shared a similar dynamic in academic spaces: *"In my cohort in school, as soon as I leave, I have a friend that will report to me, that's when they'll bring up Israel. And that actually feels more offensive, because I'd like to speak about it."*

In both cases, participants were excluded from conversations; they were pre-emptively silenced. These stories underscore the theme of *Silence and Conditional Solidarity*, the way Jewish participation is often contingent upon a refusal to name or defend one's Jewishness. This also ties into the idea of performing the 'palatable Jew.' Part of this palatability was understood as being aware of other people's needs, experiences, traditions while having little expectation of this being reciprocated.

> Eila expressed frustration *"People don't know a lot about Judaism. They don't learn. They don't talk to other communities and I guess since we live in a Christian centric world we are forced to understand them, but they don't understand us."*

> Bechira recalled, *"There were three Jews [in my town] and they are all my family. And there was also Jehovah's Witnesses, who once drove 4 hours to my house because they knew we lived there."*

This strange juxtaposition of intense isolation and sudden scrutiny typified the experiences of many.

> Bina added, *"I was one of the only Jews at my school. That's when I felt more connected or tied to the Jewish community, because I felt more of a minority."*

In these moments, connection to Jewishness was not cultivated in community but catalyzed by absence and estrangement.

This paradox, of feeling most Jewish when most isolated, was shaped by what Sara Ahmed (2007) calls affective economies: the way emotions become attached to particular identities in public discourse. Being visibly Jewish often meant being read as a representative, a spokesperson, or a threat. Participants described the exhaustion of navigating constant misrecognition.

Participants expressed deep ambivalence about this dynamic. On the one hand, they longed for solidarity. On the other, they resented being positioned as either exceptional or suspect.

>Eitan reflected, *"You learn how to make people comfortable. But it makes you tired."*

This weariness was systemic, a result of persistent othering.

Despite these experiences of scrutiny and erasure, participants found moments of unexpected kinship.

>Eber offered: *"It's the Jewish soul that bonds us. I don't need to agree with someone politically or theologically. If they feel Jewish in their bones, that's enough."*

This affirmation, Jewishness as a felt presence, not a testable performance was echoed throughout the gatherings as participants claimed belonging on their own terms.

>Yehoshuah offered a reflection that lingered with the group: *"The pain of being Jewish is also the strength. It's the best and worst part of who we are."*

In this moment, he named a paradox many participants carried, the way Jewish identity is shaped by inherited trauma, and yet also strengthened by it. His words opened a shared inquiry: What does it mean to build identity around pain? Is our sense of self sustained by wounds, or in spite of them? This provoked a deeper conversation about hypervigilance, trauma, and the narratives we internalize.

>Yehoshuah asked, *"Do we need to all be hypervigilant to protect ourselves? Is that the only way?"*

His question made space for others to reflect on whether fear and defensiveness had become default modes of Jewish survival, and whether they wanted them to remain so.

The discussion turned to the stories we tell about ourselves, and how they shape what we imagine as possible.

>*"How do we tell ourselves a story about Jewish identity that isn't so damaged?"* Gila asked.

In response, Zalman offered a reframing: *"We've survived this long and that we are here together tonight doing projects like this as a 3000-year global tradition. I think retelling it to ourselves and also just retelling it to other people—our story is one of survival. Highlighting the high points in Jewish history and, you know, kind of the phoenix-out-of-the-ashes story is probably more powerful in combating the damaged story."*

This wasn't a denial of harm, it was a call to widen the frame. To remember what was lost as well as what was made. In a quiet moment, Bina and Eila reflected on how they had each first encountered Jewish stories as children, Eila in the 1940s and 50s, Bina in the early 2000s. Despite the generational gap, both remembered first learning about miracles before learning about trauma.

> *"I think that… when it comes to the Jewish story, how I remember learning it, I never thought of it as through tragedy. For me, the stories growing up were just stories about all the miracles."* Bina began.

> *"Miracles in every sense of the word."* Eila Added.

> Bina continued *"There was more about miracles rather than tragedy. And I think only as I got older, when I started to learn more and became more aware of the darker parts of Jewish history, that's when I think it started becoming more… I guess talking more about the victimization rather than the triumph and miracles."*

Both their reflections speaks to what many participants seemed to yearn for: a rebalancing without erasing pain. A Jewish identity that remembers trauma without being defined by it. A tradition that holds the miracle and the scar together not in opposition, but in tension and growth.

These reflections challenge both purity politics and assimilationist narratives. Instead, they affirm what Boyarin (1996) calls diasporic hermeneutics: an approach to Jewish identity that privileges relationality, memory, and complexity over normativity.

Participants spoke of finding kinship in imperfection. *"Even if I don't always feel safe being Jewish in public,"* said Bechira, *"I feel safest around other Jews who don't ask me to prove I belong."* This desire for spaces of non-performance where belonging does not hinge on perfection was a recurring theme across gatherings.

> As Eila shared toward the end of the Shabbat dinner: *"I didn't think I had anything to say. But when I sat down and everyone was telling stories about being alone in Jewishness, I thought…oh. That's me too. I just didn't know it counted."*

Her voice captures the essence of diasporic belonging: fragile, plural, and forged through recognition in the eyes of others who carry the same inheritance, beautiful in all its complexity.

The Inability to Hope: Antisemitism and Haunted Futures

Participants expressed a profound difficulty in imagining Jewish futures, an inability that itself reveals a layered story of inherited trauma, ambient threat, and disillusionment with solidarity. As Gila put it, *"It's hard to ignore it. It's hard to turn your mind off. I feel ready to run or fight or something at any moment".* This visceral readiness, this somatic bracing, echoes what Tuck and Ree (2013) call "haunting," the way historical violence and structural erasure constrain future-making in the present.

After several long pauses in response to the question, *"What do we hope for a Jewish future?"*, Eila offered a single word: ***"Safety."*** Her response was quiet, but it landed with force. It reflected a sobering truth: that dreaming requires conditions many participants did not feel they had. The moment laid bare the profound difficulty of envisioning joy or liberation when basic safety remains uncertain. In this context, hope itself became a privilege, something extremely difficult to access.

Several participants named how the aftermath of October 7th, 2023, intensified their sense of isolation and danger. Even as they felt the presence of antisemitism before, recent years have felt more dire and more dangerous.

> Zalman reflected, *"October 7th wasn't the original moment I started feeling all these things though… it was just amplified massively… I quickly just felt that I couldn't speak to a lot of the people who I thought were my friends".*
>
> Eila responded with kindness and a stark sense of realism *"Unfortunately, we can't change the world. We can't change the other people's minds. I think what we have to do is satisfy ourselves that we can still live a Jewish life and hope that we're not attacked and hope that we don't run into problems. And hope that along the way, if we run into people who really dislike us, that we are able to have a conversation with them that will maybe start them thinking in a different path."*

This loss of trust, of having one's belonging feel contingent or revoked was not rare. For Zalman, Eila, and others, the rupture was not new but deepened, exposing fault lines that had always been there.

Other participants described the effects of this conditionality on their mental and emotional health.

> Gila and Eila discussed how as they have aged they look for Jewish spaces to feel safe. Eila says *"when I play cards and am at a table were we're all Jewish it just feels like a weight off. I'm just more comfortable relaxing."*
>
> This sentiment was echoed by younger participants, *"I found I've, like, sought out more Jewish connections just because I felt like I've been so angry for so long. And who can I talk to about that?"* said Zalman.

Seeking refuge in Jewish spaces, they implied, was about survivability about emotional safety in a moment where Jewish identity is suspect and subsequently a target.

The perception of antisemitism as both overt and ambient was a common theme.

> Zalman and Eber observed, *"I just started reading everything, you know. It got really hard to see all the antisemitism happening all over the world everyday, all day"*.

Participants described this as a "low-level hum," an atmosphere more than an event where safety always felt provisional and you always had to be on guard.

> For Yehoshuah, the stakes of visibility were clear: *"You can combat antisemitism by just being more prepared for that, I think"*.

His comment speaks to an embodied preparedness, a readiness not only to flee or protect, but to absorb blows that may come simply from being Jewish in public.

> This preparedness was echoed by Eitan a 69 year old man as he recounted his experiences of antisemitism growing up. He said *"I think it's being smart. We're analyzing the situation, but the antisemites, the ones that hate the Jews. They don't… they just feel and follow what they feel not what makes sense. It's just feeling, just fear… and it kills us sometimes."*

And yet, despite the weight of history and the present, participants voiced resistance, in deliberate ways. Zalman reframed survival as resistance:

> *"I think winning is just being Jewish. It's just staying Jewish… confronting antisemitism. But winning is just being Jewish and staying Jewish"*.

In this view, continuity is not predicated on persuasion or proof. It is an act of being persistent, visible, and unapologetic.

> Bina, framed Jewish futures in terms of her view of realism. *"That's [targeting Jewish people] happened for thousands of years, so it's probably going to happen again in the future... there's no stopping it"*.

Her reflection gestures toward what Magid (2021) has called *Judeo-pessimism*, a recognition that the recurring nature of antisemitism makes safety feel unreachable and hope itself precarious.

And even in this terrain, it was clear that hope was hesitant but still present. That survival, fragile, ongoing, and relational was braided into the gatherings themselves. Dreaming, then, did not always take the form of easy articulation. It was enacted through practice: by showing up, telling stories, holding silence, and being Jewish together. It was about staying, about continuing, and about returning.

"It's not that we see the whole path," Gila said referring to the rhythm of the group's presence. *"It's that we keep going."* Gila went on to gesture to the group and the conversations and connections present and say, *"this is what Shabbat is supposed to be."*

Refusal, Improvisation, and Jewish Joy

While participants spoke of rupture and grief, they also brought forward stories of joy, laughter that burst through silence, kitchen improvisations that invoked memory, and moments of irreverence that honoured survival and presence. Jewishness, for this chavruta, was not solely a site of mourning. It was also a space of play, invention, and deep affection.

At the Challah Bake, a spirited exchange erupted over measuring techniques. Yitzchak joked, *"Tablespoon? Bubby just went like that…"* miming a pour from the bag. He followed: *"She'd be like 'a pshhh of this.'"* Bechira responded with awe and delight, *"Do those sounds mean something to you?"* The table laughed and mimicked the pour: "*Shhhh, pshhh,*"

> Bechira laughed, *"I feel like that is Jewish culture in itself, you know?"*

> Yitzchak nodded, *"You know what it means. You know it intrinsically".*

This improvisational fluency wasn't presented as a lack of knowledge, it was knowledge. It was, as Belser (2023) might argue, an "embodied archive": instinctual, collective, and carried in sound and muscle memory. Tradition was seen through laughter and sound effects.

Food became a site of sensory joy and remembrance.

> Bina spoke with affection: *"Pickles have a certain smell and there's a Pesach smell… the matzoh… but then also the chrain, I love the horseradish".*

These were portals, ways into memory, into lineage, into the tactile dimensions of identity.

Even the act of teaching and sharing became joyful. Yitzchak exclaimed, *"I'm so happy to be teaching someone how to braid challah!".* This was an act of love. It marked joy as relational and iterative, something that grew through participation rather than perfection.

> Eitan said *"A little bit of knowing that the JCC or Chabad is there. I think about all the work that goes into these places. What's special is knowing the community's around and has your back. And we don't care what type of Jew you are, but we want you to show up."*

In these irreverent and affectionate exchanges, participants enacted what Bell Hooks (1990) and Saidiya Hartman (2008) have described as the radical power of play: a mode of storytelling that defies flattening, that reclaims space for life within and beyond suffering. Jewish joy was not escapism it was resistance.

Participants found joy not despite loss, but alongside it. This was a Jewishness that held complexity with tenderness: jokes and stories passed across generations with grief and humour braided together.

As Zalman put it, *"There's not one way. Maybe almost everything can be done a little differently depending who you are"*.

Eber followed by saying *"But there's values and I think we all can agree that there's some important positive thing that makes us different. It's not our pain or our suffering that makes us great. Our legacy, ancestors, or descendants, our soul, the thing that ties all of us together. We need to continue to promote that and protect it because that is where we are joy"*

In this way, joy itself became a refusal of the narrative that survival must always be solemn. Through laughter, improvisation, and collective silliness, participants made clear: they were not only surviving they were delighting in each other and the profound power of their community and Jewishness.

Returning to the Braid to Move Forward

The themes and subthemes mapped in this chapter the living contours of Jewish life as it is felt, practiced, and continually reimagined by the participants in this study. They hold the textures of presence and absence, joy and grief, inheritance and rupture. Across stories, rituals, laughter, and longing, participants enacted what they already knew: that Jewishness is not something to be performed for legitimacy. It is something to be woven together in fragments and fullness, in loss and in light.

These findings also speak to the methodological commitments that shaped this research. The Braided Jewish Methodologies guiding this work stand in direct conversation with critical social work's pluralistic, justice-oriented approaches (Gray & Webb, 2013; Morley & O'Connor, 2016). Both traditions insist that knowledge-making is not neutral, but ethical, situated, and politically conscious rooted in relational accountability and a refusal of universalizing narratives. In holding multiplicity, centering lived experience, and making space for knowledge that is embodied as well as spoken, these findings affirm that epistemic justice is not an abstract principle but a lived practice.

The work of survival, care, resistance, and sacred connection described is about remembering the past; it is also about making possible the futures participants long for and dream of. In the next chapter, the discussion turns toward those futures, drawing from these findings to explore how Jewish life might continue to be built in ways that are courageous, generative, and unapologetically plural. There, the focus shifts from what has been named to what might yet be created: practices, relationships, and commitments that hold open the possibility of Jewish futures grounded in collective care, critical engagement, and shared hope.

Fragments into the Future: Makom for Discussing What It Means To Continue

Threads that Emerge from Story:

Carrying What was Never Fully Learned

This study began with a central set of questions: How is Jewish knowledge transmitted, embodied, and reinterpreted across generations particularly through mitzvah, storytelling, and relational practice? How might Jewish epistemologies, shaped by diaspora, structural antisemitism, and embodied practice serve as methodological interventions against erasure while cultivating futures rooted in memory, refusal, and regeneration? In other words, what does it mean to live Jewish continuity as something more than survival, something that is at once recursive, embodied, and creative? And what would it mean for social work practice to take these ways of knowing seriously, engaging Jewish continuity not only as cultural survival but as a framework for community care, epistemic justice, and intergenerational healing?

The findings, drawn from six participant-generated themes and thirteen subthemes, offer a textured portrait of contemporary Jewish life as lived across generations. They reveal Jewish continuity not as an abstract inheritance or a static cultural identity, but as an enacted process, one braided from embodied mitzvah, memory work, political refusal, and speculative imagination. The data demonstrate that Jewish continuity emerges through dynamic reinterpretation in the present rather than perfect replication of the past. This reinterpreting is grounded in the relational ethic of *dor l'dor* (generation to generation) (Roskies, 1999; Boyarin, 1996).

Participants described acts of recursive practice, lighting Shabbat candles every Friday night, wearing a *magen david* in public despite risk, gathering to tell and retell family stories, as living archives of Jewish knowledge. These were what Belser (2023) calls "pedagogies of presence," ritual enactments that transmit memory through the body, voice, and shared time. Gila reflected on this interplay of continuity and presence:

> *"There's so much we don't know. We're expected to carry something we never got to fully learn. Used to make me feel guilty."*

Her words name a recurring theme: the responsibility to transmit memory and identity even when those inheritances arrive fragmented, interrupted by migration, assimilation, or violence. This is what the findings call *fragmented inheritance*, a phenomenon the literature also captures through Hirsch's (2008) concept of *postmemory*, where the second or third generation inherits the affective weight of stories, gestures, and silences rather than full narrative continuity.

Yet the gatherings in this study also made visible the ways Jewish continuity is sustained through joy, humour, and experimentation. Several participants expressed that they had rarely felt they deserved to take up space in Jewish spaces oriented toward continuity. Participants harshly judged themselves for trying to be present without fluency, or felt that intergenerational exchange might be evaluative rather than reciprocal. This feeling as many participants identified came more from a self critical place rather than external criticism with Zalman stating:

> *"It's almost as though there is a self-imposed prerequisite to participate, like I need to be and do all these things to show up on Shabbat."*

This self criticism was lessened for many participants as they realized they were not alone in their experiences, Eila shared in her post-Shabbat reflection:

> *"If I heard of another one of these [intergenerational Jewish events], I'd be the first on the list signed up."*

These spaces disrupted the "good Jew/bad Jew" binary that many had internalized, creating instead an environment in which belonging was not conditional on knowledge, practice, or performance. This aligns with the literature's critique of gatekeeping in Jewish communal life (Plaskow, 1991; Shohat, 1999) and its insistence that Jewish peoplehood (*Am Yisrael*) is a relational, covenantal belonging rather than a standardized checklist of behaviors or beliefs (Batnitzky, 2011).

Between Vigilance and Dreaming

The findings also illuminated the tension between ***trauma-based continuity*** and ***desire-based continuity***. Trauma-based continuity, as it appeared in participants' accounts, is the carrying forward of Jewish life as a response to collective harm, rooted in knowing how and needing to survive under conditions shaped by antisemitism, displacement, genocide, and other forms of structural violence. It is a posture of vigilance, an ethic of "never let them win," often formed through Holocaust education, inherited fear, and the transmission of survival strategies across generations. Desire-based continuity, by contrast, reaches beyond survival. Drawing from Eve Tuck's (2009) articulation of desire-based frameworks, it does not deny or erase the realities of harm, but refuses to be defined solely by them. Desire is not singularly hope; where hope can hold open the possibility of change, desire insists on the worthiness of wanting, of dreaming, of reaching for a future that is more than the absence of violence. Desire-based continuity in this study took shape in what participants called ***"miracle stories,"*** narratives that foregrounded pride, creativity, and unapologetic Jewish expression. As Zalman reflected:

> *"When we tell a miracle story, we're just showing everyone that we are proud of who we are. The story is just being proudly and unapologetically Jewish in every possible way we can."*

This reframing resonates with Tuck's (2009) *desire-based frameworks*, which seek to account for loss and oppression without allowing them to be the sole defining narratives. It also draws from counterstory theory (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), in which marginalized communities tell their own stories to resist dominant deficit-based frameworks. Instead of naming this a counterstory, the chavruta named it a story of miracles.

The emergence of these miracle stories was one of the most striking and generative findings. While I anticipated that antisemitism, historical trauma, and structural marginalization would be central topics, as indeed they were, I did not anticipate that participants would place such emphasis on joy, miracle, and desire as conditions for continuity, even as they remained uncertain of what this dreaming might look like. This orientation toward joy is not naive optimism but what Freire (1992) calls *critical hope*: a refusal to surrender to fatalism, grounded in a sober analysis of present realities. Yet desire moves one step further. Where hope sustains the possibility of change, desire asserts a claim to it. Desire is more than necessity, it is a want, a

reaching toward something because it is seen as worthy of having. Desire assumes the safety and belonging required to want at all; without those conditions, survival demands leave no room for such reaching (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). In this sense, desire builds on critical hope while also insisting on the conditions of futurity: that Jewish life not only persist, but flourishes enough for its people to imagine, to want, and to create without apology.

In sum, the findings show that Jewish continuity in this context is lived as a recursive and embodied process, continually reinterpreted through the interplay of obligation, desire, and creativity. It is expressed through acts of ritual return, through public Jewish visibility, through the preservation of memory in fragmented form, and through the cultivation of spaces where multiplicity is welcomed. Participants' desires for spaces of safety, openness, joy, and intergenerational exchange point toward a potential framework of **Judeo-futurism**: a speculative practice rooted in tradition but oriented toward possibility. Judeo-futurism does not ask the community to choose between memory and imagination; it insists that the two are inextricably linked through Jewish notions of spiral time and return. It rises from the terrain of Judeo-pessimism (Magid, 2021), acknowledging the structural limits of Jewish inclusion in Western modernity, but it refuses to be defined solely by those limits. Instead, it takes up the technologies of relation, mitzvah, storytelling, and interpretation as the very tools with which to imagine otherwise.

Braiding the Stories:

The narratives gathered in this study reveal a consistent and intricate interplay between what can be called *trauma-based continuity* and *desire-based continuity*. This tension is not unique to the participants in this project, it is echoed in the literature on Jewish intergenerational transmission, diaspora identity, and postmemory. But here, it is rendered with an intimacy that shows how these broad theoretical categories are lived in the body. Participants' stories make clear that Jewish continuity is always negotiated between memory's weight and the longing for joy, between vigilance and vulnerability, between inherited grief and the courage to imagine otherwise.

Fragments, Returns, and the Joy of the Table

Many participants carried into the gatherings an inheritance shaped by vigilance. This is the kind of inheritance Marianne Hirsch (2008) names as *postmemory*: a transmission of trauma from one generation to the next through affective, embodied, and imaginative channels rather than direct experience. In the Jewish context, postmemory manifests in stories half-heard at family tables, the sight of a *magen david* tucked discreetly under a shirt collar, or the instinct to scan a room for exits. As Eber reflected:

> *"I never learned the way I was supposed to be Jewish because we had to get out [of Egpyt], the future was bleak. The quota said from Egypt, you're only allowed a specific number of people and you have to put your name down and wait and it could be years and the years weren't available. I didn't have time to learn it even if my parents wanted to teach me."*

His words capture what the findings term *fragmented inheritance*, the simultaneous possession of an obligation and a gap. It is a continuity defined as much by absence as by presence. This

echoes Connerton's (2009) work on forgetting, which frames gaps in cultural transmission not simply as loss but as active structuring forces in memory.

Yet within the same breath, participants spoke of Jewish memory as a site of joy and nourishment. Eber's relief at hearing *"there's no one way"* illustrates how permission for multiplicity, seeing Jewish life through a Jewish lens, can transform the experience of continuity from a test into a gift. This resonates with Roskies' (1999) framing of Jewish memory as a verb: something performed, improvised, and reinterpreted rather than a static storehouse of facts.

Across narratives, the acts of ritual return: lighting candles, telling family stories, gathering for meals were described not only as obligations but as pleasures. Belser's (2023) framing of Shabbat as a "pedagogy of presence" is instructive here. For Belser, the weekly practice of Shabbat is not only a rest from labour but a political and spiritual refusal of capitalist temporality, an act of creating space for care, joy, and interdependence. Participants' accounts of Shabbat echoed this, describing it as

Bina says *"a time I don't have to explain myself,"* as Yitzchak says *"the one time in the week I feel like my whole self can be here. Body, mind, spirit.,"* or as Zalman says *"Shabbat is ideal. Definitely ideal… but… not easy how we live."*

From Trauma to Desire: The Emergence of "Miracle Stories"

While it was anticipated that discussions would center heavily on antisemitism and historical trauma, a striking thematic current emerged around what participants began calling "miracle stories." Bina, in particular, reframed Jewish continuity not as the duty to remember loss but as the opportunity to celebrate survival and creativity. In response Bechira said:

> *"We could tell the story of the pogrom, yes, but we could also tell the story of my grandmother baking for the whole block after she got here. That's a miracle too."*

Zalman added:

> *"When we tell a miracle story, we're just showing everyone that we are proud of who we are. The story is just being proudly and unapologetically Jewish in every possible way we can."*

Yehoshua feeling hesitant framed by his family's experiences being from Israel says:

> *"Our holidays highlight the miracles, but like our current or like recent modern experience as Jews have been anything but miraculous it feels, there have been some miracles, but there's also been a lot of things that feel the opposite of that I guess."*

Yehoshua's reflection does not negate the miracle story; rather, it situates it within a Judeo-pessimist lens, one that acknowledges persistent harm without foreclosing the possibility of joy or growth. This posture resonates with Eve Tuck's (2009) desire-based frameworks, which call for narratives that account for loss while also centering visions, wisdom, and possibility. In this light, the miracle story becomes an act of refusal against damage-centered narratives that collapse Jewishness into a single posture of grief or vigilance.

Miracle stories also function as a form of counterstory (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), disrupting dominant narratives that render Jewish identity legible only through trauma. In

telling these stories, participants reclaim narrative sovereignty, choosing to foreground joy, creativity, and unapologetic presence.

Contextualizing with Literature

The desire to move beyond trauma-centered continuity does not mean forgetting or denying historical violence. Rather, it resonates with Magid's (2021) articulation of *Judeo-pessimism*: the recognition that antisemitism is not an episodic prejudice but a structural feature of Western modernity. Participants' stories reflect this recognition, Yehoshua's admission that *"we're always on alert"* is a lived expression of Judeo-pessimist awareness. Yet, by centering miracle stories alongside vigilance, participants demonstrate Freire's (1992) *critical hope*: a refusal to let structural precarity foreclose the possibility of imagining and building futures.

This dual posture, holding both grief and desire, also parallels practices in Afrofuturism and Indigenous futurisms. As Grace Dillon (2012) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) describe, these traditions envision futures not by erasing histories of violence but by living forward from ancestral teachings in ways that disrupt colonial timelines. The participants' speculative impulses, imagining spaces without gatekeeping where ritual can be re-entered without shame and Jewish community can exist with a desire for joy not just a hope for safety mirror this futurist ethic.

The prominence of joy and miracle in the data may be partly attributable to the design of the chavruta gatherings. These were intentionally constructed as intergenerational, non-gatekept spaces where curiosity was welcomed and failure was permitted. As Eila put it:

> *"It felt like I could just show up. I didn't have to know everything or be anyone's idea of the right kind of Jew."*

The literature on community-based participatory research (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003) indicates that when participants are engaged as co-creators of knowledge (as in a *chavruta*-style discussion) and when the setting is grounded in relational accountability (as in the ethic of *dor l'dor*) they are more likely to shift toward generative engagement. The gatherings in this study appear to have fostered precisely these conditions, doing so by mobilizing distinctly Jewish ways of knowing and being in service of the community's own growth and continuity. This is returning to community knowledge.

Braided Tensions

Ultimately, the interpretation that emerges is one of *braided continuity*: strands of trauma and desire, vigilance and joy, wound together in the everyday acts of Jewish life. Jewish continuity, in this view, is neither the replication of an intact tradition nor the abandonment of it, but a dynamic, recursive process of reinterpretation. It is what Rabbi Benay Lappe (2013) calls *Crash Theory's third option*: remaking the story after rupture, not to erase the rupture but to live differently with it.

The participants' miracle stories, their refusals of gatekeeping, their longing for spaces of belonging without performance, all of these are political and epistemic acts of resistance and continuity. They point toward a Jewish future in which continuity is not the burden of perfect transmission but the practice of creating conditions where memory, imagination, and dreaming can coexist. This is the heart of what a Judeo-futurist framework would be: beginning with the

acknowledgment of structural limits, as Judeo-pessimism demands, but refusing to stop there. Instead, it moves toward building otherwise, rooted in the embodied, relational, and speculative practices that have always sustained Jewish life.

What Becomes Possible:

The findings of this study carry implications not only for Jewish communal life but for broader conversations about cultural continuity, identity formation under structural marginalization, and the work of imagining livable futures. They reveal that Jewish continuity, when cultivated through embodied mitzvah, intergenerational relationship, and the refusal of gatekeeping can move beyond survivalist frameworks into spaces of creativity, joy, and multiplicity. This shift has the potential to reorient both community practice and scholarly discourse.

Beyond Survival: The Work of Remembering Forward

A central implication of these findings is the need to move away from framing Jewish continuity solely in opposition to antisemitism. Participants' accounts align with Magid's (2021) assertion that antisemitism is a structural, enduring feature of Western modernity, a reality that necessitates vigilance. Yet, as the miracle stories and joy-centered practices illustrate, continuity built only on vigilance risks narrowing Jewish identity to its defensive postures.

Several participants named this exhaustion directly. As Yehoshua reflected:

> *"We're taught to keep the memory alive so they can't erase us, 'נִזְכּוֹר nizkor' but sometimes it feels like all we do is remember the bad stuff."*

Additionally Eber asks multiple times:

> *"What is it really we are trying to carry forward?"*

This aligns with Tuck's (2009) critique of damage-centered narratives, which can unintentionally reinscribe the very harm they seek to resist by centering injury as the primary lens for identity. The participants in this study did not reject the necessity of remembering harm; rather, they sought to braid it with stories of resilience, beauty, and everyday creativity. As Zalman says:

> *"Just that we've survived this long and that we are here together tonight doing projects like this as a 3000 year global tradition. Like I think retelling it to ourselves and also just retelling it to other people. Our story is one of survival, and highlighting the high points in Jewish history and you know, like kind of the Phoenix out of the ashes story is probably more powerful than a damaged story."*

This move toward a desire-based model of continuity has implications for how Jewish educational and communal institutions design their programming. It suggests an orientation that holds both *Zakhor* (remember) and *Simcha* (joy/celebration) as co-equal imperatives may foster deeper engagement and longer-term commitment than one centered exclusively on vigilance or memorialization. As Levinas (1969) describes Zakhor is a verb and a call to action that requires care.

Speculating in Spiral Time: Judeo-Futurism as a Framework

The introduction of *Judeo-futurism* in this study offers the potential for the development of a conceptual tool. Rooted in the acknowledgement of structural constraints named by Judeo-

pessimism, Judeo-futurism refuses to be defined solely by them. It envisions futures grounded in recursive time (spiralling), polyvocal interpretation (like midrash and traditions of rabbinic commentary/interpretation), and embodied ritual (living Jewish practice). Importantly Judeo-futurism is not a concept to be invented from scratch. Rather, it is a recognition and articulation of what has always been alive in Jewish life: speculative practices embedded in diasporic storytelling, Shabbat rest, ritual cycles, ethical imperatives, and the imaginative traditions of *midrash*, *chavruta*, *Tikkun Olam,* etc. These are not speculative insertions into Jewish thought, they are evidence that Jewish communities have long practiced futurity under conditions of rupture, grief, longing, and resilience. Judeo-futurism, then, is not an abstract idea, but a naming of what is already present: a living archive of future-thinking, cultivated in spiral time, intergenerational relation, and the radical refusal to disappear.

This framework draws from Afrofuturism (Dery, 1994; Womack, 2013) and Indigenous futurisms (Dillon, 2012; Lewis, 2017) in its commitment to memory as a foundation for speculation. As in those movements, Judeo-futurism does not imagine a clean break from the past but an iterative engagement with it, one that honours ancestral knowledge while reimagining its application. Remembering forward.

In practical terms, Judeo-futurism encourages communities to ask: What would it mean to create Jewish spaces where safety is assumed, joy is prioritized, and multiple interpretations are celebrated? What does it mean to be speculative in a Jewish context? These are not hypothetical questions; they are already being answered in the microcosms created by the chavruta in this study and shabbat tables every Friday night around the world.

Belonging Without Performance

The desire for spaces without gatekeeping was one of the most consistent findings. Eila's reflection

> *"I didn't think I had anything to say. But when I sat down and everyone was telling stories about being alone in Jewishness, I thought… oh. That's me too. I just didn't know it counted."*

speaks to a deep hunger for belonging without performance. This longing is sharpened by the reality that, in many non-Jewish spaces, participants often feel pressure to make themselves palatable, downplaying visible markers of identity, avoiding certain topics, or over-explaining traditions to preempt misunderstanding or hostility. Such self-monitoring reflects what Erving Goffman (1963) describes as "managing a spoiled identity," a process that can create emotional distance even in ostensibly inclusive environments.

Participants spoke directly to this kind of navigation. Eila described always "double-checking" what she said in mixed company:

> *"I edit myself. I hear myself doing it, taking out the parts about holidays or traditions because I don't want to have to explain or hear the comments."*

Similarly, Bina recalled wearing his *magen david* tucked under her shirt in professional settings:

> *"It's not that I'm ashamed, it's that I don't want it to be the first thing they see and decide about me. I'd rather they meet me first, then find out I'm Jewish when I know it's safe."*

These narratives illuminate how assimilationist pressures, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, encourage self-erasure as a strategy for safety and acceptance.

The literature on feminist pedagogy underscores the importance of countering these dynamics. Bell Hooks (1994) emphasizes that transformative learning requires spaces where people can bring their whole selves without fear of invalidation. Translated to the context of navigating non-Jewish environments, this means moving beyond "welcoming" as a surface-level value and toward cultivating spaces that actively resist the subversive demand of multiculturalism to smooth out difference for majority comfort.

For participants, the gatherings in this study contrasted sharply with those everyday negotiations. In these settings, uncertainty, experimentation, and vulnerability were not only tolerated but valued. To inhabit their identities in ways that are generative rather than defensive.

As Bina put it:

> *"Here I didn't have to explain or justify anything. [...] I could just be."*

Learning in Both Directions: Relational Time and Intergenerational Exchange

Another implication concerns the ethics of relational time. Drawing on Levinas' (1969) ethics of responsibility to the Other and Boyarin's (1996) framing of diaspora as epistemology, the findings suggest that Jewish continuity is sustained through relational modes of being not content transfer. The gatherings' emphasis on intergenerational exchange reflects this: knowledge moved in both directions, with younger participants offering contemporary cultural fluency and older participants offering historical context and memory.

This relational, reciprocal model stands in contrast to hierarchical or unidirectional teaching structures. It resonates with chavruta traditions, where learning emerges through dialogue rather than lecture. Such models could be applied more broadly in community, fostering environments where knowledge is co-created rather than transmitted from a single authority. This returning to community knowledge actively resists the often imposed colonial paradigms participant continually identified.

Implications Beyond Jewish Contexts

While this study is rooted in Jewish experience, its implications extend to other diasporic and marginalized communities negotiating continuity under structural oppression. The combination of postmemory (Hirsch, 2008), counterstory (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and desire-based frameworks (Tuck, 2009) offers broad context.

The findings of this study underscore a profound opportunity and responsibility for social work to reimagine its role in Jewish communal life, particularly through the lens of community-based practice. Participants' expressed longings for spaces of intergenerational connection, ritual return, and epistemic safety demand a social work practice that is not merely trauma-informed but culturally rooted, relationally oriented, and grounded in Jewish ways of knowing.

Yet, this vision of community practice requires an epistemological shift. Dominant models of social work often rely on fixed, legible truths and linear outcomes. Approaches deeply misaligned with Jewish epistemologies that value pluralism, argument, and recursive interpretation (Hulatt & Hershtein, 2024). Where social work seeks clarity, Jewish frameworks

dwell in ambiguity. Where social work favours diagnosis, Jewish ethics favour dialogue. This tension is not a barrier, but an opportunity. As seen when Yehoshua's gentle assertion that *"there is no one way"* brought comfort to Eber, safety emerged through multiplicity, not certainty. For Jewish communities, truth is not singular but contested, embodied, and held in relation. Social work that refuses ambiguity risks replicating the very erasures participants grieve. Community-based social work, as articulated by Ife (2016), is rooted in a commitment to relational practice, shared knowledge production, and place-based care. It emphasizes collective action over individual pathology, recognizing the interdependence of personal, communal, and structural well-being. Within Jewish communities, this ethos aligns with a long history of mutual aid, cooperative governance, and obligation toward the collective. As Shulman (2009) and Berman (2019) have argued, Jewish communal structures have long embodied a form of relational ethics in practice, where care is embedded in ritual, obligation, and shared narrative.

Participants' desires for culturally attuned, shame-free spaces to engage with Jewishness must be understood as a call for what Walter and Anderson (2013) describe as epistemic justice in community work. That is, the right not only to receive services, but to do so in ways that affirm one's knowledge systems, histories, and cosmologies. This includes the cyclical temporality of Jewish life, what Boyarin (1994) terms "diasporic time" in which ritual return and collective memory shape present and future possibilities.

A Jewishly grounded approach to community-based social work must therefore enter these spaces with humility privileging practices of cultural return, rather than assimilation. This includes facilitating intergenerational chavruta (partnered learning) (Ravitch, 2022), trauma-informed/culturally attuned gatherings (Belser, 2023), and collective participation in tradition as strategies of both healing and speculative resistance. As Julia Watts Belser (2023) reminds us, "rest is not retreat, but rebellion" (p. 117) a profoundly relevant ethic in Jewish community care, where exhaustion from performance, representation, and precarity are ongoing. In this sense, the movement toward spaces for communal rest and joy is not ancillary to social work, it is central.

Hope, in this context, is not generic optimism. As participants revealed, hope is a privilege not evenly distributed. A trauma-informed Jewish futurity must reckon with this unevenness. Some participants longed for rest but could not identify what that safety felt like. Others carried ancestral grief so heavy they would say it occluded imagination. The role of social work, then, is not only to hold trauma but to cultivate conditions for hope and desire. This includes recognizing antisemitism not with caveats or competing oppressions, but as real, systemic, and formative. It includes validating Jewish grief without demanding that it be politically sanitized or morally tested. Most of all, it means seeing Jewish identity as full and expansive peoplehood. When Jewishness is treated as an accessory to identity, rather than a diasporic people shaped by history, present and future, social work fails. To truly engage in epistemic justice, we must move toward an ethic of joining Jewish tables, tables that have long existed, set with dialogue, storytelling, ritual, contradiction, and rest. We are not 'creating space' for Jewish voice and view, we are recognizing that is has always existed. It is in this space of multiplicity and mutual obligation that a Jewish approach to social work practice must root itself.

Indeed, Jewish frameworks offer their own social work methodologies. Practices such as tikkun olam (repair of the world), chesed (lovingkindness), and mitzvah (moral obligation) reflect a communal ethic that aligns with critical community practice models (Ledwith, 2011). The Jewish concept of *lo ba'shamayim hi* (it is not in heaven) (Devarim 30:12) has long functioned as a

commitment to embodied knowledge-making. This principle could act as a guide for social work toward more participatory and dialogic forms of community-building, particularly in contexts of fragmentation, loss, and generational shift.

As Kerson and McCoyd (2013) argue, community-based social work must address cultural, spiritual, and relational dimensions of wellbeing, especially among communities with histories of collective trauma. In Jewish communities, this includes grappling with *postmemory* (Hirsch, 2008), inherited fear, and the burden of continuity. However, it also includes cultivating conditions for joy, desire, and imperfect return. There is opportunity here for spaces where Jewish people can co-create relational infrastructures that hold rupture without collapsing into it.

To enact such a practice, institutions must move away from metrics of Jewish continuity rooted in replication, and toward models that value relation, emergence, and care. This aligns with critical disability studies' emphasis on interdependence (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) and decolonial pedagogies of unlearning (Tynan & Bishop, 2023). The Jewish future, as participants imagined it, will not be built by gatekeeping knowledge or policing identity. It will be braided together across generations, through story, mitzvah, and the labour of collective dreaming.

In this light, social work becomes not a profession that "fixes" broken individuals, but one that listens deeply, co-creates meaning, and supports the reweaving of cultural and communal life. As seen in the intergenerational Shabbat that anchored this research, when social work makes space for tradition, laughter, and shared vulnerability, we participate in building generative futures.

The Stakes of the Work

The implications of this study are both practical and theoretical. They call for a reorientation of Jewish continuity work toward spaces that braid vigilance with joy, obligation with creativity. They suggest that Judeo-futurism can serve as a guiding framework for such work, not as a fixed vision but as an invitation to continual reinterpretation.

In doing so, they remind us that the work of continuity is never finished and never fixed. As Rabbi Benay Lappe (2013) teaches in *Crash Theory*, after rupture, the choice is not only between replicating the old story or abandoning it entirely, there is a third option: to tell the story anew, in a way that makes life possible. The participants in this study, through their miracle stories, refusals of gatekeeping, and commitments to intergenerational exchange, are already living into that third option.

Boundaries of this Work:

Like the stories it holds, this research is rooted in place, time, and relationship. The gatherings took shape in Ottawa, a city whose Jewish life is overwhelmingly Ashkenazi. As such, the voices in this work carry, for the most part, the cadences of Ashkenazi tradition, history, and practice. While care was taken to hold a range of experiences of Jewish identity, the vast, intricate expanse of Jewish diasporic life could not be contained within this study. The findings are therefore situated, not universal, and future conversations across diverse diasporic contexts could open new layers of meaning.

The stories told here also arrive through my listening and my writing. They are not raw transcripts set on the page, but interpretations, my understanding shaped by the way each voice met the room. I have tried to write with care, to honour the textures of participants' words, but I

know that no rendering can hold the full presence of the person who spoke them: their pauses, gestures, laughter, or the way their voice softened on a particular word. What remains is only one possible telling of many possible tellings.

This study also holds the intimacy and the limits of a small group. While it seeks threads of connection, it does not claim to speak for all Jewish people, nor to contain the vastness of diasporic experience. Jewish tradition teaches that each person is a world, thus each participant's story is a world unto itself, shaped by migrations, family memory, political landscape, and the daily negotiations of belonging. The aim here is not to generalize, but to honour each experience and to trace patterns that emerge when those worlds meet.

Finally, the matter of identity runs through both process and outcome. Participants spoke from shifting intersections of personal history, communal affiliation, and public perception. Navigating what it means to "be Jewish" in spaces that welcome, question, or erase them. Those meanings are not fixed; they move with time, place, and relationship. This study offers only a moment's glimpse into that motion, aware that identity, like continuity itself, is always in the making.

Returning Again - Gestures to the Future:

The findings of this study suggest a set of recommendations for both Jewish communal practice and the broader fields of education, cultural preservation, and social work. These recommendations are rooted in participants' expressed desires, as well as in the theoretical and historical frameworks discussed throughout this work. They are not prescriptive formulas but invitations to design spaces, practices, and programs that cultivate continuity as a living, generative process.

1. Develop Intergenerational Jewish Programs
2. Prioritize Joy-Centered Learning Alongside Memory Preservation
3. Support Jewish Arts and Storytelling Initiatives as Tools of Continuity and Speculation
4. Integrate Jewish Approaches to Social Work Practice
5. Expand Research and Practice Across the Full Jewish Diaspora
6. Investigate the Role of Digital Spaces in Intergenerational Transmission
7. Explore Parallels and Divergences Between Judeo-Futurism and Other Futurist Frameworks

The findings of this study suggest a set of recommendations for both Jewish communal practice and the broader fields of education, cultural preservation, and social work. Each recommendation is grounded in the lived experiences and expressed longings of participants, who envisioned Jewish continuity not as the preservation of a fixed past but as an active, evolving process shaped by relation, ritual, and creative interpretation. These recommendations draw from the braided theoretical framework of this work: diaspora as epistemology, ritual as embodied archive, and the speculative possibilities of Judeo-futurism while remaining attentive to the structural realities named by Judeo-pessimism. They are offered not as static prescriptions, but as openings for further experimentation, adaptation, and co-creation within diverse Jewish and allied contexts.

Together, these recommendations invite practitioners, educators, and community leaders to cultivate conditions where Jewish life can move beyond survivalist paradigms toward spaces of

joy, multiplicity, and imaginative engagement. They speak to the need for intergenerational reciprocity, for centering the arts and storytelling as tools of both memory and speculation, and for integrating Jewish epistemologies into the broader practice of social work. They also call for a widened lens on Jewish life across the global diaspora, attention to the possibilities and limits of digital transmission, and deeper dialogue between Judeo-futurism and other futurist movements. In doing so, they affirm that continuity is not a single act or program, but an ongoing practice of tending to relation, imagination, and responsibility across time.

Each of these recommendations reflects the braided nature of Jewish continuity revealed in this study, a continuity that holds both vigilance and joy, obligation and creativity. They are also mutually reinforcing: intergenerational, non-gatekept spaces make joy-centered learning possible; arts and storytelling initiatives fuel both memory preservation and speculative vision; Jewish approaches to social work ground care in culturally resonant practices. Taken together, these recommendations embody the core insight of this research: Jewish continuity is not a fixed inheritance but a living process, sustained through recursive, embodied, and relational acts that open space for the future to be imagined, instead of just endured.

Poetic Reflection #3: On Hope and Looking to the Future

A Different Kind of Prophecy

what does it mean to hope when you're raised on emergency exits & contingency plans,
on the rhythms of scanning the room before you enter it?
what does it mean to hope when your people have mastered the art of running?

when every generation passes down a suitcase heart already half-packed
with names,
with languages,
with the urgency of leaving before it's too late.

Survival is the choreography etched into our bones.
We never needed a rehearsal.

we come together in parking lots and vigils and WhatsApp threads
full of warnings and prayers, whichever are needed first.

when something happens,
and something always does,
we show up.
we bring food,
fold chairs, tissues, and grief into the corners of a world that sees our cries as inconvenient.
we know how to hold each other when nobody else does.

and
we name this,
sometimes through tears,
sometimes with pride
"it is the best and worst parts of who we are."

how closeness can bloom like saplings in a burn zone.
how we confuse togetherness with aftermath.
We know how to grieve, we're practiced at that

I want more for us
than being good at mourning.
I want more

than inherited crisis response.

I want Shabbats where the singing doesn't strain against sirens in the back of our minds.
I want to raise children who are watchful because they are curious,
not because they are afraid.

I want us to build a future
not out of fear
but out of longing.
not just avoiding nightmare, but creating dreams.

I want us to dream the way our ancestors danced
not as escape, but as presence.
to remember that prophecy was never only about warning,
it was about vision,
about how we could bloom if we let ourselves.
Sometimes looking into the future was about imagining the places we'd make holy just by being there.

hope, for us, has been a backlit thing
a flicker in the corner of the eye
not safe enough to name
not wise enough to ignore
sometimes I wonder what we could build if we didn't have to use every brick as both shelter and shield.

if we could rest like it's not borrowed
if we could gather without the watchfulness humming under the surface of our songs.
if our children's lullabies didn't carry the ghosts of escape plans.

But here we are.
still braiding
still blessing
still breaking
bread and silence
in the same breath.

so maybe hope isn't soft,
isn't naive.
maybe it's a rebellion to believe we are worthy of ease.

maybe the next chapter of Jewish survival is joy.
not the joy that comes after the fire,
but the kind we don't apologize for.

maybe we begin by noticing when our shoulders lower.
when we let the quiet in.
when we stop checking the exits long enough to breathe deep and really…
Really see the future.

This poem lingers for me. It speaks in the register of inherited watchfulness, of memory stored in the body. And yet, within the repetition of mourning, within the muscle memory of survival, it let me dare to articulate something gentler: the longing for ease. It names hope not as erasure, but as possibility. Hope is something that can coexist with grief and can emerge precisely *because* we know the contours of what it means to lose.

Hope, here, is not framed as naivety but as a radical act of refusal, a refusal to be only defined by trauma, by aftermath, by the choreography of running. It is the audacity to want more for ourselves than vigilance. More than resilience. More than being good at grief. This is something I have struggled with. There is tenderness in this vision, but also strength: the insistence that we are not only survivors of catastrophe but creators of joy, of ritual, of presence. That Jewish life can be more than preparing for the next crisis, it can be about resting, singing, raising children who do not carry the hum of danger in their bones.

This is not a forgetting. It is a reorientation. A different kind of prophecy. Not a warning, but a vision. A turning toward the dream of a Jewish future that is spacious enough for stillness, for breath, for gathering without scanning. A future in which prophecy doesn't come cloaked in fear, but in the quiet recognition of togetherness. In this way, hope becomes active. Not a distant light, but something we choose, moment by moment, whenever we let our shoulders lower. Whenever we allow ourselves to see the future not only as a place of risk, but as a space we might make holy by simply being within it.

Carrying Forward in Full: Final Thoughts

This thesis began with a question braided from memory, grief, and obligation: what does it mean to inherit forward? To take seriously the fragments, rhythms, and ruptures of diasporic Jewish life, and to live toward continuity not as replication, but as an ongoing, relational, ethical practice. The work that followed was not an abstract investigation it was an enactment of Jewish continuity itself. For social work, this framing matters: it models how practice can move beyond survival or replication toward relational forms of care that honour memory, improvisation, and community wisdom. To inherit forward is, in many ways, to practice social work otherwise, to recognize that continuity is built in kitchens, around tables, and through stories that resist erasure. It is to recognize care as simultaneously ethical and political, and to take seriously the practices diasporic communities cultivate in the face of rupture as guides for social work engagement.

Through intergenerational gatherings, challah baking, Shabbat dinners, Havdalah, interviews, and written reflections, we did more than collect stories. We practiced a methodology grounded in Jewish epistemologies: chavruta's dialogic exchange, Shabbat's sacredness of rest, postmemory's embodied inheritance. In kitchens, around tables, and across generations, participants enacted refusal against erasure, improvisation in the face of rupture, and joy as an insurgent act. The words, songs, silences, and contradictions they shared became a living archive, one that holds multiplicity without demanding resolution.

The findings show that Jewish continuity is not a fixed state or the seamless transmission of tradition. It is recursive and embodied, emerging from practices that make space for grief and delight, for the ache of what was lost and the improvisations that keep us whole. Against the pressures of structural antisemitism, epistemic injustice, and conditional inclusion, continuity is sustained not through assimilation, but through promised memory, communal care, and interpretive transformation. It is carried in acts of presence: lighting candles each week, telling the same story a new way, showing up for one another even when it feels risky or uncertain.

Hope threaded its way quietly through this thesis, even if it was never named outright in the data analysis. In the gatherings, I often heard a fear of hope, a hesitancy to lean toward futures we could not guarantee. Participants spoke readily of resilience, memory, even joy, but rarely of hope. At the time, I did not identify it as a theme; I think now that my own ambivalence toward hope, shaped by my embeddedness in this same community, made me less able to name it. To hope, after all, is to feel safe enough to want, to believe in the possibility of what is not yet. For a people marked by exile and erasure, hope can feel dangerous. In hindsight, I see this as both a limitation of the research and a mirror of our collectiveness. It is also an invitation, for myself and my community, to learn how to hope without erasing the truths we carry.

Writing this thesis as a Jewish researcher has been an act of both offering and exposure. I have carried into these pages the scent of my grandmother's kitchen, the hum of niggunim, the weight

of warning in my elders' voices: *be careful*. I have felt the tension of translating what is sacred into the language of the academy without flattening it, of protecting the fullness of what was shared while making it legible in spaces that have often been hostile to Jewish voice. The process has braided scholarship with devotion, theory with grief, analysis with love. I have not written *about* my community from a safe remove, I have written *from within* it, in conversation with the very people who braided me into its fabric. This work has reminded me of the ways my Jewishness shows up in my social work. The way I think, care, and engage with community is deeply informed by how I have watched and learned to care, and by how I have known to show up. I have been reminded that my way of thinking and caring, undoubtedly Jewish, is valuable in social work, and that my community's wisdom is not just applicable but an insurgent, beautiful way of knowing and caring that offers an alternate path to the often individual or detached nature of institutional social work. Social work must honor the embodied knowledges of communities, even, and especially, when those knowledges resist dominant paradigms. My Jewishness is not incidental to my practice; it is the ground from which I have learned to listen across difference, to sit with grief without rushing to fix, and to recognize continuity and care as forms of resistance.

This work is also a refusal to let Jewish life be defined solely through the lens of suffering. To speak of antisemitism without speaking of Jewish joy would be another kind of erasure. Our lives are not made meaningful by our wounds, but by the ways we continue to sing, study, rest, and care. Mitzvah, in this light, is not only tradition but theory in motion: a technology of relation that interrupts urgency, makes holy interdependence, and insists on presence in a world that demands our disappearance.

For social work, this thesis offers both a methodological and ethical provocation: that community-based, culturally grounded research must be accountable to the people it engages; that Jewish epistemologies, like many marginalized and diasporic ways of knowing, are rigorous, insurgent, and worthy of standing on their own terms. The call here is to practice research not as extraction, but as accompaniment; not as a linear path to a fixed answer, but as a rhythm of return, listening, and reinterpretation. This orientation also reshapes practice itself. Social work must cultivate spaces where intergenerational exchange is possible, recognizing that continuity is sustained not only through memory but also through joy, creativity, and everyday ritual. Supporting arts, storytelling, and speculative practices becomes central to this task, offering communities avenues to imagine futures that are not bound only by rupture. Integrating Jewish approaches to relation (whether through dialogic learning, Shabbat-informed rest, or a commitment to communal responsibility) expands what counts as legitimate knowledge and care within the field, offering a counterpoint to institutional models that often individualize or detach. Paying attention to the full diversity of the Jewish diaspora resists the narrowing of Jewish life to Ashkenormative frames, while attuning to digital spaces acknowledges the changing landscapes through which memory and tradition are transmitted. Finally, social work can learn from Jewish speculative traditions as a way to enter into solidarity with other futurist frameworks that grapple

with histories of displacement and survival. In these ways, Jewish ways of knowing and being not only inform Jewish continuity, but also invite social work to imagine itself otherwise.

At the same time, this thesis intervenes in a gap that has left Jewish knowledge too often sidelined. While many other epistemologies have been taken up within decolonial frameworks, Jewish ways of knowing have rarely been recognized in that register. Antisemitism has long rendered Jewish knowledge an artifact, something to be preserved behind glass, mourned as loss, or treated as an object of study rather than as a living, rigorous, and evolving epistemology. By framing Jewish continuity and Jewish epistemologies as decolonial, this work resists that artifacting and insists on their vitality and relevance. It seeks to contribute to a reframing and reclaiming of Jewish knowledge on Jewish terms: not as relics of the past, but as insurgent, relational, and deeply ethical ways of knowing. To name them as decolonial is to insist that Jewish knowledge belongs in the chorus of global struggles for survival, renewal, and justice, and to mark Jewish continuity as an act not only of endurance but of epistemic presence and contribution.

I return, then in spiral Jewish time, to where we began with new eyes: Jewish continuity is not the absence of rupture, it is what we make with it. It is the braiding of dough each week in anticipation of rest that will hold us all. It is the courage to keep telling stories that may outlast us, knowing they will change in the telling. Like the story of Torah that was unrecognizable in Rabbi Akiva's classroom, we must be assured that "This, too, is Torah." We inherit forward by trusting that transformation, even beyond recognition, that is guided by our knowings and care remains profoundly and unequivocally Jewish. Continuity is not replication but the willingness to let tradition shift and to believe that change itself can be sacred. It is the willingness to inherit forward, to carry memory not as a burden, but as actionable promise.

May this work be one such act of carrying.

> ***Zalman***: *"How would you describe yourself if somebody asked?"*
>
> ***Bechira:*** *"I would say I am Jew"*

Appendix A:

Table 2: Co-Created Thematic Codes

Theme/Code	Definition
The Way of Jewish Survival: The Unwillingness to be Defeated	This theme captures the embodied and generational resilience of Jewish people in the face of historical and ongoing attempts at erasure. It reflects a deep refusal to surrender identity, tradition, or presence, even when faced with systemic oppression, antisemitism, or cultural loss. This code includes narratives of persistence, adaptability, and the insistence on life physically, spiritually, and communally despite forces that seek to diminish, assimilate, or erase.
Nurturing the Collective: A Common History and the Way We Show Up	This theme centers the relational nature of Jewish identity and community. It includes stories of mutual care, accountability, solidarity, and the embodied responsibility to one another across time and space. It reflects how participants engage with Jewish peoplehood (Am Yisrael) not only as a shared history of struggle, but as an ongoing commitment to show up for each other, for ancestors, and for future generations. This includes intergenerational care, collective grief, joy, and belonging.
Navigating Loss and Loneliness: The Experience of Ostracization as Jewish People	This theme reflects experiences of isolation, marginalization, and exile internally and externally. It captures moments when participants described feeling disconnected from broader society because of their Judaism, due to antisemitism, assimilation/erasure, isolation, or cultural dislocation. It also encompasses mourning for what has been lost (language, ritual, community, etc.) and the longing or struggle to find one's place within Jewish identity and collective memory.
Jewish Resistance: Accomplishing, Contributing, and Moving Forward	This theme reflects the creative, intellectual, and cultural resistance of Jewish people, refusing victimhood and instead engaging in generative acts of contribution and survival. It includes narratives of reclaiming tradition, creating Jewish art or knowledge, engaging in social justice, and imagining or building Jewish futures. This code highlights how participants resist both external threats and internalized erasure through action, leadership, and continuity.
Jewish Culture: Teaching, Creating, and Passing Knowledge Generation to Generation (Dor L'Dor)	This theme encompasses the transmission of Jewish wisdom, memory, and creativity across generations. It includes teaching stories, rituals, recipes, songs, ethics, and customs. Central to this code is the idea that Jewish culture is not static but is continually reinterpreted and renewed through relational learning (chavruta, storytelling, embodiment, and presence). This theme honours both the content of what is passed down and the sacredness of the act of passing.
Embodying Sacred Connection: Ritual, Chesed, and the Jewish Soul	This theme reflects participants' experiences of the divine, the sacred, and the soulful through Jewish practice and being. It includes moments of ritual (e.g., Shabbat, blessings, prayer), acts of chesed (loving-kindness), and expressions of spiritual identity. This code captures the embodied and relational nature of Jewish spirituality, including how participants find grounding, meaning, and connection through Jewish

ways of being even when they do not feel "religious" in a conventional sense.

Table 3: Thematic Subgroups

Code	Definition
Ritual as Relational Knowledge	Engagement with Jewish ritual (e.g., challah baking, Shabbat) as a form of relational learning, intergenerational transmission, and community-building rather than rote practice. Emphasizes the embodied, affective, and memory-laden nature of ritual.
Fragmented Inheritance	Expressions of partial, forgotten, or disrupted Jewish knowledge due to assimilation, conversion, geographic isolation, or family rupture. This includes gaps in language, prayer, or tradition.
Reclaiming Language and Diasporic Memory	Longing for or efforts to restore endangered Jewish languages (e.g., Yiddish, Ladino) and cultural memory. Often includes awareness of colonial loss, displacement, and the fragile threads of diasporic connection.
Resisting the 'Palatable Jew'	Critiques or refusals of normative, sanitized, or "acceptable" forms of Jewish identity that conform to dominant expectations (e.g., apolitical, non-confrontational, culturally digestible). This includes discomfort with silence around antisemitism, Zionism, and the burden of "representing well."
Humour as Resistance and Survival	Use of irony, sarcasm, and culturally Jewish humour (e.g., self-deprecation, shtick, sarcasm) to cope with marginalization, resist erasure, and subvert trauma. Not just comic relief, but a method of critique and cultural continuity.
Burden of Representation	The pressure of being the "first" or "only" Jew in non-Jewish spaces, and the obligation to act as an ambassador, educator, or symbol for the Jewish people. Tied to surveillance, self-policing, and managing others' perceptions.
Cultural Continuity and Disruption	Reflections on what has been preserved, altered, or lost in Jewish practice across generations. Often appears in relation to family dynamics, mixed observance, or "breaking generational curses."
Intergenerational Responsibility	A sense of duty to transmit or preserve Jewish knowledge, language, foodways, and memory for future generations. This includes both formal and informal acts of preservation (e.g., cooking with grandparents, writing down recipes).
Rest and Refusal (Shabbat Politics)	Valuing Shabbat and other forms of ritual rest as countercultural resistance to productivity, individualism, and assimilation. Often

	discussed with longing and ambivalence, especially by those struggling to practice it consistently.
Negotiating Jewish Identity in Public	Moments where Jewish identity must be asserted, hidden, defended, or explained in public, often in response to antisemitism or social discomfort. Includes fears around "not knowing enough" or being called upon to speak politically.
Silence and Conditional Solidarity	Experiences of erasure, discomfort, or betrayal within progressive or non-Jewish spaces, particularly in relation to Israel/Palestine discourse. Includes feelings of being "watched," silenced, or subject to conditional inclusion.
Diasporic Belonging and Isolation	Expressions of loneliness, longing, or displacement as Jews in predominantly non-Jewish spaces (e.g., small towns, public schools). Also includes the tension of joining Jewish spaces later in life and feeling both welcomed and estranged.
Jewish Joy and Improvisation	Moments of communal joy, shared memory, improvisational knowledge transmission ("a pshhh of this"), and sensory nostalgia. Affirms that Jewish life includes play, delight, and sensory connection, even amid loss. Hope is a key component.

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