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THE THEORETICAL SYMBOLISM OF *ERUVIN*:

A Model of Dual-Identity and Sacred Space

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Liza Stoltz Hanson

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ABSTRACT

Eruvin are an innovative solution to the logistical “problem” of carrying on the weekly Sabbath. Boundaries that symbolically extend the walls of private homes into the public sphere, *eruvim* allow Orthodox Jews to carry objects outside of their homes on the Sabbath, a seemingly simple act that would otherwise be prohibited. Constructed according to intricate Rabbinic specifications, *eruvim* use existing architectural elements such as walls, train tracks, roadways and telephone wires, as well as natural features like rivers to create a continuous boundary. This paper will examine the theoretical significance of creating such a space. My argument maintains that beyond the functional application for observant Jews, *eruvim* strengthen the bonds of Jewish communities while subsequently allowing for the full integration of the same Jewish community into the majority “mainstream” culture. Further, they represent a challenge to western notions of space, most emphatically the concept that physical space can hold more than a singular meaning; the result is that the *eruv* becomes a model for “territoriality without sovereignty¹,” or a microcosm of symbolic Jewish geography while simultaneously being a part of the American cultural landscape.

¹Fonrobert, Charlotte Elisheva. The Political Symbolism of the Eruv. *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no.3 (2005): 29.

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CHAPTER I: What are *Eruvin*?

*“The concept of the eruv appears to be one of the most radical innovations of rabbinic law (halakhah), both with the respect to biblical Sabbath law, as well as with respect to other interpretations and expansions of Sabbath law [...]. In its fully developed symbolism the eruv, therefore presents itself as one of the more important aspects of the rabbinicization of the Sabbath laws.”*²

A boundary surrounds nearly eleven square miles of Denver, Colorado. The border consists of buildings, fences, hillsides, and bridges but is primarily marked by wires hung overhead from telephone poles.³ Denver residents walk and drive in and out of this area daily, and elementary schools, parks, restaurants thrive within its confines. The contiguous nature of the boundary is of such importance to those who adhere to it that the perimeter is inspected on a weekly basis, yet to those not aware of its presence the border is virtually invisible. What I am referring to is a modern construct of an *eruv* (or in the plural: *eruvim*).

Eruvin are boundaries that symbolically extend the walls of private homes into the public sphere. Within the *eruv*, Orthodox Jews are allowed to carry objects outside of their homes on the Sabbath, a seemingly simple act that would otherwise be prohibited.

² Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert. “From Separatism to Urbanism: The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Rabbinic 'Eruv.’” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 11, no 1 (2004), 43.

³ “The “Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of Eruv,”
<http://www.denvereruv.org/explain.html>

Constructed according to intricate Rabbinic specifications, *eruv* use existing architectural elements such as walls, train tracks, roadways and telephone wires, as well as natural features like rivers to create a continuous boundary. When necessary, an Orthodox Jewish community may complete the boundary by stringing wire from telephone poles. For members of the neighborhood who are not aware of their existence, the eruv is an invisible fixture.

While a lengthy treatise could easily be written solely on the more practical implications of *eruv*,⁴ this paper will instead examine the theoretical significance of creating such a space. My argument maintains that beyond the functional application for observant Orthodox Jews, the presence of *eruv* help to strengthen the bonds of Orthodox communities while subsequently allowing for the full integration of the same Jewish community into the majority “mainstream” culture. Further, they represent a challenge to western notions of space, by refuting the concept that physical space can hold more than one singular meaning; the result is that the *eruv* becomes a model for “territoriality without sovereignty,”⁵ a microcosm of symbolic Jewish geography that is simultaneously part of the American cultural landscape.

⁴ See, Rabbi Yosef Bechhofer. “The Contemporary Eruv: Eruvin in Modern Metropolitan Areas,” (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1998).

⁵ Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert. The Political Symbolism of the Eruv. *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no.3 (2005): 29.

Methodology

Not meant to be a complete treatise on the entire historical, theological, and legal use of *erubin*, this paper will instead highlight some of the practical applications (as there are many) and build a case for understanding the theoretical significance of such a produced sacred space. I come to this topic as an academic, using critical theory rather than a religious perspective to inform my research. I use the tools from a background in Religious Studies, Urban Studies, and Sociology to ask: Who benefits from an *eruv*? Who is offended by their presence? What opportunities does it provide for rethinking questions about religious identity and sacred space?

This thesis begins with a brief explanation of the initial context of *erubin* at the time they were first established by the Rabbis, including an in-depth examination of the historical observance of the Sabbath based on Biblical references and later rabbinical commentary. The Hebrew Scriptures are used as a primary text to establish the extent (or lack thereof) of Sabbath protocol and restrictions. Specific tracts of the Babylonian Talmud are also used, outlining the complex discussions and creativity that went into the formation of the tradition. Further, I rely on scholarly translations and interpretations of these primary texts, specifically the New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV) and Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert's work on the origins of the *eruv* in the Talmud and Dead Sea Scrolls.⁶ Based on Fonrobert's treatment of *erubin* as both ritual practices and a

⁶ Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert. "From Separatism to Urbanism: The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Rabbinic 'Eruv.'" *Dead Sea Discoveries* 11, no 1 (2004).

“symbolic unification”⁷ of community, I extrapolate my own theories of the *eruv* as a model for a new understanding of (sacred) space in America.

To inform my discussion of space in America, I rely heavily on Arjun Appadurai’s theory of neighborhoods and the production of locality in *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, particularly his intriguing claim that, “a neighborhood is a multiplex interpretive site.” Although *eruvim* exist in communities around the world, my thesis will look solely at the *eruvim* phenomena in America; however academic papers will be cited to look at the *eruv* debate in Canada and England that share the same Western/Enlightenment challenges. The discussion of American *eruvim* is flawed without an understanding of the Jewish immigrant experience, informed by Richard Alba, Albert Raboteau, and Josh DeWind’s *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspectives*, and informed by the notion that, over time, immigrant religions either start to resemble protestant Christian traditions, entirely separate from what could be considered a typically American lifestyle, or become secularized. My argument is that *eruvim* provide a fourth option.

Guiding Questions

The following Guiding Questions provide a framework for my thesis and will provide structure as I build my argument:

1. Is the *eruv* simply to be understood as an intricate “Sabbath subterfuge,”⁸ or is there a deeper symbolism found beyond the *eruv*’s pragmatic praxis?

⁷ Fonrobert, “The Political Symbolism of the Eruv,” 15.

2. What role does the importance of Jewish identity and the formation of community play in the creation of *erubin*?
3. Are *erubin* a challenge to fundamental American notions of land ownership? How can we understand Jewish American integration into American society considering the presence of *erubin*?
4. How do *erubin* model a new way of understanding sacred space, space in general, or territoriality in an ever changing global society?

Outline

Chapter II, *The Rabbinic Innovation of Eruvin* will, as previously mentioned, serve as a foundation for when and how the *erubin* tradition was created. Beyond the specifications for the ritual, the Talmud incorporates highly symbolic meanings into the writings on the *eruv*. The third chapter, *Eruvin, Community, and Sacred Space* will consider the history of the Jewish people and their relationship to the sacred as housed in the Temple, in addition to the history of the *eruv* post-Enlightenment as a way to situate the importance of place and community in the Jewish psyche. Pushing further on the ideas of sacred space and place, Chapter IV, *Contemporary Eruvin: The “Normalization” of American Jews* examines *erubin* as an America phenomenon where during the last forty years the number of *erubin* has continued to rise. Broadening the lens even further, the final chapter, *A Theoretical Model of Sacred Space*, will undertake a global perspective using *erubin* as a theoretical model to understand the plight of other religious minorities in our globalized world. Using Olivier Roy’s work on Islam and

⁸ Alan Dundes. *The Shabbat Elevator and Other Sabbath Subterfuges: An Unorthodox Essay on Circumventing Custom and Jewish Character*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

deterritorialization,⁹ we understand a need for a reinvention and redefinition of a culture when, as a minority, they are in a population that does not share the same practices or beliefs.

⁹ Olivier Roy. *Globalized Islam: The Search for the New Ummah*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

CHAPTER II: The Rabbinic Innovation of the *Eruv*

*“The rabbinic laws of Shabbat simultaneously point both toward its universal (creation of the cosmos) and nationalistic (the formation of the people Israel and God’s covenant with them) aspects. [...] To participate in the rituals and laws of Shabbat is to participate not only in the inherent holiness of the day but also in God’s holy plan.”*¹⁰

To understand anything about the need, desire, or motivation behind the establishment of *erubin*, we first need to understand the place of the Sabbath in the lives of Orthodox Jews. Observing the Sabbath is, and has been, a defining characteristic of Judaism since before the Rabbinic period,¹¹ to the extent that well before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE Jews observed Shabbat with enough frequency for non-Jews to interpret it as a Jewish predilection for “laziness.”^{12 13} For two thousand years, observing the Sabbath once a week has been used to identify Jews from non-Jews from both insider and outsider perspectives. This distinction will continue to play important roles as we discuss how *erubin* came to be, why the observation of the Sabbath,

¹⁰ Michael L. Satlow. *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 173.

¹¹ Following Michael A. Fishbane, the Rabbinic period is approximately from 70 to 700 CE.

¹² Satlow, 172.

¹³ “Laziness” being an outsider’s perspective of people who took time away from “work” in some sort of capacity, at a time when it is likely manual labor was required for survival.

and the establishment of *erubin* continue to play an important role in the lives of American Jews.

The Sabbath, among other Jewish ritual religious obligations, is unique.¹⁴ While the Sabbath is technically a “calendar custom” because it is observed on a weekly basis according to the calendar, it has also been called the only custom perhaps “directly mandated by God himself,” as detailed in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵ The dictate for the Sabbath, according to some, is found in the first pages of Genesis. When God was creating the world, according to tradition, six days were spent working on the creation of land and sea, darkness and light, animals and human were created. On the seventh day, God rested. Humans now emulate this schedule in a form of *imatatio dei* (imitation of God) in which humans see themselves in God’s likeness and attempt to live as such.

In addition to the notion of *imatatio dei*, observing the Sabbath is a legal obligation for Jews. Not only is the mandate to observe Sabbath listed as one of the 613 *mitvzot* (commandments given in the Torah, considered to be the ruling laws of Judaism), it is also one of the Ten Commandments, believed to be given directly from God to Moses on Mount Sinai. The commandment is found in Exodus and says:

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made

¹⁴ Alan Dundes categorized the Sabbath as a “calendar custom,” cultural festivals and holidays based on the calendar, related to phases of the moon or harvest and planting milestones.

¹⁵ Dundes, 4.

heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day consecrated it.¹⁶

As one of the Ten Commandments, significantly singled out from among the other 613, the commandment has been an important aspect of Judaism since the early 5th century BCE – or even before, which the language of the Torah brings to light. Alan Dundes notes:

It would appear that by the time God got around to issuing the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath tradition was already known to the Jews, and that it was already in effect. One cannot, logically speaking, possibly ‘remember’ or ‘keep’ a tradition that is being enunciated or created for the first time.¹⁷

While this is largely an issue of interpretation and semantics, it is important for this discussion to see the value of the Sabbath in the culture of the Jews. Dundes continues by stating, “It is surely the case that no other calendar custom on the face of the earth can claim its authority on the basis of its being one of the Ten Commandments.”¹⁸ To understand why it is important to be able to observe the Sabbath, we have to understand the Sabbath’s place as a commandment given at Sinai.

We understand that in Jewish tradition, the Law of Moses was decreed at Sinai; the specifics of the commandments were not. For the Rabbis who later attempted to sort out the exact definitions for legal reasons, it seems enough was given in the Hebrew Bible to interpret what could not be done as work, but not what could be. There is very

¹⁶ Exodus 20:8-11 NRSV.

¹⁷ Dundes, 6.

¹⁸ Dundes, 5.

little text in the Hebrew Bible that outlines Sabbath protocol. The elaborate restrictions on how to observe the day of rest are instead Rabbinic interpretations of brief biblical texts. Early Rabbis interpreted the text of the Hebrew Bible and wrestled with what behaviors and actions were permissible on the Sabbath and what behaviors were not. According to Satlow, it appears that Jews before Rabbinic times were observing the Sabbath as a day of rest, but the Rabbis instituted additional structure to the observance. It seems that for the early Rabbis, the creation of ritual and stringent laws were a way to ensure God's commandments were being followed. As we will see, this desire manifests itself in innovative means because of the conflicting and sometimes obscure mentions of the Sabbath in the canon.

One passage in the Torah, from Exodus 16:29 says, "...each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day." This mandates the restriction of traveling, even outside of one's home on the Sabbath. In Jeremiah 17:21-22 an additional stipulation is found regarding the Sabbath:

Thus says the Lord, for the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors.

It is this verse that restricts the ability to carry anything into a public space, on penalty of death. And another passage, Exodus 35:2-3 mentions restrictions on starting a fire, as an afterthought to the original Sabbath commandment, which also threatens death:

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy Sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the Sabbath day.

Of course, much debate stems from these verses: does work mean any manual labor and what does that entail? For Orthodox Jews today, work is defined from career obligations to the pushing of an elevator button and the ripping off of a toilet paper square. And can a fire be going at any time during the Sabbath, or can a new fire just not be started? It is these sorts of questions that concerned first century Jews who must have turned to the Rabbis for answers, and in the history of rabbinic interpretation, the Rabbis began to debate. It is the Biblical restriction of carrying a burden out of the home on the Sabbath that inspired the development of the *eruv*.

The Innovation of the Eruv

The root of the Hebrew word from which “*eruv*” is derived has been translated as “mixing” or “blending” as well as “commingling,” “joining,” and “amalgamating.”¹⁹ ²⁰ In the Talmud there is an entire book (*Tractate Erubin*) which discusses the intricate details of *erubin*, including categorizing three distinct types of *erubin*: the *eruv* of courtyards, the *eruv* of distance, and the *eruv* of cooking.²¹ Within the *eruv* of courtyards there are two basic discussions on which the remainder of this paper will focus: the use of literal boundaries and the use of symbolic action through the gathering of food to create community. The following section examines both of these forms of the *eruv*, especially

¹⁹ Peter Vincent and Barney Warf. “Eruvim: Talmudic Places in a Postmodern World.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 27, no.1 (2002). 33.

²⁰ Fonrobert, *The Political Symbolism of the Eruv*, 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

as they relate to the social formation of the *eruv* itself.²² The creation of a unified community appears to be the primary purpose of the *eruv*, whether done by erecting a physical boundary or uniting a group symbolically.

Creating Community through the Strategic Collection of Food

Originally, the *eruv* was established through a collection of food, most commonly bread. Unlike a modern potluck, the food in this ritual of community unification was not intended to be consumed. Instead the collection of food was placed in the public space and became a literal representation of the community. The Talmud indicates:

“The *eruv* (of courts) or combination (of alleys) maybe effected with all kinds of nutriment except water and salt. Such is the dictum of Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Jehoshua, however, said: Only a whole loaf of bread is a lawful *eruv*” (*mEruvin* 7:10).

From this excerpt we see the debate between the Rabbis; one maintains that any food item is enough to create an *eruv*, the other insists in the wholeness of the loaf. In another example, a Rabbi collected a portion of flour from each family and then baked a loaf of bread.²³ Not only did this symbolically reflect the unification of the community, represented in a loaf of bread, it also served as a way for the Rabbi to know who in the community had contributed, and was therefore a viable member of the *eruv* community and able to carry and visit the public area on the Sabbath.

²² Fonrobert, *The Political Symbolism of the Eruv*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

The collection of food is the original definition of the *eruv*, but the architecture surrounding the homes of the *eruv* community dictated later interpretations of what constituted the *eruv*. Private dwellings were grouped around a shared courtyard; individual homes naturally created a walled boundary. We can understand that the action of participating in a collection of food creates a symbolic boundary to signify who is “in” and who is “out.” This is a method of essentially establishing difference and a way of identifying “the other.” While “othering” is always in a sense a power play— a way to demonstrate separation and distancing resulting in a show of power – in the case of *eruvim*, boundaries do not have to be read in this way. The boundary of the *eruv* is not one that is projected outward to keep non-Jews out (in part because the boundary is typically not visible), but instead an internal boundary for the benefit of the individual and group. Partly, this is because the physical boundaries of the *eruv* do not signify only a community of Jewish believers because non-Jews are not excluded, and are found on both “sides” of the *eruvim* demarcations. *Eruvin* essentially exist only for the benefit of those Orthodox Jews who observe the strict Sabbath law. The power of the *eruv* border is found in the way it enables unification within the group’s identity, establishing both a home and a literal sacred space which enforces a sense of unity within the Orthodox community.

Renting: The Deliberate Unification of a Neighborhood

Talmudic teachings are the primary sources on who can and cannot live within the boundaries of the *eruv*. Not surprisingly, there are multiple perspectives on the issue of neighbors within the boundaries of the *eruv*. The Talmud says:

To one who dwells in the same court with a Gentile, or with one who does not acknowledge the laws of Erub, the latter prove a bar (to his carrying in the court). Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob, however, said, ‘At no time can such a prohibition be caused, unless there be two Israelites, who prevent each other.’

It is explicitly stated that *erubin* cannot exist in mixed communities where gentiles or non-rabbinic Jews, or anyone who does not agree with the principle of the *eruv* reside.²⁴

However, the Rabbis disagree (with the texts and each other) and create an innovative solution for *erubin* to exist where Jews live among diverse neighbors. In the sixth chapter of the *Eruvin* Tract, a lengthy discussion on renting occurs. This question over Gentile neighbors is raised and a solution is suggested through the symbolic renting of the gentile’s home for the Sabbath. “From a non-Jew one can rent, indeed, one must rent for the purposes of the Sabbath and the *eruv* community, without however identifying what precisely it is that one rents.”²⁵ It is through renting that permission from the “other” is granted, bypassing the issue from the Mishnah that an *eruv* cannot exist when one who does not agree with the principles of the *eruv* are present. The mandate on renting is one of the most strategic stipulations the Rabbis created to intentionally involve the non-Jewish neighbor. This stipulation requires that *erubin* cannot be established without the permission and consent of the neighborhood. In rabbinic times, if the neighborhood disapproved, the *eruv* was invalid. In contemporary times, this consent usually brings the subject of *erubin* to light, something that would likely have gone

²⁴ Fonrobert, *From Separatism to Urbanism*, 62.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

unnoticed by the public, but often creates significant controversies. Yet, as tempting as it might be, *eruvim* are not erected in secret. There is something very important about the way the entire community, Jewish, non-observant Jew, or non-Jew must communicate over this issue; the Rabbis felt a neighborhood could be the site of a multi-purpose community, what Appadurai terms in his theory of neighborhood as a “multiplex interpretive site.”^{26 27} However, the community needs to be based on a shared respect for the other, on interaction, or at least the ability to share a symbolic agreement.

Reading the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as the Mishnah, Fonrobert reaches the conclusion that the early Rabbis purposefully and conscientiously established a method for not simply circumventing Sabbath protocol, but rather created an innovative way for a group of Jews to live as neighbors and at the same time exist in the “religiously and ethnically mixed communities in Palestine.”²⁸ From this reading, we see not only that *eruvim* are important for certain ritual practices, but it is the “symbolic unification”²⁹ through collection of food and living in community with Jews and non-Jews that is the center of the meaning of an *eruv*, especially for a group that for most of its history, lived

²⁶ Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 184.

²⁷ For Appadurai, a neighborhood is a set of contexts, “within which meaningful social action can be both generated and interpreted” (184). For my work with *eruvim*, I find this phrase useful for understanding a location where constant interpretation is necessary to comprehend the many actions that are taking place. “Multiplex” becomes a fitting word when one thinks of a large movie theater with a dozen films playing at once. There are a dozen individual plots, but they share the same location.

²⁸ Fonrobert, *From Separatism to Urbanism*, 71.

²⁹ Fonrobert, *The Political Symbolism of the Eruv*, 15.

in diaspora. Fonrobert's "symbolic unification" interprets the *eruv* as a "theory of community, of collectivity, or neighborhood as a unified community with collective intent."³⁰ Beyond Sabbath observation, Fonrobert interprets that the Rabbis developed *eruv* as a tool to unite a Jewish community, along with their diverse neighborhood. We can understand this reading the symbolism in a strategic collection of food and deliberate protocol of renting.

Since the destruction of the Temple, significant changes were required in the belief systems of Judaism and much of that task fell to the Rabbis. According to Satlow, "The Rabbis spatially decenter holiness, pushing to its logical conclusion, the assumption of God's omnipresence."³¹ However, while the omnipresence of God in Judaism is a shift from previous thought, and the Rabbis do 'decenter' the importance of space/place, it is clear they never disregard it entirely. The physical boundary of the *eruv* shows that to some degree, spatial importance is reconfigured and reimaged into the creative innovation of the *eruv*. Rather than having one central sacred space (the Temple), as the Jewish population in the Middle East began to grow and disperse, the focus logically shifted to small communities of Jews and private homes. *Eruvin* became a way to preserve the ritual of the Sabbath, as well as build on the strength of the community.

³⁰ Fonrobert, *The Political Symbolism of the Eruv*, 16.

³¹ Satlow, 171.

Chapter III: Eruvin, Community, and Sacred Space

*"The boundaries of the erubin do not simply differentiate Jews from non-Jews, for both groups are found on either side. [...] The establishment of precise eruv boundaries cements and solidifies the sense of community within the eruv in the face of a dominant, secular, individualistic culture."*³²

Eruvin, as I discussed in Chapter II, are more than a device to ensure the full observance of Sabbath Law (although that is a valid component), but a way to symbolically unite a group of people attempting to live differently than their neighbors. Being different in a "dominant, secular, individualistic" culture (see quote above) causes you stand out, but also reinforces the strength of the community.

Community and Sacred Space

To call the area within the boundary of the *eruv* "sacred space" is, in fact, not necessarily accurate. It does not appear that the ancient Rabbis who put the practice into place were attempting to create anything that could be defined as sacred space. Indeed, the notion that sacred space is something that could even be "created" by man goes against everything that Jews held dear about the sacred. Although the Temple was human-built, the belief that it was sacred and set-apart from any other structure was the

³² Vincent and Warf, 47.

belief that it was the dwelling-place of God.³³ In ancient Judaism, sacred space had been a highly charged, even dangerous place, where bloody sacrifices were made, and God's presence was strongly felt.³⁴ The Temple in Jerusalem is no longer the sole location for sacred acts, and worship ritual has dispersed to local synagogues, private homes, and "temples in time,"³⁵ but sacred space is still a tension in Judaism, seen in the devotion to the physical location of the Western Wall, for example. From an academic perspective, I maintain that whether or not the legal texts of Judaism acknowledge it, *erubin* are sacred spaces.

Sacred space in my definition is first a location where rituals are observed and second, a place where a community identity is present. For this definition, I closely follow Joel Brereton's entry on sacred space in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*:

We begin with the assumption that if a place is the location of ritual activity or its object, then it is sacred. To designate a place as sacred imposes no limit on its form or its meaning. It implies no particular aesthetic or religious response. But if sacred places lack a common content, they have a common role. To call a place sacred asserts that a place, its structures, and its symbols express fundamental cultural values and principles. By giving these visible form, the sacred place makes tangible the corporate identity of a people and their world.³⁶

It is significant that *erubin* exist in space and allow for a group identity to have a physical sacred space, yet are not visible in the sense of having a physical structure. This is a

³³ Satlow, 164.

³⁴ Ibid.,

³⁵ Abraham Heschel. "Architecture of Time," *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Straus and Young, 1951).

³⁶ Joel P. Brereton. "Sacred Space," *Encyclopedia of Religion* vol, 12, edited by Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 534.

unique gift from the Rabbis as it allows for the ability to reside simultaneously in two different communities and maintain active participation in both.

David Chidester and Edward R. Linenthal have an additional definition of sacred space that adds an important nuance to the discussion particularly as it relates to *erubin* and the public controversies that often surround a new *eruv*. The definition states three attributes of sacred space, the first two which are incorporated in the definition above: the ritual context of sacred space, and the questions that arise from sacred space about the human condition. The third attribute stated is that, “Sacred space is inevitably contested space, a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols.”³⁷ The authors concede that the contested state of a sacred place would not align with Mircea Eliade’s foundational work on sacred space,³⁸ yet there is truth to their statement.³⁹ Controversies over proposed sacred spaces have consumed the media, especially the debate of Park51, the Islamic Community Center located two blocks away from Ground Zero in New York City. Debates surrounding *erubin* have lasted years in cities like London and New Jersey. As controversy is a central component in sacred

³⁷ David Chidester and Edward Linenthal. *American Sacred Space*. (Indiana University Press, 1995) EBSCOhost eBook (accessed May 11, 2012), 15.

³⁸ Mircea Eliade. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1959.

³⁹ Eliade’s work on sacred space assumes a stark binary position: there is either sacred space, or profane space. Additionally, there is one locus of sacred space, the *axis mundi*. Eliade’s notion leaves no opportunity for gray areas, or controversy for that matter, as there are only two definite possibilities. *Eruvin* present an inherent challenge to this notion because of the multiple definitions that can be read when a boundary that symbolizes sacred space is simultaneously place around both the sacred and profane.

space, it is clear that strong feelings are held on both sides. It is important to look at what is at the core of these debates to understand what those emotions signify about sacred space and place in America.

The Boulder Eruv

In America and other Western countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom, when an *eruv* is proposed, the topic of land ownership inevitably comes up which, as shown by an *eruv* debate in Colorado, is a charged topic. In Boulder, Colorado, well known for being one of the most liberal cities in the country, the reaction to a proposed *eruv* turned into an issue of citizen rights and public land, and the accusation of government “favoring” of religious institutions. Several Denver Post and Boulder Daily Camera articles documented comments on the proposed *eruv*, which was approved in December of 2007 and completed in September 2008.⁴⁰ The majority of the comments are from anonymous posters, many of whom seem familiar with the area in Boulder that would be affected by the *eruv* or showed a familiarity with Boulder in general. Many of the comments repeat a similar sentiment: opposition to the *eruv*. Although many comments offer thought-provoking counter-arguments and valid questions regarding the *eruv* tradition, a majority were mocking, demeaning, and discourteous to anyone who

⁴⁰ Denver Post, “Boulder to add Symbolic Fence”
http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_7787893

would validate the “superstition” of religious ritual, whether it was a Jewish, Christian, or Muslim tradition.⁴¹

One active discussion thread centered on the question of how the non-Orthodox and non-Jewish residents who lived near the proposed *eruv* would be influenced by its presence. The concern of neighbors living in the *eruv* was that there may be an increase in the (or a constant) Orthodox Jewish presence at a local park. The debate primarily focused on the issue of this park, centrally located to the community and within the boundary of the *eruv*, because it was specifically cited in the proposal documents as a potential gathering place for Jewish community picnics.⁴² The general tone of the *eruv* opponents who participated in the informal online forum indicated that somehow the presence of the *eruv* would then appropriate the park only for Jews. Commenter “stevevs” wrote:

Great, just what we need, religious groups staking claim to public property. This sounds like a great idea on private property. We should have a catholic park, and a wiccan park and a islam park and a buddist park etc.

A few minutes later, “stevevs” added:

If a group declares an area "special" they are likely to congregate there. When groups congregate they tend to take ownership of that area. It's like going to a park where there is a family reunion, good luck getting a turn on the swings.

If a group puts up a string on public property and says "that is our special string" it invites conflict. The string may not be hurting anyone, but it says: "people aren't supposed to do things like carry children unless they are in the special string, if

⁴¹ Amy Bounds, “Completion of Eruv Cause for Celebration,” Daily Camera Online, September 8, 2008, http://www.dailycamera.com/ci_13119594.

⁴² Ibid.

you do you are bad." that makes people feel judged and make them want to take down the string.

Religion causes more conflict in the world than anything else, often it's because of something meaningless as this.

The primary issue “stevevs” is responding to is the notion of “othering” and the association of power that is inherent in the act of establishing a boundary (see Chapter II). *Eruvin* cause public controversy because their boundaries overlap onto public space, space which “stevevs” would likely say ought to be free from any religious meaning.

Commenter “Xxx” offered the following question pertaining to the need for a literal boundary made of string:

I'm really having a hard time wrapping my head around the idea of a string that allows people to give up their religious beliefs by simply letting it surround you. Wouldn't it be easier to just bless the ground or something? [...]

This common perspective was that if the *eruv* was practically invisible anyway, why did there need to be an actual wire encompassing the area? Could Jews simply respect a boundary whose borders were known, but not physically marked? If this were the case, nothing would stop Jews from gathering at the park when they wanted – *eruv* or no *eruv*. In that same vein, based on the public misunderstanding of the function of the *eruv* nothing was stopping Jews from gathering at that particular park on the other evening of the week, enjoying its space or preventing non-Jews from entering.

The topic of land ownership and the rights of land owners stirred up strong emotions in many people, such as commenter “KR” who wrote about religious boundaries and *eruv* in a negative way:

Yes, it's a border. A religious border that soon becomes more than that. When Jews move within that border and quickly outnumber others who were there before them, and those folks start moving because they no longer feel welcome in their old neighborhood, then what kind of border is that? I've seen it happen time and time again. Jews who are for the *eruv* border aren't interested in the broader community. Once your house is within the *eruv*, and you're a gentile, they want your house and they want you out.

The commenter articulates a sense of fear and clearly felt threatened by the idea of the *eruv*. These particular comments share strong opinions about the importance of land and the place it has in the forefront of their minds, which I doubt is rare for the majority of Americans. The importance of land was central to the commenters. The fear of Jews taking over a neighborhood, as brought up by “KR” is particularly telling of a perception of space that Davina Cooper calls a “zero-sum” understanding. For Cooper, this common understanding maintains that, “activity that privatizes space for one group simultaneously withdraws space from others.”⁴³ This notion is based on the perception that boundaries symbolize ownership, which therefore indicates privatization, a misconception of the Rabbinic function of the *eruv*. Finally, a comment by “vertex3dx” added witty comic relief to the discussion: “Most modern religions have gone to wireless.”

The article included a brief synopsis of what *eruvim* are and how their presence benefits observant Jews. Missing from the article was information on the symbolic meaning that the Rabbis incorporated into *eruv* protocol. As discussed in Chapter II, *eruv* builders are required to gain permission from local authorities or neighbor Gentiles before an *eruv* can be established. Many comments raised valid points regarding the place

⁴³ Davina Cooper. “Talmudic Territory? Space, Law, and Modernist Discourse.” *Journal of Law and Society* 23, no.5 (1996), 533.

of government and its responsibility in supporting the *eruv*. Despite the way the comments were posed, Boulder was not granting a gift, although permission in the form of a public right-of-way lease did need to be granted from the Boulder City Council for attaching wire to public telephone poles and trimming a few tree limbs.

This brief look at a local *eruv* controversy is just a small sample of the conflicts that have occurred over the presence of *eruvim* across the western world. While others have taken more serious legal action than in Boulder, this debate took place only in anonymous online forums, and the *eruv* has successfully been constructed as of 2008. Yet the debate provides an excellent entry into the issues that are at play regarding the controversy and strong feelings over religious practices taking place in American public space. The issue of relationships with the broader community was also raised in the comments above, implying that *eruvim* are in part present to create a “self-segregating” and Jewish only community, a topic that will be addressed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV: Contemporary *Eruvin*: The “Normalization” of American Jews

“Practice of ‘eruv’ manipulates both space and interpersonal relationships in curious and important ways.”⁴⁴

This quote from Cynthia M. Baker on the complex meaning of *eruv* is perfectly on point. Ultimately, the boundary of the *eruv* is not simply a mechanism used to circumvent a taboo practice (that of carrying on the Sabbath), but the greater implication of what any boundary, and especially what the *eruv* boundary implies is vast. Boundaries of space/place evoke myriad images: fences forcing people out and gates keeping people in, of borders that cannot be crossed and margins that are truly blurred. But *eruv* are not just about space; they are also about community and relationship – and somehow because of *eruv*, we are forced to look at the connection between space/place and relationship precisely because of what Baker says: the *eruv* has a power to manipulate them both.

From the time of the early Rabbis to the present, history has seen Jews become true diaspora people. From around the 700s CE, Jews lived under the rules of various empires, moving from Northern Africa to Spain, facing exile after exile from England, Spain, France, Portugal, and more. Refusing to assimilate to the current empire’s culture, Jews often lived in self-segregating communities, but at other times were forced into segregation. In America, Jews historically have settled together in new communities,

⁴⁴ Cynthia Baker. *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity*, (Stanford University Press, 2002), 119.

usually based on where they were working – often in urban centers.⁴⁵ Today, cities across America are home to neighborhoods with dense populations of often multi-generational Orthodox Jews.⁴⁶ Based on an immediate assumption, one might conclude that the nature of the *erubin* is to create a “Jewish only” community, observing that *eruv* borders are in place to facilitate a unified community between the Jewish members of the neighborhood. But in fact, that assumption could not be further from the truth.

Eruvin and “Mainstream” Jews

In America, scholars of immigrant religions have observed three typical trends when new religions come to the United States. While we just have space for a broad overview, these trends present an interesting question for this discussion of *erubin*. The first and most common trend has to do with immigrant groups taking on certain characteristics which make them appear more American, as Calvin Goldscheider notes:

Jews have been transformed from an immigrant group defined by a combination of religious and ethnic distinctiveness to an American ethnic community defined by a distinctive cultural construction of Judaism and Jewishness with central features that are particularly American.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Jennifer Cosineau, “Rabbinic Urbanism in London: Rituals and the Material Culture of the Sabbath.” *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no.3: 37.

⁴⁶ Calvin Goldscheider. “Immigration and the Transformation of American Jews: Assimilation, Distinctiveness, and Community.” In *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspectives*, 216.

⁴⁷ Goldscheider, 198.

Goldscheider cites education, occupation, and an upward social-mobility to explain the increasing American “transformation” of Jewish immigrants through generations.⁴⁸

The second trend is full separation from American culture. This is usually a self-imposed separation from modern society. For Orthodox Jews, this is with the intention to preserve, “the values and life patterns of ‘Torah-true’ Judaism.”⁴⁹

Lastly, some immigrant group’s religion simply disappears over time, either as members of the religion convert to other American, usually Protestant denominations, or the secular culture of modern America takes hold.⁵⁰ This is a real concern for American Jews today as the retention of Jewish culture and religion is threatened in the face of “cultural and social assimilation” pressures.⁵¹

On the surface, many Orthodox Jewish practices, especially involving clothing and diet, exist disconnected from mainstream American culture. There are many practices of Orthodox Jews that separate their culture from what would be considered the “mainstream” and this is, admittedly, an issue for most immigrant groups arriving in America. There is a choice between, “continued distinctiveness and incomplete assimilation on the one hand, the consequent testing of the limits of pluralism, or, on the

⁴⁸ Goldscheider, 205.

⁴⁹ Fishbane, 137.

⁵⁰ Goldscheider, 222.

⁵¹ Alba, et al 193.

other hand, the reduction of ethnic and religious distinctiveness.”⁵² For newly-immigrated religious groups to the United States, there is a conflict in what it means to assimilate to the majority culture; it simultaneously signals a loss of another identity. Yet, it does not have to be an “either or” situation. *Eruvin* allow for a “hyphenated-identity” to exist peacefully.⁵³

Gender Equalization within the Eruv

Many scholars and those in favor of *eruvim*, observe that the presence of *eruvim* in urban communities has the ability to normalize Orthodox Jews in ways that then become acceptable to mainstream America.⁵⁴ Several scholars cite the presence of *eruvim* in a Jewish community as advantageous in its ability to improve the quality of life of observant Jews within the area.⁵⁵

Eruvin have been held up as especially beneficial for Orthodox women. According to Susan Lees, scholars see that, “there is a connection between the recent proliferation of *eruvim* and changes in the social position of women among modern Orthodox Jews.”⁵⁶ In many Orthodox traditions, women have not typically been present in the synagogue for Shabbat services; women remain at home to prepare the Shabbat

⁵² Eisen, 226.

⁵³ Ibid., 224.

⁵⁴ Vincent and Warf, 45; Cooper, 537.

⁵⁵ See Susan Lees, Davina Cooper, and Peter Vincent and Barney Warf.

⁵⁶ Lees, *Jewish Space in Suburbia*, 44.

meal and care for the children, leaving the synagogue as a gathering place for men.⁵⁷ But with the addition of an *eruv* in a community, these traditional gender roles are able to shift. As Lees says:

“The *eruv* is one device that promotes a more egalitarian relationship between husbands and wives who have small children. Both can leave the house with their children in strollers (which constitutes carrying) on the Sabbath (rather than decide which parent will take care of the children at home).”⁵⁸

Eruvin make little physical change to the appearance of a community, but as Siemiatycki contends, they do change, “the human demographics on that landscape.”⁵⁹ More Orthodox Jews will appear in its neighborhoods and streets. Orthodox families will be out and about, present as members of the neighborhood rather than absent and invisible within the four walls of their home. A young Jewish mother will not only interact with other Jewish mothers at the park on Saturday afternoon, but any other mother who is also at the park. Conflicts over *eruv* ultimately are not about territory, but about the place of religion and a visible religious minority in the public realm. In this way, *eruv* have the ability to aid in the integration of a religious community into the fabric of American society while still allowing for the retention of core religious practices to occur.

⁵⁷ Goldman, 2.

⁵⁸ Lees, 44.

⁵⁹ Myer Siemiatycki. “Contesting Sacred Urban Space: The Case of the *Eruv*.” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 6, no. 2 (2005): 269.

CHAPTER V: A Theoretical Model of Sacred Space

“Eruvin are more than desperate attempts to carve out a space for the sacred in the face of a profane commercialism; they are sites for the continued reproduction of a culture that long predates capitalism.”⁶⁰

“[Eruvin are] a model for pluralist uses of the city that do not exclude other readings of the same space.”⁶¹

Eruvin in neighborhoods around our nation and world are in place for the sole benefit of the Orthodox Jews who desire to observe the Sabbath Law completely. Yet, unraveling the intricacies and consequences of producing such a religious space, we find that the *eruv* can serve as a model for other groups of religious or cultural minorities who are pushed to assimilate into dominant cultures.

The Hybridization of Jews in America

The retention of Orthodox Judaic praxis and simultaneous integration into American culture is a reflection of hybridized identity. The connection between identity and space is mostly overlooked by most people, yet the deep, emotional relationship has vast implications for how we understand and name our own identities, as well as categorize and assign meaning to other things and people we encounter.

⁶⁰ Vincent and Warf, 48.

⁶¹ Ibid, 49.

Post-modern geographer, Edward Soja⁶² has contributed an influential theory, which he calls “Thirdspace,” with which to examine *eruvim*.⁶³ “Thirdspace” is a third, or new, way to understand space beyond the usual binary of space as 1) concrete and 2) a human perception. Instead, “Thirdspace” is 3) both real and imagined at the same time. This fits well with the dual understanding of *eruvim* as both literal space, and symbolic or even imagined territory. Vincent and Warf go further, by applying the notion of “Thirdspace” as a way beyond the:

...simple dichotomies of Enlightenment’s binary divisions... to find an understanding of places that are neither simply crude material objects nor idealist constructions of a disembodied will, but complex, contingent products of human thought and imagination situated in local historical and spatial contexts.”⁶⁴

Eruvin can be understood to fit within that refined construal of Soja’s Thirdspace, insofar as they offer an identity that can be extended beyond the individual and group, but to the locality as a hybrid identity. While understanding hybridity as “negotiating dominant and subordinate identities,”⁶⁵ we realize that individuals juggle these identities, particularly in regards to race, nationality, and gender on a daily basis. To be Jewish and American, indeed utilizing the hyphen and understanding one to be Jewish-American is not a difficult notion to grasp.⁶⁶

⁶² Edward Soja. “Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places” (Blackwell: Oxford, 1996).

⁶³ Soja, 28.

⁶⁴ Vincent and Warf, 46.

⁶⁵ Homi Bhabha. “The Location of Culture” (Routledge: New York: 1994).

Reading *eruv* as constructs instituted to enable certain Orthodox Jews to exist as dual-citizens – full participants in both a religious culture that has historically been on the margins of mainstream society, and the culture of the local neighborhood – leads to a conversation regarding Jews in America as diaspora people. Davina Cooper affirms, “An *eruv* is intrinsically a structure for a nomadic or diaspora people – a private domain they can take with them anywhere.”⁶⁷ Yet, the theoretical concept of the *eruv* makes all the difference for Orthodox Jews in diaspora. A deep sense of connection to geographical location and the desire for sacred space seems to be meaningful from a Jewish perspective. Charlotte Fonrobert adds to the discussion, suggesting the *eruv* can be a model for “territoriality without sovereignty.”⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ In the current context of focus on the nation-state as a center for identity, Fonrobert’s model is valid as a way of re-conceptualizing identity for those in diaspora, especially for Orthodox Jews in America.

⁶⁶ The hyphenation of Jewish-American is not likely to raise current controversy as Jews have had decades if not longer to “prove” their belonging. This argument would (and does) look significantly different when we use the term Muslim-American and stand back in awe at the inane arguments that arise, particularly over whether or not one can be loyal to both Islam and the United States. (See Alba, et al for further discussion and comparison.)

⁶⁷ Davina Cooper. “Out of Place: Symbolic Domains, Religious Rights and the Cultural Contract.” In *Land and Territoriality*, edited by Michael Saltman. (Oxford, UK: 2002), 99.

⁶⁸ Fonrobert, *The Political Symbolism of the Eruv*, 29.

⁶⁹ Fonrobert flips the phrase “sovereignty without territoriality,” originally used by Arun Appadurai to comment on the changing nation-state as a result of globalization, to “territoriality without sovereignty” to describe the *eruv* as a theoretical territory with no claim to government authority. This, for Fonrobert, is an especially important model for diaspora cultures.

There is a way in which we can understand the innovation of *eruv* as a response of a minority culture to a globalized world. Olivier Roy presents a treatment of the response of minority cultures/religions to globalization (in regards specifically to Islam in the west) by using Gilles Deleuze's concept of deterritorialization.⁷⁰ Roy says there is a need for reinvention and redefinition of a culture when, as a minority, they are in a population that does not share the same practices of beliefs, saying:

Muslims as recently settled minorities have to reinvent what makes them Muslim, in the sense that the common defining factor of this population as Muslim is the mere reference to Islam, with no common cultural or linguistic heritage.⁷¹

Replacing Judaism with Islam in this quotation (or in fact any minority religion or culture), we see the influence of deterritorialization on the need for members of a group to go to great lengths to define themselves. Further defining deterritorialization, Roy explains, "Muslim religious sentiment is seeking, beyond or beneath politics, autonomous spaces and means of expression, feeding contradictory and burgeoning forms of religiosity."⁷² Muslim immigrant communities are currently being pushed to explore the means of practicing their religion as a minority culture, an experience that is not uncommon for Jews. The *eruv* have become a way for deterritorialized Orthodox Jews to

⁷⁰ Deterritorialization, as Roy uses it, is the notion that religions or cultures or ethnic groups are no longer ascribed to specific geographical regions as a result of globalization. In terms of Islam, the *ummah*, or community, "no longer has anything to do with a territorial entity. It has to be thought of in abstract or imaginary terms" (18).

⁷¹ Roy, 18.

⁷² Roy, 3.

define themselves, in essence, just by being able to participate in their religious practice.

However, it is important to note, as Vincent and Warf point out:

Eruvin are much more than desperate attempts to carve out a space for the sacred in the face of profane commercialism [or secularization]; they are sites for the continued reproduction of a culture that long predates capitalism.”⁷³

It is, again, not simply the presence of a theoretically “sacred” space that has the greatest implications for *erubin*, but the symbolic establishment of identity for a people group with no legal claim to territory.

Eruvin and Neighborhoods

Eruvin are and were intentionally created to be communities, and further because of a designated relationship to geographical space, neighborhoods. Much can be extracted from placing *erubin* within a discussion of a theory of neighborhoods.

Following Appadurai’s declaration that, “the production of neighborhoods is always historically grounded and thus contextual... neighborhoods are inherently what they are because they are opposed to something else.”⁷⁴ Neighborhoods then can be a structured way of establishing boundaries, defining a space by what is in or out of the area.

Appadurai continues and presents that neighborhoods are ultimately in the business of creating locality and that:

...locality building has a moment of colonization, a moment both historical and chronotypic, when there is a formal recognition that the production of a

⁷³ Vincent and Warf, 48.

⁷⁴ Appadurai, 182.

neighborhood requires deliberate, risky, even violent action in respect to the soil, forests, animals, and other human beings.”⁷⁵

These actions connected to colonization are not new, and current scholarly work is furthering these claims and the long-reaching influences of colonization of not only space, but knowledge. The notion that drove colonization appears to be based on a concept of space and place that Vincent and Warf term, “enlightenment thinking.” While it is true that the colonial project made place and space into a materialistic capitalistic power game, I submit again that *eruvim*, while geographic spaces that are about a physical notion of locality, do not fall into a colonizing attitude, but are in fact an example of diaspora and immigrant communities coping with deterritorialization by becoming “religiously creative”⁷⁶ as a minority culture,⁷⁷ and a method of coping for a diaspora community.

Spatial Time

After the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, a notable paradigm shift occurred within Judaism. The eventual result was a shift in understanding Judaism as a religion of space, based on the location of the temple and therefore the location of God, to an understanding of Judaism as a religion of time, in which God was present during times of worship, primarily based on the observance of Sabbath.⁷⁸ Yet despite Heschel’s theory

⁷⁵ Appadurai, 183.

⁷⁶ Phrase used in RLGS 4000 lecture, September 26, 2010.

⁷⁷ Roy, 3.

⁷⁸ Heschel, 13.

and the subsequent changes that occurred in the praxis of Judaism in this time, there has remained an affinity for a physical connection to the land that God promised through Abraham. Charlotte Fonrobert responds to Heschel's theory by noting, "The rabbinic Sabbath has all the world to do with spatial practice and situating one's self and the community in space."⁷⁹ This is particularly true when discussing the spatial boundaries of *erubin*. In the context of paradigm shifts from temple to synagogue and sacred space to sacred time, there is a way we can also understand a shift from sacred space to community, when within community sacred space is realized. In this way, sacred space has no substantial connection to geographical location, but occurs in concert with those who abide by the same rituals. In the case of *erubin*, one could argue that sacred space can even occur when non-Jews are present because of the lengths the Rabbis went to define a theory of community that was all inclusive.

Sacred space has become in many ways a westernized product of rationalized "enlightenment thinking," particularly in the mind-set that sacred space can only be understood in terms of black or white, sacred or profane. The notion that *erubin* are sacred spaces in public neighborhoods, that a certain space has more than one meaning, has proven to be a difficult concept for people to accept. In America, the debate over public space is best described by Cooper, who says, "At the heart of the *eruv* struggle are fundamentally different conception of the relationship between space, symbols and

⁷⁹ Fonrobert, *From Separatism to Urbanism*, 44.

cultural meaning.”⁸⁰ Americans have a perception of space that perceives land ownership as a God-given right. The ideology of Manifest Destiny, the mission to conquer all land between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, might not be a conscious current duty of Americans, but is certainly a theme in our history and engrained in certain American values, especially the rights and power associated with those who were land owners. Therefore, the protection of public and private land is very resolute, especially when it comes to the perception that a religion is infringing on public space. One of the key issues in debates about public realms is what some have termed “enlightenment” ideas about space, the want for ordered urban space.⁸¹ Within this is also the notion that space is finite and can only have a singular meaning, and for public space, opponents of *Eruvin* feel it ought to be secular,⁸² maintaining that any other meaning would be a privatization of that space. In this finite definition of space, if one group begins to privatize public space, there is less space for others.

In current day America, *eruvim* provide an opportunity to challenge the enlightenment concepts of space, and see the city as a location of multiple readings.⁸³ The presence of *eruvim* in America is still a widely unknown phenomenon to most Americans. After much research into a particularly bitter conflict over an *eruv* in the New Jersey

⁸⁰ Cooper, 534.

⁸¹ Vincent and Warf, 46.

⁸² Cooper, 534.

⁸³ Vincent and Warf, 49.

suburb of Tenafly, Susan H. Lees came to the conclusion that although *eruvim* have been used to challenge current hegemonies, and that at the end of it all, "... they superimpose a place on an existing place. But both places are in the imagination of their respective communities."⁸⁴ It is the socially constructed notion of identity and particularly identity when tied to a geographical space that causes the greatest controversies over *eruvim*. While researching this subject, I discovered that the White House and many of the buildings of the United States capital are within the boundaries of the Washington D.C. *eruv*. No other example shows the significance of a space that has multiple readings; the capital of the nation is an iconic space, honoring the values the nation was founded on. That region is considered "sacred space" for most Americans. Yet it is also a sacred space for the Orthodox Jews in the community who are ensured a certain freedom when they are able to lock their apartments, put their keys in their pocket and join their family for Shabbat service on Friday night. The *eruv* is both a Jewish practice, and a socially constructed method to create community, for the observant Jews for whom the *eruv* provides a way for the Sabbath Law to be observed, and for the surrounding community who benefits by living in a diverse neighborhood.

⁸⁴ Lees, 68.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that beyond the functional application for observant, Orthodox Jews, the presence of *eruvim* help to strengthen the bonds of Orthodox communities while subsequently allowing for the full integration of the same Jewish community into the majority “mainstream” culture. Further, they represent a challenge to western notions of space, by refuting the concept that physical space can hold more than one singular meaning; the result is that the *eruv* becomes a model for “territoriality without sovereignty,”⁸⁵ a microcosm of symbolic Jewish geography that is simultaneously part of the American cultural landscape.

Situating the concept of the *eruv* in the context of Sabbath Law, we see that observance of the Law is, for many Orthodox Jews, an integral expression of their religious practice, and further, one that produces and reinforces religious identity. Our discussion of the Sabbath aided in understanding the Rabbinic influence on Sabbath Law, and most integral to this argument, the innovative creation of the *eruv* as a community-strengthening ritual, not only for certain Orthodox communities, but also for a diverse neighborhood by intentionally involving non-Jews in the permission-granting process of renting.

Relationship with non-Jewish neighbors and interaction with the dominant culture as a whole are central to the power of *eruvim* for diaspora communities, where over time immigrant religions either start to resemble protestant Christian traditions, entirely

⁸⁵ Fonrobert, *The Political Symbolism of the Eruv*, 29.

separate from what could be considered a typically American lifestyle, or become secularized. *Eruvin* model a fourth option, where religious practice is observed according to Rabbinic Law, alongside full integration into a mainstream American lifestyle.

While *eruvim* are a significant part of Orthodox Jewish praxis, providing a method for full observation of the Sabbath Laws in the face of modernity, this paper has explored the theoretical meanings of *eruvim*, proving that they are more than a practice that only has to do with Judaism. Because the *eruv* offers a new perspective on sacred space, one that is not only about spatial boundaries but also the theoretical construction of identity, community, and neighborhood, we can look at *eruvim* as a model for a new theory of sacred space.

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