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Tikkun Olam and Jewish Outreach within Jewish Faith-Based Organisations

Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed substantial growth in the literature on religious non-governmental organisations (RNGOs), the majority of which revolves around the work of Christian organisations. Unsurprisingly then, studies on RNGOs and on their difference from NGOs have largely been cast in the image of Christian RNGOs, with special emphasis put on questions of development and proselytism and its limitations. While an emerging body of literature recognises the importance of studying non-Christian RNGOs, little has been written on the work of Jewish organisations and on the research questions that such studies may evoke. The present chapter responds to this gap by introducing and exploring some of the preoccupations, practices and dilemmas within Jewish RNGOs. Methodologically, the chapter combines theoretical discussion, practical experience based on work with several Jewish RNGOs, and interviews with actors in the field.

Judaism is by far the smallest of the three principle Abrahamic faiths. While estimates suggest that there are upwards of two billion Christians and one and a half billion Muslims worldwide, the size of the world's Jewish population is commonly gauged at around fourteen million. Considering these minuscule numbers in global terms, one may assume that a religion this small would have little to contribute to the global development campaign. Such sentiments may further be fed by recognition that, while Judaism has a wide global scope—historically, the term diaspora has been primarily associated with Judaism—it is largely an ethnic religion, and as such, it tends to be inward looking and preoccupied with its own community. And yet, Jewish organisations and individuals have a disproportionally high presence in the forefront of the development sector.

Arguing that Jewish RNGOs provide a fascinating case study, we note that one intriguing facet of Judaism's engagement in development is the religion's longstanding, resolute avoidance of proselytism. While this positions Jewish RNGOs as a counterpart to many Christian and Islamic

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RNGOs and the academic debates about them, in this chapter we propose that the work of Jewish RNGOs can indeed serve as missionary-like activity, albeit towards its Jewish volunteers and staff, many of whom are secular or assimilated, and feel little connection to Judaism as a religion. In the second part of this chapter, we address this missionizing tension through the exploration of two concepts: '*tikkun olam*'—a popular and often-vague Jewish imperative to make the world a better place, which has become the rallying cry of Jewish development activities—and 'Jewish outreach', by which we refer to missionary-like tendencies aimed not at host populations but exclusively at the development initiatives' Jewish staff and volunteers. We demonstrate the principles behind these concepts by appealing to two case studies: Project TEN in Ethiopia, an initiative by the Jewish Agency for Israel focused on multiple aspects of community development, and the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village in Rwanda, a Jewish-American private initiative aimed at supporting young orphans.

In approaching this chapter, we emphasise from the onset that Judaism is a complex label, whose understanding varies across individuals and groups: for some the term serves primarily as a spiritual and moral compass, for others it is a national anchor, for some it offers a sense of ethnic belonging, and for others it serves as cultural orientation. As Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin suggest, "Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with one another" (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 721). Indicating how the Jewish category pervades over simple notions of religious identity registers is the application of such seemingly paradoxical terms as "non-Jewish Jew," as proposed by historian Isaac Deutscher (1968).[1] In discussing Jewish RNGOs, we must keep in mind this inherent diversity.

Jewish Engagement in Development

As a largely decentralized, international religion, Judaism's involvement in development may be read through the prism of its multiple diasporas, of which we can consider the American and the Israeli as dominant, and in terms of gradual opening up towards service provision outside the community. Thus, writing on Jewish communal social service institutions in the

1 Making a similar argument, Woolcock (2014: 11, n13), following Benovil (2012), proposes that the ambiguity regarding Judaism is akin to that which stems from the English term "Russian", which dissolves the Russian language's original distinction between ethnic Russian ('*russkiye*') and a citizen of Russia ('*rossiyane*').

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United States, Rabbi David Ellenson (2006) explains how Jewish institutions such as hospitals and senior citizen centres were once staffed almost exclusively by Jews and catered to a decisively Jewish population, but over the years they expanded their services and employment opportunities to non-members. As Ellenson explains, when Jews began arriving in the United States in large numbers in the 19th century, discriminative practices forced them into erecting their own social service-provision organisations. As this barrier diminished over the years, Jewish-originated institutions began to accommodate non-Jews, a process that is, in Ellenson's view, "faithful to the genuine Jewish spirit that resides at the heart of Judaism" (Ellenson 2006: 130).

A similar trajectory was noted in the field of international development, in the case of major Jewish organisations such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Hadassah, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which were established in the US in the first half of the 20th century. While their original *raison d'être* was to provide assistance to Jewish communities around the world—grappling, most notably, with the task of promoting the establishment of the Jewish homeland and supporting Jews throughout the Holocaust—by the turn of the 21st century much of their operations involved development and relief work among non-Jewish communities. It should be made clear that these organisations' high international presence is not unique. Back in 2003, Julia Berger noted, in her random selection of RNGOs associated with two UN bodies, how Muslim and Jewish organisations have roughly the same size in her sample, "despite the fact that Muslims outnumber Jews worldwide by a factor of 100 to 1", a substantial representation that she explained in terms of "the large Jewish presence in the United States, the material resources of the Jewish community, as well as its emphasis on advocacy and social justice" (2003: 34; cf. Haynes 2014: 21).[2] What seems to be new, however, is the passion with which Jewish organisations in recent years have discovered the field of international development. An umbrella platform for Jewish RNGOs called OLAM, itself established in 2014, suggests that, according to "modest estimates", more than half of the organisations with which it partners were founded over the last ten years, and nearly a third were founded over the last five years (Wolfe 2015: 3; 43, n2).

2 To these she added that, seeing as her data was based on UN affiliation, it may also reflect Jews' political interests in the maintenance and security of the State of Israel—in which the UN plays a major role.

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This trend is observable in Israel, where investments in the field of development—once heavily promoted by the government—have dwindled since the 1970s, but were picked up again in recent years, largely thanks to the work of non-governmental initiatives. From the late 1950s up to the early 1970s, under the leadership of politicians such as David Ben Gurion and Golda Meir, Israel was highly involved in international development, especially in Africa. These activities were processed through the Department for International Cooperation or MASHAV (Hebrew acronym).[3] These strong ties, however, began to dissolve following the 1967 Six Days War and largely came to a halt after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. While they began to enjoy partial restoration since the 1990s, Israel's current allocation of resources towards international development, whether channelled through MASHAV or elsewhere, fall substantially short of expected OECD standards. In the context of this chapter, it should be stressed that MASHAV's work has never been regarded as explicitly Jewish, but was, however, inspired by Jewish experiences and 'values'—a trend that continues up to this day.

Currently, with limited state support for international development, Israeli engagement in the field is channelled primarily by private organisations. The Israeli branch of the Society for International Development (SID), a global umbrella platform for international development organisations, claim sixty-six Israeli member organisations (SID-Israel 2018). Similarly, OLAM claims ties with forty-six partner organisations that are Jewish, Israeli, or both. The organisation also points at a dramatic disparity in Jewish organisations' economic abilities: alongside the veteran, well-funded Jewish organisations, who have been centers of the Jewish aid and relief for decades, nearly two thirds of OLAM's partners have an annual budget of under half a million USD (Wolfe 2015). According to OLAM's Executive Director, Dyonna Ginsburg, many Jewish RNGOs operate as 'hybrid organisations', combining multiple types of development-based activities including, alongside ongoing development projects, short-term VSOs and humanitarian disaster relief. Ginsburg notes that themes such as refugees

3 During those decades, Israel has sent over 2,700 experts to Africa for development initiatives, and tens of thousands of others were trained in Israel—relations that were qualified by *Newsweek* as "one of the strangest unofficial alliances in the world" (Decalo 1971: 162). Scholars suggest that the country's motivation in engaging so heavily in development was due both to expediency—seeking political alliances in response to the Israeli-Arab conflict—and to ideology and identification with the political awakening and long-lasting suffering of African and other people at the hands of European colonisers (Oded 2011; Bar-Yosef 2013).

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and genocide, which echo past Jewish suffering, are particularly appealing to Jewish RNGOs (Ginsburg, 22 November 2016). It is no coincidence, for example, that many Jewish RNGOs—such as Agahozo Shalom Youth Village discussed below—operate in post-genocide Rwanda.

Judaism as a Non-Evangelising Religion

In the field of research on RNGOs, a special emphasis tends to be put on the question of proselytism. While, as the present volume shows, many RNGOs are not involved in active proselytism, others, such as conservative evangelical groups, consider it central to their agenda.[4] International bodies and scholars often show suspicion towards RNGOs' missionary tendencies, cautiously taking into consideration organisations' active employment of their activities to promote their faith and win converts (Clarke and Jennings 2008). Recognising that RNGOs are not all of the same ilk, scholars propose yardsticks for assessing organisations' religious orientations, what Berger (2003) terms "religious pervasiveness". While Benedetti (2006) notes that pervasiveness is difficult to measure with precision, she draws a distinction—or rather, continuum—between secular/moderate RNGOs (who, for example, employ non-religious staff based on credentials or share a universalist orientation) and militant RNGOs (who, for example, only hire members of their faith group or see their primary goal as proselytization). Benedetti adds that, when it comes to collaboration with mainstream NGOs, such pervasiveness is crucial: seculars/moderates are likely to find a common language of cooperation with mainstream development agendas, whereas militants position themselves as an alternative to them from the onset. A basic taxonomy is offered by Thaut (2009), who identifies four dimensions of analysis for "the significance of religion" within development organisations: (1) The organisation's expressed mission (2) Ties to a religious base or religious organisation (3) Staff policies and their stated affiliations (4) Sources of donor support.

As previously mentioned, concern with RNGOs' attempt at 'winning souls' rather than simply promoting development is responsible for much of the suspicion with which 'secular' international organisations approach RNGOs. For example, the termination of the short-lived collaboration between the World Bank and faith leaders in the mid-2000s has been explained, among other things, by concern in regard to many RNGOs'

4 Conversely, one may also reflect on how 'secular' development agendas can be claimed to engage in forms of proselytism (Rist 1996).

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emphasis on proselytization (Haynes 2013; Marshall 2013). From an ethical standpoint, the missionary tendency raises dilemmas: on the one hand, from the perspective of people's own belief system, sharing their truth—or rather, Truth—might be the greatest gift they can bestow, while on the other hand, an appeal to convert populations in need might take advantage of their fragility.[5] To make matters more complex, religious standpoints often cast doubt on the very division between material and spiritual goods, such as through emphasising how the "redemption of the soil" is intrinsically related to the "redemption of the soul," or by proposing close connection between "good living" in the sense of improved living standards and "good living" in the sense of virtue and adherence to Christian teachings (Bornstein 2002: 9).[6] Writing on Christian RNGOs in Zimbabwe, Erica Bornstein commented that, for the organisations' employees, "the world was divided into two realms: evangelised/developed and unevangelised/undeveloped. It was through acts of development that the world could be reached, touched, and transformed" (Bornstein 2002: 7). But while Bornstein recognises that development is instrumentalised by certain Christian RNGOs for the purpose of evangelisation, she also recognises diversity in shades and degrees of this proselytizing agenda across Christian RNGOs.

On this backdrop, Judaism's well-known disinterest in, even aversion to, evangelisation offers a stark contrast. As an ethnic religion, one that has often been persecuted throughout history, Judaism maintains an inherent reluctance about conversion. Converting to Judaism, though not impossible, is a lengthy and complicated affair. To illustrate this point in the context of the global South, an interview with Jacob, a Kenyan computer engineer and a second-generation sympathiser of Judaism, provides an illuminating example.[7] Jacob described how, when his father first went to the only active synagogue in Nairobi and asked to convert, the head of the community replied that "we do not do conversions". Jacob then explained the complications of converting to Judaism in a country like Kenya:

5 It might be argued that it is not only FBOs that take advantage of local fragilities to redirect people's beliefs, but that 'secular' NGOs and governments similarly impose structural changes and shifts in values in moments of crisis (Klein 2007).

6 Or, when it comes to prosperity teachings, to treat material prosperity as a gift of God may render economics "intrinsically spiritual" (Bradshaw 1993: 41, 116).

7 Interviewed in Nairobi by Yonatan N. Gez, as part of a Swiss National Science Foundation project tilted "*Structures anthropologiques du religieux: butinage et voisinage*", which ran from 2010 to 2015 (project number 100013–130340 and 100013–146301).

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> "Judaism is really hard to practice outside of a community. Where do you get your kosher food, how do you interact? You know, it becomes very difficult if you want to convert and live in Kenya for that matter. On the other hand, the conversion process is quite difficult, to say the least; it is expensive."

Jacob's words attest to a unique feature of the work of Jewish RNGOs in the global South. Without a missionary agenda, and often equipped with a liberal ideology, Jewish RNGOs may appear to score very low on the pervasiveness scale as presented above. As a Jewish staff member at a Jewish American RNGO was quoted saying, "[w]hen you start talking faith-based, it's like what are you talking about? Our organisation is really non-sectarian. I mean, we'll work with anyone. And we're not going to preach to them anything in particular. But I think when you go to other faith-based organisations, they will" (Netting, O'Connor, and Yancey 2006: 277). Berger (2003: 34) similarly notes that Jewish RNGOs "make few references to God or religion, focusing instead on the social justice teachings of the Torah as the basis for their advocacy oriented missions" (e.g. Rose, Green Kaiser, and Klein 2008). Thus, by and large and compared to other RNGOs, Jewish RNGOs—to the extent that they fit into existing categories—tend to belong to the end of the spectrum, which Benedetti (2006) qualifies as secular or moderate RNGOs.

Tikkun Olam and Jewish Outreach

As mentioned above, most leading Jewish RNGOs date back to the first half of the 20th century, when they were established with the explicitly political purpose of supporting the creation—and later on, the flourishing and safe existence—of a homeland for the Jews, or otherwise to save Jewish lives (Haynes 2014: 22). At the same time, and since the establishment of the State of Israel in particular, the work of Jewish RNGOs did not limit itself to the promotion of so-called Jewish interests, bringing to the fore the perennial tension between universalism and particularism as a central axis informing Jewish thinking in general and with regard to development in particular. This tension is embodied in the characterisation of the Jewish God, who is both the Lord of the earth, the one and only maker of the entire earth and its countless human groups, but at the same time is the God of the Jewish people, who has spoken to individuals and directed history along the blueprint of a covenant made exclusively with the patriarch Abraham and his chosen descendants. As Rabbi Ellenson (2006: 130) suggests,

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> "it is instructive to note that within Judaism there have always been universalistic and particularistic dimensions, and this dual approach to the world, as well as the relationship of God both to the Jewish people and all humankind, finds expression in the concept of covenant (*brit*) that lies at the very heart of the Bible and Jewish religious tradition".

In contemporary parlance, this tension—and the conflicting obligations that they imply—has come to be embodied through twin logics. On the one hand, there is the often-quoted injunction that one must tend to "the poor of one's own city" before assisting other people—a post-biblical rabbinic idea.[8] On the other hand, there is the notion of *tikkun olam* as a central axis informing Jewish thinking about the obligation to engage in making the world a better place. It should be stressed that, in and of itself, the notion of *tikkun olam* is not incommensurable with the biblical idea of the Jewish people's special election—indeed, the moral imperative may be suggested to naturally flow out of the idea of the Jews, as the Chosen People, being a "light unto the nations" (Isaiah 49,6). As Kliksberg (2003) indicates, solid strands of global justice can certainly be gleaned from the Hebrew Bible, including: responsibility of one person for their fellow humans; commitment to the eradication of poverty; preserving the dignity of the poor; avoiding gross inequality; providing opportunities for the poor; and volunteerism as an ethical obligation (cf. Davis 2009). As the founder of a leading Jewish RNGO told us in an interview, "*tikkun olam* can have various interpretations in our global world, and social justice is at the core of Judaism."

Looking at the work of Jewish RNGOs, it is expected that the dedication to ameliorate conditions among other populations implies a clear leaning towards Judaism's universalist strand. But while that may be true, this chapter proposes that often the working of Jewish RNGOs contains a strong inward-looking agenda. This takes into account both the application of the concept of *tikkun olam*—which has become something of a foundation and default motto of liberal Jewish RNGOs and progressive Judaism more broadly—and the particularist tendency as embodied by the concept of 'Jewish outreach'. With these two concepts clarified, the remainder of this chapter will turn to discuss how this tension is put into action in the working of two Jewish development initiatives.

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8 See, for example, Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah, 251:5.

Jewish Outreach

In the context of international development, the term outreach designates an organisation's involvement with a host community, but in the context of missionary work, this meaning has the added implication of winning souls and gaining converts. The dual meaning is particularly poignant in the case of RNGOs' development work, which may combine inclusive provision of services with some emphasis—at times subtle, at times less so—on the possibility of religious change. By contrast, in speaking of Jewish outreach, we focus on actions intended towards members within the religion—actions that arguably qualify the idea of Judaism as non-proselytizing. For example, in Israel, countless initiatives aim at attracting secular Jews to the observant-orthodox world, whether through downtown activists handing women Shabbat candles and urging men to publicly don *tefillin* (phylacteries), or through state-level initiatives promoted by religiously-informed political parties, such as making religious studies mandatory in secular state schools. Chabad, a prominent Hassidic movement, has been at the forefront of Jewish outreach initiatives, and created an impressive network of centres or 'houses'—including many in the global South. Led by *shlichim* ('emissaries'), Chabad Houses engage in Jewish outreach by organizing events for Jewish travellers and residents, including non-practicing ones, such as celebrating Jewish holidays and obtaining kosher food (Fishkoff 2003). As we will see in the following section, the notion of Jewish outreach appears apt to describe a significant aspect of the work of Jewish RNGOs, namely, activities aimed at the organisations' Jewish facilitators themselves.

This idea of a Jewish-only outreach as found in the case of Chabad requires a recognition of the multiplicity of voices within the Jewish world. The prevalence of a secularist worldview among global Jewry results in that, for many Jews, when it comes to development-related matters, tradition may not function as a central source of inspiration. As Tirosh-Samuelson points out with regard to Judaism and environmentalism, "[i]n Israel and in America, the religious sources of Judaism do not inform the identity of most Jews, and secular Jews do not appeal to them in their attempt to address environmental concerns" (Tirosh-Samuelson 2006: 55). Among those who explicitly appeal to tradition for moral guidance, the very question of what it means to be a 'good Jew' is highly debated. Judaism is a largely decentralised religion, with multiple and competing voices claiming authenticity and representativeness—a fact shown by Martha Nussbaum (2000), who demonstrated how approaches to a core issue such as women's

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rights can be met with diverse responses among Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Jews.[9] Granted, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has something of a monopoly in Israel, but it does not represent global Jewry as a whole—not even in Israel, and certainly not in the diaspora, where liberal and progressive forms of Judaism are much more common. In recognising the debate over Jewish hegemony, it is worth evoking scholars' observation whereby religious discourse functions not only on the descriptive, but also on the normative level, regulating legitimacy and excluding undesired voices (Amesbury 2010: 63-64; Pearson and Tomalin 2008).

Tikkun Olam

The term *tikkun olam* is borrowed from the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism): according to the central Kabbalistic book of the Zohar, the 'vessels'—the receptacles of primordial divine light—broke under its abundance, leading to a reality that is flawed and imperfect (Scholem 1965). To mend the vessels, Jews must not only follow the commandments of the Torah, but also engage in various good deeds and extraordinary spiritual rituals that can restore divine harmony through acts of *tikkun* ("repairing").

With its mystical overtones, the concept of *tikkun* was for a long time marginal within mainstream Jewish discourse. According to Cooper (2013), the now-popular concept *tikkun olam* ("mending the world") is a recent manifestation of an assimilation of values that became widely circulated in 20th century American culture, mainly throughout the civil rights movement.[10] The two traditional strands that have given rise to this notion—the mystical strand, and the modern call for social justice—should be kept in

9 As Wuthnow (1988: 218-222) discusses, value gaps between liberals and conservatives within the same religious tradition can be at least as fierce as those that separate people of different traditions.

10 Despite its Hebrew source, as Avraham Infeld suggests, the term *tikkun olam* "is probably better known to American non-Jews than it is to Jewish Israelis" (Infeld, 10 March 2012). The term's distinctly Jewish-American appeal may be understood in terms of perceptions of guiding values. According to a Pew Research Center poll comparing between Israeli and American Jewish worldviews (Pew Research Center 2016), 56 % of American Jews stated that working for justice and equality is an essential part of their Jewish Identity, whereas only 27 % of Israelis held the same belief. But while the concept of *tikkun olam* may be less central in Israel than in the United States, it is central to Israel's international development scene—in part by its appeal to Jewish liberal values and possible sponsors associated with diasporic Jewry.

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mind when considering how the concept of *tikkun olam* has been popularised in recent years into becoming a recognisable commitment to the pursuit of justice worldwide, as manifest by the common use of the term within Jewish RNGOs' names and mission statements. At the same time, our study among Jewish development workers attested to the wide range of interpretations that the term evokes (Maya 2015). This interpretative diversity may lead to criticism whereby the term "has become a cliché, used so often that it offers little real guidance for social justice efforts" (Kanarek 2008: 15), an overly ambitious yet unspecific imagination that is more of a wishful thinking than a true reflection of the engaged Jewish community's actual activities and achievements.[11] Similar critique may be leveled at other Jewish terminologies adapted to and prevalent across Jewish RNGOs, such as *tikkun halev* ("mending one's own heart"), *tzelem elohim* ("God's image"), *tzedakah* ("charity") and *tzedek* ("justice").

What does the centrality of the term *tikkun olam*, and the Jewish tension between particularity and universality more broadly, tell us about the work of Jewish RNGOs? In her study on religious RNGOs, Berger (2003) notes that the question, "[a]re you a religious NGO?" did not win a straightforward answer from the Jewish organisations' representatives that she interviewed. She claims one representative of the Jewish Women International (JWI),

> "was unable to respond to the above-mentioned question commenting that the answer depends on one's definition of 'religious,` adding that JWI 'is founded on the Jewish principles of *Tikkun Olam*' (repairing the world) and observes Jewish holidays. The distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' was equally challenging for the Zionist Organisation of America, which sees itself as 'more secular than religious but […] Jewish'" (Berger 2003: 21).

This observation fits with that of Jeavons (2004), whereby discussion on RNGOs' work tends to offer "too clean and facile" a division between personal beliefs and their manners of expression, echoing perhaps the Protestant Christian notion of separation of 'faith' and 'works'. The author then goes on to ponder, following questions raised, among others, by "Jewish friends": "what do we do with an organisation that is rooted in a religious

11 For example, one of the volunteers of Project TEN in Gondar, Ethiopia, admitted that, in her view, "*tikkun olam* feels like such a big word, in comparison to what we've done here in Gondar, and does not reflect our work. We do not act to take care of the cause or the root of a problem, we only address the symptom. For example, we worked with people with blindness, but we do not try to prevent blindness in the first place. Is that mending the world?"

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tradition that sees all acts of service and compassion toward others, or all efforts to 'mend the world,' as inherently *religious*—that is, as acts of devotion or even prayer?" (Jeavons 2004: 142).

Case Studies

Having considered the tension between the particularist and universalist stands within Jewish RNGOs, this will act as a lens through which to discuss the example of two Jewish RNGOs: Project TEN in Ethiopia and Agahozo Shalom Youth Village in Rwanda.[12] While these case studies share certain commonalities, the discussion refers to both in order to show how Jewish RNGOs are essentially heterogeneous in their approach to this tension. We will explore how these two initiatives manage their Jewish identity both outwards, towards their host communities, and inwards, towards their Jewish volunteers and permanent staff. While variations certainly exist in the religious pervasiveness of these projects, and while none of them engage in outward proselytism, their modes of inspiration and sources of funding result in a disproportionately strong religious consciousness, which partially, and arguably paradoxically, frame their development work as an exercise in intensification of Jewish identity. Thus, even as such initiatives are presented as a break from isolationist Jewish exclusivism, the development projects themselves might end up serving as a backdrop for inner-Jewish dramas aimed at countering assimilation and loss of Jewish-religious sentiments in the diaspora and in Israel. Many projects are designed as opportunities for inter-diasporic Jewish socialisation, and put a disproportionate emphasis on Jewish learning, inspirations, and practice among the Jewish staff. As one donor instructed, "whatever you do [in the field], do in a Jewish way."

12 Information on Project TEN draws on Adi Maya's participatory research in Gondar in Ethiopia (2013)—TEN's first centre—conducted as part of her Master's dissertation in anthropology (Maya 2015). Information on the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village draws on Ido Benvenisti's participation as a volunteer advisor to the Liquidnet High School principle in 2010. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to all fieldwork data as reflecting our collective insights.

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Case Study 1: Project TEN

The TEN programme (est. 2012) was initiated by the Jewish Agency, the world's largest non-profit Jewish organisation. The programme is aimed at young Jewish adults (aged 20–30), from Israel and the diaspora, who partake in a three-month volunteering cohort in one of the project's centers, in Mexico, Ghana, South Africa, Uganda, Israel, or Ethiopia.[13] The name of the project, TEN, carries a double meaning: it is the English acronym of Tikkun Empowerment Network, but also alludes to the Hebrew verb for "giving". The Project's ultimate goal is to improve the quality of life of (non-Jewish) populations in need, while providing a meaningful volunteering experience for young adults who are keen on infusing their backpackers' trip—a known rite of passage among Israelis, which usually takes place after their military service (Noy and Cohen 2005)—with social engagement and personal development. While the programme is open to Jews of whichever religious persuasion, in reality, most participants are either of a secular leaning or define themselves as conservative, with little to no representation among orthodox Jews.

Throughout their three-month residency, volunteers engage not only in development work—mainly in the fields of informal education, agriculture and public health—but also in intensive exploration of their Jewish identity.[14] In Ethiopia, we noted that intensive Jewish content learning was predominantly carried out in and around the celebration of the Shabbat day. Participants were expected to partake in preparing *chalot* (sweet bread for Shabbat), and engage in a Shabbat dinner on Friday evenings, preceded by a *kabbalat Shabbat* (religious ceremony for welcoming the Shabbat). The weekly Torah portion (*parashat hashavuah*) was routinely discussed, and the volunteers' house had to be kept *kosher*, a challenge resolved by a general ban on cooking meat. On "closed Saturdays" (or Shabbats), the TEN staff offered lectures about Jewish identity, including sessions on *tikkun olam* and Talmudic readings, while volunteers—including secular ones—were not allowed to leave the volunteer center. In addition, participants were expected to celebrate Jewish Holidays, such as *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement). Most of these practices are far

13 The centre in Ethiopia was shut down in 2016 due to political instability in the country.

14 The very choice of Gondar as a site for the project also reflected an emphasis on Jewishness, as the project's central target population was the Falasha, an Ethiopian Jews community who await confirmation from the Israeli government in order to immigrate to Israel.

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from evident for secular Jews, indeed leading to murmurs of discontent by some participants. As one secular volunteer pointed out:

> "To tell you the truth, I have a great affinity for Judaism, I've always said that it would be interesting to study the Talmud and all that. […] I assumed that this [Jewish content] will be present in the lessons, but not to that extent and intensity. It was too much of that, […] I really felt like I was living in a religious place, too religious for me. […] I respect that, keeping the Shabbat and all, but nevertheless it was difficult and this is not what I had in my mind and it's not my way of life. To live inside of it, it was very difficult for me."

Beyond the actual Jewish content of the program, Project TEN's organisational goals include connecting Jewish communities from Israel and the diaspora through the recruitment of Jewish volunteers and their transformation, ideally, into change agents within their communities of origin. This mission was thus explained by one of the programme leaders: "Our target is to prevent assimilation. There is 60 % assimilation in the US alone, and that is the main reason why we're here". It is the programme leaders' intention to reach out—or rather, reach in—to potentially assimilated young Jews, mainly from the diaspora, by showing how Judaism can be a value-infused engine and a moral compass for engaging with the world at large. We observed that, at times, these inner-Jewish goals seem to overshadow the intended development goals of the initiative with regard to the provision of aid to local communities. As one of our interviewees put it: "they [Project TEN] could have stressed more our volunteering projects and further discuss why we are even here, instead of dealing and thinking almost exclusively about ourselves."

Case Study 2: Agahozo Shalom Youth Village

The second case study, the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village in Rubona, Eastern Province, Rwanda, represents a different model of an RNGO that is rooted in Jewish tradition, but puts less emphasis on imposing a Jewish agenda on its staff and volunteers. The village was established in 2009 by the late Anne Heyman, a native of South Africa, who after working in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office dedicated herself to philanthropy both in and outside the United States. The Agahozo Shalom Youth Village is an educational facility that is heavily based on the model and the philosophy of the Yemin Orde Youth Village in Israel, one of many villages created as a systemic solution to the great number of Jewish orphans who immigrated to the newly established State of Israel after the Holocaust.

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Heyman learned about the need for a solution to the orphan problem in Rwanda following the 1994 genocide and its aftermath in a lecture series she and her husband initiated at Tufts University's Hillel chapter[15] in 2005, which they titled "Moral Voices." Heyman made the connection between government officials and local agents in Rwanda, Israeli educators, and consultants from the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in New York.

The word *agahozo* translates from Kinyarwanda as "A place where tears are dried," and *shalom* is the Hebrew word for "peace." Thus, the very choice of the village's name symbolises the importance of the connection between Jewish tradition and local reality in Rwanda. Every year, the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village, together with the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and its Entwine Programme[16] selects up to a dozen volunteers who spend a full year working in the village. The volunteers are mostly in their 20s, and most come from either Israel or the United States. JDC volunteers must be Jewish, but the village selects its volunteers mostly according to skill and to the village's changing needs. Volunteers are given an advance orientation seminar to prepare them for the trip, revolving primarily around the notion of *tikkun olam*. While on site, and similarly to TEN, Jewish outreach rituals are practiced within the group, such as baking *chalot* and organizing *kabbalat Shabbat*. Those rituals are not exclusive to volunteers, and the local Rwandan staff are often invited to take part. To clarify, this inclusivity should not be mistaken for proselytism, but stems from the fact that volunteers and local staff share houses and common areas, leading them to take active interest in each other's lives.

The village is home to 500 Rwandan teenagers, and its goal is to enable them to realise their personal and professional potential. This is done by operating on two levels, which are presented to the local beneficiaries through a Hebrew terminology inspired by traditional Jewish teachings:[17] the first level is *tikkun halev* ("repairing the heart"), which offers the teenagers ways to overcome trauma with the support of a staff of counselors, house mothers, and social workers, as well as through arts, sports, debate clubs, leadership platforms, and other activities in which the youth can find an outlet. The second level is *tikkun olam*, where every week the

15 Hillel is the world's largest international Jewish campus organisation.

16 Formerly known as the Jewish Service Corps, Entwine is a movement for young Jewish leaders, opinion leaders, and advocates who seek to make a meaningful impact on global Jewish and humanitarian issues.

17 In particular, inspiration derives from Maimonides' writing on charity in chapter seven of his famous *Mishneh Torah*.

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teenagers leave the village to volunteer in the surrounding villages, helping locals to fix mud huts, teaching English to primary school children, and cleaning the regional clinic. The appeal to these universalised Jewish terms through the application of a pedagogical philosophy developed in Israel is interesting, considering that according to staff figures, 95 % of the teenagers in the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village are Christians and 5 % are Muslim.[18] Most of the teenagers attend church every Saturday or Sunday, with some denominations even offering religious services inside the village's community center. Since most of the staff are observant, participation in services is regarded as a component within the healing process. Needless to say, there is no Jewish proselytism on the part of the handful of Jewish facilitators. However, the teenagers are often curious about the Jewish religion, and may engage volunteers with questions about the holy city of Jerusalem or about their views on Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the little-explored domain of Jewish RNGOs. We identified their unique features, dwelling on their collective motto of *tikkun olam* and their aversion to proselytism. This aversion we then qualified by drawing a distinction between missionary activities and Jewish outreach. In the last section, we appealed to two case studies, which showed how, while Jewish RNGOs strictly avoid missionary activities among their recipients, their initiatives must also be considered in terms of inner-Jewish goals of consolidating identity among facilitators and volunteers. This is done, among other things, through the regular organisation of Jewish learning sessions, celebration of religious festivals, and encounters between Jews of different diasporas and religious orientations.

Returning to the wider literature on RNGOs, it appears that, to the extent that one may generalise, Jewish RNGOs represent a unique category, as can be demonstrated by the question of religious pervasiveness. In some respects, Jewish RNGOs maintain high religious pervasiveness, for example by their tendency to insist on the Jewish identity of their staff and volun-

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18 Data retrieved in 2010.

teers[19], while at the same time, initiatives such as Project TEN and the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village show the dominance of a pluralistic tone, which is strengthened by a staunch non-missionary stance. Among the Jewish staff, Judaism is understood in a variety of ways, and for many it represents a basis of cultural, ethnic, and political belonging more than a theological dogma. While it thus appears that the emphasis on *tikkun olam* with its universalist focus and plurality of interpretations helps to establish Jewish RNGOs as moderate and as convenient partners in achieving global development goals, further research is needed in order to establish a taxonomy of Jewish RNGOs.

Beyond the specific context of Jewish RNGOs, our conclusion raises general questions regarding an RNGO's actual target audience. The study invites us to think beyond a project's formal beneficiaries and consider internally directed objectives as involving RNGOs' own religiously affiliated staff, volunteers, and religious community at large. Indeed, the case of Jewish RNGOs, with its formal aversion to proselytism, warrants a second look at the possibility of RNGOs' work as targeting global North facilitators themselves. We urge scholars to keep these observations in mind and to consider how religious outreach operates not only in relations to the host communities, but also inwardly within the organisation, its staff, and the religious community on behalf of which it claims to operate.

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19 In recent years, Project TEN has been moving towards hiring local country directors and coordinators. Nonetheless, the volunteer centres and communal houses where staff and volunteers reside still retain their clear Jewish orientation, and local personnel are expected to eat vegetarian food due to Kosher food restrictions, to learn about Jewish holidays, to partake in Jewish values and identity classes, and even to learn some Hebrew in order to maintain the Jewish 'character' of the house. By contrast, Christian holidays are excluded from formal discussion.

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