Going Away to Find Home: A Comparative Study of Heritage/Homeland Tourism

by

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Date: March 22, 2011
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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract
In this dissertation I explore the “homing desire” (Brah 1996:193) of American diasporas. I argue and show how identities are constructed as primordial. Specifically, I am interested in how homeland tourism, group tour experiences to ancestral homelands can be used as a “charter for new social projects” (Appadurai 1996:6) based around ancestral lands of origin and the qualities we associate with home. Therefore, this dissertation examines what happens when imagined communities (Anderson 1993) become briefly tangible.

I present analysis of participant observation and interview data from three different American populations to examine the very real desire to belong to a meaningful and worthwhile group. I map how secular college-aged American Jews, middle-class African Americans and white families with adopted Chinese daughters shape and define the imagined community through the brief face-to-face experience of the group homeland tour.

This dissertation takes the reader on tour, and analyzes the sites/sights of homeland travel, interactions between tourists, and interactions between tourists and homeland natives arguing that these experiences are consumed and interpreted to then define the individual and community’s place in the social world and in the process influence domestic experiences of otherness.

Individuals engage with larger systems of organization that incorporate and implicate both the nation they reside within and the place they have chosen to visit, representing a distinctly Western and American path to imagined communities. While tourists look internationally to discover heritage and roots, I demonstrate how many expect and anticipate domestic changes and domestic acceptance of difference. In addition,
tourism also facilitates global thinking, where homeland discoveries become examples of another sort of grounding in community, belonging to the cosmopolitan international global imagined.

In all these examples of empowerment and the assumed benefits of homeland explorations, we see the American, the transnational, and the global intersecting. This dissertation teases apart the multiple forms of movement occurring simultaneously that represent our contemporary moment. Therefore, I argue that this desire for rootedness and comfort that comes with knowing one’s homeland reveals more about our contemporary moment and our individualistic approach to community consciousness than essential aspects of our identity and community. Homeland tours therefore provide Americans with experiences of international travel and a sense of global enlightenment, based not on heritage, but an understanding of global connectivity and power relations.

Through a comparative examination of three different engagements with homeland tourism, I examine how individuals not only tell a story to themselves about themselves, but also speak to the larger world. This dissertation therefore is a journey itself, a journey to belonging and discovery of community.
Dedication
To everyone still searching for belonging and traveling on their own identity quests.

You are my community.
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I believe that one can never leave home. I believe that one carries the shadows, the dreams, the fears and dragons of home under one's skin, at the extreme corners of one's eyes and possibly in the gristle of the earlobe. We may act sophisticated and worldly but I believe we feel safest when we go inside ourselves and find home, a place where we belong and maybe the only place we really do.

Maya Angelou, Letters To My Daughter

In this quote Maya Angelou highlights the contemporary longings for rootedness, and the critical importance of home. We “carry the shadows” of home in our engagement with others and our outward appearances. For Angelou, home is the place where we effortlessly belong, maybe as Maya Angelou states, the only place we really do.

Home is an important aspect to study in this moment of contemporary global mobility. Mobility and transformation are inherent features of contemporary social life (Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997; Olwig and Hastrup 1997; Rapport and Dawson 2003). According to Appadurai (1996), one characteristic of the present era of globalization is mass media technologies that have both collapsed the globe penetrating every inch of the earth, and connecting people in new ways and across vast spaces. We are also moving and migrating at levels previously unseen, un-tethered from our places of origin and their communities of support. This change in the spatial relationship of individuals coupled with an increase in migration and mobility, I argue requires rethinking our assumptions concerning home and belonging.
Home can mean many things; it can be an inalienable source of identity (Havel 1992; cited by Tucker, 1994), an intimate space, associated with security (Dovey 1985), and is sometimes interchangeable with kin and family (Crow 1989, Oakley 1974, Bernardes 1987). Home also doesn’t have to be related to a dwelling or a defined structure or location. As Mary Douglas describes, home can be any space under one’s control (1991). Tucker (1994) suggests that home may be an expression of a person’s subjectivity in the world, a space where people feel at ease and are able to express and fulfill their unique selves or identities. Therefore homes “may be an emotional environment, a culture, a geographical location, a political system, a historical time and place, a house etc., and a combination of all of the above” (Tucker 1994:184). Homes encompass “cultural norms and individual fantasies...The idea of home brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial, and the temporal, the local and the global” (Rapport and Dawson 1998:8). Therefore home can be alternatively, a space or a memory, or feeling of belonging and rooted-ness. While some see home as a place where you withdraw from communal life (Saunders and Williams 1998), I demonstrate how home-lands, places of ancestral origin come to create and shape communal life.

Despite recent predictions of anti-essentialism, place and home continue to be important to individuals and communities as sources of identity (e.g., Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Kibreab 1999; Olwig 1998; Oxefeld and Long 2004). In addition, foundational characteristics of identity still thrive in everyday discourse. These are associated with roots or grounding, a belonging that is based upon “blood” and primordial connectedness that is ineffable, a priori and affective. These foundational characteristics of identity based on a perceived natural belonging bind “by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import
attributed to the very tie itself” (Geertz 1963: 259). But, how do populations with no direct connection to home or homelands discover and use home to bind their social group and understand their subjectivity?

I see home as an ideological construct that emerges through and is created by people’s lived experience, history, and memory and in this dissertation I explore the “homing desire” (Brah 1996:193) of American diasporas, people shaped by their “otherness” or difference who are looking to find community and belonging. I argue and show in this dissertation how identities are constructed as primordial. Specifically, I am interested in how homeland tourism, group tour experiences to ancestral homelands can be used as a “charter for new social projects” (Appadurai 1996:6) based around ancestral lands of origin and the qualities we associate with home.

Ideas about staying, leaving and journeying are integral to notions of home (Mallett 2004), and are of particular importance to populations shaped and defined by histories of dispersion and migration, like diasporas. In this dissertation I follow three different American “diasporic public spheres” (Appadurai 1996) as they travel to the ancestral lands of origin and then return to the United States. These returnees have no direct connections to these homelands; they travel together on group homeland tours because other more standard ways of connection either have broken down or have never existed.1 As Somerville (1992) states, people may have a sense of home even though they have no experience or memory of it. To summarize, I’m interested in the journey to home, and then

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1 The Hmong Diaspora is the best example of this. Their post world war II diasporic experience includes forced dispersion to at least two foreign countries and they struggle to maintain a collective memory of their homeland and a Hmong ethnic consciousness (Yang 2003; Schein 1999).
back again, where populations travel temporarily to the homeland to understand and explore their place of origin and then return to their everyday.

These are not recent migrants with established networks of back and forth. These are American populations interested in discovering and creating a connection to a homeland and in the process find strength and power in what they experience as natural belonging. Individuals use homeland tourism to explore paths to understand histories of dispersal and contemporary difference. This dissertation explores the practice of “home-searching as a basic trait of human nature” (Tucker 1994), arguing with other scholars and those whose voices speak in these pages that homelands and transnational identities can also “illuminate and transform the present” (Hooks 1991, Massey 1992).

I present analysis of three different American populations with very different diasporic histories and pasts to examine the very real desire to belong to a meaningful and worthwhile group. I map how secular college-aged American Jews, middle-class African Americans and white families with adopted Chinese daughters shape and define the imagined community through the brief face-to-face experience of the group homeland tour.

I argue that the process of imagining home and rootedness is determined by the intersection of history, contemporary innovation and most importantly practice. The identity and meaning of a place and homeland therefore must be constructed and negotiated through social interaction. For example, drawing on the work of Satre and

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2 I am focusing my attention on an American context and an American audience. While I believe that other international players can travel for heritage there is a distinct power dynamic involved with a Western traveler engaging with a homeland. I limit my discussion to American examples of homeland tourism as to not conflate my argument or dismiss the power imbalance of travel and global flows by claiming global generalizations.
Martin Buber, Kuang-Ming Wu claims that ‘home is being-with-other(s)’ (1993:193). In this dissertation I build upon this notion and explore what happens when imagined communities (Anderson 1993) become briefly tangible.

In chapter two I present theoretical and empirical work on diaspora. I discuss the field of diaspora and focus on James Clifford’s roots and routes to understand contemporary forms of movement and migration. This theoretical approach highlights the process of becoming where present circumstances work with histories of dispersal to create contemporary diasporic communities, moving diaspora theory forward. I make a case for homeland tourism as a contemporary mechanism suited for understanding our interconnected global moment. These are temporary migrants, who travel to the homeland and then return. I end this section by discussing the tourism industry and it’s growth as a consequence of our globalized world and a mechanism for understanding contemporary imagined communities.

Chapter three of this dissertation explains and presents my methodological choices. I use an extended case model, mixed qualitative methods, and comparative analysis to assess theories about social group boundaries and imagined communities. I first discuss the extended case model and the benefits of theory generating qualitative research. I then present background information and review some of the extant literature on the cases I have chosen to study. I then detail my methods and present information regarding those who have participated in this study. I end by explaining the limitations and again make a case for this specific approach that highlights and showcases mobility in all its forms.

The fourth chapter in this dissertation explores why homelands are thought to be important. Homelands allow you to begin at the beginning, as sites original primordial
belonging and original movement Homelands are discussed as important in the same language as pilgrimage, yet tourists do not see homelands as static locations, these are sites of transformative possibility for both the tourist and the region being toured. I also discuss the different roles of obligation and duty, detailing whom each group envisions their obligations to and how that shapes the boundaries of community. Homelands also can fill empty spaces where roots symbolically grounds and orients whole communities. This belief in the power of home is not static or ahistorical. Contemporary approaches to migration and integration influence how populations defined by their difference and otherness discuss the power and possibility of home. I end by explaining homeland journeys, and the power of experience, especially experiences of being there arguing that the individualistic and active nature of homeland discoveries are perfectly suited to the individualistic ideology of America.

In the second part of this dissertation, I take the reader on tour. Chapter six presents the sites deemed significant by tourists for heritage purposes. In this section I explain and explore the specific histories tourists draw from demonstrating how history is used across all cases to connect and to define the domestic imagined community. By traveling to the homeland tourists can experience the materiality of history. Individuals consume the experience as proof of its validity and as a piece of their subjectivity. The experience, once consumed by the participant is interpreted and then used to define the individual’s place within the social world.

Chapter seven explores the significance of the group. Homeland tourists do not encounter the homeland alone. In this section I present instances where individuals (or families) become active participants in the processes of shaping current and future
definitions of their social group. The homeland tour allows participants to spend extended time with the American community they claim. During activities and experiences that are both structured and spontaneous travelers construct the meanings that make up the group and make the imagined community tangible. While each member discusses individual feelings of elation or spirituality, what makes these important to the domestic imagined community is the act of going through it together.

In chapter eight I examine tourists/local interactions. I discuss both the tourists’ gaze and actual interactions between tourists and locals and examine how tourists express a shared consciousness with the inhabitants of the homeland in the face of difference. Tourists connect and distance to homeland natives, and they use different strategies in order to construct the boundaries of their larger transnational imagined community.

In the final part of this dissertation, we return from the homeland and I examine the language tourists use to explain transformation and the implications of this transformation. They discuss the power of feeling, even, briefly, like a member of a majority. This experience has domestic possibilities, and can only be explored and understood because of new technologies of connection, like tourism leading to an expanded global consciousness.

Homeland journeys are sentimental and nostalgic explorations through time and space. Through a comparative examination of three different engagements with homeland tourism, I examine how individuals not only tell a story to themselves about themselves, but also speak to the larger world. The chapters of this dissertation address the intersection of history, heritage, family and community detailing the process of imagining one’s
community for contemporary American social groups. This dissertation therefore is a journey itself, a journey to belonging and discovery of community.
Chapter Two: Diaspora, Homelands and Tourism

You can go home. But you can’t start from where you left. To fit in, you have to create another place in that place you left behind.
Carol Stack, Call to Home

This quote about the reverse journey back to the south for African Americans in Carol Stack’s book Call to Home (1996), reminds us that you can never travel back in time, you can only create a new place inside the spaces that are already significant. In this section I present theoretical work on diasporas, situating my work within the diaspora literature and moving it forward by envisioning diasporas in the contemporary global moment. As the speed and scope of movement increases and identities become disconnected from national boundaries many envision a global citizenry unconcerned with the specificity of place (Appadurai 1996), yet these same scholars notice how primordial understandings of identity have not ceased to exist. Primordial claims are not pre-modern relics we cling to as the last stronghold of a bygone era. As I demonstrate in these pages, homelands and claims to home are still deployed and are being deployed as a consequence and a result of contemporary global change. I see diasporas as populations embodying mobility and movement, and am interested in how people use this new transnational imagined to create community. I highlight the transnational to stress mobility and present my material in “contrast to conventional migration research which tended to regard emigration and return as permanent dislocations” (Stefansson 2004:7). 

In this section, I first discuss the theoretical foundations of diasporas, using James Clifford’s roots and routes paradigm to move diaspora research forward (pun intended), seeing contemporary diasporas as examples of our mobile world. I then present a brief
explanation and definition of homeland tourism, arguing that homeland returns must be studied as one of the major characteristics defining diasporic populations. I add to existing literature by studying populations that do not just return to homelands, but return to their everyday, using brief and temporary journeys to the homeland to construct their domestic communities with global and transnational consequences. I end by briefly discussing tourism, both as a growing industry that signifies our changing and more mobile world and a mechanism for transnational self-discovery.

Diasporas: Mobility and Home

Diaspora suggests dislocation from one region and relocation in another. I focus on diasporas because I believe they tell us something particular about group identities and boundaries for this contemporary moment of movement and mobility. Diasporas bring to mind movement and difference, they are populations of others due to a perceived natural connection to a foreign land. Therefore diasporas have within their very construct a sense of primordial belonging and a contemporary lived experience of otherness.

The Jewish experience of forced exile is the first reference for the term diaspora. “In Jewish historiography, the source of dispersal begins in the sixth century BC with the destruction of the First Temple of Jerusalem…By the fourth century BC there were more Jews outside rather than inside the region of Jerusalem” (Ages 1973). While the term was used to describe Jewish movement out of Palestine, African scholars in the 1960s applied the term to the mass movement of Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Bauman 2000) and has since been used to describe any movement (usually forced) of peoples from their land of origin. To summarize, the classical form of diaspora is based upon the Jewish
experience of forced movement, exile, and the loss or inability to return to one’s land of origin.

Theorists use diaspora as a descriptive tool (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997) as well as a process (Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1994).¹ Safran (1991) discusses the “triadic relationship” of diaspora. In this, individuals must have a collective identity as a dispersed group, a nation in which to reside within, and an affiliation to a homeland through social, economic and cultural ties.² With a “myth” to return, the classic diaspora paradigm focuses on specific groups that do not get assimilated into the host country.

Cohen (1997) builds on Safran’s (1991) model providing a list of conditions that must be met if one is to be labeled “diaspora”. This includes dispersal from a homeland, a collective trauma, a sense of community that transcends national borders and a promotion and desire for return (among other qualifications). Brah’s (2003) view of diaspora includes a historical narrative about journeys that involve settling down in another place outside of the homeland. Diaspora populations, according to Safran (1991) believe they cannot be fully accepted by their host countries thereby forming a double consciousness (Du Bois 1897) and constructing counter hegemonic identities and imagined communities.

¹ For empirical work on transnational identities and diaspora see, for example, Erikson 1992, Itzigsohn 2000, Ogelman 2003, Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002
² Safran (1991) defines diaspora as follows “expatriate minority communities” (1) that are dispersed from an original “center” to at least two “peripheral” places (2) that maintain a “memory” vision, or myth about their original homeland (3) that “believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country (4) that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; (5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and (6) of which the group’s consciousness and solidarity are “importantly defined” by this continuing relationship with the homeland (Safran 1991, 83-84).
Particularly, I find James Clifford’s understanding of diaspora to be the most productive for this project. The roots and routes discussed by Clifford (1994) focus on the process of movement and the creation of the collectivity based on the experience of motion. Diasporic communities form boundaries based upon the routes in which they have immigrated and the roots, or ancestral links to place that shape behavior. Therefore, the diasporic community is based upon the original route of dislocation and the maintenance and knowledge of the roots of the homeland. Most importantly, for Clifford, diasporic consciousness is entirely a product of cultures and histories in collision and dialogue (Clifford 1994:319). In this model, collective memory and history and the contemporary circumstances must be explored together to understand the routes and roots of belonging.

Globalization theorist Mike Featherstone (1995) argues that the displacements and imaginary homes/homelands of individuals must be taken into account to explain how individuals construct various affiliations. Arjun Appadurai furthers this work, and calls for an understanding of the “diasporic public sphere” – the people moving across national spaces using technology and cultural products to connect to original homelands (Appadurai 1996). However, Appadurai approaches this from a different angle arguing that the continued focus on the nation-state fails to take into consideration the expanded and interconnected global world. Appadurai believes we can learn more than just the roots and routes of belonging, or the creation of affiliations, these diasporic public spheres are the “new arbiters of social change” (Appadurai 1996:4) ushering in a new form of sovereignty that will replace the prominence of the nation-state.

At this historical moment, I am left unconvinced of this outcome. I argue throughout this dissertation that the nation is far from behind us. The cases I present and
the processes of creating community boundaries suggest that while these communities do have international and global implications, these identities are significant for domestic purposes and domestic agendas, and therein lies the possibility for change.

This dissertation therefore furthers our understanding of diaspora and explores the link between routes, roots, and the contemporary moment of increased mobility and global consciousness. I move diaspora theories further taking into account how contemporary social forces like globalization shape the “experience of being from one place and of another” (Clifford 1994). I see diasporas as a process and provide a theoretical model where the boundaries and identities created by the interaction between “being from one place and of another” impacts the way people live and the society in which they are living within.

Why look at homeland tourism?

Historically, social groups have always used new technologies to imagine connections across vast spaces. Benedict Anderson (1983) discussed how the modern nation really came about because of the spread of the written word. The printing press allowed for mass production of written works in regional vernaculars. Because of this, by 1600 large reading publics developed in Europe. People reading the same language were able to imagine themselves linked to the other unknown people doing the same thing, thereby creating a sense of community or bound national identity.

Imagined communities are social collectivities based upon perceived affinity rather than direct face-to-face interactions. These group identities are not based upon political power or coercion, but upon knowledge and consumption of cultural products.
Arjun Appadurai takes this idea of technological innovation and imagined communities even further discussing the economic, political and cultural changes we see occurring due to globalization. Where Anderson had the printing press, Appadurai says that mass-media technologies are the new game changers in contemporary society. For Appadurai, the spread of media to all corners of the world coupled with the ease and frequency of migration requires rethinking connection in terms of flows. Basically for Appadurai, our ability to imagine has been extended globally due to the movement of people and media. Making sense of contemporary global phenomena then requires thinking in ways that highlight movement and expanded space. Homeland tourism, I argue is one contemporary mechanism that facilitates movement and expanded frames of thinking.

The identity of the diaspora is neither fixed nor pre-given and due to contemporary circumstances and technological innovations, there are new paths and mechanisms to imagine community. The definition of a people identified by an original movement with a shared consciousness must be worked at and continually created. People claiming to have common origins (roots) and similar patterns of movement (routes) will seek out new flows of knowledge and information to continually inform and shape their collectivity.

These ancestral homelands represent the very spaces where diasporic populations would still be. Original homelands as one of the key identifiers of diasporic populations, is crucial but not static. How people return, why they return, and for what purposes requires attention.

The homeland tour is one of these new mechanisms and homeland tourism is a growing industry. Homeland tours exist for many different populations. Other examples of
this type of travel can be found in many contexts, including Europe (Danforth 1989, Delaney 1990, Lehmann 1993; and Neville 1979), Israel (Habib 2004; Mittleberg 1999; Storper-Perez and Goldberg 1994; Shapiro 2000; and Zerubavel 1995) China (Louie 2000, 2001, 2009) and Africa (Ebron 1999; Hartman 2007) among others only beginning to pique the interest of researchers.3

Homeland tours are structured touristic experiences highlighting natal relationships to the state or region being toured. Homeland tours are group travel packages that take individuals to destinations that they believe is their land of origin. They travel as a group relying on a tour guide (provided by and paid for by specific companies) to present the place as somehow related to the traveler’s heritage in a way that will provide the tourist a deeper understanding of the land being toured and the individual’s relationship to that land. There are two streams of diaspora tourists, one is made up of people who are more removed from the origin country; the second is composed of more recent emigrants (Newland and Taylor 2010). I focus on the group of tourists more removed who are not able to call on friends and relatives so they hire guides and return with diasporic tour agencies. They experience the materiality and significance of the homeland and learn their history and culture from the source. They interact with their fellow tourists, the people and culture of the homeland, and specific to diasporic returns; they learn about original movements. Tourism, first mobilized for nation-building projects, now is mobilized for diaspora building projects (Kelner 2010).

I separate out homeland tourism from other forms of cultural heritage tourism, like visits to museums or other locations of significance to signify and highlight the importance of home, and specifically homeland journeys. Other works on homecomings contain elements of rupture, surprise and experiences of disillusionment when returnees confront their “new/old place” (Casey 1993:294). But in this case, we don’t see this occurring too frequently, because these homecomings are structured, controlled, and most importantly brief.

Tourism is a perfect mechanism to understand the ways in which objects, places, and people are narrated in order to animate or realize certain versions of the world. The beginning of tourism research took place in the 1970s with Cohen (1972) and MacCannell (1973). They represented tourism as a modern variety of pilgrimage where modern subjects were so starved for authenticity they had to travel outside of their daily lives to experience authentic “Others”. In this theoretical frame, the tourist approaches tour destinations as bucolic pockets where traditional (and rural) was equated with authentic. MacCannell discusses the idea of authenticity and fantasy at play within the touristic experience. Tourists are on a quest for authenticity and therefore they attempt to look for “behind the scenes” sort of sites, where the true nature of the place can be found, yet what they find is staged authenticity (1973), created backstage spaces specifically produced for tourists.

Tourism is the largest industry in the world (World Travel and Tourism Council 2006) and there are tour experiences that suit most every need. In these cases of diasporic return one looks to the backstage spaces to see the self. Homeland tours are not extended
stays but quick jaunts and brief encounters.⁴ The mission is overtly transformative combining group leisure travel with diasporic connection. Homeland tours provide experiential knowledge concerning one’s heritage and roots. It is not simply a holiday or vacation; it is traveling with a particular group of like-minded individuals and sharing intimate moments with your peers. The experience is twofold: you tour the homeland, while at the same time participating within your diasporic community.

Homeland tourism is a very structured experience. While other research, particularly on African American slavery/heritage tourism focuses on how culture has become a commodified object (Ebron 1999) or has ultimately undermined the emancipatory project of Pan-Africanism (Hasty 2002), group tour packages make homelands more accessible, less foreign and easier to maneuver. As Rose explains:

It’s like God said, this is the time I have given you the financial means I have given you the connection to go so that you are not just out there wandering on your own, there will be some consistency to the trip. The time is just right, it is the right time to go, we may never get this opportunity to go again. Everything just seems in place. Rose

The ease of travel and the price of travel today allow Rose to begin to explore the meaning of her identity in a more transnational and global framework. While Paula Ebron highlights the commodified nature of the homeland return, and Saidiya Hartman (2007) laments about problems and inability of actually discovering these emotional connections, Rose rejoices and finds comfort in the consistency and stability of structured international tourism. Karen, a participant on my homeland tour to China and mother of adopted daughter Allie, also discussed the anxiety of uprooting and a fear of “wandering on your own” in a foreign land:

⁴ Although some participants do return to the homeland for more extended visits, and some return frequently on homeland tours, this is rare and not covered by this study.
I feared that I had made a terrible mistake bringing my children halfway around the world on my own. Everything worked out by the first morning, and I felt a huge sense of accomplishment when we made it back to the U.S. Karen

As Karen and Rose’s comment suggest the structured group tour provides stability and organization that facilitate explorations of roots. Karen initially worried at her choice to travel internationally with her children, but things worked out specifically due to the relative ease of group tour packages. Homelands are important now because they are financially within reach and homelands themselves are easily accessed and organized to suit Western routines and Western comforts. Therefore, tourism provides a contemporary option specifically suited to elucidate emerging concepts and possibilities of identity in the age globalization and consumerism.

This dissertation therefore examines the changing nature of the diasporic public sphere—the people who are moving across and between national spaces, people who imagine themselves as a collectivity dispersed from their lands of origin but maintain a memory, vision, or myth about these original homelands and use technology and cultural products (like homeland tourism) to connect in different ways. Yet the desire to connect to a homeland, or a natural and primordial place of belonging and identity, I argue, is sought after because of and due to contemporary desires and interests.

The tourists I engaged with expressed feelings of liminality and dislocation, believing to be not fully accepted where they reside due to the qualities that mark them as somehow connected to these homelands. Because of this, I argue, homeland tourists are on a quest for meaning (Geertz 1973), where tourists search for the essential aspects of identity and a feeling of communitas in homeland spaces. As Shaul Kelner states, homeland tours “foster a sense of shared belonging in a common political community that
is simultaneously territorialized and deterritorialized, rooted and uprooted” (Kelner 2010:xvi). In the next section, I present my methodology, using an extended case model to connect these three cases in order to generate new theories of group belonging that can speak to our contemporary moment.
Chapter Three: Homeland Tourism: A Single Case of Routes and Roots

In this section I discuss my cases and the method I used to select these specific examples of homeland tourism and American diasporas. I employed an extended case model approach when selecting the cases in this dissertation in order to generate theories about home, belonging and rootedness. The three cases and homeland tours I focus on are: Jewish American college-aged participants of Birthright Israel, African American’s traveling to Ghana through Sankofa Travel, and a new emerging case of adopted Chinese children and their American families traveling with Panda Tours.¹

I begin with Israel since it has the largest historical reach for the imagined. The Jewish diaspora envisions connecting to a biblical homeland, solidifying longing through religious rituals. “Next year in Jerusalem” is spoken at the close of every Passover celebration. Yet, as I will demonstrate throughout this work, present day connections remain surprisingly secular and covertly political. While contemporary Jewish engagements like Birthright, begin with biblical claims to land, they adapt to the present day reality of Jewish secularism and contemporary circumstances.

I then turn my attention to the African diaspora and the longings of rootedness caused by forced separation and legacies of racialized trauma. Historically, Africa has been crucial as a site of active and symbolic black political mobilization and imagined

¹ The names of the tour agencies and any individuals in this dissertation are fictitious in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants and the businesses. Sites, locations and memorials have not been changed due to their specific importance in the history presented in this dissertation. However, Birthright Israel is a well institutionalized consortium of multiple donors and organizations combining private philanthropists through the Birthright Israel Foundation; the people of Israel through the Government of Israel; and Jewish communities around the world through United Jewish Communities (UJC), Karen Hayesod and the Jewish Agency for Israel. Birthright Israel is mentioned by name since it organizes/funds all the Jewish programs that offer free ten-day Israel homeland tours.
cultural longings for connection. African symbols like “Sankofa” come to represent the power of homeland discoveries and the empowering possibilities when the diaspora takes an active role and “goes back and takes” what has been severed and lost. While global racial hierarchies are at play in the collective imaginings of a contemporary African homeland, the histories of American racialization shape the significance of the homeland and the shape of these narratives of longing.

The final case is contemporary in its history, and therefore I end with transnational Chinese adoption. While Asian immigration to the United States is muddied with racism and policies of exclusion, transnational adoption involves different global factors and cultural logics. Understandings of homeland for Chinese adoptees represent a truly constructed sense of primordial identity, since white parents are the actors defining the meaning of a Chinese homeland. Families (parents) construct “clean break” (Duncan 1993) narratives in order to embed the adopted child within their new family and new culture and justify the movement of these children to their new Western homes. Yet there are many factors that complicate this construction since primordial identity is thought to define one’s very essence.

The Extended Case Model: Homeland Tourism as a single case
Initially, I traveled on Birthright as a participant, trying to discover my own identity and community as a Puerto Rican Jewish girl who straddles yet does not fit perfectly within her identity categories. Because of this I am interested in how identity and belonging are discussed and the processes by which people without direct connections to these lands of perceived origin discover and then explain these connections. The three cases in this dissertation therefore were chosen for their hypothesis generating possibilities (Small 2009)
to understand the process and meanings of identity when “what cannot be ‘remembered’
must be narrated” (Anderson 1991:204).

Instead of choosing my cases for their generalizability, I see each case as providing
an increasingly accurate understanding of the question at hand, using an extended case
model approach for determining what cases to focus on and how many participants to
interview. “Each case is not representative, they yield a set of findings and a set of
questions that informs the next case. The objective is saturation” (Small 2009:25). In a case
model then, the number of units is unknown until the study is completed.

This extended case method is most often associated with Burawoy (1998, Burawoy
et. al., 1991). In this interpretive method, Burawoy argues that the case reveals the
essential nature of the society at large. I see these three different and sometimes contrasting
examples of homeland tourism as a single extended case, where I am interested in
generating hypothesis and theories about belonging and identity. Because, “a well
executed single-case study can justifiably state that a particular process, phenomenon,
mechanism, tendency, type, relationship, dynamic, or practice exists (Glaser and Strauss
1967; Lofland and Lofland 1995). This, in fact, remains one of the advantages of
ethnographic work, the possibility of truly emergent knowledge” (in Small 2009).

The importance of this single case method therefore lies in what it tells us about
society as a whole rather than about the population of similar cases (Burawoy et. al.
1991:281). Whereas Burawoy believes the key to the method is explaining local conditions
in light of external forces, I am more interested in the ability to uncover processes.
Therefore I follow Mitchel (1983) and Lamont and White (2009)² and have chosen my

cases deliberately in order to uncover the mechanisms and trace the processes I am interested in. Therefore I ask the reader to judge the inferences I make concerning the social world on the validity of the analysis rather than the representativeness of the events (1983:190).

I focus on these cases because they all see themselves as American outsiders, specifically constructed as populations on the fringes due to very interesting histories of trauma and dispersion. Each case illuminates a different aspect of the larger idea of belonging and community for domestic populations of American “others”. I see each case as unique yet connected together as one extended case useful specifically for developing and extending social theories (van Velsel 1978).

I also use a comparative approach to examine how culture is deployed, highlighting similarity and difference across and within each case. I focus on three different populations and use data drawn from participant observation of three different homeland tours, in-depth interviews from participants of homeland tours, participant created content like photos, poetry and journals, and content and comments by these social groups found in the virtual spaces of the internet.

Each case has a different history of trauma and dislocation, with different organizers. They also vary in the number of participants. But what brings them together in the face of this difference is the organizing principle of otherness, international homelands, and a desire for discovery. Also, while different players construct these homeland tours, they remain surprisingly similar in structure and general purpose.

Below, I present the historical background of these three cases. Birthright Israel is a very structured and organized homeland tour organization, yet their message is amorphous
since no single organization controls its direction. Sankofa Tours represents a more “bottom up” sort of tour organization, where the tours began because of diasporan demand and the receiving touristic countries then accommodated. Adoption tourism to China is an interesting addition to this study because of a few reasons. The dispersal that is confronted is more modern, these original movements occurred mainly in the 1990s. It also involves one extra layer of distance since parents mediate and determine Chinese identity, and the family as a unit engages with the nation toured. I add China to my comparison to add more depth to our understanding of how transnational identities are formed and for what purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Moment of Dispersal/Separation</th>
<th>Agents/Organizers</th>
<th>Size of organization/Size of tour group</th>
<th>Who Travels Together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birthright Israel</td>
<td>Biblical Dispersion</td>
<td>State-Sponsored/Privately Funded by Jewish philanthropists</td>
<td>Large, highly organized recruitment. Over 22,000 individuals from 52 different countries each year.(^3)</td>
<td>Individuals. Friends, Hillel Groups, regional associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sankofa Tours Ghana</td>
<td>Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade</td>
<td>Private Tour Agencies create tours based around the activities created by the Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations</td>
<td>Moderately sized, must discover on one’s own. 10,000 African American visitors each year (Zachary 2001)</td>
<td>Individuals, Friends, Families and Church or other groups (young alumni, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panda Tours Chinese Adoption</td>
<td>Transnational Adoption</td>
<td>Private Tour agencies</td>
<td>Small, linked to adoption community</td>
<td>Family, Original Adoption groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 1: Breakdown of cases
Being Jewish and Birthright Israel

The story of Israel and the Jewish diaspora has been important to the construction of the group from the time of the destruction of the Second Temple until the establishment of the state in 1948 (Segal 1987). Jewish holidays, rituals and customs are based upon the sacred stories of dispersal and remembrance of the Land of Israel. For example, the Jewish holiday of Passover ends with the prayer “L’shanah haba’ah b’Yerushalayim”, or “next year in Jerusalem”. For Jews, Israel has been a metaphorical place that meets the spiritual needs of its people, only in recent history have we seen the nation of Israel as an actuality.

With the end of World War II and the consequences of the Holocaust witnessed by the world, a Jewish state emerged as a response to global persecution. The political movement known as Zionism supported the creation of a Jewish nation. According to Theodor Herzl, the answer to worldwide anti-Semitism was the creation of a Jewish state. Pressing the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) the western region of Palestine was partitioned into the secular Jewish nation of Israel. Zionism used biblical connections to land and the persecution of Jews to defend and petition for a Jewish nation thereby solidifying Israel in the imaginary of global Jewry as a biblical reference and a present day Jewish nation.

Through the 1950s, Jews in the diaspora now needed to redefine their community based upon the new global order. As American culture became more homogenized and Jewish Americans assimilated, concern was raised over the continuation of the new nation of Israel and the diaspora’s involvement in its existence. A new generation of American Jews were concerned with Jewish identity in the United States and Jewish American values and culture (Shapiro 2006). One technique used to re-establish solidarity for Jews in the United States involved highlighting the importance of travel to the new secular Jewish
nation. While it was always customary to imagine Israel in one’s prayers, travel to Israel became more institutionalized for observant Jews. Jewish youth usually traveled to Israel as a gift for their Bar or Bat-Mitzvah, a coming of age ceremony, relating their introduction into adulthood with the importance of the land of Israel. Ritual travel to Israel has been shown to be an important element of Jewish education, creating community and fostering lifetime involvement in Jewish causes (Chazan 1994; Mittelberg 1999). The experiential model of learning through travel had a strong impact on attitudes and behaviors concerning community, values and identity and has shown to cultivate support for Israel (Chazan 1997). The experiential model of homeland tourism to Israel influences attachment to the global imagined community. “Beginning in 1948, and particularly after the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel trips have become a promising resource of world Jewry to educate and affect the Jewishness of young and old alike” (Saxe and Chazan 2008:7).

However, past travelers were already engaged and connected to Israel and involved in local Jewish communities. If one had not traveled to Israel by early adulthood, and one’s family did not stress Israel’s importance it was unlikely to be seen as an important part of their identity. Many unaffiliated, Conservative and Reform Jews did not participate in travel to Israel (Saxe and Chazan 2008; Saxe, Kadushin, Kelner et. al. 2002), and were becoming lost. Assimilation and intermarriage were seen as the biggest problems affected unaffiliated Jews who lacked the necessary structures and networks to engage in a Jewish community. Coupled with the lack of travel to Israel, these Jews did not have the cultural repertoires for engagement and continual involvement in Jewish communities. Beginning in the 1970s, with identity politics shaping group membership and civic engagement, the issue of the Americanization of Jews who were losing their distinct Jewish
attachments and identification required action (Phillips, Lengyel and Saxe 2002). The Jewish community in the diaspora needed to be reorganized to include the secular Jew, who might only have one Jewish parent and a limited knowledge of Jewish religion, history and rituals.

Birthright participants therefore exhibit varied levels of religious and cultural knowledge, viewing American Jewish identity more in line with symbolic ethnic affiliation than religious practices and piety. Yet, Israel already plays a very important role for the American secular Jew. Hebrew school attendance and participation in religious holidays set up Israel as an important aspect of Jewish identity. Where Israel previously existed in the heart and mind, representing a perfect and transcendental form of peace, the Birthright generation has always known a literal nation of Israel and has learned about its importance through family and community.

Birthright Israel was developed to bridge differing levels of Jewish participation, religiosity, community support and size. Created by Edgar Steinhardt and Michael Bronfman to “plug the dam of assimilation” (Wohlgelernter 2000) seen occurring in the diaspora, this ten-day complimentary tour for mostly “fallen” young adults was created to present Israel as every Jewish person’s birthright, not just the land and responsibility of the pious. “Most importantly the program was created to help participants develop and strengthen their Jewish identities by acknowledging their past and giving them a framework to think about being part of the Jewish people” (Saxe and Chazan 2008:31). Birthright is a carefully crafted travel experience with clearly articulated ideas about what it means to be Jewish and the importance of Israel for world Jewry. Birthright Israel provides a hands-on educational experience displacing previous formal presentations with a more tactile and
approachable homeland. A change in approach from mass mobilization to direct engagement (Sasson 2010) that begins with the assumption that Israel is not a state of mind, but a Jewish nation requiring one’s individual support if it is to remain a sanctuary and homeland for all Jews worldwide.

Birthright Israel was inaugurated in 2000 at the general assembly meeting of the council of Jewish Federations and financed by the Israeli government, private donors and the Council of Jewish Federations. The goal of Birthright is simple; provide a gift, a free ten-day experience for Jews ages fifteen to twenty-six in order to jump start their journey of lifelong engagement with Judaism and the Jewish community. Since most Jews in the diaspora live in the United States, the program focuses on a mostly American demographic who might not have been “drawn into the existing Jewish frameworks” (Post 1999). While there is a North American focus, Birthright is a global program providing the same gift of inheritance to a global Jewish audience.4

Taglit Birthright sponsors trips organized by many different agencies. These sponsored providers tailor tours for participants around shared activities, life stages, and regional locations. All Taglit-Birthright homeland tours involve Israeli tour guides, accommodations in three and four star hotels, uniform safety and security procedures, and visits to the Old City of Jerusalem, the Western Wall, the Dead Sea, and Masada.5 The brief ten-day experience must include these specific aspects that alone can occupy the entirety of the journey. Yet each tour operator attempts to distinguish themselves from other

4 While Birthright is global, I focus on the American diaspora. While I believe the experience of dispersal creates similarities in identity and community (Gilroy 1993), my focus on the American experience allows closer examination of the intersections between commodification of identity and American values.
providers using specific activities, levels of religiosity, bound regional identities, and similar age brackets to organize tour groups.

Some trips cater to those interested in the outdoors, highlighting hiking and camping. Other Birthright trips cater to the needs of a religious Jewish population interested in perhaps daily prayer and religious engagement. Other trips are organized around fitness, age, and educational level. Some trips even market themselves as progressively oriented, trying to attract a civically engaged or possibly future civically engaged American Jew.

The different tour providers, no matter how they try to differentiate themselves stress similar concepts of connection to Israel, knowing one’s roots, and an insistence on the importance of creating a relaxed atmosphere for discovering the meaning of Jewish identity. The marketing techniques of each provider demonstrate how Birthright participants are already primed for behaving as a community while on tour.

Israel trips are organized into bus groups that include forty participants and five to ten Israelis. Israelis serve as tour guides, trip overseers, peers and soldiers accompanying their international kin while they explore their role in belonging to world Jewry. The founders and financial backers hope to encourage a connection between Israel and Jews living in the diaspora by focusing on Jewish values that they might be familiar with but not have seen on such a large scale. For example, Birthright highlights the holiday of Shabbat.

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6 A Progressive Approach, The Kesher program offers a unique opportunity to experience Israel through a progressive lens. Learn about the challenges of pluralism in Israel, connect with the leaders who embody the spirit of contemporary Zionism, and give something back on a meaningful service project. URJ Kesher Israel. URJ Kesher Israel. Yet this progressive approach still presents Zionism as outside the realm of debate and discussion, pluralism is equated with progressive politics, but the agenda of Zionism is a spirit of a people, something beyond approach. (Accessed February 15, 2010. http://www.birthrightisrael.com/site/PageServer?pagename=trip_to_reform_main
While Israel is secular, witnessing an entire nation celebrating this religious event presents Jewish customs as common and widespread.

In 2005 I traveled to Israel on a Birthright tour through a university Hillel organization as a regular participant interested in discovering a little bit more about my heritage. The group included two different Hillel groups from two different universities, one in the Northeast the other in the Midwest. In total, roughly forty Jewish college-aged participants and two older and more jaded sociology graduate students traveled together for two weeks in the beginning of January. Many other tour groups traveled alongside ours, and I was actually able to re-connect with a college friend who I hadn’t seen in years. He was also traveling on Birthright, but his tour was created through regional connections and not organized through any campus Jewish groups. Many of the interviews come from these two tours.

Birthright presents Israel as a diverse nation, an exemplar of the pluralism and possibilities of Judaism, while still presenting Judaism as possessing distinct community specific values and rituals. This representation allows those who might not see themselves as traditional or exemplar models of Jewish living to feel a connection to a foreign land and a similarity with those speaking a different language.

Birthright Israel exposes participants to specifically chosen sites representing key narratives of Jewish diasporic identity. Every Birthright tour visits one memorial or attraction dedicated to the Holocaust, providing contextual and historical examples of the persecution of Jews. Other areas stressed by tour providers include sites relating to the political institutions of the state, and sites relating to the history of Zionism. Tour guides and Birthright Israel’s organization strongly state that they are not attempting to
indoctrinate participants into any political agenda. But the placement of Israel as an important part of Jewish identity more than a symbolic holy land, I argue accomplishes something greater.

Participants see old and new, the devout and the secular simultaneously existing in the land of Israel. They gaze upon Holocaust memorials and museums, contemporary Jewish life and Zionist and biblical Jewish history constructing narratives that connect these historical junctures to their own participation in the Jewish community. The tour is multivocal, and the participant can see themselves within the constellation of Jewish possibilities. Individuals are encouraged to ask; “how does this relate to me?” Birthright Israel’s structure challenges each participant to relate the activities and locations to their lived experiences, shaping the personal journey of the individual and therefore the trajectory of the group.

The ideas representing core Jewish values for Birthright are a history of trauma, the need for support and connection of world Jewry, and the presentation of Israel as a modern secular state. Scheduled discussions are included in the itinerary fostering the active practice of meaning making. Therefore this trip is an exercise in becoming/being Jewish. The Birthright trip attempts to discredit the notion that Judaism is accessible only to those who have mastered Jewish texts and religious knowledge and that Israel is a nation requiring unquestioned global Jewish allegiance and support. You might disagree with political decisions or directions, but imagined birthrights expect and demand sentiments of allegiance.

The tendency for young adult Jews to leave Judaism is not necessarily about Judaism, but the naturally occurring process endemic to this age group (Cherry, DeBerg
and Porterfield 2001). Birthright Israel attempts to alter this path, supplying the necessary tools for the individual specific to this moment in the life course. While the concern over Jewish-American identity is not new (Rawidowicz 1987), directing resources towards the unaffiliated was seen as risky. Yet by the end of the summer of 2007, more than 160,000 young Jews from North America and around the world went on Birthright (Saxe 2008).

“Birthright Israel seemed to “work” because it resonates with deep-seated American Jewish conceptions about what being Jewish means and Israel’s place in this constellation of values. This encounter with the mythic Israel of American Jewish dreams was essential to the ultimate power of the Birthright Israel experience” (Kelner et al. 2000: iv). From my interviews and previous research (Shadish, Cook and Campbell 2002; Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman 2004; Bard 2004; Sales and Saxe 2006), Birthright accomplishes this task. Birthright alumni may not engage politically or alter their daily life, but it does have lasting effects on the imagined community. The 2002 and 2004 reports on Birthright conducted by the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen center for Jewish Life concluded that “the trip has little effect on ethical behavior, religious behavior, or participation in organized Jewish life” (Saxe and Chazan 2008). However, with regard to campus involvement, the 2006 report found that Birthright increased involvement in on-campus Jewish activities. Therefore, while Birthright does not affect some behavior like increased levels of political activism or religious attendance, it does create a deepening attachment to Israel and commitment to Jewish family (Saxe, et. al. 2009).

African Americans and Heritage Tourism

If diasporic identity is created through journeys of routes both literal and symbolic, tourism for other groups can also provide a contemporary option specifically suited to
elucidate emerging concepts and possibilities. A growing body of literature (Mintz and Price 1976; Thompson 1983; Ndibe 1993; Lake 1995; Ebron 1998, 2000; Hasty 2002; Hartman 2007) suggests a mounting interest in the ancestral land of Africa as a way of organizing and defining the African American community. Diasporas, by definition are concerned with original dispersal, and in this case, the African diaspora utilizes the literal movement of slave ships as the starting point for developing a united consciousness (Gilroy 1993) among black populations of African descent and to connect back to África.7 As Paula Ebron states: “the Middle Passage also creates the point of origin for African American history as a collective project of memory, trauma, and healing. It serves as a reminder of the physical and psychic separation from “home”” (2002:201).

While in earlier periods, African Americans linked colonialism in Ghana to their struggle for civil rights, today the slave trade is central to many African Americans’ construction of their connection to Ghana (Holsey 2008). Specifically, the slave trade has contributed to a narrative shift from black Americans being victims of slavery to blacks as noble survivors of their own freedom (Clarke 2004). African Americans are re-examining slavery, reflecting upon it in multiple cultural forms and remembering it through rituals and ceremonies (Jones 1995:1), and traveling to Africa on homeland/heritage tours.

West Africa and Ghana in particular contain many locations where possible ancestors may have begun their forced journey to the New World and in recent years Ghana has become an economically promising West African nation (Carrington 1994),

7 “I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship – a living, microcultural, micropolitical system in motion – is especially important...Ships immediately focus attention on the Middle Passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland” (Gilroy 1993:4).
attracting the most diaspora repatriates (Jenkins 1975:152; Dunbar 1968) and diasporic tourists. According to estimates, 10,000 African Americans visit Ghana each year (Zachary 2001).

Homeland travel is seen as a continuity of the Pan-African movement (Ebron 2002). The Pan-African movement emerged in the late 19th century through the work of black churches and colleges associated with American thinkers like Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois (Drake 1982). “Pan-Africanism is grounded in the belief that all African peoples, no matter where we may be born, are one and belong to the African nation.” More than just a “back to Africa” movement, Pan-Africanism focused on the political possibilities of bridging African intellectuals in the diaspora with the Continent for development and empowerment. Therefore homeland tourism is seen as a new unifying technique that uses consumption and culture to construct a shared and bound community.

Ghana specifically is working to persuade the descendants of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to “think of Africa as their homeland – to visit, invest, send their children to be educated and even retire here” (Polgreen 2005). Besides from Pan-African engagement, Ghana claims to be the “gateway to the Homeland,” providing more information around the dispersal and movement of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Forty castles and lodges used

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8 Earlier forced repatriation to Africa existed during the 18th and 19th centuries (Bittle 1964; Blyden 1976; Shick 1980; Harris 1982). This forced repatriation also framed return as redemptive, however this return to the “motherland” was conceived by European Americans actively and did not represent the concerns or desires of the people who it transported (Martin 1983; Uya 1971; Redkey 1969).

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for the slave trade are located in Ghana with three sites designated by UNESCO as World Heritage sites. Even though Ghana only accounts for 13 percent of the slave trade (Richardson 1989:13), it has been able to market itself as the primary imagined homeland for African Americans. The Ministry of Tourism specifically states their primary function is to create a “sustainable relationship with the diaspora for resource mobilization and investments”. This focus shapes understanding concerning the aspects of Ghanaian history and culture that are worthy of preservation and included in tourism agendas.

Inspired by Alex Haley’s Roots (1976), in 1998 Ghana began capitalizing on the increased interest and financial success of the diaspora and began organizing tourism activities, events and constructing memorials designed to attract African Americans and Afro-Caribbean tourists, these events and programs were spearheaded by the aptly named Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations. Yearly festivals, events and commemorative monuments mark just a few of the programs the Ministry of Tourism has embarked upon (Hasty 2002). Targeting the interested diasporan, Ghana’s tourism agenda presents Pan-Africanism as a personal project, where the African American tourist can experience the global African community and confront the history of slavery.

Officials at the Ministry of Tourism were quick to assert that Ghanaians enthusiastically welcomed diasporan visitors as returning brothers and sisters. A.S. Bebkoe, chair of the Emancipation Day Planning Committee proclaimed: “we are taking them as

12 From The Ghana Joseph Project, Ghana Tourism Website; ‘Ghana has some 40 slave lodges, slave forts and slave castles still in place. The condition of these range from well preserved through deteriorating to mere remnants. These are hallowed memorials of an agonized past. They must be preserved for posterity and used to keep alive the memory of the evil times.’ www.ghanatourism.gov.gh/main/advertdetail accessed 8/28/07
our own family members coming back home” (in Hasty 2002). This new revival of the Pan-African movement focused on the needs of Ghana as a nation, Africa as a collective, and the needs and desires of the rising middle class African Americans in search of roots.

However, as Hasty states, “in the emphasis on mythic redemption, the political agenda of contemporary Pan-Africanism necessarily overlooks and even dismisses the interplay of ideological, historical, and regional forces that constitute postcolonial politics in Ghana” (Hasty 2002:58). And as Bayo Holsey observed, these programs sometimes fail to attract local Ghanaians. 13 What complicates this connection is the traumatic history of movement that haunts and shapes the African American interest in Africa and the different and vastly unequal contemporary economic conditions of these two populations.

Yet, for the homeland tourist, despite these issues these tours still “work” much like Birthright because diasporan visitors during Emancipation Day interact with an African representation that caters to their specific needs. They witness and experience a pre-modern Africa, the Pan-African movement as understood by the tour organizers and the government, and the slave trade simultaneously.

Memorials and monuments of the slave trade are one of the main focal points for homeland tours in Ghana. Elmina Castle, where slaves were held before being transported to ships represents one of the largest and iconic symbols and memorials of the African slave trade. Sites of trauma are visited and participants are encouraged to see themselves within the walls feeling the materiality and weight of history.

13 In Routes of Remembrance (2008), Holsey shows how sparse turnouts in 1998 and 1999 demonstrated that for the Ghanaians, history did not begin with slavery. Most Ghanaians are not particularly concerned with slavery and focus on the long history of the colonial presence. Heritage travel would need to expand attracting local participants as members of the Pan-African family.
Tourists participate in Panafest, a cultural event dedicated to bridging the diaspora with the African continent. Panafest stands for Pan-African Historical Theater Festival and takes place in Elmina and Cape Coast; where the two main slave castles are located. In addition to Panafest, in 2007 coinciding with Ghana’s 50th anniversary of independence, the Ministry of Tourism inaugurated the Joseph Project. The Joseph Project is a series of activities, similar to Emancipation Day and Panafest focusing on Pan African development specifically geared towards the diaspora.

For this project, I chose to travel to Africa with a tour group during this particularly monumental year when the Joseph Project would be inaugurated. “The Ghana Government intends to use the year 2007, the 50th Anniversary of the country’s independence, to celebrate African excellence and to inaugurate “The Joseph Project”. Ghana will use the year to bring together, more closely, people in Ghana and brothers and sisters in the Diaspora and establish herself as the true gateway to the Homeland for Africans in the Diaspora.”

I traveled with Sankofa travel, a tour agency based in the capital city of Accra. Sankofa has been providing tour services for over a decade. As a full service tour agency they offer a wide array of options for travel to West Africa, many of their tour experiences are organized around Ministry of Tourism sanctioned celebrations focusing on the desires of the diaspora. Owned and operated by an American now living in Ghana with her Ghanaian husband, Sankofa travel regularly organizes trips around the events of Emancipation Day, Panafest and in this year, the Joseph Project. Sankofa tours details

14 http://www.thejosephproject.com/
Panafest as “living heritage” and an opportunity to reestablish ties to Africa.\textsuperscript{15} As one tour brochure stated; “as Panafest has grown in its popularity, it continues to attract record numbers of African Americans who combine attendance at the festivities with their thirst for knowledge about their heritage”.\textsuperscript{16}

Sankofa tours and homeland tourism to Ghana is not as institutionalized and standardized as Birthright. Sankofa relies on American trip organizers to plan and recruit participants for group tours. Barbara Jones, the coordinator of my Sankofa homeland tour, organizes tours to Africa every two years, interest permitting. She uses her social networks to finance her ritual return journeys, calling on friends and family to spread the word and relying on connections through employment and her church. The other tour groups, representing two young alumni groups, a family reunion and church group, and retired educators and social workers, traveling alongside our tour also represented a bound and interested entity before approaching Sankofa for the particulars of travel. All interview participants regarding homeland tours to Ghana were travelers on a Sankofa tour during in 2007 for the Joseph project. While Birthright tries to signal similarity among participants, the preexisting social networks inside the African American community influence tour participation and tour group composition.

In 2007 Sankofa organized trips for over 600 participants for the inauguration of the Joseph Project. These tours involved worship services and guided tours of slave castles and memorial services and vigils. Consistent with Bruner’s work the homeland tourists in this dissertation represent a well-educated middle class segment of the African American

\textsuperscript{15} Panafest was originally launched in 1991, yet after 1993 took a three-year hiatus and returned in 1997 by consolidating venues. In 2001 Panafest included the activities in Emancipation Day.

population, “consisting mainly of those with the money and leisure time to make the long and expensive journey” (Bruner 1996:290).

While some travelers choose to live in Ghana, the experience, similar to Israel’s Birthright, is not about settlement, but about pilgrimage. Participants anticipate returning changed thereby altering the future links between diaspora and homeland. Homeland tourism links the political movement of Pan-Africanism with American consumerist and experiential practices fostering new relationships (however tenuous and amorphous) between the Black Atlantic, and the continent of Africa.

Previous research on African American slavery/heritage tourism focuses on how culture has become a commodified object (Ebron 1998) or has ultimately undermined the emancipatory project of Pan-Africanism (Hasty 2002). Homeland journeys have been shown to expose the problematic nature of claiming a lost and severed heritage (Hartman 2007). In her book, Lose your Mother, Saidiya Hartman discusses how she was searching for moments of inclusion and demonstrations of belonging while in Ghana. Yet to Ghanaians she is an obruni – a stranger, a powerful Western traveler harping on an insignificant and brief historical moment in Ghana’s extended history of exploitation, an unimportant historical blip compared to contemporary development issues and the everyday lived experiences of Ghanaians.

But homeland tourism introduces diasporic travelers to an accessible approachable Africa. Homeland tours are structured and predictable. By their very nature, they dictate and design encounters based upon the desires of the tour group. Interactions that would expose contentious division like those experienced by Hartman are managed through rigid
itineraries, packed days full of activities, and homeland/tourist interactions geared towards diasporic connection.  

**Chinese Adoption and Chinese Homeland Tourism**

The circumstances of migration for transnational adoptees complicate the construction of Asian American identity and homeland returns for adoptive families. “As [the child and her new parents] move away from the Great Wall, [they] carry with them not just the meanings of that moment of exchange, but all the conditions that made it possible” (Dorow 2006:64). Therefore Chinese adoptees and their families are simultaneously exploring and discovering the meanings of Asian/Asian American identities and the conditions and circumstances of the movement of transnational adoption.

Cultural portrayals of Asian Americans depict this bound group as foreigners maintaining deep and engrained ties to Asia (Dirlik 1999). Such notions of identity place Chinese Americans in difficult positions because they are involuntarily tied to their “places of origin in China through exclusion from U.S. cultural citizenship” and simultaneously “excluded from “authentic” Chinese identities because of their cultural, physical, and temporal distance from their ancestral homes” (Louie 2001:350). Asian Americans are both assimilated and unassimilatable, the model minority and the enemy within (Lee 1999). Previous work on Chinese migration discuss how specific forms of migration and the American experience have homogenized Asian Americans while overlooking the important heterogeneities within the Asian American community (Lowe 1991; McKeown 1993).

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17 In this article, I focus on the homeland tourist, not the homeland repatriate. The African American repatriate has a very different experience with identity and connection to Ghana. For some work on the repatriate experience, see Lake (1995) or Hasty (2002).
1998; Glick Schiller 1999; Chen 2000; Louie 2002).

Therefore, Pan-Asian-American identity developed focusing less on roots and origins, and more on the shared struggles of Asians as minorities within the U.S. (Louie 2002).

But Chinese adoptees typically are not raised in Chinese-American settings. For the transnational Chinese adoptee, her connection to the “original” culture is tenuous at best, yet her appearance clearly marks her as other. As Andrea Louie has noted in her work with adoptive families: “these children are viewed as both victims of their circumstances and as highly redeemable and flexible subjects who can reach their full potential with proper parenting” (Louie 2009:296).

With an increase in international adoption, especially from China, a new generation of Chinese-Americans and their adoptive families navigate cultural meanings around identity, ethnicity, race and family. Transracial adoption of children from China is becoming more socially acceptable. Chinese adoption constitutes the largest transnational movement of adopted children. Between 1971 and 2001, U.S. citizens adopted 265,677 children from other countries, and more than one-quarter of the children adopted internationally by the United States, are Chinese. Parents of adopted foreign-born children are generally white, in their late thirties to early forties, college educated, and have high levels of income (Register 1991). Adopting from China is not a quick or

18 This homogenization has also allowed for a political movement to grow among the Asian community who use common regional origins to represent political interests in the post 1960s era of identity politics. This movement focused on the broad Asian influence on American history (Wong and Chan 1998) and the lived experiences of discrimination that affected the larger community constructing a more homogenous expansion of the term Asian-American (Espiritu 1992; Dirlik 1996; Kibria 2002).

19 http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/FactOverview/international.html#3, Since 1985, there has been a total of 67,842 adoptions from China to the US.
http://www.fwcc.org/statistics.html revised on 9/26/08 accessed may 27 2009
inexpensive way to create a family; adoption requires around $20,000 and one year of paperwork and processing (Dorow 2006).

With Chinese adoptees, concerns are raised about the role of culture, heritage, race and ethnicity (Register 1991; Barholet 1993; Tessler, Gamache and Liu 1999; Rojewski and Rojewski 2001). To understand Chinese adoption, parents and adoption specialists look to other eras and areas of international adoption, like South Korean adoptees. From the late 1950s through the 1970s, South Korea was the most significant and longstanding location for international adoption (Kane 1993, Bergquist et. al. 2007). Koreans adopted in the United States, historically were silenced and parental approaches limited homeland nostalgia and suppressed even the mentioning of racial differences (Bergquist, Vonk, Kim & Feit 2007). Early adoptees were advised to minimize their children’s difference and to raise them as Americans. For these parents, race, ethnicity and culture were mainly ignored in the adoption process and no communities existed to provide support like they do today.

While previous generations of international adoptees were not socialized into their birth culture, adoptive parents today believe in offering opportunities for Chinese socialization (Tessler, Gamache and Liu 1999). Chinese adopted children access their natal heritage through parental mediation. As writer and adoptive mother Cheri Register states; “we are a internationally adoptive family. This is the heritage that we truly have “given”

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21 “We base this on years of research and experience with multi-racial adoptions in American and emerging research/documentation on the part of the Korean adoptive community about their experiences growing up being "adopted from Asia. "Returning to China with your Adopted Chinese Child" Dr. Jane Liedtke http://www.fccncalif.org/HomelandTravel/returninghandout.pdf
our children. Filling it out and giving it meaning is a shared family endeavor, which we
must undertake with deliberate care and sensitivity” (1991:182). Usually families explore
what it means to be Chinese through the international adoption community. Organizations
have formed in order to connect families and provide structured experiences relating to
China and Chinese heritage, rarely mentioning or engaging with Asian-American histories
and subjectivities.²²

Parents participate in Chinese heritage camp, attend activities sponsored by
Families with Children from China (FCC), eat at Chinese restaurants, watch films and
television shows about China, and celebrate Chinese New Year. Within the clinical
psychology literature there is controversy and debate over the implications of this tactic
and recent publications have addressed the loss of heritage and the feelings of haunting by
unknown biological kinship (Hurdis 2007, etc.).²³ Critics argue that these are essentialized

²² Families with Children from China is composed of a network of not-for-profit, volunteer
parent-support groups located throughout the United States, Canada, and the United
Kingdom. FCC chapters vary in their structure, from formal organizations guided with by-
laws and a board of directors to loose-knit groups that provide support and opportunities
for interaction. The organization promotes three goals: (1) to support families who have
adopted a child from China through post adoption and Chinese cultural programs, (2) to
enhance and support families waiting to adopt a child from China and (3) to advocate for
and support children remaining in Chinese orphanages. Examples of the types of activities
offered by various FCC chapters include newsletters, family picnics and potluck suppers,
celebrations of Chinese festivals and holidays, pre-adoption information meetings, Chinese
language and culture classes for children, and parent speakers (FCC 1999). Our Chinese
Daughters Foundation was founded by Dr. Jane Liedtke, herself an adoptive mother of a
daughter from China, in 1995 as a nonprofit private foundation designed to be both a
funding agency and a support group for single parents and their children adopted from
China.

²³ Some academic work has focused on some more sociological issues surrounding
international adoption. Yngvesson (2002, 2003) draws on the experiences and narratives of
transnational adult adoptees to reconstruct the routes of exchange and value that haunt the
productions of adult Korean adoptees as particular cases of Asian-American identity
formation.
versions of culture that are decontextualized and dehistoricized “culture bites” (Anagnost 2000), but Andrea Louie has also showed that these practices might also signify a new type of identity formation in which “whiteness incorporates (some may say co-opts) parts of nonwhite culture into family identities” and that this form of cultural education is not specific or confined to the white adoptive family because Chinese American adoptive parents also engage in similar practices (Louie 2009:294).

The original adoption group is also very important for creating the community. Families stay in touch with their travel mates, and plan their homeland tours together. As this quote from one adoptive mother from her blog demonstrates:

Fast forward 10 years, our group of 4 first-time parents became "families" together. We also became close friends. We have gotten together every year for the past 10 years to celebrate our adoption day. We also get together every year for China camp...On top of all this, 3 families in the group returned to China earlier this year for a birth land tour!....We believe that our bond as parents has helped to bond our children together as well"
Blog "Hearts in China"24

Whether informal playgroups, internet list-serves and chat rooms, or national organizations like Families with Children from China or Our Chinese Daughters Foundation (OCDF), parents actively seek out other families and develop communities based upon shared experiences of Chinese adoption and family life within the United States. Involvement in these communities and activities vary, yet as the quote above suggests the bond between adoptive families is very important and the homeland tour is then seen as a natural extension of familial engagement with China.

Marketed as ways for children to gain self-knowledge through experiences with native lands, native peoples “and reconnecting these children with their past” (Journeys of

the Heart, Motherland Tours) homeland tourism to China is an especially effective vehicle for examining the role of heritage for transnational adoptees and their American families.

Homeland tours highlight mythic Chinese dynasties, adoption specific landmarks, and symbolic Chinese culture. There are also many family centered activities and performances catering to the travel needs of families with young children. Families embark on heritage tours lasting for seven to fourteen days, when their children are roughly between the ages of six and fourteen. This age is stressed because these girls are at the age where they still enjoy family vacations and have not yet succumbed to the passions and concerns of adolescence. Tour agencies encourage multiple visits, focusing on different levels of comprehension at different ages. “For instance, if your child really enjoys Chinese food, make this a point of emphasis…If your child likes Chinese dresses, a dress or two bought from places of meaning, such as a specific region, to facilitate positive associations.”

There are around four major tour providers in the United States for adoption specific homeland tours; unfortunately no data exists on the number of families that have returned. Panda Tours, the tour agency I travelled with, assists adoptive families with travel arrangements to China and other destinations in Southeast Asia, providing avenues for adopted children to “appreciate their rich cultural heritage”. Tours are customizable and Panda Tours also organizes private family tours. While private tours do occur, experts in transnational adoption encourage group travel, for similar reasons as the other homeland tour cases in this dissertation. As FCC founder Jan Liedtke explains:

\[25\] Panda Tours Website
\[26\] Panda Tours Website
Some families have said that traveling as a group, while not their normal mode of family travel, was good because the girls were all in the same situation – experiencing China; they had kids to play with, they had programs and activities that would not be available as an individual family traveling, and the girls interchange their adoption information. Dr. Jane Liedtke\textsuperscript{27}

Dr. Liedtke details how the tour groups is important for families to interact with each other, therefore to study this process I joined a group tour in 2008. This tour group was substantially smaller than the other tours I travelled on. This tour consisted of three families, with two families who already knew each other from their original adoption process. The other family was also interested in traveling with members of their original adoption group, but timing and cost prevented this from occurring.

The groups of parents traveling together to adopt children are the primary points of entry for parents into the community of transnational adoption. The initial journey to China follows similar principles as return homeland tours. Parents travel as a group and engage in some sightseeing activities before they are introduced to their new child. When circumstances allow, families try to return to China with the individuals they originally traveled with.

Chinese homeland tour operators relying on the already existing social networks of transnational adoption, similar to African American homeland tours. All parents mentioned price, timing and tour excursions as reasons they chose to travel with Panda Tours opposed to other tour providers. Families discovered homeland tour options through the Internet, transnational adoption forums, expositions and social networks.

\textsuperscript{27} Returning to China with your Adopted Child.  
http://www.fccncalif.org/HomelandTravel/returninghandout.pdf
Tours typically begin and end in popular tourist cities: Beijing, Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shanghai. Accompanied by English speaking guides, families visit touristic sites like the Great Wall, the Summer Palace, the Terra Cotta Soldiers, and scenic pastoral cities like Guilin. Homeland tours also schedule specific activities and performances presenting Chinese heritage in age appropriate forms for children. Activities like kite flying, walking the Great Wall, visit to Panda reserves, and tours of adoption agencies represent China’s history and family histories of transnational adoption.

Other forms of heritage tourism for Chinese-Americans do exist and these tours focus on the generational separation of Chinese immigrants in the United States (Louie 2002). These programs work from the underlying assumption that visitors of Chinese descent feel pride in China’s recent economic growth and a responsibility to help further grow their “home” regions (Louie 2002:354). Similar assumptions exist for adoptees, they are presented with the country of their origin, and encouraged to feel pride in its bucolic pastures and larger than life cities.

The work on Chinese adoption specific homeland tourism is limited, making only a brief appearance in Sara Dorow’s work (2006). Barbara Yngvesson’s research explores homeland returns to Chile, in this she states that homeland return journeys “reveal the impossibility of ever being fully integrated” and become a “constant reminder of what the adoptee had left behind, of what he or she lacks” (2005:36). I argue throughout this dissertation that the internationally adopted Chinese daughter and her family do not return to heal primordial separation; my experiences on a homeland tour suggest parents narrate integration in different ways consistent with white approaches to ethnic difference (Waters 1990) and contemporary multicultural approaches to difference and diversity.
Making a case for the extended case

In all cases preexisting networks influence how individuals choose a tour agency and a tour package. Group homeland tours are marketed as a more effective mechanism for introducing the interested yet distant diasporan member to the homeland. Homeland tourists self select participation in specific homeland tour options and participants choose excursions that best suit their personalities, financial circumstances, and availability. In addition, all tourists have the time and/or means to travel and chose homeland tourism as a controlled and accessible way to engage with community.

While the other cases in this dissertation stress the individual, homeland tourism in China involves the family adding to our understanding. Through the homeland tour parents attempt to present positive and adequate signifiers of cultural identity for their children, stressing their Chinese natal heritage yet balancing difference with narratives of seamless, yet constructed family units. The activities families participate in and the narratives they use, I argue, connect them not to China but to the larger adoption community and other American populations shaped by experiences of domestic exclusion, migration, and globalization. These are sometimes three very different homeland explorations, but while the circumstances of these American populations might not seem comparable, they are searching in international locations to discover positive affirmations of American difference.

Ethnography in Motion

I see myself as a methodological bricoleur, using multiple techniques and mediums in order to understand the process of social group formation. This type of fieldwork has been identified by George Marcus as doing ethnography ‘in/of the world system’ (1995)
where researchers work across multiple field sites and follow people, images and commodities as they move, much like the tourist itself.

The tourists and travelers in this dissertation discuss moving through different life stages (and see the tour as a mechanism for this transformation) and they are presenting their group identity in varied social spaces that must also be examined and explored. While most social science research has neglected studying movement and the forms in which movement influences economic, political and social organization (Urry 2007), I see movement as crucial for this project.

To understand homeland tours, one must travel on them with homeland tourists. Extended stay ethnography would not capture the physical act of movement occurring, therefore the ethnography(er) must be able to move alongside the participants on this transformative journey. Like the pilgrim, existing in a liminal space between the past and the not-yet-spiritually transformed present, so too does the research(er) need to be keen to this shift.

I began by interviewing tourists before they traveled to the homeland. I then travelled on three different homeland tours. While on these homeland tours, I took extensive field notes, engaged with homeland tourists and experienced the activities and tour sites alongside them. My motives were always explicit, and usually led to some very engaging and useful conversations over communal meals regarding heritage, ethnicity, race, religion, and community. I also audio recorded portions of these tours when writing field notes wasn’t a possibility.

If I relied solely on interview material and field notes, I would limit my analysis and not be able to explore what happens when tourists return. Therefore, over the course of
this project I have interviewed tourists before travel, during travel and after. I have also
revisited homeland tourists, asking for further clarification regarding a comment or
interview excerpt returning to the source when necessary. The meanings behind travel can
only be determined by expanding the scope and level of engagement, revisiting
participants multiple times clarifies the meanings of these journeys. Because of this
process, I was able to refine my questions as the research developed.

In 2005, I travelled with a Hillel organized Birthright tour consisting of forty Jewish
college-aged Americans from two different universities. This group consisted of mostly
mid-western and northeastern college students ranging in age from nineteen to twenty-
four. Right after New Years day, we left Newark New Jersey as strangers, only beginning to
meet each other in the airport. Together we took pictures, listened to tour guides, feigned
interest when we were saturated with Israeli history, drank beer and wine in kibbutz bars,
and sang together to pass the time on long bus rides. I was a few years older than those I
travelled with, and sometimes it showed; but for the most part we all became close as we
shuffled through Israel together. Many of the interviews in this dissertation come from this
Birthright trip.

In addition, my friend who was travelling around the same time on a non-Hillel
organized Birthright tour also shared with his group my project and I was able to interview
his trip leader and a few of the tourists in his group. I also used snowball sampling and
word of mouth. When I would talk about my research with friends, everyone knew of
someone who went on Birthright that I could contact. I interviewed high school friends,
friends of high school friends, and college students at my university; it seems everyone
Jewish either had gone or knew someone who has participated in Birthright.
While I was working on this project, my brother even got the Birthright bug and I sent him packing with a voice recorder and stack of consent forms. Throughout his tour he would pass around the voice recorder to those interested capturing the on-the-ground feelings and emotions. Twenty-two additional voices shared with me how they felt about their experiences while they were occurring. Upon return I introduced myself and asked some more questions following up and clarifying some specific points or feelings, but did not find it necessary to conduct longer interviews. In total, I conducted in-depth interviews with thirteen Birthright participants between 2005-2008, I also analyzed Birthright’s public face, looking at their tour material and website as well as the public face of those I interviewed and travelled with, examining their presentation of self on social networking sites interesting in seeing how they now expressed their Jewish identity upon return from the homeland.

In 2007 I travelled on another homeland tour, joining around 600 members of the African diaspora as they traveled to Ghana for the inauguration of the Joseph Project. I first discovered Sankofa Tours on the internet. After contacting the company, they passed my information off to Barbara Jones, who just happened to live only a short distance away. We met a few times before the trip and had a chance to discuss the project as I dropped off paperwork and deposits at her home.

This trip also was around two weeks, and consisted of twenty-one African Americans mostly middle-aged women. While most of this tour was made up of retired women, there were two husbands and two single men; however, most of the voices in

28 With all participants, follow-up interviews were conducted via phone, e-mail and in person if direct quotes were ambiguous of required further elaboration.
these pages come from the women traveling on homeland tours. Sankofa tours had multiple groups traveling during our voyage, and we were frequently grouped together with other tours of equal size for meals, lodging and daily activities. Among these groups were two alumni organizations from two American universities, a loosely knit family reunion/church group from a moderately sized southern city, a group of retired National Association of Black Social Workers, and another group consisting of educators and young professionals from an Eastern city. Travelers on all of these tours ranged in age from twenty-one to ninety.

At first my fellow travelers had reservations about my involvement in their trip. Yet, by the end of our journey, my outsider status as a younger white woman actually allowed me to get closer to those I travelled with. Since my tour group consisted of mostly older women, I became a sort of adopted child. As the sole white homeland tourist, the women on my tour made a concerted effort to watch over me in order to mitigate my obvious difference. For example, I was directed to keep close to the group when we stopped to shop at craft markets. If I showed interest in an item, someone would engage with the vendors on my behalf, acting as mediator and elder. As an outsider both by age and race, I was also allowed to ask the ‘naïve’ questions engaging with my fellow travelers as an inquisitive and respectful pupil. Fellow travelers would seek out my company during moments or activities they felt deserved emphasis, detailing the importance, making sure I was fully aware of the significance of each moment.

I conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews with eleven homeland tourists travelling during this time period interviewing many tourists before we travelled and after.

29 The gendered imbalance in my interview subjects does require further study, and not covered in these pages.
While many were members of my tour, I also interviewed some of the young alumni travelers and members of the family reunion group after their homeland tour. I was also interested in the public face of Sankofa and looked through their tour materials and brochures, followed news articles, blogs and other on-line spaces where homeland tourism was being discussed.\(^{30}\)

My final homeland trip occurred in 2008 when I travelled to China with three families with adopted Chinese children. I joined a moderately priced homeland tour organized by Panda Tours, a tour agency specializing in travel to Asian destinations and adoption based travel that I found on the internet and would allow a researcher to accompany a tour as long as those traveling gave consent.

Two of the families I travelled with met in China during their first journey and have stayed close throughout the years. While the other family wanted to travel with the family they traveled with when they adopted Farah, the timing wasn’t right, so they joined our tour group. In total, there were five Chinese daughters, two birth children, and five parents. The children on this trip ranged in age from twelve to eight, with two fifteen year old biological twins accompanying their mother and adopted younger sister. Only one family was interested in visiting the orphanage/welfare center where their daughter spent her first few months, and I was able to accompany the Elms during their time in Farah’s home city.

I came to know the families quite well as they drew me into their lives. I was the only single person so I could move in and out of each family pretty seamlessly. Since I was

\(^{30}\) When citing open source material, I have not changed any of the names, since they are publicly available.
younger than the parents, but older than the children, I existed as both an older kid and a younger adult.

I conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews with seven of the participants travelling to China (both children and adults). I also used homeland tour brochures and printed material provided by tour agencies, news articles with user comments, blogs and list-serves.\textsuperscript{31} As adoptive parent and anthropologist Toby Alice Volkman details, an adoption community has developed “through the formation of play groups, dance troupes, culture celebrations and camps, reunions, Web sites, electronic mailing lists, and publications intended for the adoptive community” (2005:83). Therefore to supplement such a small sample size, I also analyzed news articles with user comments, adoption blogs and list-serves.

Besides interviews and participant observation, for all the cases I used a variety of participant created materials as primary data, looking at travel journals and photographs. Photographs can capture moments and feelings that words sometimes cannot convey so I used photos in my interviews as well as primary source material. The use of photographs to provoke a response is known as photo-elicitation (Harper 1984, Heisley and Levy 1991). Photo-elicitation has also been used across other disciplines and topic areas in order to determine ethnic identification (Gold 1986), understand behaviors (Entin 1979, Wessels 1985), enhance memory retrieval (Aschermann et al. 1998), work with young children/school students (Diamond 1996, Weiniger 1998, Foster et al. 1999), and to talk about more difficult, abstract concepts (Curry and Strauss 1994, Bender et al. 2001).

\textsuperscript{31} When citing open source material, I have not changed any of the names, since they are publicly available.
Photographs are useful because they can stimulate memories and demonstrate concepts that word-based interviews and analysis might not be able to explore and convey. Photographs represent already framed interpretations of events and captured moments of intentionality. They transform present experiences into bound symbols that are used to recall the past. Photographs are useful in discovering meaning, especially for experiential meaning since reality can only be known by its traces (Sontag 1977).

I was also interested in how tourists and members of these imagined communities presented themselves post-travel, and discussed the meaning of travel with other members of their community. As I have stressed throughout this project, new technologies are crucial for imagining community. The sense of space, for social interaction is changing, and therefore requires examination of on-line content. Social media is embedded in all social spaces and structures and cannot be examined in a self-enclosed cyberian apartness (Miller, Slater 2000:5). I used news articles with user comments, and engaged with Facebook groups, blogs and list-serves to capture why people thought heritage was important, and how these new forms of movement, seen in homeland tourism, where changing the definitions of group membership. When citing open source material, I have not changed any of the names, since they are publicly available.

Limitations
The social world is not static but in a constant state of flux, my very presence contributes to this and should be exposed in the research process. While I tried to blend and belong, my participation changes the tour dynamics. I also discovered, that my very interest in the subject also shaped how respondents interacted with me in our interviews.
As this quote from Karen describes regarding her daughter’s comments during our interview:

If she told you she learned about her heritage on our trip, she was probably telling you what she thought you wanted to hear. I don’t think we can get her to elaborate on that one. Karen

In my post-travel interview with Farah, I was having difficulty getting her to talk about what she meant when she said she learned about her heritage. I wanted to know specifics, but Farah couldn’t elaborate. I thought maybe she just didn’t know how to put into words what she was feeling so I asked her mother if she knew any more details. In this interaction I discovered something important for this project, because I was questioning her on the topic, she thought it best to respond in a way I might be interested in. My mixed method approach, however, can explore this bias in my interview material. I can use Farah’s words with Farah’s actions to understand more deeply what she did learn on her trip, and the meanings community places in these events. As I argue in this dissertation, I think Farah’s right, she did learn about her heritage. However, it might not exactly be what was presented to her on tour that truly mattered. If I relied solely on interview data or participant observation I wouldn’t be able to see these disagreements between discourse and practice.

In addition, because I am studying identity, I must also be cognizant of my own identity in the research process. I am studying the “other” as well as studying myself. I am not an older black woman, nor am I a member of a family with a Chinese adopted daughter. I also do not feel I “fit” totally within a Jewish American community. However, as I mentioned earlier, I believe my outsider status at times was useful, because it was assumed I needed significant moments made explicit.
By using my three cases and interacting with participants before the tour, during the tour, after the tour, and in the virtual spaces; I engage in dialogic data collection, using my position as researcher and participant to encourage conversations and thinking about belonging and community, taking into consideration the complex dance between all sorts of virtual, imagined and literal interactions (Wellman 2001).

“The craft of social inquiry lies somewhere between art and science. It combines the creativity and the spontaneity of art (although art can be hard work) and the rigorous systematic character of science (although science can be joyful)” (Alford 1998:8). The mixed method, comparative and extended case model approach I have presented above allows me to explore themes and phenomena in a broader more theoretical perspective. I can emphasize the process and focus on patterns and expand the scope of this project through comparative analysis.
Chapter Four: The Significance of Homelands/The Power of Journeys

As one of Birthright’s itinerary suggests; “though we are not alike in mind and body, somewhere in the depths of our souls we know we are the children of one people.”

Homelands therefore are presented and symbolize rooted-ness able to assuage an “anxiety of incompleteness” (Appadurai 2006) in an age of movement and liminality. This chapter lays the groundwork for this dissertation and illustrates how homelands are important and why homeland journeys are so significant. As stated in the previous chapter, tourists might not have direct connections or contact with the present day inhabitants of the homeland – among those I interviewed, they rarely had family or close friends in these locations, and homeland tours are too structured to really allow any extended encounters with homeland citizens – yet all believe in a strong sense of kinship and belonging to these international places and people. Therefore, I argue, homelands are constructed spaces of belonging where primordiality is shaped for contemporary moments and circumstances.

For the homeland tourists I interviewed and travelled with, they discussed a power that comes with discovery, only capable at this degree in homelands. As Kathryn, a recent graduate from a historically black university commented during one of our interviews; “I didn’t realize it was [important] until I went…I think I had this inner sense to reconnect and find out what my history was, a natural curiosity to know where my heritage is”. Kathryn’s comment exposes how homelands are approached, and why homelands remain important for constructing community today.

Homelands are important because you can learn about your innate qualities from the source – the histories of migration, the cultural practices of the people, and the heritage

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1 Quoted in the Taglit Birthright Itinerary Handbook Ruth Brin.
of your ancestors can all be revealed and personally engaged with during a visit to the homeland. But as I will demonstrate, notions of return change over time and across homelands. Contemporary homeland journeys reference specific histories of movement and return.

In this chapter I make four main points; I first discuss how homelands are spoken about as locations of greatest importance in a long line of other activities that already bind tourists to their larger imagined community. I then discuss how homelands are thought to be important because we have obligations to discover primordial identities, because without knowledge of one’s inherent essence, people believe themselves and their communities to be lost. But as I demonstrate and present, these narratives are heavily influenced by contemporary multicultural and pluralistic understandings of American difference. I end this section discussing homeland journeys and the power of experience particular to the Western tourist. Experiences confirm and affirm the social position of the imagined community, the role of the homeland for this community, and your personal role in this constellation of allegiances and social groups.

To Begin at the Beginning
Here I illustrate the symbolic power of homelands. Across all cases, participants discussed homelands as specific territories where one can discover the perceived innate biologically based aspects of identity. Yet, what I present demonstrates the critical role of histories of movement and migration for these ineffable bonds of belonging. Therefore I argue homelands are tangible pockets of pastness shaped by both narratives of origins and narratives of original movement. Across all cases there were varying levels of participation in the symbols and practices that come to define and represent the imagined community,
however participants across all cases discussed the same set of practices specific to their community. For example, Birthright travelers all discussed Hebrew afterschool programs, Jewish youth organizations, Jewish holidays, temple and synagogue attendance, and Bar and Bat Mitzvahs as ways they already saw themselves as Jewish. Jacob, an intelligent and inquisitive college senior considering a career in Sociology presented three aspects he found most significant for binding the Jewish community; the trauma of the Holocaust, participation in religious activities, and for him, most importantly the presence of Jews in show business.

Being part of a community of people who have been through similar things, whether that’s similar history like the Holocaust or modern things like growing up in similar places or having your parents growing up in similar places, and all that stuff is what it means to me to be an American Jew. And its not totally unreligious, going to Hebrew school is a part of that...so all these rituals and tradition are a part of what it means. But all of this transcends the religious and goes to the cultural. The foods people's moms know how to make, the movies, like Mel Brooks movies. Seemingly trivial things like that make me feel part of a larger community. Jacob

For Birthright tourists like Jacob, the community involves knowledge of the religious rituals one may or may not continue observing along with connections to American Jewish cultural icons. People like Mel Brooks, and his movies, become cultural products that are consumed as signifiers of Jewish identity. Yet, the significance of Israel runs deeper than the Jewish presence in comedy, Israel becomes a tangible symbol of an ineffable and absolute bond. In the quote above, Jacob never discusses the importance of Israel; he focuses on recent history and cultural indicators to construct the boundaries of American Jewish identity. Yet Israel is not dismissed or far from his mind. Jacob sees Israel’s importance existing in a different category; Israel is not a significant place because of a
collective memory or cultural tools; but a location of significance as a sacred site of origin and beginnings.

Birthright’s website also uses the language of a priori connection to express Jewish connectivity and subsequently Israel’s significance. This quotation from a Birthright alumnus explains Jewish identity shaped not solely by a shared set of practices, but a shared natural understanding of the most sacred aspects of Jewish identity: the Jewish homeland:

Of course, I was eager to see this Holy Land which I had studied for many years at school and whose current events I avidly follow and debate. Here was the land where our prophets had declared their prophecies to the Jewish people. This was the land on which many battles and wars had been fought. And, of course, it was on this sacred soil that our ancestors were buried. Wendy Wolfish birthright website Old and New: A Source of Strength

This quote references the biblical presence of the Jewish people in the land of Israel and the contemporary history of Israeli state formation. And yes, while this Birthright alumnus does highlight her engagement and active interest in Israel, demonstrating the socially constructed nature of homeland significance, she also claims biblical prophets as “ours” and the space as “sacred”, biblical histories therefore still carry weight today as essential aspects of identity.

While this institutionally approved Birthright quote might signify Birthright’s intended desires, Jacob also narrates homeland significance in a similar fashion. When asked to describe why Israel is important, he comments upon similar themes of sacredness and originality, believing to have a natural and obvious attachment to this land based upon his membership in the global Jewish imagined community.

Obviously I have a special attachment, being Jewish...All the bible stories take place there. And the Hebrew school I went to made it a point to make
it feel like a place that wasn't so foreign...It has always been something I have known about. Jacob

Jacob’s understanding of American Jewish identity is very telling; he combines contemporary aspects of American culture similar to the quote from Birthright’s website with biblical origins and historic claims to land. Both reference a special attachment to Israel through a belief in a primordial essence to Jewish identity – one learned through activities like Hebrew School. Therefore, homelands are narrated as important today due to their significance as sites of beginnings for naturally bound groups.

Across all homelands, travelers discussed the other activities that bound them to their community. Through interviews with both older and younger homeland tourists to Ghana, and observations made on our tour; I noticed the importance of spirituality, religion and Afrocentric cultural engagements for defining the community and explaining homeland significance. Barbara, my trip organizer mentioned attending cultural and heritage workshops and holiday celebrations specific to the African American community like Kwanza. Other participants, like Rose, who I will mention below, discussed visiting domestic sites of particular interest to African Americans, like American memorials, monuments and museum installations dedicated to the history of slavery. Ryan, one of the younger members of his family reunion/church tour group actually travelled recently to Jamaica with those he met through his homeland tour, an island discussed as significant for its slave history. And all interview participants referenced popular products like the television mini-series Roots, to indicate group membership and Afro-centric understandings of American black identity. Participation in specific activities therefore demonstrates how one becomes and does membership in these social groups.
Rose, one of the older African American women I travelled with explained how homeland journeys were a natural extension of her interest in Africa. When I asked her why she was travelling to Ghana, she began by discussing the domestic memorials and museums she visited highlighting an increasing of signification to her activities of belonging.

We went to the museum in Memphis when the slave ship was traveling around the country. Black history is very important to us and our family...this is just another extension. This takes us to the point of the beginning where the Africans were carted off on the ship, so that's the part that I want to see the most. Rose

For Rose, Africa is extremely significant as the site of original belonging and most importantly original migration. In Africa she can discover and interact with an aspect of her history inaccessible in the United States; the original location of her people, and the site of separation.

The notion of origins detailed by Rose is different from Jacob’s understanding of biblical origin. For Rose, Africa represents the specific site of rupture between two connected people; where Africa is approached because it’s the location of original movement. For Rose to understand her identity as a descendant of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, she must begin at the beginning. Jacob and Rose reference two distinct types of origins, one religious and cultural and one historical and racial, yet both envision effortless and natural connection based on innate characteristics that exist within the self.

In Rose’s quote above, she references original sites of movement and the trauma caused by forced migration. Homeland returns to China are narrated similarly to Rose’s. Transnational adoption also involves separation between an individual and their place of primordial and natural belonging. In the comments section of a New York Times feature on
adoption and homeland returns, one parent commented; “it’s important that our children learn about China and how the adoption process works”. Therefore, China is not just a site of an assumed effortless connection based upon shared ineffable traits determined by biology, birth and geography; it is also a site of extreme significance because it can clarify contemporary, not historical circumstances of migration. Both this parent and Rose construct identities based on legacies of movement and migration, and China and Ghana are understood as locations of importance capable of illuminating historical movements that have influenced identity and belonging.

Journeys to homelands are then seminal practices signifying serious membership and active interest in community discussed in two main frames: original movement and original connection. Where homelands themselves are the most important as tangible geographical starting points. Specialists recommend sending adopted children to Chinese culture camps, they encourage families to participate in Chinese rituals and holidays, with return homeland tours a natural extension of this engagement with what it means to be Chinese and adopted from another country. As child psychologist Angela Krueger states; “a trip to one’s place of birth can be valuable to any adoptee”. Homelands are important because they are ways to experience the ancient culture that one believes to naturally have an affiliation and connection with. As Karl, one father traveling to China discussed:

We went so my wife and I could better understand this amazing ancient culture our daughter is from, and for our daughter to have some further context. Karl

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2 Return to Homeland, Jade Nisel. November 26, 2007 NY Times
3 I will discuss the difficulty of understanding belonging based upon primordial aspects with the creation of transatlantic and transracial families later
What these quotes speak to is the special power of transformation and understanding that can only happen in these locations. Homeland narratives referencing the importance of and the particularity of place sound very similar to anthropological understandings of pilgrimage.

Pilgrims are self conscious about the possibilities for their travel; their journeys have purpose, they will return changed. Heritage tourism in China for families with adopted Chinese children demonstrates how self conscious and structured primordial explorations really can become. As I’ve stated before, for families with adopted Chinese children, Chinese heritage is seen through the eyes of the transnational adoptive family and community. Therefore, Chinese adopted children access their natal heritage through parental mediation. Parents literally give their children the symbols for understanding Chinese heritage and the language to describe the significance of the Chinese homeland.

In my interactions with parents and my analysis of conversations on adoption blogs, homelands are believed to instill cultural Chinese literacy and heal wounds of natal separation. While parents have a difficult relationship to primordial allegiances (which I will discuss at length later), they still recognize and believe in the importance of discovering the supposed innate aspects of the self. Carole, an urban mother of a pre-teen, with whom I travelled to China with, explores Chinese culture and heritage through the adoption community she belongs to.

We have been members of FCC-NY since we first started the Chinese adoption process. When she was younger, we used to attend many of their functions – such as celebrations for Chinese New Year and Autumn Moon Festival. Our adoption agency in the Philadelphia area also has a Chinese New Year party, and we used to attend that to reconnect with our travel mates...We do, however, still have an interest in Chinese culture, and will often attend exhibits at museums that are related to China. We also have
continued our interest in reading books and seeing movies that relate to Chinese culture. Carole

Carole’s understanding of Chinese socialization was mirrored in many of the adoption blogs I analyzed demonstrating how tourists already participate in the communities they hope to understand in greater detail in the homeland. On one adoption blog, China Adopt Talk, parents frequently reference the adoption specific community as proxy for an American Chinese community in their conversations. In one thread discussing the benefits of a diverse educational environment, one parent voiced the common understanding that diversity pretty much equals the adoption community.

…we did choose a daycare where there is a bit more diversity than she would find in our city…I struggle with finding ways to ensure she’s not the only different one. We are fortunate, in this regard, that we have a fairly large population of Chinese adoptees around us so she has friends in her age group that we hang out with fairly often.

Whether informal playgroups, internet list-serves and chat rooms, or national organizations like Families with Children from China or Our Chinese Daughters Foundation (OCDF), parents group together and create communities around Chinese adoption, not necessarily China. Parents like Carole and the woman writing on China Adopt Talk, actively seek out other families and develop communities based upon shared experiences of Chinese adoption and family life within the United States. Therefore the significance of home is mediated through adoption specific migrations for adoption specific communities.

Thus far, I have suggested that homelands are important because they are sites where one can access the perceived ineffable, a priori, and affective qualities of natural and effortless belonging and engage with original movement; because homelands allow you to begin at the beginning. But homelands do not exist in a vacuum, the homeland is specifically important as living heritage. Not all tourists approached homelands to
experience tradition, the parents I interviewed and travelled with never discussed the significance of living heritage, nor did I see occurrences of heritage re-enactments discussed on adoption blogs. I believe this is due to the fact that families determine the meaning of origins, and engage in rituals and activities to connect to the adoption community, not necessarily China. In addition, for mostly white adoptive parents China is not the site of their living heritage.

For travelers to Ghana and Israel, who already align themselves with the inhabitants of the homeland based upon shared rituals; homelands are thought to be important as places that can help you understand why you do what you do. Homelands are locations where origins come to life. Tara already sees herself as Afro-centric. When I asked her why traveling to Africa was important for her, she began by explaining how she constructs her American black identity:

"I consider myself to be Afro-centric. The way I view the world, is more from the standpoint of somebody who is a daughter of people who have been enslaved throughout history. Understanding the struggles they went through helps to navigate my place in the world. And to be able to fully understand that I actually needed to have contact with people living in Africa, people who are still carrying out the traditions that have been carried out for thousands of years. Tara approaches Africa and the importance of aligning with an African identity from a point of rupture and loss. She is the ancestor of someone who has been enslaved, and approaches her homeland tour of Ghana through this lens. But Africa doesn’t exist in history, Africa continues to practice the foundational aspects of their shared identity, and therefore homelands are important as living legacies.

Jessica and Tara’s University Alumni tour group pretty much followed ours around the country. Because of this, I became close with a few of the members of their tour, not
just to discover the meanings and importance of homelands, but also to have some time
where I could socialize with people my age and shed the pressures of concerted
participation. My closeness with these younger homeland tourists led to many continued
conversations during my writing process leading to further clarification concerning many
key points in this dissertation. In this quote, Jessica details how origins and ritual interact in
the homeland awakening and confirming the strong bonds of belonging:

It awakened a spirit in me for what it means to be a part of something. There are a lot of traditions that started in Africa that have been passed
down to the African American community. Even though a lot has been lost a lot of it still lives. And I wanted to be in a place where I felt I could learn
more about those traditions from their origins. Jessica

Homelands are important for Jessica as sites where she can extend her community because
she can see these traditions in their place of origin, their most natural state and most
natural environment. By seeing the locations where traditions developed, she hopes to
know more about their meaning and as a result more about her place in the world.

Jessica travels to Ghana because she wants to be part of something; she wants to
feel grounded in the knowledge of belonging to a rich legacy. Consistent with primordial
approaches to identity (Geertz 1963, Shils 1957), Jessica references the affective qualities
of naturally belonging where homelands represent lost traditions that are not just practiced,
but presently thrive. My conversations with Tara expand upon this concept of living
heritage and in the quote below she details how homelands blend time. Upon return she
reflected on the activities she took part in while in the homeland, and found meaning in
them based upon references to things in America she was already familiar with:

Everything we saw over there, a lot of what we saw over there are traditions that have been passed down for thousands of years. The way they prepared
their food, the ceremonies they have, the way they celebrate, that's been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years so its
almost like being over there with them is a glimpse into history, and at the same time its a glimpse into our present. A lot of what they do, like especially when we had the naming ceremony and you had the dancing and the libations and the overall celebration the festive atmosphere of that, you can go to a black church service and see the exact same thing. Or go to a family reunion and see the exact same thing, or go to a party and see the exact same thing. Tara

In this quote Tara combines two distinct communities and two distinct time periods. She sees Africa as a site where passed down traditions are still practiced in their land of origin by authentic and passionate possible distant kin. She sees similarities between African Americans and Africans, constructing a racial kinship to further confirm her connection and legitimize her expansion of her imagined community. As Tara stated, homelands are important because “you don’t even realize [the things] that have been handed down to you from your ancestors. It’s all connected. Everybody stand on the shoulders of somebody else”.

Homeland tourists evoke a sense of liminality similar to that of the religious pilgrim. They have left one reality anticipating transformation during their experience. Homelands are seen, and are presented as able to ground the spirit, through the discovery of primordial belonging. For Turner (1974) and Turner and Turner (1978) pilgrimage involves the conditions of ritual, where pilgrims symbolically exit one space and state but have not yet entered a new one. Homelands are similarly discussed as places mediating the betwixt and between, and homeland tourists envision returning changed.

Homelands are therefore important since they have the ability, much like sites of pilgrimage, to transform the self through knowledge and experience with place (Bruner 1991). HAWK, an educator in the south writes for an Afro-centric on-line magazine and discusses the importance of homelands for similar reasons as the alumnus quoted on
Birthright’s website I discussed above. In an article he wrote before travelling to Ghana on a homeland tour, HAWK explains how he will approach the homeland:

> With open arms, an open mind, and an open heart and soul, I welcome any and all of the countless life lessons that I will learn from the infinite sights and sounds and people - young and old, most especially the Elders - our people, African people, who I will encounter and meet and greet during my short stay there.⁴

HAWK references the power of transformation that can only occur in homeland spaces. Even though HAWK will only be travelling for roughly two weeks, he envisions enlightenment only possible through his interactions with those living in the homeland. Homeland tourism involves traveling to a heritage site and experiencing a historical past that you also claim as your narrative. The inhabitants of homelands therefore represent pockets of pastness. “In sharp contrast to transient emigrants, the people in the old homelands have been literally grounded in specific patches of land, presumably over many generations. More often than not they have nurtured a passionate attachment to their sacred soil” (Zelinsky 2001:29). Homelands are important since this sort of enlightenment can only occur in these spaces, with these specific people.

Therefore homelands allow individuals to begin at the beginning, where homelands themselves symbolically embody the entire past, present, and future of a shared social group. Tourists like HAWK systematically reflect upon the ineffable emotional lure of homelands, in this phenomenological approach, time and space blend and primordiality is re-shaped, retaining its emotional and affective aspects yet revived and rejuvenated for contemporary purposes.

⁴ Hawk The black commentator, July 26, 2007 Issue 239
Thus, I have illustrated how homelands are constructed as sacred spaces similar to those sacred spaces visited by religious pilgrims. However, these are not sacred solely as the geographic origin of a social group, but are also approached as sites of original movement and migration. Homeland tourists already see themselves as members of a bound group, they engage in similar practices, celebrate the same holidays, and view homeland journeys as the most significant and powerful act of community involvement, able to elucidate dormant bonds of kinship and accountability as well as personal strength and understanding. In the next section, I delve deeper, layering experiences of domestic otherness into understandings of belonging.

**Obligations of Belonging**

Homeland tourists also expressed an obligation and duty to their ancestors and heritage, signaling their diasporic identities by referencing belonging to different lands. Yet, obligations are deployed differently across each case based on specific histories and contemporary circumstances. For participants traveling to Ghana and Israel, homelands are discussed as locations of significance because you have a duty to your ancestors and your future, for families with adopted Chinese children; your duty is to your child. These obligations to rediscover serve a function, by exploring one’s primordial homeland you can hopefully fill a void and discover some of the aspects of the self.

Rachel is a recent college graduate from a mid-western school who never really participated that seriously in any Jewish community. Her experiences are pretty similar to many Birthright participants. She was raised Jewish, yet doesn’t really do anything now that link her to the Jewish community. While she travelled to Israel with her local Hillel chapter, Rachel mentioned how Hillel didn’t shape her college experience. Yet, in our
interview she kept returning to the pressure by her community to understand the importance of Israel:

   Everyone seems to want us to understand where we come from. Not this is what we believe, here it is. This is where we come from; this is what we stand for. This is our culture. Rachel

In this quote, Rachel references her religious community and her family, a group of imagined elders who believe strongly in the significance of Israeli soil. Jewish belonging is not then solely about beliefs and religion, but about shared origins that then shape contemporary civic engagements. For Rachel, “where we come from” becomes “what we stand for”. Rachel then has a duty to explore Israel as the defining aspect of her Jewish identity. Yet Israel is more than just a site of extreme importance because of origins, but also because Israel is a symbol of contemporary values and civic responsibilities.

As Jewish Americans assimilated, concern was raised over the continuation of the new nation of Israel and the diaspora’s involvement in its existence. Birthright came into being to combat Jewish assimilation (Phillips, Lengyel and Saxe 2002, Shapiro 2006, Kelner 2010). Obligations to heritage and ancestors in Birthright’s texts re-orient American Jews to a constructed community based around essential characteristics. As this quote from Birthright’s website demonstrates:

   Your great, great grandparents faced Jerusalem three times a day in their daily prayers and they prayed for the return to Zion and rebuilding of the Temple. Your own grandparents probably were touched and ignited by the struggle to create the new Jewish State n the years after the Holocaust. You are the first generation in 2,000 years to live in a world in which a thriving Jewish state is a given fact. And for you and your world the question “Why Israel?” is a real question – and one that deserves some answers.5

I highlight this quote because of the specific way it combines multiple historical junctures and symbolic Jewish cues. Birthright engages through the very practice Jews are stereotypically known for, encouraging submission through familial duty (Jewish guilt). In addition, the context of this quote begins by asking participants to imagine their grandparents and great grandparents, a specific sort of Jew that was probably more religious. These were displaced people, facing Israel as the imagined homeland, yet longing for a day sometime in the future when that would be a reality. This quote then encourages Birthright participants to travel again back in time right after the Holocaust, imagining the necessity of a Jewish state after the atrocities of mass genocide. This trip is therefore an exercise in becoming Jewish and appropriating Israel in one’s hyphenated American identity through common tropes, shared histories, and ancestral obligations. “Thus, one’s life is not solely one’s own, and one is placed on an historical continuum that extends well into the past” (Kelner 2001:15).

Jacob’s comment in the previous section speaks to the binary of Jewish identity that this quote engages with. American Jewish identity is discussed as primordial and land based, as well as uniquely culturally American. Without primordial ties to land as definers of identity, Jews can blend, choosing their level of participation and engagement and slowly melting into the white American mainstream. Israel as a symbol then represents an aspect of Jewish identity that is beyond and above assimilation. Israel is natural, ingrained and static as a symbolic marker of a Jewish identity. Birthright Israel then seems to “work” because it resonated with deep-seated American Jewish conceptions about what being Jewish means and Israel’s place in this constellation of values. As Saxe and Chazan have

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6 There is much debate concerning the role of Israel as a metaphorical spiritual center versus a actual literal bound nation.
stated, “the trips, both covertly and overtly, create links between the major threats to Jewish existence in recent decades – the Holocaust, the Arab-Israel conflict, assimilation and intermarriage – and Israel is a response to these threats” (Saxe and Chazan 2008:49).

As the first generation to live in the diaspora with a tangible and viable homeland, Birthright reminds you of the hardships of belonging to a displaced people and your present day duty and obligations to at least begin to think about why the homeland may be important today.

Sherrill, a non-Hillel Birthright trip leader, also discussed the pressure and obligation to understand Israel and Jewishness. In a phone interview, she discussed

homelands as sites of tangible connection that fulfill familial obligations:

I think everyone, a lot of people feel pressure, sometimes they are encouraged to be Jewish from their parents, grandparents great parents. And this gives people a connection that they may not have prior. And I’m sure their parents are happy when they come home and tell them how much they love Israel and what a great trip they had. Sherrill

Sherrill highlights the pressure a community might place upon the next generation to remain in the fold mirroring the testimonials on Birthright’s website and tour materials.

This extended obligation to one’s ancestors and predecessors is not specific to travelers on Birthright. Tourists around the same age travelling to Ghana also reference the responsibility to community and the importance of continuing the work done by previous generations. In this quote, Kathryn discusses the common and essential elements she sees in African society and her family:

We grew up with a strong sense of self and a strong sense of black empowerment and a sense of responsibility and selflessness. Everything you do should be to give back to your community. And I realized that that is common in Africa too and I think that it stems from a tribal background and a village background that we all have together. Kathryn
In Kathryn’s comment she extends belonging to an entire continent of contemporary people. She believes her family and Africa share a primordial tribal history that they both still carry with them in their values and symbols. The belief and deployment of this innate value of community has shaped why she believes she now carries with her a sense of black pride and black empowerment. Kathryn uses a form of racial kinship to connect herself and her experiences to that of the homeland, and in the process she also connects the American history that has shaped how she sees herself with her observations of Africa. Kathryn uses culture and consumption instead of politics and civic engagement to enact and envision social change. With her individual act of traveling she believes she can influence the entire imagined community. While these two engagements with community, historical/political engagements and present day culturally commodified engagements might appear at odds, the continuity assumed in Kathryn’s understanding is consistent with recent work on African heritage tourism (Ebron 2002:927). But what Kathryn also signals that Paula Ebron does not discuss, is how these new contemporary homeland journeys serve a purpose, they allow Kathryn to explore and discover what she sees as a fundamental aspect of contemporary subjectivity. This quote from Marcus Garvey displayed prominently on the Joseph Project’s website demonstrates the perceived lasting and serious belief in the importance and power of primordial identities and heritage and how the history of black social organization is used in these new contemporary engagements with Africa and African American identity. “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.”

7 www.thejosephproject.com/index1.php  Accessed 8/28/07
Tara’s journal also references community and social cohesion, yet she references a sense of responsibility quite different from Kathryn’s familial and historical approach. Tara describes belonging and obligation to community as a factor one can only truly feel if that bound group retains their essential distinctiveness. This essential aspect of identity provides the entire community with a sense of value and worth. In her journal and travelogue Tara stated:

I have yet to see people, young or old, just hanging around as though there’s no end to the day. I’m sure a great deal of this drive can be attributed to the fact that they were able to retain a great deal of their cultural identity, while those of us who were forced to the U.S. were stripped of our heritage and dehumanized beyond measure. I wonder if we’ll ever see the day when we can move beyond that and toward a brighter day. Tara’s Journal

In this journal excerpt, you can feel a sense of otherness and the lasting psychological trauma of a history of racialized oppression that Tara carries with her daily. For Tara, homelands are approached individually yet can possibly restore community obligations and duty. She sees her journey as possibly fixing the problems of a community shaped by rupture, and in the process discovering positive and empowering aspects of the self and group. Obligations to essential aspects of one’s identity keep communities together, without it, as Tara comments, a community is lost.

Edna, one of the older women on the Sankofa tour I joined had a particularly interesting approach to return that also referenced the loss and emptiness when a bound primordial group is forcibly and viciously split. In our conversations during the tour, and in our interviews, she focused on the trauma of severing a bound people, and its implications for how she sees herself and her sense of rooted-ness demonstrating how this feeling of loss is not specific to younger generations.
I needed to be among the people, to attempt to engage, and participate with them in some way. Hearing the [Ghanaians] talk also reminded me of how much I have lost, and may never truly be connected again. Edna

Edna’s comment also speaks to how crucial collective memories of movement and rupture are for defining a people. Edna, now retired, travels to confront the trauma of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and America’s racial history. I will return to the importance of loss and trauma in later chapters, further detailing and describing how legacies of trauma can possibly be healed in homeland sights of extreme sadness like slave castles. Homeland returns though are brief moments that can hopefully mend this deeply engrained loss and emptiness she has carried through generations.

In my conversations with Kathryn, she also detailed the consequences of separation for the larger community and the importance of individual returns to Africa. In this exchange, similarly to Tara’s she evokes both individual and community level consequences and outcomes:

I think within the black community that’s something that was definitely lacking, a sense of self and our sense of self esteem is low because we are all feeling disconnected in some sort of way. We are all feeling divided or orphaned. And I feel like when you start making those trips to Africa, in your mind and in your heart and in your spirit you start putting in some puzzle pieces, you start filling in some holes you have always felt but could never really pinpoint. Kathryn

Kathryn describes a community shaped by movement and dislocation. Both Tara and Kathryn believe the African American community is lacking in self-esteem and a sense of community responsibility. By discovering one’s inner essence both young ladies hope to mend this deeply engrained loss and in the process empower the domestic African American imagined community.
The same essentialist language seen in racial branding used to oppress is used here to connect and to ground both the individual and the bound group. The personal emptiness that Edna, Tara and Kathryn feel is thought to influence how the entire American black community engages. My interviews suggest that homeland returns are crucial because they can possibly ground and stabilize an entire domestic imagined community through individual (touristic) actions.

For families with adopted Chinese children, they do not need to travel far back in time to encounter and engage with the consequences of migration. Homelands are seen as important because they might be able to provide answers to that first year of your child’s life. After we returned from China, I asked Karen what was the most satisfying aspect of her homeland tour. She mentioned the relief she felt when she was able to confirm that even though Farah was abandoned, she was not lost:

It helped us make sense of her story. It was also wonderful to see that there is someone in China who really cares about her -- someone who is emotionally attached to her. Karen

Karen approaches China and travels with her family to soothe her discomfort with displacement and abandonment. She fills a different sort of void than Kathryn, Tara or Edna. She travels to confirm Farah’s rootedness, hoping that even when she wasn’t present Farah never felt disconnected to the smallest unit capable of providing rootedness and security; the family.

American Outsiders

In the examples throughout this dissertation homeland returns are discussed as possible methods to fill the empty space left by histories of forced migration. For those I interviewed who travelled to Israel and Ghana, they discussed overtly being labeled as
different, and could articulate experiences of otherness. Experiences of exclusion and separation from mainstream American practices and histories shape why tourists long for home.

Josh, a Birthright participant and my brother, used narratives of otherness to describe his everyday. Consistent with comments above that described the homeland as a site of heritage reenactments, he explains why these sites are so powerful specifically due to domestic experiences of outsiders:

Best point, coming to see my history. When you are in America you're feet aren't grounded any place specifically so coming here you see where you come from. Josh

For Josh, history comes alive in the land of origin and this can heal a lived experience as an outsider. Seth, a member of my Birthright tour expands upon Josh’s emotional allegiance to Israel and gives a particular example when he was exposed as different in his community:

I went to a high school where there were only 6 other Jewish people and it was a 2,000-person high school...A lot of people didn’t understand. One girl asked me why I wasn’t living with the other Jews. I didn’t know what to make of that. Seth

In his suburban community in Ohio, Seth was only one of a handful of Jewish people and therefore understands Jewish identity through the framework of a persecuted minority. Being singled out as Jewish was something that all participants could relate to. Seth’s interaction with one of his high school classmates reveals this deeply ingrained belief in the naturalness of homophilous communities based on essential similarities. The girl who approached Seth questions why he’s not living within a Jewish community, and in the process undermines his very existence in the larger non-Jewish American mainstream.
Moments of exposed difference were discussed frequently. As Jacob so aptly commented, “we know what its like to be the only kid eating matzo during Passover or the only kid who is not looking forward to Santa Claus”. Jacob’s comment demonstrates how experiences of exclusion and exposure of difference, become mechanisms defining the Jewish imagined community as a group of people defined by outsidersness. Seth, Josh and Jacob speak to the powerful feeling of separation, where they desire not necessarily essential and ineffable historic legacies but tangible communities of similars. Jacob and Seth discuss feeling left out from they key organizing rituals and symbols defining mainstream America; what is missing therefore is inclusion in the American mainstream, not necessarily the void of primordial kinship.

For example, Ross mentioned how Jews across the United States are being singled out in cafeterias for their dietary restrictions. He discusses how these dietary rules have kept him on the outside of social gatherings but would not be strange or othering in Israel:

I feel like you are more understood as a person. At home, as a kid growing up and they get pizza and you tell them you don't eat pepperoni, its just hard to explain little things like that, that you don't have to concern yourself with over there. Ross

For Ross, homelands are therefore important because of the shared understanding of the daily things that make and mark someone as Jewish. Ross brings us back to the indescribable aspects of a priori social connectivity. Yet he doesn’t present this as a void in his essential being, his cultural practices just mark him as different. By being, only briefly, in the land where these cultural practices originated and still exist he believes this might armor him for future experiences and moments of exclusion.

Yet, in our interview, Ross also mentioned how he doesn’t keep kosher anymore. Due to Ross’s very ability to assimilate, he can leave otherness behind. Therefore what we
see going on here is not really validation of engrained and lasting otherness, but imagined
continuation of legacies of difference combined with acceptance and espousing those
characteristics. Jewishness is then being reformed in essentialist terminology for present
day circumstances that are discussed as forever labeling you on the outside, no matter how
much you assimilate. What these quotes suggest is that present experiences of otherness
and exclusion shape these feelings of ungrounded-ness, not necessarily the missing
knowledge of one’s land based claims to natural belonging.

Otherness is deployed differently across all cases, the otherness of racialization was
discussed by all those I interviews and traveled with to Ghana suggesting the problematic
relationship between race and ethnicity in the United States. Tourists referenced feeling
excluded from the mainstream narrative of America as a nation of immigrants. While racial
classification has historically excluded African Americans from ethnic assimilation models
(Alba 1990; Alba and Nee 2003; San Juan 1992, Winant 2001; Glazer and Moynihan
1970), the very lasting quality of land based ontological belonging as a framework for
constructing American subjectivities influence contemporary engagements with difference.
Allison, a PhD student in mathematics discussed how she felt like a domestic stranger in
the United States. She began by highlighting how “America likes to think of themselves as
this country of immigrants”, continuing by discussing the importance of traceable legacies
in the United States:

A lot of us really don't feel at home, you feel like am immigrant, you feel
like a first generation, second generation, although most of us don't know
anything but America. We can't trace anything anyplace but America but
sometimes you always get that feeling because you don't have ownership to
this country like a lot of white Americans do, so it gave you something to
feel a part of, because you don't always feel a part of this. You sometimes
feel on the fringes, so that it made you feel, it gave me this sense of
connection. Allison
Allison highlights the importance America places on the immigrant ethos. She can’t access that narrative due to the history of racialization, the negative perception of African identity, and a migration story of force. Allison mentions feeling on the fringe, similar to how Jacob and Ross see their Jewish identity shaping their experiences in the United States, yet Allison is never able to assimilate or access positive immigration narratives and immigrant success stories.

As Nina, an older black woman who came of age in the Civil Rights era in the American South discussed, the history of racial exclusion bars large American populations from key American master narratives.

[America’s] supposed to be a melting pot but my ancestors were brought here against their will but we survived and made it. The system is still against us, we're the only people who have to petition the government for basic rights that others are given. Nina

African Americans like Nina, with memories of the struggle for representation, do not see themselves as citizens, since they have not historically possessed the same rights as other Americans. She discusses how her ancestors were brought to the United States against their will shaping her subjectivity and defining her as an American outsider.

Homeland encounters facilitate group consciousness based upon grounding American outsiders through the consumption of lost and foreign heritages. As Kathryn, a recent college graduate from an upper class Texas family stated, “there’s a whole side of me that I haven’t been able to necessarily get to know here in America, so I just wanted to experience that”. African Americans, like Kathryn, discuss carrying with them an absence of heritage due to the rupture and trauma of slavery, excluding her from contemporary narratives of difference.
The quote below from Jessica expands upon Allison’s. Both Jessica and Allison’s quote highlight the most important element of primordial identity – the route of roots:

There are cultural differences in various ethnic groups and although many people in America are able to trace their differences and traditions directly, African Americans, for the most part, can not. I wanted to see what I could relate to in Africa. I wanted to know what I could trace. Jessica

Jessica also sees essentialist characteristics imbued within social groups, but what is the most striking for African American homeland tourists I interviewed was how important the rupture of the slave trade influenced their desire to extend through time and space. These quotes from both ladies suggest a deep desire for legitimate and positive routes to America. Therefore, the loss and the void is not necessarily the essential or the primordial, but the break in the line and the negative implications of forced migrations. Rose and older woman with whom I travelled with also discussed the significance of rupture in her immigration narrative:

So much of our history was lost for so many years. We were a people without a name...Some groups of people can probably go back to Abraham’s day, we were not able to do that, ours stopped at a point. Any information that we can get on African history or how the African Americans are tying in with that is just always an increase in knowledge. Knowledge is power, and I think as we try to raise our children to know that we are not inferior... you always want to feel that you're connected to something. Rose

Rose like Jessica compares the African American community to other ethnic groups who can trace their lineages back. For Rose, some even have the ability to trace their lines back all the way to the bible, highlighting the very real belief in the power of original belongings and original collectivities.

Both Allison and Rose state how their tour gave them “someplace where I could really connect to”. But I wonder if it was something more. Rose continued, “even though
we don’t have some of the history that some people do have, we still know that we are a proud people”. Therefore connections to homeland locations give strength and positive understandings of domestic racial difference. Homeland tourism then becomes a ritual activity that can provide empowerment when one has been denied access to traditional American heritage narratives. Imagining Africa and return journeys become ways to reclaim heritage and discover one’s place within a nation constructed upon a discourse of immigration (Steinberg 2001; Abla and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964). By claiming transnational ties, these women ground themselves domestically using an imagined African continent as the site of primordial origin.

There are problems with these actions that are not really discussed in my interview data. There are competing underlying assumptions to multicultural acceptance and race classification. Unequal treatment along racial lines is seen to “spring forth as a natural antipathy to difference” (Steinberg 2007:52). Whereas unequal treatment along ethnic lines represents a brief moment of contention that will ultimately be resolved over time through assimilation into the melting pot. Therefore race and ethnicity cannot be deployed interchangeably. The United States has been able ‘to swallow and digest every sort of normal human difference, except the purely external ones, like the color of the skin’ (Park 1913:206). Multiculturalism sees possibility in difference where race relations assume a natural antipathy between groups. The multicultural ideal is a paradox -- diversity has been accepted within the limited scope of ethnicity leaving the larger system of racial domination unchallenged.

As I have presented through my interviews and conversations with travelers to Ghana, the significance of American racialization severely inhibits access to mainstream
frameworks of difference and diversity. For African Americans; there is no choice or
option; sadly, race is still discussed as an essential and primal characteristic of the self
(Bonilla-Silva 2007). Unfortunately, adding to this history of forced migration, is the
classification of lands of origins, with Africa still perceived as an underdeveloped land
existing on the periphery of a global social order. As this quote from the Joseph Project’s
website demonstrates:

The African peoples everywhere have been taught to be self loathing, to see
everything African as a negative: Taught to believe that Africa is a definition
of failure and ugliness... The Ghana Joseph Project

The Joseph Project connects all those of African descent together by referring to the history
of racialization that has marked the black body as inferior. The exclusionary history of
racism and the historical understanding of race as a biologically based system of
stratification shape how we discuss race today and must be managed for homeland tourists
interested in using Africa to bind their community.

During my interview with Jessica, she referenced the historical legacy of negative
racial branding that has influenced how her family sees Africa. Her extended family’s
perception of Africa is consistent with the sentiments expressed by the Joseph Project. In
our interview, Jessica explained how hard it was for her to hear such damaging comments
from family:

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9 I am not trying to argue that there hasn’t been a vibrant and active history within the
black community to confront histories and legacies of oppression. Throughout American
history Africa has been used to mobilize for domestic and global change being both a site
of literal return and a symbol and metaphor for strength. The methods and history of black
empowerment in American society are outside the purview of this dissertation. I limit my
focus based on my interview data, demonstrating how pervasive and damaging
mainstream narratives can be.
There are a lot of misconceptions in the African American community about Africa, to the point I was talking to my Aunt, and she is of the generation that thinks Africa is bad, its a third world country where people are backwards. I was like what? Are you serious? Is that what you really think? You are African American and that’s what you really think? We talked about that as we went through the pictures how the slave trade came about and why people sold other people who looked like them. To give them a sense of where you come from is not this bad thing, do not think that you are. And to talk about this experience that you have come all this way, it means wherever you are from, they were very strong people. Jessica

Jessica is stunned because she sees something very important in discovering and accepting the African part of her African American identity. She can redeem her racialized identity and stop being a domestic other. However, she is not really referring to the essential characteristic that exists within all those of African descent, but the specific strength within those who are descendants of slaves, highlighting again the importance of movement and migration for these present day creations of community.

Yet these histories of movement, and the significance of homelands are important due to contemporary approaches to difference and identity that set up culture and land of origin as an essential and required indicator of one’s identity. For families with adopted transnational children, obligation is deployed differently based primarily upon contemporary American approaches to diversity. In a conversation with Karen’s son Chris, I asked him why his family went to China. Chris stated:

We have been thinking of this trip ever seen we got Farah. We always knew that we would go back. It was important for her to see where she came from, and important for us to respect that. Chris

For Chris, and tourists across all cases, homeland journeys are important because of this contemporary understanding of respect and tolerance towards difference. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the American multicultural project is not without its own challenges and controversies (Steinberg 2007, Hartman and Gerteis 2008); but this quick comment
from Chris exposes the saliency of these popular approaches to diversity and difference in the United States today.

Chris approaches Chinese difference through popular multicultural and pluralistic understandings of American diversity. He has to respect and understand that within the depths of Farah’s being, lies dormant a naturally Chinese person. He believes that primordial identities are inherent, natural and require him, as an outsider, to respect and facilitate her journey in true pluralistic American fashion. Chris’s perception of the importance of discovering Farah’s natal heritage is not specific to him; comments on adoption blogs also mirror Chris’s sentiments. One parent stated; “personally I feel like we owe them these experiences and opportunities”.

The approach to difference accessed by Chris and seen in the narratives of difference on adoption blogs began around the 1960s. Since then diversity and difference has been celebrated resulting in a perceived ‘ethnic revival’, where even populations with the ability to describe themselves simply as ‘American’ claim ethnic identities (Waters 1990). Ethnic difference also has received institutional support in the form of programs and avenues for the preservation of immigrant languages and cultures demonstrating the specific type of difference allowed within multiculturalism. Difference is thought to be essential, and diversity (albeit not applied universally) is seen as central to the American contemporary project; where we respect and incorporate the essential characteristics that separate people.

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10 China Adopt Talk, “Adult Adoptee Writings - Going Back” 1/30/09
As I have previously stated, this new generation of adoptive parents approach transnational dislocations based upon a reflexive look at previous generations of international adoption where Korean difference was ignored. Documentary filmmaker and adoptee Barb Lee goes further and actively connects these two moments of Asian adoption in her film *Adopted*. In this film she follows two well-meaning white American families; one with an adult Korean adoptee and one just beginning the process of Chinese adoption. Jen Fero, the adult Korean adoptee featured in Barb’s film, feels disconnected to her adoptive parents, and blames her sexual promiscuity and willingness to adopt sexualized Asian stereotypes in her feelings of dislocation and unrooted-ness.

New generations of transnational adoptive parents discuss the changing American landscape and the power of the multicultural model to ease their child’s socialization into a white American mainstream. In this quote below from a Chinese adoption blog, this parent references previous histories of Asian adoption, but comments upon how times have changed.

I have read the opinions of adult Korean adoptees. I read a lot of hurt and angst. And it is understandable, and it is very real. But I also consider that current adult Korean adoptees were raised in the US during the 60s and 70s...I think raising a child of Asian heritage in the year 2010 in the US is entirely different. The social climate is different, people are more educated, and as parents we have many more resources and tools to help our children.11

Many parents expressed similar beliefs of the changing American climate and increased acceptance towards diversity thereby limiting the outsider status of their adopted child and their particular family arrangement. Society now accepts and incorporates diversity, and most importantly I argue, a community has developed around transnational adoption

11 http://chinaadopptalk.com/2010/08/10/identity/#comments
guiding parents and families in their engagements with difference. The lasting belief in a
duty or obligation to one’s essential identity, and in the process their land of biological
origin reflects how enduring narratives of effortless belonging can be. Yet in these well-
intentioned attempts to ease rupture, families overlook the very real history of racialized
constructions of difference and the larger Asian American historical trajectory shaped by
institutional exclusion.

The behaviors seen in Korean adoptees are thought to stem from the lack of access
to primordial connections not necessarily the dismissal of their very obvious phenotypical
difference and America’s contentious history with regards to Asian immigrants. These
children (mostly girls) exist in mostly white upper and middle class worlds, where parents
approach difference as if it were optional, symbolic and voluntary (Waters 1990). Where
otherness is related to a natural and native Chinese origin, not contextualized within
America’s history of difference and exclusion.

One day after dinner in China, I sat with the parents and tried to explain why I was
doing this project. I told them I was trying to understand how one finds their place and
comes to peace with their difference. For these parents, Chinese-ness is seen to exist within
the very being of these girls, yet is engaged with like the symbolic ethnicities of White
ethnic group where food, rituals, and competency in even things like international travel
are equated with understanding one’s difference. Chinese identity is then seen as a
possible option or choice, and the constraining aspects of American racialized labeling are
sidestepped.

In this section, I argued contemporary understandings of difference have influenced
how we approach identity and heritage and I demonstrate how primordiality is re-shaped
to fall in line with American fascinations with the essential aspects of culture. Homelands are important for those who see themselves (and are seen by others) as not belonging due to primordial allegiances to distant lands and domestic experiences of exclusion. I present interview excerpts that speak to the lasting significance of essentialist understandings of identity coupled with contemporary understandings of difference and diversity. The meaning and obligations one has to community and to homeland is another indicator of America’s obsession with culture as a foundational issue of citizenship (Ong 2004).

This section demonstrates how tourists do not discuss origins, primordial belonging, and present day realities as singular and non-interactive entities. Explanations of homeland significance weave past and present, in order to set up homelands as spaces of extreme importance. Pasts, presents and futures exist simultaneously in the homeland, a feat of time blending not attainable in the home environment (Morinis 1984, 1992; Porter 2004). I argue in this section, what we see happening is not the reclaiming of a primordial essence, but the re-grounding of domestic difference based upon obligations to historical legacies and contemporary understandings of difference; a combination of perceived pasts, understood presents and desired futures. Where experiences in/of the homeland reground and justify American lived experiences of difference.

**Being There: Experiential Knowledge**

All tourists visit different locales and see them through excited eyes; they actively look at the places they visit. “When we ‘go away’ we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in a way we appreciate, or at least anticipate that it will do so” (Urry 2002:1). Yet while the tourist looks with appreciative eyes, the diasporic tourist looks with eyes hungry for symbolic connection, and then return to their everyday now
able to speak with authority and certainty concerning the defining characteristics of their identity.

Ryan, one of the younger members of the family reunion/church group tour to Ghana stated in one of our interviews; “being of African heritage, I just wanted to step on the soil”. Ryan’s quote speaks to an added consequence seen in journeys and traveling when you share a heritage and a culture with the land visited. Being there is not specific to tourists traveling to Ghana; across all cases tourists expressed a belief in the power of journeys to there.

In this section, I explore the power of experience to heal otherness and rootlessness, weaving in the movement of tourism and the transformative power of experience. Raymond Williams (1985) states that the term experience has been employed in the Anglo-American tradition in order to understand how knowledge is gathered from past events through either observation or reflection. He further states that this particular type of action creates a consciousness of subjectivity that can be distinguished from reason or knowledge. This emotional attachment of feeling relies on the act of experience and the consciousness that it creates to construct ontological truths. The idea of experience, being there, and witnessing, is “offered not only as truth, but as the most authentic kind of truth…the ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis (Williams 1985:128).

Therefore, in this section, I analyze the being there narratives of homeland tourists. First, homeland tourists compare and contrast the experiences in the homeland with more passive forms of learning and engagement. Touching and experiencing is discussed in contrast to reading or studying. These are places of pre-determined power and meaning for tourists, where experiences in the homeland become evidence unto themselves. Yet these
self-motivated individualistic acts of experience hold different meanings for different tourists and different social groups based upon the histories of migration and the contemporary realities of these social groups. Experience is significant for two main reasons, tactile forms of learning are discussed as the most truthful and powerful and experiences are active and individualist journeys in accord with America’s individualistic nature.

Community, history and connection come to life while in the homeland. Journeys are significant because of the belief that experience is the most truthful and evocative form of learning. Experience can assist in giving names and details to that which is still in formation, or provide support for that which is already known, because who can contest someone’s lived experience?

This quote below from Seth, one of the travelers on my Birthright tour expands upon Ryan’s comment. While Ryan discusses how his African heritage connects him to Ghana, Seth explains the actual symbols and processes that have shaped his connection to Israel:

In Hebrew school everyone talked about Israel, we watched videos, the original Sesame Street in Israel; I can't remember what it is called. I remember learning the language and being told how beautiful it was from an early age. I was fascinated by the Dead Sea as a little kid, people told me you could float in it. I had always wanted to experience that. Seth

Seth discusses memories from his childhood, and remembers watching Israeli Sesame Street in Hebrew school. He remembers being told that Hebrew was a beautiful language, and that there were places in Israel that defied natural law. How can one confirm these truths unless one experiences them first hand?
As Dr. Liedtke explains, experiential learning does wonders, as she contrasts passive forms of learning from experiential and tactile homeland journeys:

Many children adopted from China only experience Chinese holidays as a means of understanding their culture and don't know anything about China except Panda bears and the Great wall... If their toolbox is limited to what we tell them, such as their adoption story, or a video on "Big Bird in China" or "Mulan" we are limiting their ability to function and are not providing them experiential tools - seeing is believing! Life in China is not like "Big Bird in China. Dr. Liedtke 12

Homeland tours are active moments of direct contact between the child and China. These experiential tools are not limited to just adoption tourism. While many participants have attended specific educational programs dedicated solely to ethnic literacy, like Chinese and Hebrew afterschool programs, there is something quantifiably different between mediated methods of learning and experiential methods of learning. As Barbara, my Ghanaian trip coordinator explained; “It is one thing to read about one’s culture, but nothing can replace actually visiting the homeland of one’s ancestors”.

Tourists, like Barbara, discuss journeys in opposition to other more passive forms of obtaining cultural literacy. Rachel, a traveler on my Birthright tour, also uses similar language to Barbara. In this quote she contrasts passive classroom based learning with tangible, tactile experiential journeying:

You can learn about it in a classroom and see pictures of Masada or on poster or in a book but it’s so different when you are standing on top of it. It is just a completely different feel, it’s absolutely amazing and you cannot learn that in a classroom. Rachel

Rachel’s quote speaks to this power seen to exist within the journey. You can actually stand on top of your history. History literally comes alive and becomes more approachable

12 Returning to China with your Adopted Chinese Child" Dr. Jane Liedtke http://www.fccncalif.org/HomelandTravel/returninghandout.pdf
and understandable. As this quote from one homeland tourist to Ghana, featured in an article about slavery/heritage tourism explains:

Rahman Irvin, an American from Chicago, had only understood slavery from books before he came to Cape Coast. "We read about it a lot. It’s a part of our heritage," he said. Then he toured the slave dungeon as part of a Howard University alumni trip to Ghana. "To actually put brick and mortar to what you’ve heard," Mr. Irvin said, "is a totally different thing." Ghana: In the Slave Dungeons. Accra Mail (Accra) Lois Beckett

Raham Irvin details in this excerpt the significance of “being there”, and why this form of education trumps passive learning. He is able to “put brick and mortar to what you’ve heard”, feeling and touching making true what one has read and studied. Journeys therefore connect narratives of identity (the history of one’s ancestors, the rituals one participates in, etc.) with the actual physicality of their origins.

However, being there is not limited to just the materiality of history or the materiality of iconic homeland symbols, like the Dead Sea or Masada. By journeying to the homeland, tourists also envision interacting with homeland natives. As this quote from Tara, that I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, explains:

I consider myself to be Afro-centric. The way I view the world, is more from the standpoint of somebody who is a daughter of people who have been enslaved throughout history. Understanding the struggles they went through helps to navigate my place in the world. And to be able to fully understand that I actually needed to have contact with people living in Africa, people who are still carrying out the traditions that have been carried out thousands of years. Tara

Tara approaches Ghana in a frame similar to Ryan’s that I presented above. Yet she expands upon the specific construction of her dual identity as American and of African descent. She is not just a person of African descent; she is a descendant of enslaved peoples as well. Tara sees journeys to home as capable of grounding her two essential

13 http://allafrica.com 8/28/07
aspects of being. She discusses a sense of uncertainty and feels lost because she believes she doesn’t understand or even know her legacies and traditions. By seeing those who still practice these traditions, in their locations of origin she believes she will understand them more fully and therefore heal the rupture of displacement caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As this quote suggests, and I argue throughout this chapter, journeys to home provide the tourist with experiences that confirm and affirm the homeland’s significance, the tourists’ identity, and the symbols and values that define the larger American social group through experiences that confirm transnational links to original homelands. A confirmation at this level is therefore discussed as only possible due to travels to homelands and experiences in homelands. Therefore journeys to the homeland both make history tangible and roots accessible through the affective power of experience. As E.P. Thompson explains: “people do not only experience their own experience as ideas, within thought and its procedures…they also experience their own experience as feeling” (Thompson 1978:171).

Ross, one Birthright participant demonstrates another key factor for experiential learning and the emotional power found in homeland tourism:

By being able to say you have been to Israel is something special, that you might not even understand unless you go there...its something you have to experience. By being there surrounded by people like you, its a neat feeling. Ross

In this quote Ross highlights two features of homeland tourism. He first discusses how important it is to be able to say you’ve been there, “being there” therefore allows you to speak from authority. Homelands give you a deeper more tangible and therefore accurate understanding of place. Ross also brings up one of the key features of homeland tourism that I discuss at length in Chapter Seven. He mentions being surrounded by people like
you, including tourists and homeland natives in his bound social group. Therefore, I argue journeys to homelands are significant for discovering and constructing social groups.

Yet, homeland tourists discover the group, by finding themselves. Journeys are agentic and active. For example, prior engagements with Judaism and Jews were controlled and mediated by parents. My experiences of imposed Jewish participation are in agreement with many of the experiences of my participants. Birthright stands in opposition to the compulsory and laborious participation of one’s youth.

This personal and experiential form of learning is of particular significance for the Birthright participant just beginning to assert their control over their destiny. Birthright participants are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six. As this quote from Zach explains, this is a perfect time to begin to explore what being Jewish means to him:

It was a perfect time in my life to reflect on a lot of things...Reflect on spirituality and religion and was I on the right course with both of those elements of my life. It really helped clear my mind, I really felt like I was able to breathe and relax. Zach

Birthright has the possibility of transcendence and personal discovery because it relies upon the process of adolescent transition and individual agency. This sentiment is mirrored on Birthright’s website. The quote below also highlights personal choice and individual discovery where one tourist transitions from a passive Jewish pupil into an informed active adult community member because of experiences:

The Birthright Israel experience was more than just sightseeing and acting touristy. Going to Israel was about putting the pieces of my own jigsaw puzzle together. It was a culmination of what I had learned from my family, myself, and from what I learned at Jewish day school. Yael Ben-Moshe. Birthright website. Going Home

14 [www.birthrightisrael.com](http://www.birthrightisrael.com) “Alum Experiences” Accessed 8/28/07
This quote contrasts the agendas of leisure tourism with the power of homeland journeys. Birthright then is definitely not tourism.

Being there is not just significant for the Birthright participant beginning to discovery adult autonomy, or for the African American traveling to Ghana interested in reclaiming a stigmatized racial history. It also is the most significant and authoritative way Chinese adoptees can learn about who they are and begin to appreciate China. As Anna, stated in our interview when I asked her what she thought about China, she replied, “I like it even more because now when I see things relating to China, I can say, ooh I’ve been there”. Anna now has homeland references for the Chinese symbols and practices she sees in the United States, and can speak from authority as a Chinese American.

Parents and specialists like Dr. Liedtke stress homeland journeys because adoptees are at once visibly recognized as Asian, yet lack any understanding of what that might entail. These first hand moments are thought to be very important for understanding the culture and heritage that lies dormant in the adopted child. Being there then provides a sort of cultural understanding through osmosis. As one mother states:

No pressure on my girls to absorb whatever “culture” they can….I’m betting they pick up more culture by not trying to than they would if that were the purpose. Rumor Queen

In this respect, the homeland experience in China is similar to Birthright Israel and Sankofa tours; homeland tours are thought to provide experiences of cultural immersion culminating in self-discovery. Where other forms of cultural education set up the child as a passive vessel, homeland journeys include the child in the planning and significance narrative.

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The specific routes and circumstances of transnational adoption are also discussed when explaining the power of being there. Children have no memory of knowledge about China, besides what their parents tell them. Homeland tours provide something adoptive parents cannot, authority when discussing all things Chinese. As one mother commented on an adoption blog: “I want to take them back…so it is in their memory, not just the memory of the pictures we took [on our adoption trip].” 16

While parents have memories of China and photographs, adopted children do not remember China. Parents therefore travel to China on homeland tours to give their adopted children first hand knowledge and memories of China. As another parent detailed on an adoption list-serve:

Yes, I think it is important to take them back [so] that they are comfortable talking about China from their own experience and memories. [So] they don't have to take my word for something; they have their own personal experience to draw from. Host 17

In this quote, one parents contrasts the passive parent mediated learning with acts of journeying and discovery. As this quote suggests, the significance of individual agency is not limited to the other cases I present through this dissertation. Families also use individual and agentic frames to describe homeland journeys where experience is yet again crucial for knowledge concerning the essential aspects of identity.

“America reveres few terms as passionately as it does experience…no concept plays a more crucial role in the stories told about the nation’s founding or in the reasons given for Americans’ distinctive cultural features” (Egan 1999:3). The notion of experience

16 http://chinaadopttalk.com/2009/01/30/adult-adoptee-writings-going-back/ 2/5/2009 11:03 AM,
and its importance in shaping subjectivity and identity is specific to countries affected by
the Enlightenment and a particular feature of Americans and their “propensity for
idiosyncratic individualism” (Jay 2004:29). Experience allows Americans to understand for
themselves, it proves what one wants to see and relies on common paradigms of American
individualism for validity and authority. As Scott (1991) states: “what could be truer, after
all, than a subject’s own account of what he or she has lived through”? Yet, experience is
at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted.

The identity of the diaspora as an imagined community is neither fixed nor pre-
given. Through movement and participating in global flows, the diaspora can construct the
imagined community through touring the homeland. The imagined boundary of the
homeland include all the inhabitants, the like-minded tourists, the memorials and
monuments, the customs and traditions, the physical land, the shared history, the
contemporary moment, and the future possibilities now within reach. Tourism provides a
specific site and process for heritage consumption. It provides experience. But what does
the tourist actually experience? In the next sections of this dissertation I bring the reader on
tour, traveling to homelands with tour groups in order to understand how affect is
mobilized and community created.
Chapter Five: Overview: Imagining Ourselves to be through Travel

Part of the human condition, if not the essential flame, is the process of imagining ourselves to be. We are who and what we are only in becoming...our consciousness is the constant invention of what we may be, bounded by the possible. Breyten Breytenbach.

Imagining Africa

Homeland tours are mechanisms of becoming, where homeland tourists are in the process of imagining themselves to be members of specific communities. As Appadurai states, “it is the imagination in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood” (1996:7). And, in this case community and identity are being created through the process and power of imagining to be while traveling to place. In the chapters that follow, I explore the importance of emotion in the discursive construction of the meaning of home (Gurney 1997).

Homeland tourists are similar to any leisure tourists, they use, what John Urry has called, the tourist gaze (Urry 2002) to search for the quintessential essences that define/represent the countries and regions they visit confirming their preexisting assumptions. Like the leisure tourist searching for perfect representations, the homeland tourist looks for the distinctly African, Chinese, or Israeli that can also confirm their connection and preexisting assumptions. I call this the diasporic tourist gaze, where homeland tourists peer at the homeland searching for tangible proof of connection. They engage with the homeland much like a participant observer, as this quote by Allison, a young woman traveling to Ghana describes:
I made a point to really try, to really see connections. I was very observant…I looked at the food and tried to see the connections, and there were so many…African American traditionally cook food a certain way with certain flavors and you see certain dishes in Ghana that have the same spices, being prepared the same way. And you listen to the music and you see how the people dance, and we’ve taken it. It’s become the backdrop to a lot of black music in America. Making those connections was great.

As Allison’s quote suggests, homeland tourists actively look to the citizens of the homeland observing local presentations of self (Goffman 1959) to confirm connections, demonstrate similarities, and reconcile differences. Where tourists search for the quintessential aspects of place, the diasporic tourist’s gaze searches for the quintessential that also defines a natural and primordial relationship to this land. Homeland tours therefore present specific touristic places and people as quintessential representations of foreign yet relatable contemporary and historical ancestors and community. In these presentations, tourists consume the homeland and thereby shape and define the boundaries of community.

The tourism industry involves public involvement and investment by both the tourist and the place being toured. This relationship reinforces the desires of the tourist since countries fund restoration projects based upon the interests of those who will be visiting. The history deemed worthy of commemoration, as Bruner observed in Ghana serves the needs of the diaspora, determining what gets preserved (Bruner 1996).

In addition, tour agencies fashion encounters into itineraries; organize home visits, include approved locals in activities, and escort tourists to pre-approved vendors. Tour agencies also try to manage interactions between tourists and the homeland, giving the homeland tourists the desired engagements with locality and backstage spaces (MacCannell 1999). Therefore, tourists do not encounter raw or unprocessed homelands. The mechanics and the logistics of tours assist in the symbolic work of tours. I show in this
section how these engagements and spaces, as Urry has stated confirm already held 
notions about the land being visited.

I want to stress that homeland tourists are not passive dupes. Tourists are fully 
aware that true understanding of the homeland in its entirety is an impossible task for a 
two-week visit (if ever possible), they are also aware of how mediated and structured their 
interactions are. Yet, the organized and rigid itineraries of group tours provide more than 
just comfort for the Western traveler. Restricted and controlled tours do not limit authentic 
experiences, as Turner and Ash have suggested (1975). Structured tours structure meanings 
in ways already aligned with tourists’ desires. Tour operators and organizers are experts, 
knowing what sights/sites to focus on for the diasporan looking for connection. As Abby, 
one Birthright participant detailed:

It’s really a great chance to see the country, when you travel to another 
place, usually its up to you to decide what you’re going to see and do. I 
think that’s really nice that it’s done by professionals who have done it for a 
really lone time. They show you so many things. Abby

Abby is fully aware of the controlled nature of her homeland engagement, yet she trusts in 
the organizers to provide the appropriate and significant activities. As I presented in the 
preceding chapter, experiences are active and individual, yet the choosing of these 
experiences is left in the hands of others thought to be more qualified. This does not 
detract from their affective abilities, it actually adds to the power of the tour. As another 
tourist stated:

I like control, I felt really good because I knew exactly what was going to 
happen and exactly what I was in for…I was able to take a trip based on 
what I wanted to see

Where journeys are forms of experiential learning that are discussed as the most affective 
and truthful. They are powerful because they confirm what the tourist already wants to see.
Therefore, while the homeland tour is a bound and constructed encounter that we would expect to be dismissed for its superficiality and mediated nature; for many homeland tourists the hyperreal (Baudrillard 1994) is accepted. The hyperreal is used to describe the inability to distinguish reality from fantasy in advanced postmodern cultures. As Baudrillard has suggested, we seek simulated stimuli, where we have created a world that explains the very thing it was designed to represent, in doing so arguments and debates over authenticity are sidestepped.

This section examines the engagements while on homeland tours. Homeland tourists remove themselves from the everyday and embark on voyages of discovery. The second tourists disembark from planes they already begin to crafting meanings detailing the significance of homeland spaces and places. As Seth explains:

> When we landed I squeezed by some people and looked out the window, the runway had Hebrew letters on it, and right away I knew I was in Israel and I got a sense of excitement because this language, this culture I was finally going to be in the center of it. Seth

Birthright participants like Seth, and homeland tourists in general expect and confront the quintessential aspects of the homeland, like Hebrew letters, in homeland places, confirming and affirming their preconceived notions. He sees Hebrew letters signaling the beginning of his journey. Immediate encounters with familiar and distinct symbols confirm the significance of the journey itself. The first chapter of this section explores tourist interactions and understandings of place and the iconic locales in the homeland. I argue that tourist attractions shape understandings of the homeland giving the diasporic tourist first hand knowledge about their land of origin, its history and their connection to it.

The next chapter explores tourist interactions with each other while on the homeland tour. Once on the tour, tourists interact with each other shaping and defining
what it means to be included in this group making the imagined community briefly tangible.

The final chapter in this section presents the homeland/tourist interactions. While interactions between tourists and place involve heritage and history, and homeland tourists interact with each other to come to a consensus regarding the meanings of the homeland and their community, natives represent the present (even when discussed as present day representations of the past); they embody the principles and practices of the land toured and the larger imagined community.

I would like to stress how there is not one frame that tourists use to rationalize diasporic connection and signify the importance of place. There is also no single authentic and “pure” home, (Massey 1992, 1994). For example, while Michael, a Birthright tourist stated that "its good to see the origin of the religion that you follow for so long". Jacob reminds us that Israel “is not an ancient city of the bible, or a battleground you see on the news but a real country with thriving cities and cosmopolitan areas and universities." Tourists understand that there is variety and diversity within the land they are claiming. As Tara details, while Africa and Ghana are interchangeable due to a shared racial consciousness that connects all Black people, she understands that this frame overlooks some very real differences:

When a lot of people say Africa, they mean the entire continent they don’t differentiate. Africa has 50 something countries that are all very different. They just say Africa and think its a homogenous place, which its not. When people say African roots I don't take most of them literally...They mean it in a very general sense or are just referencing the movie, Roots. Tara

Throughout this dissertation I present interview excerpts and participant observation that shows how Africa and Ghana sometimes are interchangeable. But Tara’s quote highlights
the influence of media and culture for this Pan-African and Global racial consciousness. Tourists still use Ghana as a proxy for an imagined unified African community, yet this does not deter or diminish the power seen in imagining oneself to be.

I argue that tourism provides the necessary tools for narrating a history and a people in a concise and readily consumed form. While the specific histories are different for each case, the role of history remains the same; history provides connection and grounding for tourists. It is through the experience of homeland tourism that delineates meanings concerning the diasporic public sphere, specifically for those without direct connection to the homeland. The actual act of experiencing can provide new ways for individuals to understand their subjectivities in a world of global information flows. While diasporic public spheres might seem to have loyalty to distant homelands, this dissertation suggests that there might be a special American way to connect (Appadurai 1996:173).
Chapter Six: The Specific Sites/Sights of Significance

In this section I present analysis of my participant observation and interview data that focus on some of the specific sites visited on these group homeland tours. The places visited by homeland tourists are not only significant for the diaspora. Homeland tour attractions are common sites of interests for all travelers interested in the signifying aspects of these places. Most tourists to Israel will travel to Jerusalem, Masada etc. Similarly, most tourists to Ghana will probably see one coastal fort/slave dungeon. Travelers construct meaning through engagement and therefore tourist attractions must be consumed, experienced and witnessed to determine their meaning. Therefore I present excerpts that discuss how diasporic populations explain their distinctive connection to these spaces.

I present sites discussed by tourists as significant, the Kotel and Masada in Israel, Assin Manso and the Elmina Castle/Slave Dungeon in Ghana and the city of Guangzhou and orphanage/welfare center in China in order to understand how diasporic populations understand their natal homeland. I label these touristic locations as sites of significance because tourists discuss them as key symbols of community that narrate the history of the group and therefore come to define the identity of the community.

I cannot focus on all the tour sites visited across all three tours, nor were all the tour sites presented by tour agents and tour guides as significant because of a shared community and identity. Sites like Caesarea in Israel were visited as sites interesting for their history and archaeological possibility. As Michael’s comment suggests, sites lacking in community possibility were of marginal interest:

I don’t know why we went to Caesarea, None of it was authentic, it was a giant replica. Their biggest thing was this interactive CD-Rom, a hologram. It was just awful, and a complete waste of time. Michael
Michael even goes further, labeling this excursion a waste of time. Therefore, in this section I focus my attention on the sites deemed significant by homeland tourists that specifically speak to community, heritage and identity. In the quotes below I demonstrate how individual tourists envision these sites of significance as important for the tour group and the imagined community at large. I argue that sites of significance come to symbolize community and belonging due to a “shared significance embodied in form” (Griswold 1987; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz 1991). For the homeland tourist, these sites belong to the imagined community as contemporary sites of ancestral importance and are significant today because the lessons learned within their walls come to indicate contemporary shared community values.

The Wailing Wall and Masada

There are two sites of extreme significance for Birthright participants. The Wailing Wall or Kotel and Masada are tourist destinations for all those visiting Israel; yet signify something particular for the Birthright tourist. The interview data below shows how the Wailing Wall and Masada represent resiliency and affirms contemporary understandings of Jewish identity. By visiting these sites, Birthright tourists use this space, not as a symbol of religious devotion but as a representative cultural product signifying community values extending the boundaries of belonging to include all representations and possible levels of Jewish participation that exist in the contemporary moment and throughout time. This understanding becomes evidence of legitimate claims to Israel and therefore the required and needed support from the diaspora for Israel. The history of trauma and the importance of support and connection to world Jewry are represented on the Birthright tour through the framing, presentation and ultimate experiencing of place.
The Kotel: Symbolic Jewish Legacies and Contemporary Obligations

Located in the Old City of Jerusalem, The Western Wall remains a site of devotion for the Jewish people and is already an important symbol of Jewish identity. One doesn’t visit Israel and not see the Kotel. While all tourists visit the Wall, Jews have a special connection to it. The Western Wall, sometimes referred to as the Wailing Wall or the Kotel, is an important Jewish religious site visited by every Birthright tour. In Judaism the Kotel represents an important symbolic marker of the history and religiosity of the Jewish people.

Tourists discuss deeply personal moments at the Kotel, or Wailing Wall; where they felt the weight and pull of community and belonging. As this quote and corresponding photograph from Rachel suggest, the materiality of these sites of significance signify the gravitas of membership confirming one’s rightful place within this ancient yet contemporary people:

I remember when I first walked up to the Kotel; it was almost like the wind struck at just that moment. You see all the people standing before The Wall praying, it was inspiring. As I walked to the right side, where the women were, I looked around in awe. I was able to find an unoccupied spot where I immediately put my hand on The Wall and shut my eyes. Although there was complete silence all around the Kotel you could feel everyone around you praying. I felt connected to people I never met. Rachel
Yet, as I will demonstrate in this section, these highly personalized and personal moments like Rachel’s that connect the Birthright tourist to their larger imagined community assume certain truths and demand certain allegiances.

This wall is the sole remnant of the Holy Temple and is a place of pilgrimage for Jews around the world. Jewish law dictates prayers should be directed towards the Temple Mount and the last remaining artifact of the Temple accessible to Jews is the Western Wall. Birthright participants already have knowledge of the significance of the Kotel, albeit sometimes very minimal. As I’ve mentioned previously, Jewish synagogues around the world face Israel and Jerusalem. And as Michael states “All temples in the United States face East to face the Wall, you’re drawn to it; it’s the closest to god that you can ever be”. By personally traveling to this site of extreme significance, Birthright tourists come face to face with one of the most significant sites of Jewish history and Jewish symbolism. The quote below from Gabby suggests how powerful tangible experiences with familiar symbols can be:
It just was a wall, but it felt to me, so spiritual and really overpowered me. This was the wall that I was facing from New Jersey for the last twenty-five years and it’s been in the Torah and has been known by all of my ancestors and here I am touching it. I think that the Wall had a certain spirituality about it. It’s pretty evident when you go. Gabby

In this quote she explains the significance of this touristic and religious site because it links her through time to other historical periods and more specifically to each historical moment and ancestor from biblical times to the present. While she states that it’s just a wall; it is more than a wall. She has known about this wall through the rituals that bind her to the Jewish community. She touches the Wall feeling the power behind symbols. As Gabby mentions, the Wall is engrained in every Jewish person’s understanding of what it means to be Jewish, therefore you need to see it. As Adam reminds us in the quote below this location is important because of the larger community also believing in its significance:

The location and the importance of the location and the number of people crammed into this space to pray was just, especially since its one of those few things that if you haven’t gone to Israel it’s such an important place to go see, everyone tells you. Adam

In this quote Adam succinctly explains why the Kotel is important, “everyone tells you it is”. Yet again, while each Birthright participant discusses their individual experiences of enlightenment, the imagined community and the not so imagined obligation to its continuation is not far away.

Participants are encouraged to re-establish this distant biblical and historical landmark in their construction of what it means to be Jewish. As Seth comments, the very oldness of this site and its lasting importance signify that it must be powerful and important today. As the quote below states, he feels small in the long history of Jewish belief; yet empowered by that very same feeling, because he can feel the binds of community:
When I touched the Wall, it was empowering. I felt myself grow strong and weak at the same time. Weak with how much history there was and how in the scope of everything how insignificant I felt in the history of Judaism and empowered at the same time because here was this holy symbol still standing and how everyone was gathered around it, it was one of the most incredible things I have ever seen. Seth

Seth mentions being humbled at the Wall. By viewing this physical representation of an entire global and historical people Seth, and other Birthright participants experience a moment where the imagined community does not feel so vague. They are connected through time to the entire history and the people of Judaism. As Leah’s quote suggests below; sites of significance are affective because you can feel your ancestry and your present simultaneously:

I almost had a hard time believing I had ancestors so long ago, which was odd. It wasn’t what I was expecting...the Old City, on a more recent level, post biblical, in between biblical and modern times I could just picture thousands of people, more than thousands, millions of people coming there and crying and asking questions, asking for things – the old city and the desert both belong to me. Leah

As I discussed earlier, the “being there” is more affective and emotional than any other form of engagement because “being” at the Kotel makes history and belonging come alive. Homeland tourists extend connections back through time to imagined ancestors who have stood in the same locations during other historical periods. Leah can connect and feel connected to ancestors because of the materiality of these specific places. The quote and photograph below from Rachel suggest just how powerful tangible symbols can be since they evoke strong emotions of belonging. At the Wall, visitors write down notes and prayers and place them within the cracks of the wall, filling in crumbling mortar with their hopes. By participating in this ritual, Rachel discovers the importance of Israel, and the pull of community:
Once I opened my eyes I wrote a note and placed it with the others. Seeing everyone’s prayers stuffed into these cracks just goes to show you that everyone needs some help sometimes... These pictures mean so much to me because they remind me of how I am never alone. Millions of people have been to the Kotel and each one of them left a piece of themselves there. These are my people, our people. Rachel

![Prayer Notes at Western Wall](image)

Figure 3: Prayer Notes at Western Wall. Photograph by Rachel.

For Rachel, the Kotel becomes evidence of Jewish possibility and a Jewish community that includes all levels of Jewish engagement. Rachel found her place within Judaism at the Western Wall and now understands how she belongs:

Being at the Wall was pretty huge, seeing everyone praying. Normally when I'm at synagogue and see somebody davening [reciting Jewish prayer while rocking back and forth] I normally look at them in complete confusion, what are you doing? I think it was different being at the wall, I understand a little bit more the deeper religious feel that people have. Why they do some of the things that they do. Rachel

She might not feel inclined to be more religious, but she can see where she fits within the constellation of Jewish belief and activity. This type of identification widens the boundaries of membership to include Rachel’s limited experience with Jewish engagement. Therefore, Jewish identity, as witnessed on Birthright tours, is not based upon religious dedication but
upon the perceived shared symbols (and places) valued by the entire imagined community.

By visiting the most important site of Jewish religiosity, American Jewish participants use this space, not as a symbol of religious devotion but as a representative cultural product signifying community values.

The significance of place allows secular American Jews like Rachel to connect to her wider imagined community existing both historically, and, as I will discuss below, around the world. Rachel continues:

I think I felt most connected to God when I was in Jerusalem at the Western Wall on Shabbat because when I was there I wanted to say a prayer and I didn't know what to say so I went up to a woman who was with her family and asked is there a prayer that I can say. She told me that anything I say God will hear. She was holding my hand as she told me this. That made me tear because I felt like I was her daughter and she was helping me.

Rachel

As Rachel’s quote suggests; she literally connected to other American Jews while at the Western Wall. Rachel refers to the woman she met as a mother, a woman who can guide her and comfort her. Rachel’s experience demonstrates the power of connecting at sites already deemed significant and the comfort implied in connections based on kin, family and home. I will return to this theme later in upcoming chapters and expand upon the meaning behind kin when I discuss homeland/native interactions.

The Global Jewish community is presented as distinct with specific values and rituals. One of these is the recognition of the importance of place, both specific to the touristic site and the homeland as a nation. Those who might not see themselves as models of Jewish life can therefore feel a connection to a foreign land and a similarity with those speaking a different language due to the presentation of Israel and the Jewish people as a
diverse yet bound group. As this quote from a Birthright participant featured on their website suggests; the Kotel is appreciated and visited by all.

One aspect that I noticed while in front of the Kotel that I did not anticipate was the display of unity. It is not only religious Jews who pray there. There were IDF soldiers praying next to men in black hats and religious garments who were standing immediately beside other men wearing shorts and a t-shirt. All "types" of Jews from all over the world were at the Kotel together. It was as if the Kotel had issued a silent decree reminding us that despite our many differences, we are all Jews and therefore all one. Wendy Wolfish, birthright Website

By assuming similarity with other praying Kotel visitors, homeland tourists extend the boundaries of belonging to include all representations and possible levels of Jewish participation that exist in the contemporary moment and throughout time. Wendy’s encounter mirrors Rachel’s where place provides legitimacy for extending the community to include the vast array of possibilities for Jewish identification.

As I have argued in this section, the Kotel becomes a tangible symbol of the historic and contemporary Jewish community, but as Leah stated in the beginning of this section: “the old city and the desert both belong to me”. Leah’s comment then reveals something else, an obligation and an ownership of this land, it’s history, and sites of significance. Places of significance are now places of possession, and by owning and consuming these symbolic markers of identity the Birthright participant becomes a crucial node in the legacy and future of the Jewish people. As this quote below from Birthright’s website suggests (and as I have discussed in previous chapters), Birthright participants have an obligation to their ancestors, fulfilled through engagement with memorials:

To return our souls to the Holy Land, it is our obligation. To step foot in Jerusalem -- walk four steps -- stand in front of the Kotel, touch the stone,

\[1\] Old and New: A source of strength www.Birthright.org
imagine our ancestors, imagine ourselves as we were in past lives, we were there. Farah Fidler, Birthright website.

The interview material I have presented in this section mirror the words of this Birthright participant featured on their website. There is an obligation to link the present day Jewish body to the countless other Jewish bodies that have existed from the time of the bible to now. Sites of biblical significance are important to every generation of Jew and are key in Jewish rituals. By imagining yourself connected to a Jewish lineage, you also go back in time personally and in this time travel truly understand why Israel is so important for the Jewish identity and your personal place within its history and future.

Birthright tourists connect to Israel and the Jewish people through symbols, not necessarily a shared religious devotion. These symbols come to represent Jewish resiliency, not necessarily Jewish religiosity. Therefore, this one remaining temple wall, now the site of one of the biggest and most impressive mosques in the Middle East falls in line with contemporary and popular understanding of Jewish identity post WWII; Jews are resilient, and continue in the face of oppression. As Drew stated in our interview “We were once a large people, and we are reaching large numbers again, we must never forget what happened in our past.” This quote from Drew brings up familiar understandings of Jewish identity influenced by the shadow cast by the Holocaust. The Kotel becomes a tangible and extremely ancient representation of this resiliency, and specifically the significance of Israel for Jewish continuation. The Kotel therefore comes to symbolize not necessarily religiosity as an ancient temple wall, but evidence of legitimate claims (based on historical/biblical accounts) to land and contemporary support for the nation’s continuation. As Ross’s comment below concerning Jewish residency in Israel implies:
It is important that they stay there and keep living the way they live otherwise you lose something even bigger. Ross

This quote by Ross implicates the entire Jewish diaspora and their obligation to the state of Israel. The Wailing Wall then represents an important symbol that binds the Global Jewish population regardless of religiosity, symbolizing endurance and persistence while simultaneously encouraging support for Zionism and Israeli statehood.

Masada: Standing on History

Birthright participants also visit Masada, the ancient palaces and fortifications located in the South of Israel in the Judean desert overlooking the Dead Sea. Birthright participants wake up before dawn to climb Masada reaching the peak in time to watch the sun rise over the Dead Sea and desert. According to legend, in 73 AD, 960 Jewish rebels under siege in the ancient fortress of Masada committed suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. The particulars and truths of this myth are questionable at best. Sociologist, Nachman Ben-Yehuda suggests that the myth of Masada helped shape the identity of the Israeli state and created cohesion by fostering a strong sense of a shared and heroic past (1995). The story of Masada is a story of dedication to one’s beliefs in the face of large-scale persecution. Historical accuracy aside, the mythic heroism of Masada provides “an important ingredient in the very definition of our Jewish and Israeli identity” (Ben-Yehuda 1995:5).

For Birthright participants the story of Masada becomes a perfect metaphor for the strength of Israel and by extension the Jewish people. “The trips, both covertly and overtly,

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2 For more information about Masada’s strategic use as an ideological symbol for the state of Israel and the Jewish people see, Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel by Machman Ben-Yehuda, University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.
create links between the major threats to Jewish existence in recent decades – the Holocaust, the Arab-Israel conflict, assimilation and intermarriage – and Israel as a response to these threats” (Saxe and Chazan 2008:49). What works at Masada is again, this feeling of “being there” as Rachel states:

I think the feeling that came over you was so much more...I felt a sense of freedom, relief and a sense of awe. Just being able to look out and see so many things and be standing on a place where people lived so many years ago and are a part of your history. Rachel

In Rachel’s quote we can see the meaning of Masada. She feels freedom because of the extreme vastness of the desert as well as the freedom she experiences today to practice Judaism. She feels relief that she can stand at this site and see the history of her people and now make it party of her story.

Resiliency was discussed in narratives describing both the Kotel and Masada As this quote from Zach suggests, historically and throughout time Jews are resilient, principled and honorable:

Hearing the whole history of what happened there. It was the perfect metaphor for Israel. You never give up it’s always worth fighting, it’s important to not let history repeat itself. Zach

In our interview I asked Zack to explain why Masada was the perfect metaphor for Israel and give me particular details he remembers from his tour guide and his time at Masada. While Zach didn’t remember the historical particulars that make Masada meaningful, he did use his experience at Masada to shape his understanding of Israel and the Jewish people and his position as an American Jew. As Zach’s recollection of Masada suggests, the symbolic meaning of place is important not necessarily the specifics of history. Zach’s understanding of Masada is in agreement with MacCannell’s understanding of how tourists make sense of what they see based upon “tourist truth” not necessarily actual historical
truth (MacCannell 1989:139).

Zach gained something unattainable in the United States and only possible at this specific site of Jewish significance; he confirms the values he sees important to the Jewish people and confirms his construction of what defines a Jewish subject. He takes his experience at Masada and relates it to the history of Israel as a nation. He then uses the lesson of perseverance as a definition of the Jewish people as well as an indicator of his newfound relationship to Israel as an American Jew. Zach was not alone in his interpretation of the meaning of Masada. Ross also presented Masada in an over confident yet under informed manner. In the quote below he is totally sure of the truth behind the Jewish legacy of heroism and strength in the face of insurmountable adversity:

I am definitely a large proponent for the future of Israel. Before I went I didn't know how necessary it was to keep Israel, but it's important. It's important, going back to Masada, you don't back down, you hold true to your convictions, hold onto that piece of land that has been such an integral part of your history. Ross

Ross is now a “large proponent for the future of Israel”, believing in the state of Israel’s natural right to existence based upon an ancient incident and its constructed legend and fable.

In conclusion, the Wailing Wall and Masada symbolize Jewish resiliency and Jewish community where a history of trauma becomes tangible leading to individual connections to a global Jewish population and support for the continuation of the state of Israel. Birthright participants discuss finally understanding the truth to the Jewish legacy of persecution, a legacy that now extends through time past the Holocaust. Movement then becomes understood as crucial, and Jewish movement and dispersal is a sign of resiliency and strength; a core value that binds the community. Therefore, while religion is the base
of imagined Jewish affiliation, as I present throughout this dissertation, affiliation is not occurring because of religious participation. In these moments religion is the primordial kernel, the base to Jewish connection, yet resiliency and strength define the community. It is these values that the Birthright participant can relate to, as domestic American others, trying to maintain their distinctiveness for the current moment and future generations.

**Assin Manso and The Slave Dungeons**

For homeland tourists to Ghana there are two sites of extreme significance – Elmina Castle and The Wall of Return. Below, I show how these sites are critical because they link Ghana to the diaspora and rely on the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, not primordial beginnings. Instead of beginning with the mythic African World Family and the attributes shared by all racial kin, tourists discuss the specific strength of slave ancestors who survived such extreme brutality. Homeland tourists confront slavery and discover the strength of unknown ancestors in order to fortify the contemporary African American community in the face of contemporary racial oppression and discrimination.

Where Elmina is about slavery and interacting with ancestors, Assin Manso is about contemporary connections and celebratory diasporan returns. The material presented below suggests that homeland tourists connect not to a nation, region, or even a defined people; but to an imagined community spanning time and space. Tourists do not connect to Ghanaians, tribes, or even specific tribal lands; they connect to an imagined racial community based upon a shared racial consciousness, and the specific qualities seen in slave ancestors. This connection occurs through experiencing the materiality of slave castles and historical sites that memorialize slavery.
Castle/Dungeons: Historical Healing, the origins of strength

In Ghana, sites of significance memorialize a time more recent and more haunting than the Wailing Wall or Masada. Elmina Castle, where slaves were held before transportation to the Americas, represents an iconic symbol of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and is visited by both diasporic and general tourists alike. While touring sites like Elmina, homeland tourists are encouraged to see themselves within the walls feeling the materiality and weight of this brutal historical moment.

In the quote below, Kathryn discusses how she connects across time. Tangible representations of trauma like Elmina provide sad yet empowering revelations:

When I was at the slave castle, as a child learning about slavery I just kind of accepted it for what it was, a terrible thing in our American history where people who looked like me were enslaved and treated like non humans and when I think you are in the slave castles, its not that cerebral, its not a lecture, its something that you feel because you get there and you realize that it could have been you or some stage in time, a different form of you in that dungeon, and your emotions get into it, and you feel connected to it because you are connected to it. You realize that all the struggles of your generation and the generations before you all stem from this place. Kathryn

Kathryn begins by highlighting the importance of “being there”, and the difference between stationary learning and active experiencing. Being in the slave dungeons is something you can feel. Kathryn approaches Elmina as a site of extreme significance because she sees the legacy of racial oppression beginning within these walls. Homeland tourists like Kathryn then visit Elmina, approaching this touristic site as a pocket of “traumatic pastness” (Trouillot 1995) facilitating engagement with imagined ancestors.
This excerpt from Tara’s journal below represents a common response when encountering the origins of slave routes. At Elmina, she confronts the brutality and reality that brought her unknown ancestors to the Americas:

I couldn’t help but wonder if my ancestors were troubling the water as a sign to never forget what happened to them. For the entire time we were in Elmina, we never saw the water at ease. It always rushed to us with great urgency. Tara’s Journal

In this excerpt Tara explains her obligation to experience Elmina in a different frame than the obligation to family and the contemporary imagined community seen in the comments by Birthright participants. Tara is urged and encouraged to understand the origins of slavery by unknown and lost slave ancestors.

The castles and dungeons at Elmina are registered World Heritage sites visited by a wide variety of tourists. Yet when I traveled with groups of African Americans with Sankofa tours, Elmina was presented as a place of interest specifically for the tourist in search of routes to heritage. Sites were framed with personal significance since tourists were hailed as returnees. Although, as Bayo Holsey learned from participating in over fifty
tours of Elmina and Cape Coast, the tour guides alter their presentations according to whether the audience was composed of whites, Ghanaians, or diaspora blacks (Holsey 2008). As Allison, a member of the college alumni group stated, her African tour guide shaped her interaction to the slave dungeons by presenting place through the joint and shared historical experience and shared consequences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade:

Going on the tours of the slave castles, the tour guides spoke in terms of "we" did this; they talked about the African role that was played in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. And they spoke, to us, and I'm not sure they spoke to white tourists the same way. They spoke like "we did this to you guys" it was "we" and "you" and it made this true connection. And of course, he didn't do anything, this was many years ago and we are American born and raised, but he made the connection that you come from somewhere over here and your family is probably related to someone in my family. The pronouns that were used made this huge connection. Allison

Allison’s tour guide related to her lived experience as an African American and previous knowledge of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. She remembers the connection she felt to Ghana and to the African people because her tour guide used the word “we” to suggest a shared history and therefore a shared present. As Holsey noted though, tour guides do not present these sites in the same manner for all tour groups, yet those traveling with African American tour groups are not aware of this difference. The presentation of place in this manner provides immediate and tangible links to distant and historical pasts. The experience of travel or the routes one takes to find roots make sites of tourism important for the symbolic construction of community. Elmina, like other sites of significance becomes a mechanism for community building due to its “shared significance embodied in form” (Griswold 1987; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz 1991). In this case, Elmina was framed with personal significance since tourists were hailed as kin/returnees.
The Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism actively utilizes the global imagined when defining the meanings of historical touristic sites of diasporan interest. Commemorations to the past are constructed with regard to present day circumstances and aimed at the contemporary interests of the African World Family, but mainly the diaspora as this quote below suggests:

We will build in this slave fort, from which our peoples were shipped out supposedly never to return, a museum dedicated to those Africans in all walks of life who triumphed over slavery, who triumphed over ever adversity; who triumphed and continue to triumph over those who sought to enchain them: - we will build a monument to The True Josephs. At this monument you will relive the story of Mary MacLeod Bethune, Frederick Douglas, Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Duke Ellington, Martin Luther Kind, George Washing Carver et al. The Ghana Joseph Project, Ghana Tourism Website.

This excerpt from an on-line media outlet details events at Elmina and hails the entire global African World Family, but expresses the significance in the frames common and familiar to the diaspora. The strategies of memorialization witnessed in homeland tour sites demonstrate how Ghana utilizes its past to cater to the needs of the diasporan looking for healing, not necessarily the desires or narratives of national identity important for most Ghanaians.

Allison’s tour guide uses a common trope seen in Israel too, the insistence on a shared primordial kinship. Yet, while the quote and analysis above suggest that sites of significance confirm racial kinship between Ghanaians and African American homeland tourists, the interview material below suggest that locations like Elmina Castle become

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4 Sparse turnouts in 1998 and 1999 demonstrated that for the Ghanaians, history did not begin with slavery. Most Ghanaians are not particularly concerned with slavery and focus on the long history of the colonial presence. Heritage travel would need to expand attracting local participants as members of the pan-African family.
signifiers for the untapped strength ingrained within the diasporic community. Upon returning to the United States, Ryan explained what he brought back from his experiences in Elmina:

It made me think about the strength in terms of my ancestors and their resilience and brilliance but it also made me have a greater appreciation for what people of color, African Americans experience in this country and what we are made of…it made me realize the strength and tenacity of my immediate family members and African American people in general, particularly when it relates to racism. Ryan

As Ryan, a member of the family reunion homeland tour, comments, he gains strength from inhabiting the places where possible ancestors also stood. Ryan does hail an entire racial imagined community when he discusses the strength he discovered at Elmina. Yet, he focuses on African Americans, the African American experience and his immediate family. The ancestry Ryan constructs concerns the psychological and physical characteristics of those captured, not necessarily those who remained.

For Ryan in the quote I presented above, discovering and extending his heritage involves reclaiming a lost power. Yet recovering and consuming this lost power is not without difficulty. Strength and dignity can only be recovered once homeland tourists also encounter the weight and brutality of the routes and reality of trans-Atlantic slavery. The most important places visited are those that provide more detail of the lost and severed heritage since “the spirits of the Diaspora are somehow tied to these historic structures (Report 1994:3)” (in Bruner 1996).

5 While African Americans focus on the dungeons at Elmina, most Ghanaians are not particularly concerned with this period of history. “For Ghanaians, Elmina Castle represents a part of Ghanaian history, from the Portuguese who built Elmina in 1482 primarily to facilitate trade on the Gold Coast, to the Dutch who captured the castle in 1637, to the British who gained control of Elmina in 1872, through to Ghanaian
Slavery, for the most part, has been silenced. As this quote from a Ghanaian newspaper about one man’s journey to the slave dungeons demonstrates, when confronted with the profundity of the mechanics of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, you cannot keep it forever relegated to silenced and overlooked corners:

Rahman Irvin, an American from Chicago, had only understood slavery from books before he came to Cape Coast. "We read about it a lot. It’s a part of our heritage," he said. Then he toured the slave dungeon as part of a Howard University alumni trip to Ghana. "To actually put brick and mortar to what you’ve heard," Mr. Irvin said, "is a totally different thing." Ghana: In the Slave Dungeons. Accra Mail (Accra) Lois Beckett

Encounters with these sites of significance dissolve time and transport contemporary relatives back to the original moment of forced separation.

Homeland Tourists viscerally experience the past. The rooms and chambers smell damp, and tour guides often remark that this “is the smell of the blood, sweat, feces, and corpses that rotted for centuries in this place. Which, is also, they explained, the substance on which we are standing” (Holsey 2008). Slavery therefore becomes not just a topic in a textbook beginning on American soil; it lives, breathes and can be touched in Africa.

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independence in 1957...Generally Ghanaians focus on the long history of Elmina, while diaspora blacks focus on the mid-Atlantic slave trade.” Bruner 1996:292

6 http://allafrica.com 8/28/07
Nina returns to Ghana frequently with Barbara Jones on many of her tours. She appears almost regal on our tour, possessing a poise she says she discovered in Africa due to a healing moment with her slave ancestors. During Nina’s first trip to Ghana she brought her female ancestor home, back to her lands of origin and rightful place. She explained:

I just felt that I had brought my ancestor home…I had a very moving experience. Going down to the dungeons and suddenly something took hold of me and I just started moaning, I wasn’t speaking or anything. I wasn’t expecting to feel any emotions. I put my foot on the first step to go down, and it was like something took hold of me and it was emotional, I couldn’t speak, I was moaning, a low moan. It was my female ancestor that I had brought back home. Nina

Nina’s experience with symbolic heritage demonstrates the very tangible consequences of engagement with places of extreme significance. Nina interacts with unknown distraught and unsettled ancestors. She cannot truly heal the injustices inflicted upon her ancestors, or dismantle present day racial inequality, but she can symbolically cope and return emboldened with the power to define racial classification on her terms.
Many tour participants discussed the consequences of symbolic time travel. They detailed being overwhelmed by the presence of lost and wounded ancestors, “suggesting that they are recalling crucial yet exceedingly painful collective memories that are already deeply engrained in their historical imaginations” (Holsey 2008:198). The sights, sounds and smells of Elmina and Cape Coast castles dominate the descriptions I present in this section. The sensory experience in the dungeons and courtyards of the castles bring experiential knowledge of what transpired to the forefront.

At Elmina a balcony overlooks a large and expansive enclosed courtyard, it was explained to be the Governor’s balcony where he would stand and choose who would entertain him that evening. In the quote below Tara discusses how the physicality of place allowed her to feel a visceral connection to the female captors and understand the fear they must have felt:

> When we went to the different castles and into the dungeons, you can read about that stuff in books and see it in movies, but it’s nothing until you actually experience it, when we were at Elmina castle, when we were standing out in the courtyard where the governor could chose which one he wanted to rape. I had a breakdown. If I were in that situation, would I have been able to survive it, not only physically, but mentally. One person in my group said, all you need to know is that someone survived it. Somebody survived this so you could be here today. Tara

Tara shadowed her female ancestor discovering a reservoir of strength she didn’t know she had by trying to comprehend survival in the face of brutal misogyny. The rape of black women exemplifies the extreme and complete dehumanization of enslaved people, and poignant for female travelers due to the particular type of vulnerability of black women (Holsey 2008). Traveling to specific places of historical significance is an emotional journey where one is encouraged to confront traumatic pasts. Encounters with place where
one can come in contact with tangible legacies of trauma make unknown heritages painfully accessible and perhaps heal deeply engrained wounds of rootlessness.

In locations like Elmina, similarly to Seth’s experiences at the Kotel, Tara felt weak and strong simultaneously, however, not necessarily for the same reasons. Whereas Seth felt the entirety of a spiritual ancestry that spanned generations and millennia, Tara confronts the brutality of slavery and the strength of survival:

…even when it seems as though we’re at our weakest, scratch the surface just a little bit and I'm sure you'll find some defense mechanism instilled in us hundreds of years ago. Tara’s Journal

For Tara, Elmina comes to represent the strength she knows to exist within the African American body. She comes away with a lesson that she can refer to in any situation and can be applied to the entire African American community.

At Cape Coast there are specific sites like the courtyard discussed above that stand out and stay with homeland tourists. The “Door of No Return”, a small door in the castle/dungeon in Cape Coast where captives were led to waiting slave ships, is discussed by those I interviewed as tangible symbol of a historical truth: the final exit from Africa.
As Helen explains:

The Door of No Return, where they actually pushed the slaves overboard...That was very emotional...I said I want to bring it back and show it to the young people here, because the way I look at it, the blacks that made it safely, not safely but made it from that continent to America or the other places we went to. The ones of us who made it, to America, our ancestors who made it here, were very, very strong. They had to be. Helen

Yet as Helen’s quote suggests; this site of absolute rupture and movement can be reclaimed since, as Helen details, the ancestors of the diaspora had to be very strong. The African American legacy begins with powerful survivors, not domestic pawns. Homeland tourists like Helen construct a transnational African American consciousness that empowers for domestic agendas. Therefore, the important aspect is not the return to original sites of trauma but returns back to the United States. Helen, an older woman living in an economically depressed southern town, wants to bring the specific narrative of history back in order to shape future domestic understandings of self and community.

Helen and Tara live in two different communities. Tara is a recent college graduate living and working in a northeastern city and Helen is an older retired woman in the south,
yet both came away from Elmina with definitions of who makes up their imagined community and the innate qualities of membership. In claiming the strength of those who survived, they arm themselves for battle in the United States. “It leads them to believe that they too can survive. Such is particularly true for middle-class, educated individuals, many of whom not only see members of their own families continuing to suffer but who have also been exposed to representations of African Americans such as those found within “culture of poverty” theories” (Holsey 2008:200).

As this journal entry from Tara suggests, legacies of extreme persecution can only be healed through revelations of their enormity, and only fully understood through encounters with place:

On Monday, we experienced the slave dungeons at the Elmina and Cape Coast castles. There aren't too many things that can make me cry like a helpless baby. But as I stood in those 400-plus year old structures, I felt an overwhelming sense of grief for what my ancestors were forced to endure. I also felt an equally powerful sense of pride that they were strong enough to survive such atrocities. I have no doubt that the gift of surviving extremely difficult circumstances has been handed down from generation to generation. Even when it seems as though we're at our weakest, scratch the surface just a little bit and I'm sure you'll find some defense mechanism instilled in us hundreds of years ago. Tara’s Journal

Tara is not one to get emotional. Throughout our tour she always carried herself with a poise and carriage that signified her confidence and strength. She is career driven, socially aware and engaged; and not one to let emotions get the best of her. Yet at Elmina she felt her history. She uses her experiences at Elmina to construct positive (yet still narrated as inherent) racial characteristics. The materiality of history allows tourists like Tara and Helen to extend kinship through time to unknown African ancestors who have given her an ingrained strength of character she can now draw from in her daily life.
Encounters with the weight of truth concerning the actual circumstances of the slave trade suggest how empowering even the possibility of roots can be. In this quote below Allison comments on how unknown her actual lineage is, yet these landmarks provide grounding and a sense of rootedness:

So for me, its connected me, and hey for all I know I could have descended from someplace else, but just seeing those slave castles really gave me some concrete evidence that there is a history to who I am, and its long before this oppression and other stuff; there’s some lineage. It elongated my family tree. Allison

Allison connects not to a nation, region or even a defined people, but to slave castles, She discovers the strength of body and character that was necessary to survive institutionalized brutality and transforms racial classification from a marker of inferiority into an indicator of great power.

Interactions with tangible and physical places of significance signify authority, removing the power to define from the powerful, exposing the true depths of the brutality the African diaspora carries with them. Historical sites like Elmina do not connect tourists to Africa, they mend untraceable ancestry, using place as a proxy for family lineage. Each participant’s legacy begins at a slave dungeon as suggested by Kathryn’s comment in the beginning of this section; someone had to survive so they could return.

**Assin Manso: Contemporary Commemoration**

Other tour sites are also visited as continued markers of this narrative of forced separation. The Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism has erected a “Door of Return” specifically for diasporan visitors in Assin Manso, the historical site where slaves were washed before being sold. As presented by the Joseph Project:

At Assin Manso captives on their way to the coast for shipment were given their last bath in the River Prah prior to leaving the shores of Africa. Here in
Assin Manso we are developing a Garden of Commemoration for meditation, an interfaith prayer hall to pray for the spirits of the ancestors, a wall of return on which can be etched the name of a returnee/pilgrim or that of an ancestor or deceased relative to proclaim the return. The Ghana Joseph Project.

While Elmina and the Door of No Return are memorials to the slave trade, Assin Manso and the site of the Last Bath specifically hail diasporan returnees as contemporary subjects. Travelers to Assin Manso visit the gravesites of two returned slaves, Samuel Carver (found in Jamaica) and Crystal (found in New York). There is a memorial wall where, for a price, people from the diaspora can have their names displayed on the “Wall of Return”. There are also pictures of celebrated and famous African and African-Americans including, WEB Du Bois (who has his remains in Ghana), Martin Luther King Jr., Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (an advocate of Pan-Africanism and the leader of Ghana from 1952-1966 during its independence), and others. The memorial at Assin Manso suggests a type of commemoration that focuses on contemporary black movement.

In interviews and conversations while in Ghana tourists discussed how this site confirmed the racial kinship they were constructing. Barbara, our tour leader highlighted the intersection of legacy and mobility when stating she was “so proud that many generations later, there is a "Wall of Return" erected at Assin Manso and the group that I took in 2007 has their name there”.

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Nina’s description of her first time at Assin Manso demonstrates how specific locations come to represent and confirm the connection between the diaspora and Ghana/Africa:

I was standing up looking at the others bathing, there was one sisters she was so emotional, she was just singing and talking aloud, she was just really taken and next thing I know I was there in the water too, with my shoes and everything on. It was definitely an experience with my ancestors.

This quote from Nina is emotionally different than her other connection at Elmina. At Elmina she was overtaken by sadness and obligation, and in this moment she is overtaken by connection and possibility. By presenting and simultaneously healing wounds of slavery, I argue that the pan-African imaginary as discussed by Nina is re-constructed for a new era of American national identity that relies on global consumption and African places.

By presenting and simultaneously healing wounds of slavery, homeland tourists recreate group identity. Consuming Africa’s memorials to slavery turn moments of rupture and lost primordial ties into positive narratives of heritage. Where Elmina and Cape Coast
focus on unknown ancestors and confronting traumatic and brutal separation, Assin Manso celebrates the contemporary return by focusing solely on the needs and interests of returning economically powerful global kin.

Adoption Specific Sites

Families have different goals in mind when visiting China, they might be curious about the place where their child once lived, interested in discovering historic relics like the Terra Cotta Warriors, or want to know more about the specifics of their adoption. Homeland tours try to provide a little bit of everything; and families travel to many places one might not think of traveling to when in China and interested in Chinese landmarks. Adoption tours take families to sites of specific interest for adoptive families, specifically traveling to the city of Guangzhou, and visiting welfare centers and orphanages.

Here I argue that Guangzhou is a city visited to commemorate not necessarily Chinese identity, but transnational adoption. This city is visited specifically because of its significance for adoptive families. Stores throughout the city cater to families adopting Chinese children.
I analyze the discussions of orphanage/welfare centers and the meanings behind these commemorative returns. Parents can never fully discover the particulars of their child’s identity, these girls were abandoned and direct links to parents are impossible. Yet, even without questions answered, through ritual activities like retuning to specific hotels, signing returnee guest books at orphanages, and revisiting sites of significance specific to adoption, parents are soothed. I argue that at these places tourists connect not to China but to the other families who have come before. China is therefore different than the other two cases in this respect, the identity work of this tour is different; parents discover and explore China to understand and repair a different sort of ungrounded and uprootedness; that of abandonment due to adoption and otherness based on traditional understandings of family.

**Guangzhou**

Lotus Tours, one tour agency specializing in Asian travel, presents Guangzhou as a site of specific interest for the adoptive family. From their Chinese Heritage Discovery Tour, exclusively for adoptive families, friends and relatives, the itinerary states:
After lunch, take a walking tour of the Shamian Island area that will include the medical clinic where adoption medical exams are done and the photo shop where your child’s visa photo was taken.

The following day, you continue the adoption specific tour by beginning “with a visit to the American Consulate where all American adoptive families must go to complete adoption proceedings”. For American parents adopting from China, the final part of the adoption on Chinese soil is obtaining clearance for an exit visa only available at the U.S. consulate’s office located in the city of Guangzhou.

In Guangzhou, according to the itinerary of the heritage tour I travelled with, we were supposed to spend a day visiting sites specific to the adoption process like health centers, passport offices, and the offices of the American Consulate. Jim, one adoptive father of three daughters asked: “who would want to do that?” Jim compared visiting adoption sites like visiting the DMV or Post Office back home. While Jim wasn’t interested in re-visiting these sites, his wife Lisa remembered these locations clearly and shared her memories.

While we visited the medical clinic in Guangzhou where the babies are checked for health problems, Lisa showed me where she sat nervously. She explained how anxious she was waiting for each of her three daughters to be checked and cleared for international travel. She remembers the anticipation and fear, timidly asking the nurses if the children look healthy now, holding them close to her as if even now they could be removed from her care.

These locations, for Lisa have meaning, because these were the sites where parenthood became real and could have possibly been taken away. Yet for her husband Jim, these places were not for commemoration, they were just reminders of bureaucracy,
paperwork and process. Their different feelings towards these locations is consistent with work on parental participation in adoption-related issues, where mothers appear to be more involved than fathers in FCC activities (Tessler et. al. year; Louie 2009).

By returning to locations like those in Guangzhou, homeland tourism provides routes to celebrate diverse families. Families are welcomed back with their children and encouraged to share their feelings and stories, making their child’s route to family explicit and tangible. They challenge the history of loss and abandonment seen in adoption and create together the meanings and values of family within these locations as they introduce their children to specific sites of Chinese adoption.

![Figure 9: Store in Guangzhou offering stroller rentals for newly adoptive parents](image)

Hotels themselves are even discussed as key landmarks. The White Swan, a hotel in Guangzhou caters to American families adopting Chinese babies, and was a frequent topic of conversation. This five-star internationally recognized hotel is around the corner from the U.S. consulate that processes INS documentation. While families are not
obligated to stay at the White Swan, many do (roughly 6,000 a year). Soon to be parents spend most of their time at the White Swan or other local hotels during the adoption process. The White Swan specializes in adoption related travel and maintains specific floors dedicated solely to parents adopting Chinese children. They even give families a complimentary “Going Home” Barbie.

Figure 10: "Going Home" Barbie, complimentary with adoption specific stay at the White Swan Hotel

Most families have stayed at the White Swan and all families have eaten next door at the American restaurant Lucy’s. Due to its significance for adoptive families, homeland tours include the White Swan as a site of specific interest and the parents I traveled with were eager to return to this iconic reminder of their initial travel to China and the days anxiously spent waiting for visa clearance.

Guangzhou therefore is a city visited for a specific reason and return visits commemorate not necessarily Chinese identity, but transnational adoption. Families see

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the new families on the street, stay in the same hotel they have stayed in, eat at the same western restaurant and feel comforted by the continuation of the ritual nature of adoption, rejoining the “flotilla of strollers in the hallways of the great, floating adoption Mecca”. Similar to the Kotel and Elmina, Guangzhou therefore becomes significant because of the “shared significance embodied in form” (Griswold 1987; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz 1991).

Ritual Returns: Orphanage visits as Commemorations of Created Families

There is a distinct break between tour sites of leisure and specific sites dedicated to adoption. Generally, orphanages are not standard tourism destinations. Traveling to orphanages is specific to homeland adoption tourism. Parents hope that the orphanage will provide tangible, not imaginary connections and also commemorate and legitimate the transfer of the Chinese child to the American parent. Orphanage visits include the adopted child now that she is at an age where she will remember and become an active participant in her personal history and family narrative.

Homeland tour agencies and adoption experts featured in homeland tour literature view orphanage visits as the most crucial piece of the homeland tour. As stated on one adoption travel agency’s website:

The orphanage visit is not an add-on; it is the cornerstone of these tours. Journeys believes that adopted children are entitled to know as much about their past as possible. The cultural and political circumstances surrounding child abandonment in China make it nearly impossible for adopted children to find their birth families, so Journey’s tours try to bring children as close to their roots as can be arranged. Journeys of the Heart Motherland Tours to China

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9 http://www.internationaladoptionnews.com/archives/article_white_swan_barbie.html
Journeys of the Heart insist that homeland tours and orphanage visits give children more information regarding their birth and their past. As this quote suggests, orphanage visits are not supplemental to the homeland tour; they are the cornerstones. Tour agencies like this one then present orphanage returns as a proxy, a stand in for biographical knowledge.

Karen details the type of knowledge she (and her family) hopes to acquire by traveling to China, and specifically her daughter’s orphanage:

We'll never know anything about Farah's birth family, but we want to know as much as we can about her first few months...We wanted to learn more about what type of care she had, why she seemed to have spent a lot of time with older children, and why she seemed so far ahead of the other babies in our group developmentally. I also hoped Farah would get a sense of what her hometown is like, and how beautiful China is. Karen

Karen knows that discovering Farah’s birth family is impossible, yet she wants to give her daughter and herself a context for understanding Farah’s life before she became part of her American family.

While Karen is interested in contextualizing Farah’s first year of life, tour materials and parents believe this is a knowledge the child is not only interested in, but a crucial factor for their development. As this one mother on an adoption blog stated: “going back to the orphanage is a bit different. When you do that you have to talk about it. And you are obviously going just so the child can see it for themselves”. 11 Adoptive children therefore are presented as needing first-hand, “being there” experiences with the Chinese sites specific to adoption.

During my homeland tour, only one family was interested in returning to the orphanage. The Elms wanted to learn more about their youngest daughter’s personality and perhaps even come away with stories and anecdotes filling in her early years. Visiting the orphanage became a way to honor family, recall cherished moments, and provide context for Farah’s subjectivity.

By making the orphanage a part (or the cornerstone) of the tour, homeland tours present China as a place of possible answers. Yet for most parents it is virtually impossible to know more about their child’s birth family or first year of life. While most parents will not be able to directly meet with the caregiver of their child, the return visit to the orphanage itself becomes a ritual that connects parents to children, and families to their child’s past. Orphanage visits include the adopted child now that she is at an age where she will remember and become an active participant in her personal history and family narrative.

According to homeland tour experts, orphanage visits give the child more answers about the circumstances surrounding their abandonment. Yet they also specify and bring to the forefront how difficult and unlikely a true connection to the child’s birth family truly are. On the heritage tour I travelled with, the orphanage visit appeared to cater to the needs and interests of parents. As Farah commented in our interview:

I understand it more, and I like to see what’s going on there more now. But like I said before, it's not like I feel a bigger part of China now that I've gone there. Farah

Farah doesn’t feel connected to China. For Farah, the orphanage was strange and full of people she could not understand. Her mother understands that the orphanage was more memorable and important for her.
She knows that the orphanage / nanny part was most interesting to me because of the connection to her past. Of course that was incredibly awkward for her. I don’t think she’s looking for a connection to her past. Maybe she’s too young for that. She told me the best part of the China trip for her was the pandas. I don’t think she liked anything about her city -- she wasn't feeling well, and she was ready to go home by that time. Farah

Farah’s response differs from the stereotypical adoptee discussed by adoption experts in tour brochures and material. As the eldest child in our group at twelve, she is probably the most aware of her difference, yet still uncomfortable and uninterested in visiting sites that represent abandonment and adoption. She enjoys the pleasurable and symbolic aspects of China, where pandas hold more appeal than the sterile and institutional welfare center and its staff of Chinese speaking adults.

Orphanage visits, unlike other destinations on homeland tours, aren’t about connecting to a lost heritage, but connecting to a lost memory and filling in lost years shaping the possible definitions of the American family by bridging the gaps in the child’s memory for interested parents. Presented as a way to bring the child as close as possible to their roots, orphanage visits become mechanisms to retrace the routes of international adoption and exist then more as an original location of attendance more so than ancestry. Orphanage visits, as seen in the Elm’s experience, become memories that define family. As Farah stated: “It helped me learn about my heritage. I also think that it helped bring our family closer together”.

Cities and sites specific to adoption, like Guangzhou and orphanages include the adoptive child in creating and constructing the narratives and histories that come to define kin and family. Homeland tours also attempt to “re-capture the sweet memories during their first initial meeting with their adorable little ones” by including adoption specific sites and activities. By visiting sites specific to adoption like welfare agencies, health clinics and
the cities where parents first met their children, homeland tours reconcile the feelings of dislocation parents associated with adoption and abandonment. Visits commemorate the creation of the adoptive family, reconciling the trauma of abandonment where adoption specific encounters will hopefully provide further detail into the particulars of abandonment and care. Instead of bridging generations and historical epochs as seen in the interview excerpts from Birthright and Sankofa participants, parents approach orphanages and sites still in use by the international adoption community, and therefore can see their community and connect to those also struggling with understanding the breaks of connection inherent in adoption.

Conclusion
In this chapter I analyzed tourist interactions with places and the meanings homeland tourists ascribe to sites of significance. Homeland places are presented and narrated with a focus on the needs of the diasporic community.

Elmina and Assin Manso empower African Americans by connecting participants to their ancestors and fellow members of the African World Family. The Kotel also connects homeland tourists to fellow imagined ancestors and present day members across time and space by demonstrating the breadth of possible Jewish engagement. Orphanage visits and sites specific to adoption do not really define or detail heritage, but define and create new rituals for transracial adoptive families.

What we see occurring is how the desire for rootedness is greater than the particularities of place or the specificity of history. This section presents interactions with place to highlight how diasporic global flows should be added to our understanding of the
American experience since journeys to places not yet sacred can be rendered such by the ritualistic activities of the pilgrim/traveler (Fife 2004).

By claiming a place you already see as important for your group identity, simple acts of touring become important cultural markers that define group boundaries. Traveling to touristic sites confirms and reaffirms already held definitions and ideas of place, while providing more nuanced knowledge and expertise due to the power of witnessing and participation, the “being there”. In this section I argue that our sense of heritage and links to each other depend upon the perceived importance of “being there” that come to signifying membership in larger more globally imagined, imagined communities. In the next chapter I expand, adding the group experience to our affective construction of homeland and community.
Chapter Seven: Group Dynamics: Together on Tour
Homeland tourists do not encounter the homeland alone. Here I detail how tourists discuss becoming a unit, and analyze the activities, places and structures of tourism that facilitate community thinking, showing how together tour groups come to define and become a community. Traveling with others is an essential component of the homeland tour experience. By experimenting with the diasporic community while touring, homeland tourists define and construct the boundaries of the larger imagined. I argue that the tour group itself is important for constructing community and discovering roots and belonging. As Abby’s conversation with her mother suggests, there is something special about going to this place with these people:

I told my mom, I've been to all these places before. But she said, but you haven't gone with your birthright trip! Abby

Abby highlights how homeland tours are important not just because you discover the homeland, but you discover your peers. The homeland tour allows participants to spend extended time with the domestic community they claim. It is the interactions between tourists that define and bind travelers as members of distinct diasporic communities with transnational connections.

In this chapter I first return to how homeland tourists are already prepped for belonging. The perceived shared life experiences, values and symbols allows tourists to “let their guard down” and engage with each other to determine the meaning of the homeland and the significance of belonging. I then present concerted moments of group bonding encouraged by tour operators and included in tour itineraries. I highlight two examples from my experiences on homeland tours occurring in Israel and Ghana. I then discuss the power of group conversations and theorize why adoption homeland tours to
China rarely involve these overt and active moments. The next section returns to place, describing three homeland locations and the significance of experiencing these locations together. I end this chapter by discussing the taken-for-granted aspects of group leisure tourism like the logistics of travel, the “down-time”, and shopping and photograph taking that bind and define community.

**Comfort with Peers**

Participants are already primed to approach each other as members of the same group due to perceived shared symbols, rituals, and values. Tourists use these symbols and shared knowledge in their interactions with each other. On the tour I travelled with to Ghana, comparable levels of religiosity connected our group through daily ritual activities. Many homeland tourists were practicing Christians. Every morning began with a group prayer before our packed day of touring and discovery. While tourism is a break from the everyday, daily rituals were not left stateside.

Traveling with peers allows participants to feel comfortable and safe when traveling long distances to strange lands. But this extends further than comfort with international travel, the subjects who make up this study discussed being able to “let their guard down”.

As this quote from Jacob suggests, being surrounded by forty other young Jewish Americans allowed him to begin to feel comfortable with being Jewish:

> It wasn't just about the country; you had these 40 young Jewish people all together and clearly Jewish. And a lot of times people don't feel comfortable making their Jewish identity part of their public identity. Jacob

As Jacob describes, the meaningful part of homeland travel was not just seeing Israel, but the communitas one feels while touring Israel with peers. For Jacob, his fellow tourists also
might understand why someone wouldn’t be very open about being Jewish in the United States. Yet on tour, Jacob and those he travels with are openly and publicly Jewish. Touring with those with similar experiences of exclusion and of a similar age makes imagined communities tangible and very real. The materiality of community itself makes identity public. For Michael, a Birthright Israel participant and one of my oldest childhood friends, traveling with peers also provides him with more opportunities to connect with other American Jews:

Well you bond with a bunch of people on the trip, but it’s not over Judaism, it’s more over music and being young and stuff like that. We are all there for the same purpose. You could stick us on a bus in New Jersey and we would have a blast too. Michael

As Michael’s quote reminds us, you cannot spend the entire homeland tour discussing the heavy and emotional concepts of identity, trauma and dispersion. Traveling with peers assures that the entirety of the homeland tour; the sites, the activities, the down time, and even the minutiae of travel become meaningful. Michael’s quote jokingly suggests that even the homeland isn’t really necessary if you have all of the other elements.

For participants of Birthright and Sankofa Tours to Ghana, similarities based on age and one’s social position within the United States add importance to the homeland tour experience and assist in the processes of connecting and discovery. In this quote Kathryn, a participant of the alumni group to Ghana, describes her connection to her other travelers:

There was also a natural familial connection between us... as a historically black college we tend to embrace those family and community values that African and African American culture embraces. So when I went I didn’t feel like I was going with a lot of strangers I felt like I was with family. Kathryn

She states that she had a natural familial connection to those she travelled with, using their shared attendance at a historically black college as an indicator of a shared set of values.
For Kathryn, attendance at an HBCU indicates a commitment to family and community; and she extends this belief to include Africans and African Americans. She therefore doesn’t feel alone while traveling, because she perceives similarity with the people and nation she tours and her fellow tourists. Family and community values are broad and ambiguous. Yet, Kathryn feels community while on tour because of the perceived intrinsic and innate values that bind her to other HBCU alumni, the larger African American population, and the African continent and its people simultaneously.

In China, parents connected over narratives of adoption. They swapped horror stories of agencies, discussed the experiences of other families they knew, detailed medical histories of adopted children, and shared the particular paths that led them to international adoption. Other adoptive parents could empathize and relate to struggles with infertility, late-in life family planning, and a passionate interest in possessing a family of one’s own.

The adopted daughters, however only remember China through the stories of their parents, and did not engage with each other over the circumstances of adoption. They never discussed what their parents told them about adoption or exchange any more details about their relationship to China other than to share their Chinese middle names. The girls compared the pronunciations and meanings of their Chinese names, relating to each other over the familiar and shared cultural symbols they associated with China. While familiarity with Mulan, Big Bird in China and Chinese middle names established similarity, shared knowledge of American youth culture similar to Birthright, delineated group identity more effectively. They talked about school, pets, music, television and the private world of kid culture and its ever-changing signs of belonging. New forms of pig Latin, secret

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1 Parents usually keep their child’s Chinese name as their middle name and discussions of Chinese names occurred frequently during our tour.
handshakes and slang were either common knowledge or shared to be brought back to
their respective schools (Cool is no longer cool – now you’re a Constipated Overrated Out
of style Loser).

During these interactions the girls came together based upon the symbols and
experiences of middle-class American children. While they appear Chinese and possess
symbols of Chinese identity like Chinese middle names, the cultural mechanisms bonding
them as a distinct social group were far more at home in suburban America than the
hutongs of Beijing.

Here I focused on how similar age, life experiences and perceived shared symbols
and values connect tourists. Next, I discuss the activities and conversations included in
tour itineraries that further this connection and are discussed by those I interviewed as
crucial.

**Active Moments, Overt Activities**

Here I discuss two scheduled tour activities from Birthright and Sankofa Tours: a
Schehechiyanu prayer celebration commemorating the first visit to the Old City of
Jerusalem by Birthright participants and a pre-vigil cocktail party sponsored by Sankofa
travel celebrating the return of African Americans. Group activities on homeland tours like
these use the homeland more like an incredibly significant peripheral landscape. I then
discuss other forms of active engagement, focusing on the conversations homeland tourists
have with each other regarding their trip. I end this section by focusing on Chinese
adoption tourism and the absence of rituals of commemoration and group conversations
theorizing why this might be. Besides the smaller size of adoption tour groups, I argue
three factors influence this absence: the age adopted children are when they travel to
China, the interests of adoptive families to combat popular understandings of family as solely biological, and the approaches to difference common to white Americans that see ethnicity as optional, symbolic, and voluntary (Waters 1990).

**Rituals**

Judaism’s Schehechiyanu blessing thanks God for sustaining life in order to experience the present moment of joy. The translation of the Schehechiyanu prayer is as follows: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has kept us alive, and sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.” There are specific times to recite this blessing usually on Jewish holidays and lifecycle celebrations (bar/bat mitzvahs, weddings, etc). Hillel Birthright participants recite the Schehechiyanu when arriving for the first time to Jerusalem with their fellow travelers.

According to the Hillel Birthright journal, “the “Schehechiyanu” is the blessing we say when doing something for the first time in our lives, for the first time in a year, when tasting new food, when putting on a new item of clothing, or when celebrating a milestone”. And as Jacob’s quote from above suggests, Birthright can also come to symbolize a first time where one feels comfortable with openly being Jewish.

Birthright participants are literally swept up in the moment as American Jews from across the country hold hands with strangers.
Figure 11: Schehechiyanu Birthright Celebration

One quote from Birthright’s website describes the event:

I remember few of the traditional songs I learned as a child, but within minutes, I am singing on the hotel deck, hand in hand with 47 new friends I’d just met hours before. Kevin Deutsch, birthright website. Alum essay: Journey to my father

In this quote childhood religious memories are connected to contemporary understandings of Judaism and the Jewish community. Seth’s experience and feelings concerning the Schehechiyanu are in agreement with this quote from Birthright’s website. In our interview he discussed this feeling of connection:

Welcoming the sun and the new day and the fact that everyone could do that and had that ingrained in them to do that together. And some of these people hadn’t known each other, that is a community. Seth

Seth believes that every Birthright participant is familiar with the Schehechiyanu prayer. It is something that is “ingrained” in them, signaling primordial connections and shared upbringings. Yet, as I have stated before, Birthright attracts a diverse group of Jews, some with only limited knowledge of these rituals. Yet, even if you are not aware of the
particulars, for Seth, because you are Jewish, you naturally understand this activity.

In my experience on a Birthright tour, the mood was electric, even for the timid. While some expressed concern over knowing the words, when a hand reached out from the circling masses, it was usually grabbed and the circle widened to incorporate one more. Religious literacy, then, is not a necessary requirement for participation. As Seth’s quote suggests, the joining together of Jews from all over the diaspora produces tangible examples of the existence and energy of a contemporary and thriving Jewish community.

As the initial swell died down after the Schhechiyanu ceremony Seth explained his feelings while looking out over the old city of Jerusalem:

> When we went to Mount Scopus and everyone is dancing around having an incredible time...I looked over to [my friends] and they were calmly, quietly enjoying the view of Jerusalem. And they said this isn't a football game, this is Israel, this is a real trip... that really opened up to me what brotherhood meant in a Jewish sense, it was my first taste of it. I've been to youth groups I've been to my synagogue; I've experienced a sense of family of course not like that. Seth

Seth’s understanding of the Schhechiyanu demonstrates how imagined bonds are actively formed. He sees meaning in this event because this “isn’t a football game” suggesting varying levels of consequence and importance to male bonding activities.

As we see in Seth’s example, the Schhechiyanu is reestablished as a meaningful ritual in each participant’s personal construction of his or her imagined community. Birthright tourists may or may not have taken part in Schhechiyanu prayers before, and they may chose not to partake in any other Schhechiyanu prayers later on in life. Yet, with this situated and brief moment, they all have a personal memory and connection to this ritual, each other, and Israel, shaping the meanings and practices that define Jewish identity.
Along with rituals of a religious nature, tour operators and organizers create rituals at specific locations in the homeland to cater to the perceived needs and interests of the diasporan traveler. At the “Door of No Return”, a small door in the castle/dungeon in Cape Coast in Ghana where captives were led to waiting slave ships, the Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism organized a “healing ceremony”. As detailed by Sankofa Tour’s itinerary:

In the evening participate in the reverential night; candle light procession and vigil to commemorate the Africans who died in the slave trade. There will be a ceremony and re-enactment of the slave passage through the "Door of No Return. This is the highlight of PANAFEST CELEBRATIONS. Sankofa Tours Ghana Itinerary

Billed as one of the main events of Panafest, participating in this symbolic reversal of slave routes was thought to provide closure for diasporan travelers. As one tour guide stated:

The biggest part of the Joseph Project [is] the symbolism, of going through The Door of No Return, by that act you are ending the perils of slavery, you are returning through the place where you exited and creating peace.

Awoku: Ghanaian Tour Guide

Yet, for the tour group I travelled with and many other Sankofa Tour groups, the experiences at Elmina were enough and this tour guide’s symbolic understanding was dismissed. Many participants felt uncomfortable traveling by small boat through the “Door of No Return”. While they engaged with history, confronted legacies of injustice and explored the lived experiences of possible ancestors; this planned event was a little too contrived. The quote above exposes two misconceptions embedded in this event and why this event wasn’t appreciated or desired. The tour guide mentions in the quote above how by participating “you are ending the perils of slavery”, yet as I argue in this dissertation; slavery is the origin point of a history of institutionalized racism. The interview excerpts throughout this dissertation suggests that tourists to Ghana are interested in coming to terms with traumatic dispersion and understanding domestic strength. Therefore I suggest
they engage, not necessarily with slavery; but the entire history and the specific American construction of race and racialization. He then goes to state how “you are returning through the place where you exited”. Homeland tourists are not living slaves; they are the ancestors of an extended history of subjugation yet encounter Africa as powerful Western tourists.

The backwards return through the Door of No Return was dismissed in order to continue celebrating with other Sankofa tourists at our hotel for a Pre-Vigil Cocktail Party. Described as a celebratory event to heal the wounds of absence, this event drew crowds and was successful because it was uplifting, future oriented, and geared and organized for the diaspora by those with direct connections to it (Sankofa Tours is owned by a American woman now living in Ghana).

Dressed in white, four African American tour groups mingled and socialized. The evening started with a presentation of traditional African dance, then speakers thanked African Americans for their continued support of Ghana and "donating to the micro economy with your shop till you drop adventures". Speakers discussed the need to build new relationships between Africans and African Americans founded not on suffering but on solidarity. A sense of solidarity based around the tourist’s desire to claim a heritage and the continent’s need for increased investment.

We finished the party singing the United States’ National Anthem and then fists were raised as homeland tourists, sang the Negro National Anthem, which I present a short excerpt from below:

…We have come, over a way that which tears has been watered. We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered. Out of the gloomy past, till now we stand at last…
The use of the symbols and products of the civil rights movement and American citizenship cites a specifically domestic and American trajectory and narrative. This act, I argue reinforced the American diasporic public sphere while in Africa. For that moment participants of Sankofa tours came together as one people with a common, distinctly American history. The singing of the Negro National Anthem bridged gaps between tourists in age, socioeconomic status and gender relying on a shared knowledge of the American racial experience.

Participating in familiar religious and political rituals become doubly transformative when they occur in the homeland. These activities are personally oriented yet embody such a heightened level of gravitas due the material weight of the tangible diasporic collective. The Schehechiyanu worked because of it’s familiarity and pre-understood importance. The Door of No Return did not work because it was not a familiar ritual, and dealt too heavily with circumstances of the past, instead of focusing on the present social positions of most homeland tourists. Yet, the pre-vigil cocktail party was such a success because it was familiar and fostered contemporary community construction. This section presents these two examples to demonstrate how imagined communities are formed, and the specific domestic circumstances that shape homeland interactions.

Group Conversations, Defining Significance
In the section above I presented examples from two rituals suggesting how participation becomes imbued with greater significance, not necessarily because they take place in the homeland, but because they involve a tangible group of peers. Aware of the power of the group, Birthright tours include scheduled time for reflective discussions in their itineraries. In this quote, Sherrill explains why these scheduled conversations are
important for the tour and the group:

For me that was the first time that people had a chance to decompress…it
opened the floor not just for that evening but in general for people to have
comensations about what they were experiencing and I think that it made
everyone comfortable and gave them the chance to be a little bit more
thoughtful about what they were experiencing, Sherrill.

As Sherrill’s quote suggests, group conversations are used to create consensus, or get
“everyone on board”. The peer-to-peer nature of Birthright limits exposing its heavy-
headed nature. Sherrill’s understanding of these scheduled group conversations as personal
revelations expose how the group is constructed through frames of individual self-
discovery. The specific moments on Birthright tours where introspection is encouraged
therefore does not conflict with the desire to make independent adult choices.

Groups sit in circles in hotel lobbies and banquet halls across Israel. They are
prompted and encouraged to participate in the process of developing explanations and
answers to questions that do not have simple responses or solutions. One scheduled
discussion during my Birthright trip was entitled "My Relationship with Jewish Memory".
During this discussion, trip leaders presented open-ended questions to the circle of
participants concerning our relationship to the Jewish community and the role of Israel for
Jewish identity.

Through the interviews and my participant observation, I got the sense that many
Birthright participants saw these conversations as a chore or a hassle. Yet, these heavily
mediated moments of assessment stick with homeland tourists. In the quote below Michael
explains how his last scheduled conversation, revolving around the importance of Israel,
shaped his understanding of the country:

It means more to you…Israel is a sanctuary for Jews…You leave realizing
the importance of it. I hate saying this, but the stupid discussions they made
us have. It makes you realize. Meeting the citizens of Israel from all different countries and realizing they are all from Russia and places that have been persecuted, and of course the Holocaust. Michael

Even though he calls these conversations “stupid”, Michael discovered more than just community in these discussions with his peers and Birthright sponsored speakers. Michael’s Jewish identity is founded upon an ancestry shaped by dispersion and diaspora and he can apply this paradigm to contemporary Jewish populations. This sort of understanding can only happen within the boundary of the homeland and with other fellow participants. Michael continued:

Listening to all the holocaust stories in the context of Israel. I have been to the camps; I have met survivors, and been to the museums in Washington and NY. But I never really connected it directly to the founding of Israel until meeting all the people that left Europe after the war and fought for the independent state. Mike

These two quotes from Michael suggest that the process of reflexive interrogation actively engages participants in community development. This provides tangible moments of the meaning of being Jewish that can be re-called at later points in one’s life. Michael cannot do this alone; he needs the group to come to these conclusions. As sociologist Shaul Kelner observed in his work on Birthright, this strong group cohesion pressures participants to respond to Israel and feel transformed. Therefore these formal group discussions make consensus explicit (Kelner at al. 2000:iv). Structured conversations create moments of personal illumination that appear to be self-motivated. Group moments framed as individual discoveries position each participant as an active and pivotal member in the continuation and future definitions of the Jewish people. The Birthright model does not stress or demand compliance or consensus. Affiliation is accomplished through the group experiences of natural comunitas, thereby defining the inherent qualities of community.
Sherrill’s invocation of comfort reminds us of Jacob’s quote from before. As Jacob described earlier in this chapter, he feels comfortable in Israel because peers surround him. In these scheduled times for group discussion, Birthright tourists like Jacob have the opportunity to talk about their lived experiences as American Jews and tie that in to their experiences while on tour. By having a chance to unpack the markers of identity and explore them with a group of peers, Birthright participants define the homeland, the imagined community, and the individual tourist’s place within this constellation. As Kelner witnessed, these group conversations are not just about Israel, but the history and future of the Jewish community. “It was not uncommon for discussion leaders to ask people about their Jewish upbringings. But life histories usually begin before birth, by making reference to parents and grandparents. Thus, one’s life is not solely one’s own, and one is placed on an historical continuum that extends well into the past” (Kelner 2001:15). While Kelner highlights how these conversations place each individual tourist on a historical continuum that extends into the past, these conversations also shape how participants see Jewish identity for the future, as Michael’s quote implies.

While Birthright explicitly includes designated moments for group reflection, African American homeland tourists expressed similar sentiments of gravitas during conversations over shared meals and times of leisure.

Everyday was a chance where we could ask ourselves, what did you think about this? How did this make you feel? Whereas if I hadn't been with this group, you just would have been sight seeing. Allison

As Allison’s quote suggests, whenever you travel with a group of perceived peers for a specific goal or reason, the group will spend time unpacking the significance of each day’s activities together. The group, as an entity is a powerful mechanism capable of
encouraging and fostering consensus and community consciousness.

In this section I have focused mainly on events and conversations occurring during my tours to Israel and Ghana yet have not mentioned any events or conversations that occurred while in China. The young girls and their parents enjoyed their time in China, yet were never really interested in commemorating their return through ritual nor did tour itineraries include overt community specific activities that involved celebrating return as a group activity. The size of the group definitely matters, and this tour was substantially smaller. In smaller groups, commemorations at this level are difficult to organize and lack the power of numbers. Participants cannot get swept up into finally feeling a part of something larger.

The children traveling on adoption specific heritage tours are also younger than those traveling with Birthright and Sankofa. On the tour I traveled with, the girls perhaps were just too young to be interested in identity quests or explicit conversations regarding abandonment and adoption. Children were also separated from parents for many meals, limiting communication between parents and children. During meals, most of the kids sat at a “kids table”, enjoying the company of each other, rarely discussing the significance of events. Later in life they might be interested in the deep conversations seen occurring in Ghana and Israel and current writings by older Chinese adoptees suggests this is already starting to occur (Trenka, Opraha and Shin 2006).

As I’ve stated in earlier chapters, families recognize the essential nature of a Chinese identity, yet approach the importance of Chinese discovery through parental mediation and the family unit. As one blogger states:

I don’t want to make a big deal of “we’re going back to China so you can experience it.”...No pressure on my girls to absorb whatever “culture” they
can…. I’m betting they pick up more culture by not trying to than they would if that were the purpose. Rumor Queen²

Rumor Queen doesn’t want to make a big deal about going back to China. My observations were consistent with Rumor Queen’s interests. Adoption tourism, specifically for those with adolescent and young children do not want to place any pressure on the girls to try to deal with these difficult histories of dispersion and primordial connection. As one parent commenting on an adoption blog explains:

We don’t plan on making it about going back for her, it will be a vacation, just like DC, St. Thomas, Florida, someday Ireland (for hubby and son) and Italy (for Momma). It will just be a place we go.¹

As this comment on an adoption blog reveals, parents approach China in a specific way, similar to the symbolic, optional and voluntary approaches seen in white ethnic groups (Waters 1990) preaching it’s importance for their child’s identity and in the same breath stating how “it will just be a place we go”. I argue parents grapple with this dichotomy because China is not just the property of the child. While the child is assumed to have a natural connection to China, China represents a place where everyone discovers something. As Karl, one father, explains:

We went so my wife and I could better understand this amazing ancient culture our daughter is from, and for our daughter to have some further context. Karl

As this quote from Karl highlights, China is for the entire family, yet for different reasons. Anna receives, not necessarily understanding but context for her social identity. Anna’s

parents on the other hand, receive an understanding of China more in line with the outcomes of standard and traditional leisure tourism.

Therefore, I argue, ritual activities and overt conversations celebrating return and community would open the family up exposing the constructed nature of the adopted family and the possible different primordial allegiances of its members. These quotes suggest a strategy of learning about identity through osmosis not overt engagement. Families relied on the homeland experience unto itself as a direct and explicit indicator of how China is valued and will be incorporated into the family narrative, consistent with optional, voluntary and symbolic approaches of other white ethnic groups. Chinese identity is natural and inherent, yet understanding the circumstances of migration and the particulars of this essential kernel can occur through brief encounters with the source and does not require group level unpacking. I argue that this strategy counters the pull of primordial bonds and combat understandings of family based solely on biological and genetic connections.

Iconic Places: Creating Community in Symbolic Settings
Homeland tourists do not spend the entirety of their time in the homeland engaged with intense legacies of loss, trauma or spiritual discovery. Homeland tourism is still in fact a leisure activity. Other tour attractions also provide experiences that demonstrate group values and community solidarity. In this section I present tourists’ quotes explaining the meanings behind these iconic homeland spaces, specifically Kakum National Park, Masada, and the Great Wall in China, and how these were used to first create tangible community and then come to define it. Moments of leisure allow tourists to separate from the heavier aspects of tourists and transformation and bond over other activities. While
these moments are not regarded as significant for understanding the homeland or one’s ancestry, they do different symbolic work. These leisure moment connect tourists to each other defining the contemporary values of the diasporic community.

Kakum National Park

In Kakum National Park, a tropical rainforest in Ghana, two Sankofa tours explored the rainforest by canopy-bridge. We walked the planks, feeling the sways of the bridge and the movement of those around us. A crowd grew at the final landing and as each tourist stepped back on solid ground those waiting clapped celebrating the completion of the canopy walk.

Figure 12: Celebrating after the canopy walk in Kakum National Park

Maureen, a member of one of the Sankofa tour groups, who has traveled to Ghana before and plans to return again in another ten years when she turns 100 stated as she stepped off the canopy bridge: “I did it at 80, I did it at 90 and I’ll be back to do it again at 100.” Her determination to complete the canopy walk inspired us all, and as she smiled at her accomplishment, both groups cheered. Ryan thought this was the most moving
experience of his journey. He marveled at her strength and her perseverance, similar characteristics tourists attributed to the unknown ancestors who survived slave transportation. One woman cheered, “Now that’s Sankofa”. Using Sankofa, an Akan communicator translating to “go back and take” to describe what she was witnessing.\(^4\)

Figure 13: Maureen completing the canopy walk waving to on-lookers

The symbol of Sankofa, a bird with his head turned backwards, adorns all sorts of souvenirs and has a long history of meaning for Afro-centric diasporic black populations (Temple 2010). Diasporan Sankofa practice is distinctly bottom up, evolving not from a single organizational push. Instead multiple diasporan communities simultaneously came to favor this concept “responding to an internal desire for cultural definition and reacting to cultural casualties sustained in the experience of being involuntary immersed in Western

\(^4\) I use the word communicator instead of symbol or word to describe the Adinkra system because these symbols represent and express a philosophy and ideas about a culture’s values. In addition, I use communicator to try to fully capture the entirety of Sankofa in the face of Western power imbalances. As Christen Temple as has stated “some suggest that these seemingly innocent, yet reductionist, descriptions are just another example of the European-inspired oversimplification of African culture” (Temple 2010:13).
Barbara, our trip leader, explained how she interprets Sankofa:

Sankofa symbolized by the bird that is always looking back, and the reason he is looking back is because he wants to see, it symbolizes where he comes from, if you know where you come from then you can figure out where you need to go, or where you are...And once you come here, whatever experience you have, its going to be a different experience for everyone but...this will help you as you go forward. Barbara

The bird looking back, for Barbara symbolizes her relationship to her heritage and her past. Sankofa symbolizes the empowering possibility of knowing one’s legacy, because knowing where you come from grounds you and helps you move forward.  

I use this moment to present the meaning of Sankofa to stress how group-bonding moments come to represent and signify something larger. As physical anthropologist Michael L. Blakely (2003) observed concerning Sankofa:

It has to do with the idea that you need to go back and search in the past, to let the past be a guide. It has to do with the connection with past and

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6 The use of Sankofa is of course more complicated and political. Sankofa is a symbol of the Ashanti people, who historically were the upper class in Ghana and actually were heavily implicated in slave trading. Therefore by adopting this symbol as a sign of empowering, African Americans are using a cultural product of a historical oppressor.
Blakely’s understanding is consistent with how tourists discussed Maureen’s accomplishment at Kakum. Maureen comes to embody the connection between the African and African American community. She is a respected African American elder who understands Africa’s role, and returns regularly to replenish her spiritual reservoirs suggesting a community understanding, where tourists discuss the importance of return for constructing empowering subjects based upon confronting one’s fragmented primordial legacy. She continually “goes back and takes”, also signaling the power she has as a Western tourist. She has the ability to return and the economic opportunities to travel. She also completes this physically demanding task, signaling a natural strength only possible because of her will to connect, and the power inherited by her ancestors.

Masada

In Israel, as I have already discussed, Birthright participants visit Masada, the ancient palaces and fortifications located in the South of Israel in the Judean desert overlooking the Dead Sea. Birthright tours climb Masada in total darkness, only reaching the peak right before sunrise to see the entire desert become illuminated at dawn.

During my Birthright trip, we climbed, trying to watch our footing while leaning on those in front for support. As we reached the top our tour guide escorted us to a plateau and encouraged silence. We settled in waiting for the sun to rise. Both Seth and Rachel, members of the Birthright tour I traveled with, mentioned how experiencing Masada as a

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7 According to legend, in 73 AD, 960 Jewish rebels under siege in the ancient fortress of Masada committed suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. For more information about Masada’s strategic use as an ideological symbol for the state of Israel and the Jewish people see, Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel by Machman Ben-Yehuda, University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.
group added to their overall sense of wonderment connecting them to other tour participants, the larger Jewish community, and to God. Seth specifically commented on the communal experience of climbing the mountain:

   Masada that's another highlight...when we all climbed it together when someone was getting tired we would help them out, we would ask to stop the group to rest and continue up. It really created a community. Seth

Seth’s comment speaks to how he has interpreted this moment, not just for the message of Masada, but as an example of togetherness. Rachel’s comment expands upon Seth’s demonstrating how community and personal feelings of rooted-ness occur together:

   We hiked for what seemed like hours only a short time before sunrise. Our group stood on top of this mountain and looked all around us at God’s creation. The sun rose to illuminate spectacular views. Once the sun was up I segregated myself from the group and found a rock to sit on. I just sat there, alone, but not lonely. Rachel

Rachel’s understanding suggests how Masada and experiencing Masada can come to signify belonging to the larger imagined community. While she sat alone, she never felt lonely. This experience is something she can take with her in her daily life. As I showed in the previous chapter, the message and history of Masada suggest a heroism and commitment to Judaism that the Birthright tourist can apply to their own experiences of otherness. Yet the experiencing of Masada as a group creates feelings of belonging to this large and supportive imagined community.

The Great Wall
   The Great Wall is a symbol of China known by even those with a remote and limited knowledge of China or the world. This iconic symbol also appears in Big Bird in China and the Disney film Mulan. To commemorate the day we visited the Great Wall, Ellie, Callie and Karissa, Lisa’s three daughters, wore matching black and white outfits they
called their “panda outfits”. Clothed in symbols of China, they were ready and excited for the day’s activities, finally coming face-to-face with this iconic symbol of China. Instead of traveling to the section of the Wall closest to Beijing with other tour groups, our tour guide informed us we would be travelling further away from the city center to a remote section of the Wall far away from the masses.

While this walk along the Great Wall wasn’t extremely taxing, the humidity made it quite challenging and the path was rocky and steep. Karen, Lisa and I fell behind. Karissa, Lisa’s middle daughter stayed with us rotating from one adult to the next, telling stories and joking around. She pretended to be a sentry and would wait for us to approach. As we climbed she rotated between adults, spending time to chat, then giggle and run ahead to rejoin the others. She would then come back to check on our progress grabbing the hand of the next adult in her rotation.

When we reached the top of the third tower, the path for tourists ended and Karen led us in a cheer, similar to the cheer that celebrated our end of the Canopy Walk in Kakum National Park in Ghana. We cheered together as a group, commemorating our walk with a picture.

Parents snapped pictures regardless of whose face was the primary focus. We cheered because we did not reach the end as individuals, but we had accomplished this walk together. The Great Wall was not about each individual family, it became representative of group cohesion. In our interview, Karen explains why she enjoyed the Great Wall:

That was one of my favorite experiences of the trip. I love that we went to such a remote section of the wall and we essentially had it to ourselves. We were free to explore at our own pace. Our group was just getting to know one another, so we could walk and talk. The view was amazing with
the fog adding to the dramatic effect. Karen

In this quote, the Great Wall, is not exciting because of it’s materiality, but for the experience of climbing it together. We talked and walked at a comfortable pace, leisurely experiencing this iconic symbol of China as we got to know each other better. While the view was spectacular, it was this moment where three families became one group that was awe-inspiring. I argue that this touristic activity turned into an example of the values of family. This moment defined and represented what it means to be in a family, we cared for each other and shared responsibility. Similarly to my experiences at Masada where we looked out for each other as we climbed, we looked out for each other in this hike too. No one was allowed to fall behind, and children freely rotated through the group feeling comfortable with all the adults.

**Everyday Aspects of Group Travel**

The very logistics of homeland travel, the “off” time, and general tourism practices like shopping for souvenirs, become important moments for understanding community. Group structured travel is shaped by long stretches of boredom and movement with important meaningful excursions sandwiched in. Tour participants discuss the meaning of their travel experiences in these moments and interact with each other over the insignificant and the trivial aspects of group touring.

**Logistics of Traveling: lulls and bursts of movement**

Even the minutiae of travel shape the symbols of group boundaries. Traveling long distances on tour buses is a boring necessity that has the potential to link participants. There is also a comfort in the “same-ness” of travel options. Standard tour itineraries and expected travel procedures provide a sense of routine structuring explorations.
These interactions of shared time and shared experience shape new formations for the imagined community. As Zach comments:

You are in this rectangular box moving around form site to site. You're talking to people and joking around and forming this subtle bond of going through this experience together and I think seeing these things in itself is a pretty amazing experience, but what really heightens the emotion that people walk away with is that they experienced it with like minded people are all there for the same reasons. Zach

Zach discusses how everyone is “prepped for belonging”, but how being confined in this “rectangular box” is crucial for understanding the meaning of the tour in its entirety. The time between attractions and activities allows tourists to find common ground and get to know one another. Adam’s comment below expands upon Zach’s description:

Everyone’s really friendly because you have no choice. You are on a bus with people the whole time. And you have something in common; obviously, you’re all going on the trip. Adam

As Adam’s comment highlights, the structured nature of the tour force you to interact and bond with your fellow travelers. In this quote Adam reveals how he perceives all Birthright
participants already have something in common, making these moments of forced interaction more meaningful and valuable as examples of community practice and behavior. Therefore, being confined to this “rectangular moving box” along with the hectic pace of travel become ways for people to come together and discover common ground.

Moments between tour stops were also significant on the other homeland tours I traveled with. In Ghana, our tour guide shared a traditional call and response of the Ashanti people. This call and response was co-opted by our group whenever someone needed everyone’s attention. They would call “Ago”; and the entire group would respond “Ame”. It was used to quiet side conversations and share information quickly. In these moments we used signifiers of Ghanaian identity, similarly to the use of the term Sankofa, to come together as a bound group.

Leaving Elmina on our way to the canopy walk in Kakum National Park, hours of travel became moments of togetherness. Jonathan, who normally led us in daily prayer, began singing to pass the time. Rose, an active member of her church choir answered his call and sang the response in a clear strong and well practiced alto voice. What started out as two voices soon became twenty. We sang gospel songs as the Ghanaian countryside passed by our windows. We sang Victory is Mine and Lean on Me. In this moment, a simple activity used to entertain bonded the tour group. We sang familiar songs, and church favorites, while I wasn’t familiar with all the lyrics, those sitting next to me sang louder and clearer to help me keep up including me in this bonding moment.

In China, a harrowing experience of travel brought the group together. Three days into our tour in China we were scheduled to leave Beijing for Xian by overnight sleeper car. Over a leisurely dinner, our group relaxed while discussing the packed itinerary and
how we were adjusting to our surroundings over the past few days. Conversation was light covering topics like the time difference, hard Chinese mattresses, the food, and most importantly “squatty potties” – the defining characteristic separating Westerners (us) from the Chinese. Our tour guide interrupted our meal, urging us to hurry because with the rain and rush hour traffic, she was concerned we would miss our train.

We rushed to our awaiting bus while dodging large raindrops. Stuck in Beijing traffic, the sound of the windshield wipers squeaked as we inched forward constantly exposing and veiling the red taillights of the stopped cars in front of us. As most of the girls dozed still affected by the time change, Farah began to cry. She tried to hide her tears, unwilling to let the other girls see her vulnerability. As the eldest Chinese child on our tour, she was respected among the younger children, yet she was a child herself and outside her usual surroundings. She was halfway across the world, in a country that didn’t speak her language surrounded by people she had just met and the anxiety emanating from the adults and our tour guide was palpable. The other parents saw her cries and kept quiet, allowing her mother to comfort her unnoticed, limiting Farah’s exposure. Without words, all the parents recognized that Farah needed some “alone time” in a bus full of strangers, coming together because of the shared understanding of the duties required of a parent and the privacy needed of a young pre-teen.

Upon arriving at the train station we were immediately swept up into the frenetic pace of one of the major rail stations in Beijing. Rows of sleeping people lined the floor, and hurried masses flew past running to catch their respective trains. We were pushed forward. Hesitantly, we watched our footing trying not to step on resting or sprinting passengers. Our tour guide steered us through security and around Chinese travelers piled
high with all sorts of cargo.

As we ran through the terminal, one family fell behind. With three children under nine, speed was not their best asset. We slowed down yet were hesitant to come to a complete stop due to abject fear of the possible consequences of being left in an unfamiliar and unnerving train station in a foreign and completely hectic urban city. Leaving a family behind however was not an option, yet missing our train wasn’t either.

Traveling with children requires patience and organization. In that moment while haphazardly running to catch our train, we lost all decorum. We grabbed small arms, letting the tallest of our group lead while following behind. Three different families became one as we all worked to keep smiles on our faces for the sake of children during harrowing times relying on each other when composure failed us. Once on the train with all heads and bags accounted for we settled in for the night. Parents finally breathed sighs of relief, thinking to themselves; what have I gotten myself into?

Freshening up in the small train bathrooms the following morning we spoke in whispers discussing the previous night. We came through on the other side of that mad dash more bonded because we kept it together for the sake of the kids. The girls, unaware played games, content and comfortable because of reliable and dependable parents.

In the examples above, long hours spent traveling bond travelers whether confined to a bus, or rushing to catch a train. The constant movement of group travel is both tedious and tiring. However group travel with its lulls and bursts of action provide strangers with opportunities to determine and define similarities. Different groups use different mechanisms, usually based on previous symbols and shared common knowledge. In Ghana we sang to pass the time, in China the girls would talk about school and the
activities they enjoyed while their parents shared stories about adoption, in Israel college-aged participants bonded over similar music tastes and college life. Therefore, travel lulls and bursts create new opportunities for defining group values and the significance of membership.

Impromptu Fun

Group tours are extremely tedious and extremely taxing. In roughly ten days participants are expected to travel to all pertinent and memorable places and discover their inherent value and importance for their identity and the community. Days start early in order to maximize time spent in the country visited. Itineraries dictate meal times and locations, sites to be seen and lodging accommodations. The itineraries of group travel confine and construct the tourism experience, and participants sometimes need a break. Below, I present some impromptu leisure moments suggesting how the understanding of “down time” symbolizes the characteristics of the imagined community.

After an already packed day of travel and touring in China, we arrived at our new hotel in Chengdu to drop off luggage and freshen up before returning to the bus for an afternoon of more sight seeing. Unfortunately, things didn’t go as planned. The guaranteed adjoining rooms families traveling with small children rely upon for closeness and adult privacy were not possible in this hotel. While the adults, with the help of our tour guide, argued with the hotel representatives, the girls and I explored. As a tested and approved member of the group, I was now permitted to watch over the girls as we headed upstairs to a room marked “activities”, basically a moderately sized windowless room with a ping-pong table.

The kids quickly devised a new game called ultimate ping-pong. Only seconds ago
they shuffled their feet crankily walking into yet another hotel, obviously bored and tired from travel. Suddenly they became lively. They leapt to return balls, and tried to distract the opposing team with silly faces and poses. Parents trickled in but remained in the periphery unwilling to break the much-needed lighthearted moment with their parental presence. They all played, regardless of age, rotating in and out of games and teams.

Karen, Farah’s mother describes the event:

I love that Chris was able to get along with all the kids despite being so much older and the only boy. This photo shows him having genuine fun with an 8-yr-old girl. He’s a good sport. It doesn’t surprise me, it’s just cute.

Karen

Karen found pleasure in this moment because she was able to watch the children bond. She watched her sixteen-year-old son became a kid again. Sweaty and smiling, the children did not have to feign interest in another museum or follow dutifully from attraction to attraction. This spontaneous moment of childhood play bonded the children (I sat on the sidelines keeping a rough tally of points scored).

Figure 16: Playing an impromptu ping-pong game at a hotel in Chengdu
Karen referenced this moment frequently in our interview and subsequent conversations about her family’s time in China. This comment below suggests why this moment was so important:

That ping-pong event was a much-needed break from tourism. The kids had a blast, despite the bad impression we were probably making...We represented "loud Americans" everywhere, but we didn't care. Karen

In this comment, Karen states how the group came to represent “loud Americans”. We became the stereotypical, rude, visible and uncouth American traveler. Yet this quote suggests how the group came to define itself against and in relation to China, suggesting yet again how homeland tourism to China is not necessarily about understanding or becoming Chinese, but defining and interacting with the transnational adoptive American family.

Breaks from the hectic pace of tourism come in many forms and come to signify different things depending on the group touring and the desired outcome of travel. In our beachfront hotel in Elmina before visiting slave dungeons in Ghana, the Barbara Jones Group relaxed and enjoyed the change of pace. A band was hired for our communal evening meal and as we finished eating people started to dance. As the crowd on the dance floor grew, I noticed that everyone was dancing as a group regardless of gender and age all facing the same direction and executing similar steps. Margo asked me if I knew how to do the Electric Slide. While I do know the steps to the Electric Slide, I was flattered to be included and wasn’t going to turn down her offer. As she taught me the steps, others joined in and gave their opinions while we clapped and pivoted in unison. For roughly thirty minutes we danced together falling into the rhythm of the group. Dancing the Electric Slide at a beachfront hotel in Ghana united our group, reminding many of family
reunions and holiday gatherings from back home.

Later on in our travels as we approached our last day together the Barbara Jones Group commemorated our trip in one final gala complete with an awards ceremony and fashion show where we presented and displayed all our favorite pieces of African clothing purchased along the way. Angela and Lisa, two of the younger members of the group presided as Master of Ceremonies. Keith, one of the few men traveling with our group spoke during the event:

Everyone blended in and we were all brothers and sisters and we worked together to have such a wonderful time. …We cried a lot, but most importantly we laughed a lot [amen] and we enjoyed each other. Keith

Keith’s comment was met with a round of applause. Keith was one of the quieter members of our tour. He found out about the Barbara Jones’ group through a business contact and was significantly younger than the mostly elderly and retired women. While Keith wasn’t one of the most vocal members of the tour group or the most integrated, he still experienced something powerful and emotional. His comment speaks to the power of the group tour to create moments where strangers can become family. That night we celebrated and commemorated our trip, but most importantly we celebrated the bond that grew between us.

The symbolic work of downtime therefore defines the group of tourists against the homeland. Tourists become close, almost like family as Keith explains. Most importantly leisure time separates the homeland tourists from the homeland defining the diasporic community. For example, tourists expose their difference when they purchase commemorative souvenirs and photographs. Because who ever takes a photograph or purchases a souvenir of their everyday?
In Ghana there was always more time for shopping. We shopped covertly in hotel rooms, at open-air markets and while exiting and entering our bus. We had a running joke; counting down the days of our trip by how many remaining shopping days. We showed off our wares to the other members, discussing where we would display it in our home, what we were going to use it for upon return and who would be receiving each piece.

![Two travelers sharing their souvenirs with the tour group](image)

**Figure 17:** Two travelers sharing their souvenirs with the tour group

We tried on traditional African clothes, commenting on which pattern looked better and where each dress could be worn. Whether it was a bracelet, a woodcarving, a replica of an Ashanti stool, or African clothing, every purchase was valued as a marker of heritage and a symbol of the experience of traveling together to the homeland.

The symbols and meanings of commodities emphasize the strategic interests of each member. By engaging in shopping activities, and discussing and presenting their new wares together tour groups determine the meaning and significance of home. Commodities therefore have a powerful role in these imagined worlds, as bearers of many of the symbols defining connection, identity, and community. Souvenirs and photographs articulate both
place and experience. Objects and photographs do more than just define the homeland; they become pieces of memory, evidence of an expertise and a knowledge concerning the contours of the homeland.

When purchasing souvenirs and taking photographs homeland tourists engage with the homeland as groups of tourists. For example, tourists rely on each other to intervene when vendors become too aggressive or are insisting on a price not viewed as relative to the object’s worth. Tourists also rely on each other to determine the meaning behind each souvenir. Therefore, collecting traces of the homeland bring the group together. Photographs and souvenirs are tangible objects of recall (Sontag 1977). The experience only lasts during the homeland tour, but the photograph or souvenir on a mantle is timeless.

The meanings of souvenirs depend on the definitions determined by the group. By consuming commodities representing place, each participants divulges what is important to them for remembering the homeland. In this quote and corresponding photograph below, Carole, Anna’s adoptive mother describes the importance of Panda souvenirs:
I love this picture because Anna has always been a panda nut. She has a huge collection of stuffed pandas and her most loved stuffed creature that she sleeps with is a panda. To see her in front of so many stuffed pandas—and in China the birthplace of the panda,—really makes me smile! Carole

Carole and Anna relate to China through the symbolic image of the Panda. Panda’s seen in China are fun, and a visit to the Panda reserve was one of the highlights of our trip, yet this quote suggests something even more important. Returning with a Panda stuffed animal, purchased in China connects Anna to the aspects of China her family sees as important.

Pandas are comfortable neutral symbols of China that do not deal with politics, history, race or difference.

Therefore leisure time involves the contemporary symbols, relying upon interaction to construct the boundaries of the diasporic community. It is in these moments, where the diasporic community becomes tangible, that come to shape the domestic imagined community upon return.
Tourists are not homogenous

I do not want to suggest in this dissertation that all tourists experience the homeland similarly, or walk away believing in the homogeneity of their imagined community. Personal journeys of discovery are viewed as chosen practices of the enlightened; participants mentioned how discovery is not for everyone. For many participants, there is a difference between homeland journeys and touristic travel. This distinction between popular tourism and educational homeland journeying referencing the different motives for travel becomes a way to distinguish between the dedicated and the superficial. Homeland tourism therefore can be consumed as high or low culture depending upon the standing of the participant. As Nina, one traveler to Ghana explains:

We're not all at the same place, a lot of us went there as a tourist. I have never gone there as a tourist. I would never do that because that's home. A tourist goes there to look at the attractions and to be amused and entertained, I go home to connect to cultivate my roots and strengthen me, it renews me. Nina

For Nina, some members on her tour were not ready to explore and cultivate connections. Nina discusses how pockets of the imagined community do not even see the value of the homeland. Nina separated her engagement with those who look to be amused or entertained, discussing a distinct difference and dichotomy between the agendas of homeland returnees.

Helen, another tourist, extends this difference to the larger African American community itself. ‘I think that maybe, just maybe if some of them just knew what their family, their ancestors went through in order for them to be alive today’. In this exchange she explained that perhaps if the African American community was aware of the strength needed to survive these original separations; they would carry themselves differently in their daily lives.
In Israel too there were moments on homeland tours that united all members of the group, and times where individuals felt that some tourists weren’t taking the experience seriously. As Sherrill explains:

> It was hard for me to accept that these kids just aren’t into the ancient history of Jerusalem, it doesn’t speak to them...I can tell them to be quiet and respectful of the tour guide, but I can't be upset with them. Sherrill

The strategic deployment of distinction between those who are ready and interested from those who are not requires further study. The creation of smaller knowledged publics suggests interesting intersections within these communities, demonstrating possible important stratifications within the domestic imagined community along class lines. Except for Birthright, homeland tours are costly endeavors. Therefore homeland tourism distinguishes commitment to community as an informed choice taken up by the willing, but I argue, most importantly, the able.

**Conclusion**

While tourists discuss personal and individual reasons for traveling and personal and individual outcomes, the significance of together cannot be dismissed. The group experience adds more significance to an already significant adventure. Therefore I argue that homeland tours are personal journeys to specific locations of significance for group cohesion resulting in command of community signifiers.

Communities form because tourists perceive consensus among their fellow tourists, where all those participating on a homeland tour also see these sites and interactions as meaningful, creating “communities of sentiment” (Appadurai 1990) where individual understandings are discussed as group consensus. Therefore the actual act of traveling with a group of people prepped for connection and engaging
as a community becomes how you define your community upon return.
Chapter Eight: Diasporic Gazing, Homeland/Tourist Interactions

This chapter examines interactions between homeland native and homeland tourist where I present and demonstrate how these interactions are used to narrate future possibilities in the United States. Interactions take two forms: actual engagement between citizens of the homeland and the homeland tourist, and perceived understanding of the people of the homeland accomplished by gazing upon daily practices and behavior. Tourists spend a considerable amount of time looking through bus windows, absorbing their location and interpreting sites/sights of the everyday from a distance. The diasporic gaze involves discovering small similarities in everyday practices that connect the tourist to the land (and people) being toured, seeing similarities between yourself and the inhabitants of the homeland prove claims of membership.

The homeland tourists I traveled with relied on preexisting knowledge when engaging with living representatives of the culture they were exploring. This knowledge, as I have shown is gained mostly from popular culture and cultural activities they already participate in the United States. While the leisure tourist searches for the quintessential, the homeland tourist gazes to find similarity. Throughout this chapter I present interactions between homeland tourists and homeland natives, and perceptions of homeland natives detailing how a shared consciousness develops across all cases. I separate China from most of my analysis because while the narratives are similar their function is drastically different. First I discuss the reciprocal nature of return, highlighting how tourists traveling to Ghana and Israel both discuss the homeland’s equal interest in their return journeys. I then discuss the frame used to connect homeland tourists traveling to Ghana to contemporary
Ghanaians. Tourists perceive connection based upon a shared racial consciousness, borrowing from an African American writer, I label this the African World Family. Birthright tourists detail a different sort of connection based upon the cultural not religious aspects of Jewish identity and discuss bonding with their Israeli peers, the soldiers accompanying each Birthright tour.

Yet across all cases, homeland tourists no matter how they discuss connection and belonging are not homeland natives. Homeland tourists exist within two distinct and contentious social positions. They return as diasporan celebrities, highlighted and singled out, yet tourists discuss a desire to be hailed as local insiders. In this section I then explore and present the mechanisms tourists use to connect to homeland natives despite differences. Homeland tourists discussed ideas of simplicity and spirituality and similar imagined transnational duty when gazing upon the people of the homeland. This diasporic tourist gaze reconciles different national realities between tourist and local allowing the homeland tourist to see and most importantly feel connection. Therefore, I argue, tourists gaze upon the inhabitants of the homeland searching for specific signs that validate already held beliefs and practices related to their domestic experiences as American others. Homeland tours are not return visits by separated family members, but exploratory journeys of identity where contemporary connections despite difference are not excluded from global power.

**Reciprocal Desire for Connection: One Shared Consciousness**

Tourists traveling to Ghana and Israel discussed a reciprocal desire for connection coming from the homeland. Some even mentioned how the homeland was calling them back. For example, in the quote below HAWK explains how this interest is not just one
sided. Africa whispers to him, encouraging him to demonstrate and show his affiliations through action:

All my life Africa has softly, sweetly, and lovingly beaconed me to “Come home. Come home. Come back home to Africa.” Now, it is time for me to answer the beacon and to do so in the affirmative physically as I mostly always have in my life spiritually and mentally. Hawk

I begin with this quote to show how the “homing desire” is not discussed as the sole interest of the diasporic tourist. As this quote from Abby explains, the homeland embraces you, reciprocating tourist’s feelings:

Anytime I want, anytime I feel like I can go somewhere that will automatically accept me and automatically allow me to look at it as my home if I ever want it. It will fully embrace me no questions asked is a really powerful concept to grasp and understand. Abby

While interactions between tourists and homeland citizens affirm and confirm connection, these quotes demonstrate how tourists perceive a reciprocated interest and desire for connection. The sacrifice made by their Israeli peers also creates a specific frame when Birthright participants discuss their ownership to the land of Israel.

Flying to Israel with his Birthright group, Adam struck up a conversation with a Modern Orthodox Israeli man and woman. In our interview he shared this experience highlighting the perceived shared belied in the value of connection:

They were just shocked that a bunch of Americans wanted to go to Israel without having family there. They thought it was really nice, and they were excited we were doing it. But they were also like, wait, how old are you and you’ve never been? Why haven’t you been? Adam

In this quote, Adam demonstrates how the homeland also shares his concerns about connection. Adam’s understanding of the interests of the larger imagined community

1 The black commentator, July 26, 2007 Issue 239
explains how he understands Israel and its significance for future generations of diasporic Jews.

While the quote above speaks to the homeland’s shared interest in affiliation, this occurs through many different means. For example, as I discussed earlier when explaining Elmina castle, the strategic use of inclusive pronouns like “we” and “our” make tourists like Allison feel connected to place, and the people who included her in their bound group. I highlight again, an excerpt from Allison’s larger quote:

…but he made the connection that you come from somewhere over here and your family is probably related to someone in my family. The pronouns that were used made this huge connection. Allison

As this quote suggests, tourists perceive their interactions with homeland natives within certain frames that confirm their belief in the reciprocity of connection. Allison also discussed a perceived shared knowledge of pertinent historical events.

I felt even more at home just because the Ghanaians connect to African Americans too, they know the history. Ghanaians seem to be a little more clued in [to the trans-Atlantic slave trade], since they know the connection of their country. Allison

In Allison’s quote, she explains connection through a shared understanding of the significance of certain historical moments. The trans-Atlantic slave trade shaped not just her subjectivity, but Ghanaians as well. Unfortunately, recent work contests this claim (Holsey 2008). However, the actual true motives and subjectivities of homeland natives are not really the interest here for Allison. She is interested in confirming her already understood beliefs, using her interactions and the diasporic tourist gaze to verify that her interests aren’t one-sided.

In diasporic gazing and social interactions with citizens of the homeland, tourists flex and develop the tools to discuss the shared consciousness that connects them to the
present day inhabitants of the homeland using reciprocity as a foundation. In the section below I detail how this occurs for participants traveling to Ghana and Israel based upon the specific historical, cultural, and contemporary aspects of the diaspora and the homeland.

The African World Family: Racial Kinship
Consistent with anthropological work on homeland tourism to Ghana (Holsey 2008), many homeland tourists I met articulated an almost mystical sense of belonging. African American homeland tourists discussed not being able to trace their heritage back to a specific region or even country. In the absence of regional specificity, participants connect to a pan-African ideal, aligning with a larger imagined Africa through a shared racial consciousness. This shared consciousness is based on many factors. In this section, I first discuss the role of history, and how tourists discuss a racial kinship based on a subordinate position throughout history. Tourists connect to homeland natives by constructing narratives of kinship, where contemporary Ghanaians represent living ancestors maintaining and continuing shared or lost traditions. However, tourists do not just engage and pull from the past, they turn their diasporic gaze on the contemporary and explain a shared consciousness due to recognizable cultural symbols.

Jonathan, an educator in the south and a member on the homeland tour I travelled with discussed how the trauma of the trans-Atlantic slave trade influenced both those forcibly taken and those who remained. All people of African descent have historically and still remain in positions of subjugation due to white/dominant actors/nations. In an on-line editorial, this connection based upon a shared racial history of oppression was described
as the African World Family. Therefore, one form of extending the imagined community is based upon shared histories of disenfranchisements at the hands of (white) racist actors/nations.

This shared history connects these populations through time, where any observable similarities confirm connection and solidify imagined community boundaries. Tara expands upon this shared history and in the quote below discusses how she confirms connection based upon the contemporary practices of Ghanaian citizens:

Everything we saw over there, a lot of what we saw over there are traditions that have been passed down for thousands of years. The way they prepared their food, the ceremonies they have, the way they celebrate, that's been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years so it's almost like being over there with them is a glimpse into history, and at the same time its a glimpse into our present. A lot of what they do, like especially when we had the naming ceremony and you had the dancing and the libations and the overall celebration the festive atmosphere of that, you can go to a black church service and see the exact same thing. Or go to a family reunion and see the exact same thing, or go to a party and see the exact same thing. A lot of times, over here you will here African Americans or black people or whatever they refer to themselves as say they are not African but its like so much of what you do is, and you don't even realize it. You don't even realize that has been handed down to you from your ancestors. It’s all connected. Everybody stands on the shoulders of somebody else. Tara

In this large quote Tara showcases the connection she sees between her everyday and the everyday of those living in Ghana. Tara constructs a shared racial consciousness by

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They are such because they share at least to most important things in common: 1) a common African ancestry and 2) a common oppressor -- white (European) and yellow (Asian) supremacy. Those two items alone, but most especially the former, are the Samsonian strong adhesives that keep the AWF [African World Family] Herculean bound together. They do so by forcefully casting aside the AWF’s petty differences, as mentioned above, wile simultaneously emphasizing its profound similarities -- that of a common African ancestry, along with common problems and solutions associated with it globally, and a common oppressor(s). The Hawks Nest. The African World Family - Part I Brothers and Sisters, Let's Pull Together. HAWK (J.D. Jackson) www.blackcommentator.com 8/28/07
viewing contemporary Ghana as a newly discovered yet preceding nodes in her personal history. Tara mentions how being in Ghana is like witnessing history and the present simultaneously. Tara blends time in this quote, discussing contemporary Ghanaian citizens as living ancestors.

Besides rituals and activities, tourists also discuss the other similarities they observe. Between Accra and Elmina, Jonathan gazed out his bus window commenting on the facial similarities between his family back in Alabama and the inhabitants of this particular village. Observed physical and behavioral similarities become definitive examples of kinship ties. As Barbara, our trip organizer, explained:

This is the place that my ancestors lived, died; and many were taken away and brought to the Americas as slaves. They look like me, and many of the foods, dance, folkways, etc. are similar. Barbara

In this quote, Barbara first mentions that this is the homeland of her ancestors, claiming Ghana through traditional diasporic constructions of ancestral homelands. Yet, due to the forced removal of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, she cannot confirm that these are her people today. She then uses her diasporic tourists gaze to confirm connection. Tour participants scrutinize the cultural practices and psychological traits of Ghanaians for recognizable symbols that could possibly confirm belonging. Yet these symbols, practices, and appearances are not necessarily specific to Ghana, therefore I argue, participants connect to a mythic and imagined pan-African community based upon a shared racial consciousness.

Tara also relates to the Ghanaian people because of the similarities she believes all people of African descent share. In the quote below, she relies on contemporary cultural symbols, divorced from history and ritual.
There were certain things we would see when we would be driving around, we would see the beauty shops and the barber shops, those were the exact same pictures we would see in the beauty shops and barber shops in America. Tara

Tara connects to Ghana through the familiar photographs that line black salons and barber shops. In this observation, Tara uses witnessed acts and material products of everyday life as empirical proof of a shared consciousness.

Actual interactions also work to confirm a shared racial consciousness. For example, in Ghana the alumni group connected to Ghanaians during an unforeseen bus malfunction that left them stranded for a few hours in a small village. A break from the rigors of touring turned into an experience that was one of the highlights for many of the participants. As Kathryn explains:

Our bus broke down and we just had to hang out in the local village and we met some of the people who were there...It just felt very authentic and real, I felt at home with these strangers and we just hung out with them until our bus got fixed. We didn’t talk about anything serious, just music and pop culture. I didn’t feel I was talking to a foreigner, besides the accent. Kathryn

Moments of spontaneous socialization like the impromptu gathering described above do not revolve around confronting traumatic histories, but allow tourists to exhale and shed the gravitas of a shared history. Allison also mentioned this unscheduled stop as one of the highlights of her trip.

You end up in a place, who knows what town or village, and somehow somewhere music comes on and everyone is dancing and drinking beers and having a party, and people came from everywhere. It was just like a block party, this impromptu block party, for me, that was the most fun time. Allison

Kathryn and Allison understand this moment through the American lens. Allison relates this social experience to those she is already familiar with, like community block parties. By
engaging in leisure activities and moments of shared knowledge tour participants can imagine that life in the homeland is not so different. Therefore, I argue what Kathryn sees as a shared connection due to heritage is in reality a shared proficiency in global/western culture and what Allison associates with domestic community organized leisure events suggest that homeland travel is understood through American/western frames defining the role of community and belonging.

As I have suggested, and will elaborate further, this shared consciousness is narrated using kinship, connecting community directly to family and the natural bonds associated with kin. As this quote from Ryan below suggests, the use of kinship to connect also signals comfort and belonging in a particularly affective manner:

I encountered individuals that reminded me of people that I knew or family members. It was like, wow, I’m in Ghana. I’m in West Africa but it felt like I was home to some degree. Ryan

Physical and behavioral parallels confirm shared sensibilities, yet it does more, it suggests a natural and effortless comfort when visiting strange and new places. Nina, a homeland tourist on the tour I travelled with explained the specific aspects of Ghana that make her feel comfortable. While Ryan and Jonathan see similar faces from American towns, Nina does not need to put names to these faces.

All I felt was I was home, everywhere I looked and everywhere we went, even the hotel and everything it was us there, Africans, black people, were in control of everything. And once again, I was home, I was surrounded by family, I was home. I never met a stranger, I never felt I was a stranger or in a strange land. Nina

Witnessing a nation governed by Blacks for Blacks gives her a sense of pride and a feeling of naturally being included in this black majority. She aligns herself with the African World Family, using intersecting concepts of security and family support. Again, For Nina, her
relationship to Ghana is reciprocated. She views Ghanaians as family and they respond in kind. Imagined kinship is deployed strategically to position Nina as an insider based on race. Through observation, Nina witnesses political and social power of a black majority, and includes herself due to diasporan member status finding a level of comfort unattainable in the United States.

Barbara expands upon Ryan’s comment regarding family. Where Nina discusses the power in majority status, Barbara returns to the reciprocal joy felt when kin returns home. In the quote below she explains her position as a traveler and member:

It is indescribable, but I felt at home the moment my feet hit the soil of Ghana. The smiling faces of the Ghanaians seemed like lost relatives and they welcomed me and others as if we were family returning home for a visit. Barbara

In this excerpt, Barbara also then explains the position of the homeland. For her, Ghanaians are like lost relatives happy to see her return. Because of this specific diasporic tourist gaze, she can frame the entirety of her homeland tour as an exercise in belonging and confirmation of the boundaries of her community.

While direct links to Ghanaians are rare, they do exist. I do not want to suggest that all homeland tourists only imagine kin and construct connection through gazing and conjecture. Some tourists in both Israel and Ghana do indeed have family, or relatives of family friends living in the homeland. However, the nature of group tour packages limits travelers’ ability to use these tour packages to reconnect with family and actual kin. Group tours pack every day full of activities maximizing short trips. Therefore, while immediate family and friends cannot be incorporated into homeland tours, perceived kin are seen everywhere.
While homeland tourists use the diasporic gaze to create and verify connection, interactions provide tangible and current opportunities to confirm relationships and define values. Below, I present a large quote from my interview with Jessica. In this excerpt, she explains one interaction she had with a Ghanaian citizen she called her grandmother:

During a festival in Ghana, thousands of miles away from my home in Houston, Texas, I met my “grandmother”... I don't quite remember why we stopped or why they stopped. I do remember that they could hardly speak English and we could not make out their language either. But in that moment, I showed them a necklace I had recently purchased and through the barrier of words, I informed them that it was for my [real] grandmother - a word they knew and understood. Immediately following, my grandmother told me that I should wear it until I saw her again... At that moment, the tears fell. They fell not because I was sad or happy or angry but just because it was one of those moments where your spirit is full of joy because something so unexpected becomes expected. At that moment, my grandmother asked a question that rattled my soul. She asked where were my handkerchiefs to wipe my tears. In that moment, the tears flowed even more because in a country that holds my ancestry but is viewed by those in my own country as inferior, weak, and uncivilized – my grandmother taught me what it truly means to be a lady. Jessica

I quote Jessica’s story in its entirety to showcase the powerfully affective possibilities of homeland travel. Regardless of language barriers, Jessica finds the qualities we associate with family: support, guidance and strength. Jessica first mentions how she is far from home, signaling how travel separates you from your community. She’s removed from her system of support, she’s an individual ungrounded. Yet, in this interaction far away from the security that we associate with home, she meets her “grandmother”. Jessica understands this moment through the frame of kinship. Yet this woman is not just kin, she’s a grandmother, a sagacious elder capable of imparting wisdom, educating Jessica through example. She is a strong, confident, and feminine black woman, demonstrating the sadness of a people separated, the damage caused by legacies of racialization and the untapped
reserves of strength Jessica possesses. Jessica then extends backwards, using fictive kin to
discover ancestral pride.

Re-Imagined kin networks demonstrate the persistence and continued importance of primordial constructions of group belonging. Similarities explained due to a shared racial consciousness justify expanding the imagined community to include the members of the homeland, who in themselves represent essential characteristics and values of the larger imagined community. Many participants see locals as either living relics of their past, authentic examples of a dignified possible existence, or extended kin traversing time and space. In the next section I present examples of how Birthright participants use their diasporic tourist gaze and interactions with homeland citizens to confirm their insider status and membership in a transnational culturally Jewish imagined community.

The Power of Peers: Cultural Foundations for Jewish Identity

As I showed above tourists interact and gaze to justify insider status. This involves strategically deploying the diasporic tourists’ gaze to understand the fundamental characteristics of the nation being toured. I show in this section how tourists express a cultural foundation to Jewish belonging, yet I demonstrate how this cultural foundation is based upon religious rituals and symbols and age-related similarities. As I have previously mentioned, Birthright participants are not the most religious of Jews. As this quote from Liz explains:

I grew up in a semi-religious home. We went to Hebrew school and lit the candles on Friday nights. We went to temple and all had Bar or Bat Mitzvahs, but as we got older we stopped doing a lot of the Jewish traditions that we used to when we were little...we stopped having time.

Liz
There are many reasons Birthright participants discuss their diminishing religiosity. Yet Birthright participants are traveling to Israel, a (secular) Jewish nation. Tourists therefore need to discover symbols to bind the new contemporary Jewish community along lines appropriate for today’s Jewish person. As this quote from Zach explains, he expected Israel to be seriously and devoutly Jewish:

Israel as it relates to Judaism and the religion is very different than I thought it to be. I just figured I would be going to this place where there were a bunch of Jews practicing Judaism...Here in the US. Jewish people are a religion and in Israel Jews are a culture. And for me, I have a deeper understanding of that difference. Of what it's like to be a Jew there. Not everyone practices the religion of it, it's just something that is kind of inherent in their life. Zach

In Zach’s quote, he expresses his concern about traveling to Israel and interacting with Israelis. He initially envisions an intensely religious nation, yet he walks away from his Birthright experience seeing Judaism as an inherent, primordial and a priori way of interacting in the world and distinguishing social groups. For Zach, being Jewish is cultural, this understanding is shared, and therefore continued and perpetuated.

Religious Israel was hardly discussed or dwelled upon by homeland tourists, possibly due to the secular makeup of most Birthright participants. Tsfat and Jerusalem were probably the more religious centers visited on the tour I travelled with, yet Tsfat was presented as the perfect place to purchase authentic Judaica and not a real opportunity to gaze upon religious brethren.

The disjuncture between secular participants and perceived devout Hassidic Jew is perhaps too large a gap to overcome, so connection occurs through other means. Birthright participants encounter a secular Israel where shared religious tenets are assumed and therefore level of religiosity and religious participation is seen as a personal issue not
responsible for fracturing the Jewish community. Seth expands upon Zach’s understanding of the cultural underpinnings of Jewish identity:

I think there’s more than just a duty to God and to prayer; I think there’s a community that needs to be honored as well. Looking out for each other...looking out for brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers and kind of creating a family and community and looking out for one another.

Seth

Seth expresses how there is more to being Jewish than God and prayer. Jewish membership is about the comfort and responsibility of community. Therefore diasporic gazing confirms a shared consciousness based upon cultural not necessarily religious similarities. This understanding of the role of community is similar to the narratives of racial kinship that homeland tourists to Africa discussed. Comparable to Jessica’s understanding of her “grandmother”, Seth also constructs belonging based upon familial roles and the perceived inherent support structure thought to exist within a family and bound community. I present a shortened excerpt from Rachel’s comment in a previous chapter, also highlighting how she too uses kin to explain connections to people she meets while in Israel at the Kotel.

I went up to a woman who was with her family and asked is there a prayer that I can say. She told me that anything I say God will hear. She was holding my hand as she told me this. That made me tear because I felt like I was her daughter and she was helping me. Rachel

While the homeland tourists to Ghana envision a shared racial consciousness, Birthright participants also need to find something that can connect them to Israel and the Israeli people, and as the quote above suggests, they too use the narrative of kin and family.

Tourists might overlook the importance of religion, but religious symbols remain crucial. As this quote from a Birthright alumni featured on Birthright’s website details:

Israel is not captured in a single word. It is a feeling. It is walking along the empty streets of Jerusalem on Shabbat. Israel is not a land conquered by
war, it is a people united...It is finally finding home. Michelle Cerner

Consistent with the narratives of my interviews, this quote also discusses the diversity found within Israel. Yet this quote presents Israel as a nation bound by feeling, but explained through the rituals and symbols of the Jewish religion. Israel is a nation bound together through the shared religious practices that define the Jewish person, even if these religious practices aren't practiced. It is these practices that are discussed as uniting the nation, and what Birthright tourists highlight when explaining the homing aspects of place. Therefore, I argue that the diversity and cultural Israel tourists like Zach discuss, isn't as diverse or absent from religiosity as tourists present. The quote below from Brooke demonstrates how these distinguishing features are still based upon religious practices.

I had an automatic sense of we’re Jewish. Someone on the street walking by just saying “Hey Shabbat Shalom” and that was really nice. Brooke

Brooke mirrors the sentiments found in testimonies on Birthright’s website. She even discusses the same holiday to demonstrate connection. In her interaction, the homeland hails the tourist as kin, welcoming and including through a shared religious practice and an understanding of the symbols and rituals associated with observance.

Birthright actively reinforces this cultural foundation to Jewish belonging through the sanctioned interactions between tourists and off-duty Israeli soldiers. Two to six soldiers accompany each Birthright tour group at any given time, and are around the same age as the participants. They spend down time together and interact at hotel bars, on long bus rides and scheduled group decompression sessions. They talk about music, television and movies demonstrating that Israeli peers are also just “kids like me”.

3 www.birthrightisrael.com “Alum Experiences” Finding Home Accessed 8/28/07
These soldiers are familiar with the same popular television shows and music. Participants discussed interactions with their militaristic Israeli peers as similar to conversations or interactions they would have with their friends back home thereby making Israel seem less foreign. As one alumni featured on Birthright’s website details:

One of the many things I never imagined myself doing was staying up all night singing Green Day, Dave Matthews Band and other American songs with Israeli soldiers who bonded with us while guarding our group. Rachel Glickenstein⁴

This quote demonstrates how Birthright actively encourages peer understanding. This heavy-handed approach was not lost on the participants. As Jacob mentions, he was fully aware of the intentions behind placing Israeli peers/soldiers with each Birthright group.

In the context that I met them, they weren’t guards, they were just kids…they do a good job in making sure you sit next to them and making sure the groups are spread out. Once you start talking to them you realize you have things in common with them like any young person you would meet. Jacob

In this quote Jacob states how “they do a good job”, referring to the organizers and trip leaders that structure his Israeli experience. Birthright participants like Jacob then come to see Israeli peers as relatable thus confirming that Jewish identity really is more cultural than religious. Similarities in the life course and comprehension of global popular culture therefore influence the discourses that legitimize diasporic connection.

Sherrill, an American trip leader; stressed how Israeli guards are more relatable and approachable than static touristic sites or the stuffy tour guides of an older generation.

I think a lot of them ended up feeling a connection through the relationships that they had with the soldiers. They ended up becoming really good friends with them over that short period of time, now they had their Israeli friends who they traveled Israel with. Sherrill

I am hesitant to go as far as Sherrill. While participants did interact and socialize with Israeli tour guides, the friendships usually faded once participants returned home. Among all those I interviewed, no one stayed in contact with their Israeli peers other than the obligatory friend request on social networking sites. I argue though, that the significance of peer connections is not based upon the strength and maintenance of these ties, but the symbolic meaning behind this newly discovered transnational similarity.

The Israeli soldiers are pivotal players connecting the secular Jew to the idea of the Israeli nation. Israeli peers do not participate in a homeland tours in the same fashion as their diasporic peers, their involvement and visibility waxes and wanes. While on my Birthright tour, our Israeli peers would not participate in many activities and sightseeing excursions. Additionally, the soldiers were absent from the Schehechiyanu ceremony I discussed in the section on tourist/tourist interactions. These soldiers stood at the sidelines talking amongst themselves, smoking cigarettes as Birthright participants engaged in probably one of the most overt examples of community creation and group solidarity.
They were also absent at many of the memorials and museum tours, choosing to stay back by the bus and wait for the group to return. Yet, the absence of Israeli peers from tours of museums and landmarks was never commented upon because it was never really noticed. Seth’s quote demonstrates:

These were all people our age, they were goofing around with us, laughing at the same things…and we could relate to them because we were all young, Jewish and experience Israel in one way or another. Seth

While Seth mentions how his Israeli peers were also experiencing Israel, they were absent from most of his Israeli experiences. Yet, Seth still discusses how both his fellow tourists and the Israeli soldiers were involved in this transformative journey, even though they participate selectively.

The two sections above present and explain the frames used that bind the homeland tourist to the homeland by way of the homeland native. In both cases homeland tourists use narratives of community, kin and culture to confirm, affirm and present their insider status and expanded shared consciousness. Yet, homeland tourists aren’t insiders.
They are obvious in their large tour buses, American style clothes, and organized and structured itineraries. They are also celebrated and followed while they travel the homeland. Therefore how can tourists claim insider status when their very presence exposes them as outsiders? In the next section I discuss how tourists manage their celebrity/outsider status and the frames they use to narrate connection despite differences.

Exposed Outsiders
Homeland tourists are not natives; they arrive as powerful international subjects. While they use frames of kin, home, and community to explain their effortless connection and comfort in the homeland, they are visibly different from their homeland peers, and engage with the homeland through the very mediated group tour. In this section I first discuss moments celebrating homeland return that were common on all tours. While practices of commemoration appear antithetical to experiences of passing, the response by the homeland signals reciprocity. Honoring homeland travel proves significance and gravitas by the homeland itself even though it appears to highlight diasporan exceptionalism. I then discuss the strategies tourists use to minimize difference. By focusing on inherent and spiritual forms of simplicity and valiant heroic acts of duty, homeland tourists can still claim insider status even when confronted with divergent economic and political realities between themselves and the inhabitants of the homeland.

Romantic Simplicity: Homeland Celebs
I begin with a quote from Allison describing her initial hesitations with Ghanaian citizens. She expected hostility and resentment for her American and western status, yet in this quote she explains how she never received this cold shoulder.

I expected us to look differently, dress differently for us to stick out. And I thought it would be almost inauthentic for us to try to blend in. I didn't
walk around in African garb or anything like that. I definitely expected that, but I didn't expect them to be so friendly, I expected a cold shoulder to be honest. Because I had a perception of how Africans perceived African Americans...But it was cool, we were visible, but there was a lot of love. You felt famous for a minute. Allison

Allison worried she would not be able to pass. She believes any attempt would be inauthentic and uncomfortable, further exposing her difference and American status. Yet, while she does not pass and blend in, she’s hailed as a special returnee and celebrated, complicating this construction of return as natural and effortless. In the quote below, Allison expands on her comment above and describes why she thought she was greeted warmly:

We also talked about the perception of African Americans to Ghanaians; they were very, very proud of us. Because, for them, they see, of course they see the negative images of African Americans that we see in the mainstream media, but for them, the most successful people of color are Americans, right? So they are, and of course we are a bunch of college grads, and they wanted to be associated with us. Allison

In our interview Allison mentioned how she believes Ghanaians were “proud” of their African American kin. As a college educated members of the African World Family, she represents the best possible outcome for the black body, something Ghanaians can be proud to associate with. Therefore, regardless of racial inequality in the United States, the global hegemonic status of American culture influences how Allison perceives her reception in the homeland and does not stand in the way of connection. She believes that Africa invites her in, yet in the very act of being “proud” and representing the most successful possible black body, Allison exposes her non-native status suggesting that while tourists claim homelands, they do not necessarily want or desire a quiet return.

On all homeland tours I travelled on, the homeland tourist’s return is commemorated and celebrated. By observing and celebrating the diasporic return, the
homeland also appears interested in incorporating the diasporan into their national and cultural logic. Yet this highlights and calls attention to the very difference and specialness of the returnee, running counterintuitive to the banal sort of joy we see in these quotes. This dual reception was not lost upon participants. Some homeland tourists, like Ryan even commented upon how the special attention was unnecessary and off putting.

I felt like a rock star and I did not like that kid of greeting...I didn’t like the pseudo fame. I didn’t like being approached [like] I was someone who was important or larger than life. Folks were always grabbing at you and reaching for you. I got really tired of it really quick. Ryan

Ryan’s comment illustrates how tourist visibility sometimes overwhelmed those searching for connection and could possibly damage bonds based upon a shared ethos. While homeland tourists self identify as members due to diasporic status, they encounter locals mainly as tourists and examples of American culture. This special status felt by Ryan and other homeland tourists relates to the perceived financial cache of the Western tourist.

Vendors were keen to the homeland tourist’s motives and particularly in Ghana strategically used the language of kinship to attract travelers to their handicrafts and souvenirs.

Vendors in Ghana swarmed our tour bus hailing those disembarking as Father, Mother, Auntie and Sister. They would approach as we exited the bus walking towards tourist sites like Elmina Castle and ask for our name and where we were from. Upon exiting, young vendors would then present us with personalized souvenirs adorned with our name, residence and kin-salutation.
While exiting Elmina I was presented with a large shell from a young boy whom I spoke with before. It read: “To my dear one, Sister Gil, New York. From Isaac, have a good trip”. Salutations highlighting kin were not restricted to only African Americans as shown in my inclusion into the imagined extended family. However, I was also traveling with an entire African American group. The other members of my tour group were also presented with personalized shells, hailing them as fictive parents and other relatives. If a knick-knack is personalized, can you really say no to a disadvantaged child hailing you as a relative? Members of my tour group kindly paid the children and thanked them for the thoughtful keepsake.

I highlight these moments because interactions with vendors are fraught with the most tension. How can one belong if they are constantly exposed? While tourists sometimes feel uncomfortable by the special treatment, they also enjoy and receive the spoils willingly. While tour agencies try to manage tour/local encounters, vendors, especially in Ghana rely on tourists and the global African imagined to make a living. In
the quote below, I present Jessica’s experiences with one local vendor. In this interaction we see how she works through her Western status as tourist and personal interest in African connection.

I met one of the local artists who set up shop where ever we went…He was trying to sell me his goods but by that time [I decided] I’m going to have to have a mean look on my face because…I just [couldn’t] handle it every time I got off the bus. He stopped me and I had my little face on. And he said, you know, you can still be nice. It hit hard, I pride myself on trying to be a good person to people. What ended up happening over the course of the trip was I would see him and I would tell people the story and point to his things so he actually sold a lot as a result. Jessica

Jessica discusses how her relationship with this particular vendor forced her to reevaluate her interactions with the locals she encountered in Ghana. By accepting their persistency she reconnected to some of the values that she believes are important. Participants see similarities, yet they also have to reconcile the differences. Encounters with aggressive vendors then become teaching moments of shared values.

In the city of Kumasi we encountered a distant regal history representing the strength and power and something that could be consumed as one’s own through the shared racial consciousness of the African World Family. We toured the Manhyia Palace Museum. Once home to Asante Kings, we passed the manicured grounds complete with roaming royal peacocks. We walked from room to room, marveling at the gold artifacts and historical relics of a once powerful African empire. As we exited, our personable and friendly tour guide reminded us to spread the word to more people in the states. He wanted us to know that Africa is more than just a developing nation, Africa, and Ghana in particular is home to noble and regal bloodlines. As she exited, Jennifer, one of the younger members of our group, commented, “my eyes have been opened, you don’t here this stuff in American Schools. I had no idea”.

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As a white woman approaching homeland journeys, I hoped books could provide what I lacked in lived experience. The Asante people rose to such an elevated status due to their involvement in the slave trade. I kept quiet during the palace tour, unsure how to react. I was reminded of Saidiya Hartman’s journey to this site. “The spoils and cultural treasures of the victors could not be separated from the lives of the vanquished who were still lying prostrate” (Hartman 2007:213). For Hartman, “the heirs of slaves wanted a past of which they could be proud, so they conveniently forgot the distinctions between the rulers and the rule…[pretending] that their ancestors had once worn the king’s vestments” (Hartman 2007:164). While Hartman focuses on the “tourist truth” not necessarily the actual historical truth when she discusses diasporic returnees, she fails to explore the power and meaning behind these new discoveries. Through our conversations, my fellow tourists weren’t concerned with the specificity of African tribal legacies, nor were they imagining belonging to noble lines. The Asante role in the slave trade just wasn’t as important as the powerful imagery it represented. Racial kinship to powerful African kingdoms redeems American racial branding. Jennifer’s eyes were opened to a black history that had nothing to do with oppression and struggle.

For many tourists, the people of Ghana embody a simple majesty, one they lack due to the benefits and excesses of their American lifestyle. “The kings and queens and paramount chiefs of West Africa represent royalty and dignity, resonating powerfully in the diaspora imagination. In Africa, black people are in control, are free and independent, as opposed to the condition of being a disempowered minority in America” (Bruner 2005:203). The power of homeland natives is not exclusive to the kings, queens, and paramount chiefs; as the interaction above between Jessica and one vendor suggest; all
interactions can teach and empower. Homeland tourists see visits to Africa as ways to make “contact with people who are still carrying out the traditions that have been carried out thousands of years”.

I return to a quote from HAWK where he envisions all the possible lessons and wisdom he will discover through his interactions with homeland natives.

This will be my first trip to the Motherland…With open arms, an open mind, and an open heart and soul, I welcome any and all of the countless life lessons that I will learn from the infinite sights and sounds and people - young and old, most especially the Elders - our people, African people, who I will encounter and meet and greet during my short stay there. Hawk

Ghanaian citizens are present day living relics of noble and traditional African legacies. Yet in the process, as the above quote from HAWK demonstrates, Africa is often reduced to a static romantic birthplace, a living example of a prehistory and a remnant of a distant time. Romantic ideas of living memorials translate into narratives of proud yet simple people.

As Allison’s quote in the beginning states, she relates and connects to the symbols she sees and is familiar with, like the photographs that line black hair salons that Tara describes. Barbershops in the United States and Ghana might have the same pictures, but the setting is quite different economically between the two countries. These larger structural differences are expected and confronted through discourses of admiration and simplicity.

Many participants deployed frames of simplicity to explain transnational connections within divergent economic realities. This difference is not related to

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5 The black commentator, July 26, 2007 Issue 239
http://www.blackcommentator.com/239/239_hawks_nest_motherland.html
Accessed May 14, 2010
primordial characteristics of group membership, but the result of the separate lived experiences of a severed bound group.

HAWK’s comment demonstrates how the gaze of the diasporan shapes the meaning of the homeland. The sagacious Ghanaians possess essential and natural wisdom due to some close connection to the spiritual essence contained within the material space of the homeland. Ghanaians are wise since they represent living testaments to elemental and ancient ways of being. I present Kathryn’s experience at a Ghanaian worship service to demonstrate how narratives of simplicity mediate tourist/homeland differences.

I had the opportunity to hear the voices of people in worship on that Sunday and I feel the same exact way every time I sing on Sunday in the US. The service was different because it was basic. There was an emphasis on only what was necessary to please God and here in America we often lose sight of that. Kathryn

This example from Kathryn’s experience at a worship service exposes the challenge of searching for connection among people with vastly different global power. Kathryn finds commonality with Ghanaians through religious worship and the indescribable feeling of spirituality. Yet, she cannot ignore the visible differences affecting her ability to relate to the lived experiences of the Ghanaian people. She therefore frames economic inequality in terms that validate her belonging. She presents the Ghanaians as a people valuing simplicity rather than lacking the mechanisms for development. Ghanaians are ascetic, choosing authenticity over excess. By keeping it simple (actively), the Ghanaian church service and the people who attend it posses something Kathryn lacks, a deeper connection to the purpose of worship. Her description of this event demonstrates how disparities between diasporic tourist and local are mediated through narratives of desired character traits.
Narratives of simplicity essentialize and romanticize the living citizens of the cultures claimed, demonstrating the powerful global position of the homeland tourist. In the emphasis on redemption and the rupture of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, racialized pan-African kinship overlooks and even dismisses the regional forces at play in Ghana and the larger African continent (Hasty 2002, Holsey 2008).

The homeland tour is fraught with inconsistencies, especially when making sense of present day conditions. Therefore, homeland tourists discuss belonging not based on a begrudging acceptance into Ghana due to their status as powerful Western travelers, but as returning family who naturally understand Ghanaians due to a shared racial consciousness. Homeland tourists must reconcile the desire to be claimed as lost kin, and their social position as powerful Western visitors. I argue and suggest in the above section, homeland tours therefore are not return visits by separated family members, but exploratory journeys in racial kinship where locals are gazed upon for diasporic agendas.

Imagining Duty

In Israel I also witnessed commemoration of return. All throughout Israel, and especially in Jerusalem signs adorned lampposts welcoming Birthright participants. I remember being particularly struck by this gesture. Citywide recognition added a level of gravitas to the entirety of my Birthright experience. If Jerusalem thought it important enough to commemorate my visit, maybe I should take this trip seriously.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Birthright participants like Zach sidestep issues of religiosity. By definition Israel is a Jewish state and he is a Jew, therefore his connection based upon religion does not require further exploration and we do not see homeland tourists exploring Birthright and understanding Israel through overtly religious
frames. Yet there are major differences between Birthright tourists and their Israeli peers. Birthright participants discussed different nationalist approaches to military service as a sign of honor equating Israeli citizenship with global sacrifice. While religion is sidestepped and ignored, the militaristic differences are discussed at length in order to re-shape and reorient the diasporan tourist to Israel’s political and national agenda.

Birthright, as an organization, stresses inclusion of Israeli peers and places Israeli soldiers on every tour. These soldiers on leave carry their weapon with them at all times, an image that is jarring for the American not accustomed to explicit militarism. Birthright participants confront this difference and through group interactions rationalize divergent lived experiences. As this quote from Seth explains:

We really got to see how militarized everything was, that was a big part of their culture. I didn’t expect a guy off duty sitting in his sweatshirt and jeans to have his M4 rifle and his scope. Seth

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6 While there are debates about the religious nature of the nation of Israel, I am focus on diasporic perceptions. “Ever since its creation, there have been debates and disagreements about the nature of the state of Israel. Israel’s Proclamation of Independence makes few concessions to the Almighty. The word ‘God’ does not appear, though there is a passing reference to trusting in the ‘Rock of Israel’. Israel, it decrees, will be a Jewish state, but the concept is nowhere defined... Israel was to be a modern democratic state, an expression of Jewish nationalism rather than Jewish faith. Austin Cline “Is Israel a Religious or a Secular State?” http://atheism.about.com/b/2006/07/23/is-israel-a-religious-or-a-secular-state.htm Accessed 03/02/2010
American participants like Seth see soldiers their age who have experience and ease with combat and weapons. This ease with weaponry and war is discussed in certain frames that showcase the natural strength of the Jewish people.

Zach purchased an IDF t-shirt while in Israel and mentioned it during our interview. He mentioned how the shirt represents “people who know how to kick ass, and that’s a good thing”. This shirt and the IDF also represent something else for Zach. The IDF exemplifies a Jewish form of extreme masculinity that he cannot find in popular culture in the United States. American Jews, familiar with the negatives of Jewish masculinity can connect to a global Jewish community through masculine and powerful presentations of Israeli military success. Jews are seen as the opposite to standard representations of masculinity, even regarded as the inverse (Gilman 1991; Mosse 1996). Yet, the Israeli Defense Forces, an elite and powerful military unit, runs counter to effeminate, sickly and miserly representations of the Jewish male.
Other male tourists also voiced similar sentiments, aligning themselves with Israel because of the strength of its military. Militaristic strength is symbolic of a hyper masculinity that happens to be unashamedly Jewish. As Jacob’s quote below demonstrates, he is not a proponent of war, but identifies and takes pride in Israeli military success.

The fact that the country is known to be embattled and surrounded by countries that view it as an enemy, I couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride, even the wars and hearing how Israel a small country triumphed over Arab nations…In my real life I’m not rah, rah war, but at the same time I do feel a sense of pride when I hear about people who share this common heritage. Jacob

Jacob feels pride in his militaristic peers, they are strong and have staked their claim. Understanding military obligations and living in a culture shaped by its militaristic force also defines the Israeli people. As Irene explains:

[Israel] is not only about peace, but about the war and how people react to war, to soldiers, to death, to life and they still manage to enjoy their life and love their country and they know what they want to do for their country…the world is very much against Israel and I love how Israel reacts to that. Irene

Irene presents Israel as a nation forced into specific military situations, yet the people who inhabit Israel are more humanistic as a result. She therefore aligns herself with the duties of Israeli citizens by supporting the sacrifice they make. Yet, in these conversations we see how Israeli peers have different obligations and duties to the state than their American counterparts. Viewing Israel militarily then does double duty. It presents a masculine and active Jewish identity appealing especially to male participants and begins to develop this concept of global duty.

The Birthright travelers in this dissertation framed mandatory military service as a sacrifice and a duty for Israel and world Jewry. Yet how do tourists reconcile these different levels of commitment and duty? In the comments below, I present examples that suggest
how tourists reconcile differences by highlighting similar allegiances (with differing requirements) to the global imagined community.

Birthright Israel stresses connections of global Jewry based upon a shared and extensive history of persecution, yet only Israeli citizens are honoring this history with their lives. Themes of sacrifice must connect the participant to the imagined community, and represent a point of pride not guilt for the diasporic Jew. As this testimonial on the Birthright website demonstrates:

One of the soldiers with our group made the most profound point; he said that the Israeli army saved those hostages not because they were Israelis, but because they were Jews, and if they didn’t do it, who would? As I looked around the group everyone had tears in their eyes; I think it was the first time we truly understood that we are all a family, Israel is our home, and how proud we should be of those facts. Lindsey Cohen

All Jews, including those in the diaspora are given, by birthright, the land of Israel.

Connections to Israel must reconcile entitlement to a land tourists are not mandated to fight for and a sense of obligation they are not acting upon. Ross sees his membership as an obligation and a right, probably just as important as his Israeli peer serving through military service.

I always felt separated from Israel, but when you go there, you realize, being Jewish you are entitled to Israel. It’s your duty to hold onto it. Ross

Ross’s quote demonstrates how Birthright as a program can connect a secular Jew living in the United States to a larger community of world Jewry and to Israel. His Israeli peers sacrifice through citizenship fighting for the continued existence of his given birthright, the nation of Israel. Belonging is both a right and an obligation and while membership is

7 www.birthrightisrael.com “Alum Experiences” Accessed 8/28/07
assumed these quotes suggest that membership also comes with responsibilities. As Michael states:

[Birthright] instills more of a Jewish duty, it makes you feel obligated to Israel. Because Israel is a sanctuary in case you are ever persecuted so it’s good to keep it open for all nations of Jews. I think it gives you more of a sense of duty than instilling pride. Michael

Michael discusses how he now feels obligated to Israel, obligated to not necessarily serve in Israel’s military, but to support Israeli causes within the United States. For the diasporic Jew then the responsibilities of membership involve a banal and mostly symbolic form of support, in agreement to Michael Billig’s (1995) understanding of banal nationalism. In this sort of affiliation, the national is present daily. It is so familiar, continual and banal, that it is not even consciously registered as nationalism; “it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” (Billig 1995:8). Michael’s quote suggests that the discourse of obligation result in continuation/creation of imagined bonds, not necessarily overt action.

The diasporan envisions a critical yet passive role in the maintenance of Israel and global Jewry. There is no doubt that Israel’s militaristic actions are controversial within Israel and throughout the diaspora, but the diasporic gaze of the homeland tourist is not concerned with policy or controversy. Controversial policies or politics are dismissed for general more foundational forms of support. For example, Michael traveled to Israel during a particularly charged moment in Israeli history, embarking on his Birthright tour a month or two before the first settlement pullouts under Ariel Sharon. In our interview, Michael mentioned how no one on his tour was eager to discuss or engage in debates about the actions and behaviors of the Israeli government.

No one seemed eager to initiate the debate. I don’t think anyone had enough information to make an intelligent opinion about it. There was more of an acknowledgement of a unique time to be there. I wasn’t too
eager to debate the topic because we didn’t live there, that’s a domestic thing. I still don’t know much about it. I don’t know who is right in the situation. Michael

Michael’s Birthright group was not alone in their sidestepping of politically charged national practices. The Birthright group I toured with was present during Palestine Liberation Organization elections and tour participants seemed to be oblivious to the heightened security or tense mood in Jerusalem. Israeli/Palestinian relations were discussed, but it never appeared to be a serious topic worthy of extensive debate. Michael’s response to Israeli political agendas demonstrates the overall experience of many participants, fiercely loyal yet unwilling to provide specificity for opinions. Below Michael discusses his possible future role and duty to Israel. Due to Birthright, and his exposure to Israel Michael now envisions possible active forms of support.

I realized the importance of Israel, and if the call was ever made, like it was in 1948, around the world that said we need soldiers, I wouldn’t think twice about going. Before my trip I never entertained the notion. Michael hesitate to comment on Israeli policies, claiming he doesn’t have a mastery of the topic and shrugs it off as a domestic issue. Yet in the same conversation he also mentions his blind devotion to Israel as a nation and is willing to enlist in the armed forces of a country he doesn’t reside in. Birthright participants, like Michael, therefore view solidarity with citizens based upon shared values, not necessarily acceptance or knowledge of the national policies and practices of the nation visited. He develops an intense solidarity with the citizens of Israel yet expresses and acts upon a more soft and amorphous form of support. He still has limited knowledge but very strong emotional connections. Therefore, homeland tours create imagined communities based on a belief in a foundational
belonging, not necessarily deep understanding of the complexities of national histories and trajectories.

Both of these examples, the romantic narratives seen in tourist/citizen interactions in Ghana and the valorized duty narratives of American/Israeli peers essentialize the nations toured. The homeland is reduced to a two-dimensional nation; there is no context or complexity to the contemporary understandings of the situations of these places. Ghanaians and Israelis are constructed as noble. Economic differences between African Americans and Africans are overlooked since homeland tourists shape connection based upon a shared racial consciousness while Jewish Americans gaze upon Israelis and overlook controversial policies focusing on duty to the continued maintenance of a Jewish nation. The inhabitants of the homeland therefore are exalted and a source of pride, a present day example of the values of a bound people. In conclusion, homeland tours direct the touristic gaze in specific ways that allow travelers to relate very strongly to populations they know only symbolically and superficially, yet kin makes this extremely affective and significant. The diasporic gaze overlooks difference to understand and manage divergent lived experiences.

I have discussed how the tourist gaze passively reconciles visible differences between tourist and native. In the next section, I present examples from homeland tours in China. In this chapter, I have separated China from my analysis because of the specific and different way kin, community and connection are narrated for families with adopted Chinese daughters.
Connecting and Distancing: Creating Transnational Adoptive Family

Homeland tourism to China reveals the shifting meanings of kinship (Rapp 1998). From a primordial perspective, the adopted child should have a natural connection to China due to blood-based rights to the land. Then, how do families celebrate and include China, when by definition it pushes their child further away?

In this section I discuss similar frames and interactions seen in homeland experiences in Ghana and Israel. Tourists to China are also constructing a shared consciousness and navigating the differences between their everyday and the perceived everyday of the Chinese. I present interview excerpts and homeland interactions to show how narratives of simplicity distance the adopted child from their native homeland, while legitimizing new configurations of the American family. I then discuss who is included in the bound familial unit, suggesting that families selectively extend the imagined family to include specific Chinese orphanage employees. I then discuss the moments of exposure and experiences of passing arguing that these do not connect the tourist to the homeland like in my other cases, but connect the tourists to each other and the larger adoption community, thereby confirming and affirming new forms of American kinship and community relying upon home in a different symbolic fashion.

The family unit itself is constructed and contested on adoption tours to China. When Farah was younger, she would claim common ancestry and therefore kin membership by pointing out how both she and her grandmother had black hair. While anthropological and sociological definitions of the family have extended beyond assumptions based upon biology and its relationship to kinship (e.g., Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako 1997), kinship and genetics remain central for defining who is included in the bounded family. Yet, due to blood-based rights to land, the adopted Chinese daughter
should have a natural connection to China problematizing her place within the white American family.

Carole discussed how her family would focus on similarities that her adopted daughter had with other family members. “My mother, for example is surprisingly swarthy for an Ashkenazi Jew…at the end of every summer, she loves to compare her tanned arm to Anna’s and say, ‘At last, I have a member of my family who tans like me!’” Families with adopted children try to find connections based upon other traits and characteristics, using common hair color, similar senses of humor and even tanning ability to create what biology seems to produce naturally.

On the homeland tour families reference and align themselves with aspects of Chinese heritage they are comfortable with while distancing themselves from the “strange” and “different” in order to define and articulate the meaning of family. Familial diasporic gazing can legitimate family narratives by including basic consumable examples of the homeland while distancing aspects of Chinese culture that appear too foreign. But what we see happening on homeland tours, is that the “strange” and “different” really become the “poor”, or the exaggerated Asian stereotype.

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8 This is not something that can be cured or solved through homeland tours, which is probably why tour agencies (besides profits) encourage family trips to China at different development stages in their child’s life. They counsel parents to take their children as early as possible and throughout their lives in order to narrate China differently when different issues arise, as well as shape China as an addition to the family, not necessarily the cornerstone.

9 In this dissertation, I mainly discuss the familial diasporic gaze from the perspective of parents. While parents are doing most of the gazing and imputing “family”, there are moments in this dissertation explained by children that suggest the entire family understands and explains things in similar frameworks. Yet again, this is probably due to the group nature of tours and the discussions, albeit minimal that parents have with children to come to a consensus over meaning. As these girls become teenagers and begin
For example, in Yangshou we toured a traditional Chinese village and home under the care of our local tour guide. The family we dropped in on was encouraged to continue to live in a traditional fashion for the sake of visiting tourists. An older Chinese woman welcomed us and gave us a tour of her home, her property and glimpses into her everyday activities.

In the front of her home was a large stone mortar and pestle used to make soymilk. She showed us how to pull and push the lever in order to grind the beans down into a liquid. Each child was then encouraged to try for themselves, with parents posing and laughing while the children struggled. Parents witnessed and documented this moment, mentioning and comparing visible differences between rural China and the lives their adopted children now led.

Figure 22: Traditional Chinese woman demonstrating one of her daily practices during a visit to a rural home in Guilin

to navigate their own identities, new comparative research is needed to tease out the differences between parental and adolescent understandings of Chinese identity.
Contrasting rural household labor with middle class American childhood allows families to see differences between Chinese citizens and their (Chinese) child. Karen, one adoptive mother, explained this interaction:

I couldn’t help but think about the stark contrast between this kind of life and the life Farah is living with us in the US. Not that one is better than the other -- I’m sure there's peace and simplicity to that rural lifestyle -- but that she just didn't look like she belonged. Even though she's Chinese, she's so American. Karen

Karen describes this life as simple, the counter to Farah’s known American life. Because Farah is unfamiliar with simplicity, she could never belong to China. Karen, like Jessica uses language of simplicity to discuss economic and regional differences, but in this instance they are used to distance. Farah would never belong in rural China because she has become part of her American family, where familial membership is defined based upon lived experience and shared activities, placing only slight significance on heritage and ancestry. Romantic narratives of simplicity are used here to separate and call attention to the different economic positions of Chinese citizens and middle-class American families. Therefore Farah fits into her American family because she has been socialized as a “standard” American child. She’s familiar and comfortable with consumption and excess.

The photographs taken at this rural home became acquisitions, possessions signaling experiences furnishing knowledge about possible different outcomes (Sontag 1977). By producing tangible examples of disjuncture, these photographs confirm dissociation; they serve to construct the transracial-adopted family. While this interaction is probably an experience that many tourists can have while in China, the diasporic connection complicates and influences its meaning.

In China, family members (including the Chinese child) pointed out practices of the
everyday or symbols of culture that they found too exotic, but were perfect for separating the Chinese child from China. At dinner one evening at a McDonalds, Karl, one adoptive parent, told me about his parent’s concerns over his choice to adopt internationally. His grandparents worried that once Anna was old enough, she would choose to return to China and forsake her American parents and life. To the chagrin of her father, Anna responded: “If I marry a Chinese man, he can come to New York and open a nail salon here”. In this exchange, I argue that Anna relates to China through her American standpoint distancing herself from a rural and imagined China through stereotypical knowledge of contemporary forms of Asian immigrant labor. Farah also observed differences between Chinese and American children. “What I found was that many girls my age would dress like a little child; wearing a pink frilly dress, a cute jumper.”

As the quotes from Farah and Anna demonstrate, the diasporic gaze of the American family uses divergent economic realities to separate the child from their homeland. Homeland tours to China narrate what it means to be Chinese through acceptable and easily understood presentations of China and native Chinese like pandas and kite flying. Therefore, the homeland tour to China narrates primordial kinship in very different ways than Birthright tours or tours to Ghana.

The Chinese involved in adoption however are not discussed in the same terms. Caregivers and adoption specialists can be easily included into familial narratives since they have engaged in one of the activities defining family: care of children, especially if they can provide even the slightest bit of information or history. As I mentioned earlier, during the homeland tour I travelled with, we met with the nanny who took care of Farah and through our interpreter she shared stories about Farah’s first year of life. In the quote
below, Karen explains this meeting:

The best part for me was meeting Farah’s nanny. I didn’t expect her to remember Farah, yet it turned out that she remembered quite a bit about her and was able to answer some of the questions we’ve always had about those first several months of her life. It helped us make sense of her story. It was also wonderful to see that there is someone in China who really cares about her -- someone who is emotionally attached to her. Karen

As this quote from Karen suggests, parents hope to discover their child’s lost years. Yet, this is probably very unlikely. However, she does find something valuable, she travels to China finding proof that although Farah was abandoned, she was not unloved; someone in China cared for her. Farah’s nanny remembers bringing her home to play with her family and could provide Karen with some comfort because obviously someone cared deeply for this baby. In the quote below, Karen describes the emotional response of Farah’s nanny:

Her nanny was very emotional about our visit and sad to see Farah go. It was awkward at times. Farah wasn’t ready to be touched and fawned over by a "stranger", but she also knows it was really cool. I didn’t expect any of this, so it was so amazing when it happened. Susan

Linguistic and cultural barriers were overcome because both Karen and Farah’s Nanny value and cared for Farah, even when Farah is visibly uncomfortable with the closeness this woman feels for her.
As Farah explained:

It was also really weird to see my Nanny again. She was all hugs and smile. I'm just thinking 'I don't even know you. I mean, I know you were like there for my baby years, but it's kind of weird'. Then I thought about how I would feel if I was her -- so that helped me live through it.

Farah was very aware that the focus for her entire time at the orphanage was upon her. She shifted her weight awkwardly, patiently being the center of attention and smiling at people she didn’t understand or remember. Karen comments on Farah’s exposure and discomfort:

She knows that the orphanage / nanny part was most interesting to me because of the connection to her past. Of course that was incredibly awkward for her. I don't think she's looking for a connection to her past. Maybe she’s too young for that.

I argue then, that this interaction is not about connecting the child back to China, but discovering roots in the face of abandonment. Karen expressed an interest to connect to Farah’s past, a past that just happens to be in China. While parents definitely do make informed decisions when adopted internationally, choosing China for specific reasons;
parents return with their children to understand China and adoption in certain ways shaped by our contemporary understanding of diversity and difference, family and kin.

In China, the shared wisdom of parenthood connected families within the tour and to adoption caregivers. Farah’s nanny invited us back to her home where Farah would spend many nights in her care away from the welfare center. She introduced us to her son, who is only a few years older than Farah. As we learned through our interpreter, Farah looked to her Nanny’s son as an older brother. Both children listened to stories they didn’t remember as Nanny detailed the many adventures they had together. Photos were taken to commemorate previous bonds. Both parents herded and directed their children to stand as close together as two awkward pre-teens would allow.

Figure 24: Farah and her Nanny's son awkwardly pose for a photograph

In this moment, no translator was needed, as Karen explains:

All teenagers are the same. Both Farah and the boy look totally uncomfortable posing for this picture that their parents made them take together. There is no "body language barrier" -- they're speaking the same
language here. Maybe Farah's life in China wouldn't have been all that different from her American life after all. Karen

Karen can imagine what Farah’s life in China with the help of an approachable Chinese nanny. She discusses a life not that different than Farah’s American life, yet drastically different from the present she imagined Farah in while in the rural village. It’s not difficult to extend the imagined bonds of family to include distant others. While there are moments on homeland tours where families engage in processes of distancing like in the home visit I discussed above, acknowledgement of similar life experiences create opportunities to connect.

Molly, Karen’s biological daughter uses caretaking and family to describe how she extended the imagined boundaries of family. As a white, biological daughter, most of China was foreign to her and therefore hard to relate to or understand, but she was able to understand Farah’s nanny making some aspects of China approachable.

I have never had a personal connection to someone in China before. It seemed like everyone there was like strangers to me, and that we didn’t have very much in common. However, meeting the Nanny and her family showed me that I did have a connection with China, that a family there actually shared a sister with me, at least for a short while. Molly

Molly expands the definition of family selectively, excluding the exotic or different. Shared responsibility for the well being of Farah turns into communal understanding of the importance of family and community. Unlike imaginary connections based upon duty, touristic gazes, or primordial kin, Molly connects to China through real interactions with adoption agents.

When we returned to Farah’s orphanage we initially met with the director. As the director and two assistants discussed Farah’s past, the director slid a large sketchbook
towards Farah. It was full of pictures and comments from the other girls from her orphanage who had returned.

Figure 25: Guestbook for Returning Children

Farah flipped through the pages, reading selected passages from other children, seeing what they wrote and drew. Finally she signed the book, mentioning the grade she was entering, the activities she enjoyed and how she loved her family.

Figure 26: Farah signing the Guest book
Visits to the orphanage demonstrate how new narratives widen the definition and boundaries of family to include China and legitimize the American transracial adoptive family. In this moment, I argue, Farah and her family became connected to the other adopted children and Western families represented in that sketchbook. Orphanage visits take on aspects of ritual when families engage in specific activities like signing guest books. Moments of celebrated return do highlight the significance of homeland knowledge, but most importantly, they legitimize the adoptive family. The family as a bound unit approaches and engages with these sacred adoption spaces. These rituals of return, like signing a guestbook confirm that other families also value this experience similar to discussions of significance seen in Birthright participants.

These new family memories fill in the empty spaces, and while they do not provide knowledge concerning heritage, they commemorate the creation of family through participation in new rituals.

We showed each other our papers and our baby pictures from the orphanage. Then we went on a tour of the building and saw the rooms with paperwork on past and current matches. There was one room with big bulletin boards all around it. Each board had tons of pictures of orphans who had been adopted. All the children were so adorable and we felt happy that they had families now. None of us had known about the match room so seeing that part of our family story was really special. Jade Nisel10

Therefore, families interact not just with the orphanage employees but also with the traces of other unknown families who have also signed the guestbook and have placed value upon return visits.

This intimate moment of recognition and recall by orphanage employees is one most families search for when trying to re-create their child’s history. As we left the

10 Return to Homeland, Jade Nisel. November 26, 2007 NY Times
orphanage Karen reflected; “this is the type of experience all the families want, to have someone remember their baby.” Karen wondered out loud if all the babies are remembered and probably how unlikely such a personalized experience is for all returning families. Consistent with recent work on transnational adoption, abandonment and perceived primordial connections to distant and foreign lands are difficult to grapple with and weigh heavily on parents trying to create the a priori connections and affect of kin networks (Dorow 2006, Yngvesson 2005, Volkman 2005). The examples of connecting and distancing suggest how the act of diasporic familial gazing is a shared activity that shapes new instrumental ethnic/racial narratives (A. Cohen 1969; Bhabha 1990; Hall 1993; R. Cohen 1994). These new narratives provide both familial legitimacy and Chinese connection.

Exposed differences

Homeland tours to China also engage with managing and controlling visible differences between tourists and natives. During my homeland tour, I observed the dual process of welcoming participants as members and insiders, yet signaling the tourist as a diasporan celebrity similarly to the other two tours. For example, tour operators presented the adopted children with small gifts in each city. As this excerpt from one mother’s adoption blog details:

Emily and the other girls in the group were greeted like royalty upon arrival at the Beijing airport! They were each given a huge bouquet of fresh flowers and cameras were flashing.¹¹

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Tour agents welcomed returning children and families with such pomp that blending in as a returning native was virtually impossible. Yet the girls I travelled with did try to blend, or at least attempt to explore and experiment with a native Chinese identity.

The girls would all describe moments when they felt their Mandarin thank you was more believable than those uttered by their parents. They also worried they were too visible as Chinese children with American adults. As we walked through the mall heading back to our hotel one evening, Farah discussed her racial appearance and how it led clerks to believe she was native Chinese. Yet, she also commented on how her demeanor and behavior marked her as distinctly American. Farah’s experiences as an “outsider within” (Hill-Collins 1998) suggest a different sort of connection.

One night in Beijing over dinner Farah mentioned how she felt weird in China. For Farah, feeling weird meant she felt like a stranger and an insider simultaneously. This duality was not lost upon the younger girls on the tour, many times during our time in China they would mention feeling “weird”; as Chinese girls traveling with Americans and as possible Chinese insiders without insider knowledge.

For example, in the Summer Palace the girls walked ahead, saying hello to passing women then giggling when they were answered in Mandarin. They would whisper to each other asking if they thought they were believable as native Chinese girls. Yet at the Forbidden City, they were marked definitively as Americans. Before entering the Forbidden City, Li Li, our tour guide, attempted to purchase the Chinese child’s ticket price for the girls in our group. She swept the girls up and took off towards the ticket counter, leaving American parents confused waiting for the return of their children. The ticket person took one look at their western style dress and the puzzled faces of the hovering parents and
denied them the lower admission fee. While they looked Chinese, he stated they were American and were required to pay full price. Farah mentioned afterward how she had never felt so white when quickly scanned for her Chinese authenticity. In conflating white with American, Farah separates herself from other Chinese American populations and communities, articulating a Chinese identity specific to the circumstances of migration and family construction that define the adoption community. Homeland tour moments where Chinese adoptees were classified as American (and for Farah, white) confirm their rightful place in the American family and the transnational adoption community.

When they tried to pass as Chinese, the attempts themselves brought them together in a way that Chinese culture camp or after school programs could not. While they were engaging with the homeland and the people in the land of their birth, similar to the symbolic act of signing an orphanage guestbook, they were not of China but of each other.

This section argues that homeland tourism provides easily consumable symbols of Chinese-ness that can readily fit into familial and kin narratives. The homeland tour simultaneously settles and exposes the visible differences between Chinese child and (mostly) white parents (Register 1991, Dorrow 2006). Yet, I argue, along with the other examples of homeland tours, this too is an example of an exploratory journey of kinship and community. This diasporic agenda just deals more explicitly with actual family. I show how parents connect and distance themselves from China, using romantic rural narratives to distance and expanded kinship narratives to connect. Therefore homeland tourism to China reveals the shifting meanings in the realm of kinship (Dorow 2006, Yngvesson 2005, Volkman 2005) and possibly new expressions of Chinese American identity.
Conclusion

The homeland tour is fraught with inconsistencies, especially when making sense of present day conditions through encounters with idiosyncratic local actors. There are many instances of disjuncture and confusion on homeland tours between tourists and locals, not all interactions and observations work to align the tourist with the homeland. Yet the diasporic gaze rationalizes and explains the daily life of the present day inhabitants of the homeland.

The use of romantic narratives we see in returns to China and Ghana is problematic. The discursive strategies that link the tourist to the homeland use the same underlying assumptions of Western ideologies of race and contemporary engagements with global development. Perceptions of Africa and China by Western cultures that are romanticized and essentialist in nature, foster American and Western dominance (Said 1978). Africa and China become nothing more than a stage, a landscape of significance capable of providing roots, where romantic narratives overlook and even dismiss contemporary forces of inequality. Therefore, strategic acts of heritage consumption reinforce global power imbalances.

Diasporic insider status limits and discourages inquiries into the existing inequalities within the nations toured. Differentiations based upon wealth, lineage, religiosity, etc. are not within the purview of imagined belonging. Membership is based upon shared symbolic characteristics and superficial yet innate knowledge.

Homeland tours try to manage disjuncture by providing specific opportunities that are sanctioned and align with tourist/American sensibilities, like the imagined shared duty to Israel. What I witnessed on homeland tourism was an ironic disjuncture where people wanted to find kin and discover heritage, but not get too close as to loose the power that
comes with their American existence. But, identities are no longer autonomous from global 
commerce and global flows of power.

In the next part of this dissertation we return home and discuss the 
implication of homeland journeys. Homeland/tourist interactions are loaded 
engagements signaling present day possibilities for domestic empowerment. These 
connections are based upon witnessed moments of shared sensibility defined by 
mutual understanding due to primordial ties. Interactions become observations of 
the self, of what has been lost or never accessed and consumed as an experience 
providing expertise. In these explorations in primordial allegiance, however, we see 
a distinctly contemporary execution of a global consciousness demonstrating the 
inherently domestic implications of such identity quests that use the power of this 
global and transnational expansion of the imagined.
Chapter Nine: Transnational Connections, Domestic Empowerment

I end our journey by discussing the implications for homeland travel and present interview data that suggests that individuals engage with larger systems of organization that incorporate and implicate both the nation they reside within and the place they have chosen to visit, representing a distinctly Western and American path to imagined communities. Tourists discuss a power to homeland journeys, and an individual transformation or enlightenment that now influences their engagement once they return to the United States.

Regardless to the specifics of each homeland tour, across all cases tourists discussed the transformative power of these brief experiences of perceived inclusion in distant and foreign majorities. Homeland inhabitants look or act like the homeland tourist, and yet they occupy positions of power, something the tourists believes to lack in their everyday life. These brief moments of privilege based upon majority status influence tourist’s sense of agency over the symbols and markers of ethnic and racial identity, affirming the qualities that mark them as different in the United States. Therefore each section of this chapter begins by analyzing the power of inclusion in international majorities and discusses the domestic implications specifically for each case.

I begin with the implications for homeland tourism in Ghana, detailing how a shared racial consciousness transforms histories of racial branding into powerful heritage-narratives. Tourists reaffirm slave pasts, African roots, and contemporary racial
understandings in order to transform the self and the community: defining the essential aspects of a racial identity on their terms. Next, I present the implications of Birthright, detailing how moments of majority in Israel represent a rebirth of Judaism for the diaspora, a Judaism defined and shaped by diasporic allegiance and support of Israel. Throughout time, and especially in our contemporary moment, Israel needs the diaspora, but this form of political engagement is somewhat banal and amorphous, yet should not be dismissed. Birthright then, reshapes and redefines what it inherently means to be Jewish in the United States, and I argue limits and possibly silences other Jewish diasporic identities. I end by discussing adoption homeland tours and the power of brief encounters with Chinese majorities. In this case, what we see is not a legitimizing of Asian-American difference, but a legitimizing of the transnational and transracial adoptive family, hopefully widening our American ideas of who constitutes a family.

Redefining racial branding

Homeland tourists traveling to Ghana, as I have shown, discuss an expanded imagined community held together through a shared racial consciousness. Tourists discuss the power in belonging to this larger imagined, where belonging provides a sense of rootedness healing original histories of forced dispersal and contemporary domestic experiences of racial oppression. Specifically, the aspects, behaviors, and even appearance related to blackness are commonplace in the homeland, and therefore not markers of inferiority or deviance.

The quotes below suggest that tourists blend time and space validating both histories of forced movement and contemporary and domestic understandings of blackness and African-American identity. Tourists discuss the power of touristic returns to heal both
negative contemporary racial branding and domestic histories of oppression. Tourists are powerful individual agents, grabbing hold of their past in order to armor themselves for domestic experiences and finally come to understand the strength and power that exists within the self, and the community.

In the quote below, Allison explains how she needed to travel internationally to finally feel a sense of inclusion:

You don't realize it until you go someplace else and you kind of blend, you don't feel so different. Allison

Allison’s comment highlights the power and the surprise of finally feeling connected, incorporated and included. While I have argued elsewhere that homeland tourists are exposed others when traveling in the homeland, they discuss that sort of exposure as mostly positive viewing it more as an indicator of homeland reciprocity and appreciation. By traveling to Ghana, Allison finally understands what it’s like to not be on the outside looking in. She believes she effortlessly belongs based upon a shared racial standing, and most importantly she explains her fellow racial kin as powerful domestic actors. Allison explains further:

Being in a place where you are not the minority was just probably the biggest shock; it had the biggest effect on us. You've never been in that situation...you go there, the people in power, the government, its everything. The highest person to the lowest person, we had some very heavy conversations how in this very foreign place you could feel more at home than in America and part of it was you just didn't feel like you stuck out so much. Allison

Allison presents a racial pride she discovered in Africa, because Africa represents the motherland, and a continent governed by black people (Harris 1991:13). She sees a country controlled and governed by people she feels she can relate to and associate with. She discusses a natural connection that allows her to feel at ease, something not possible
in the United States. This is extremely significant, because not only does Allison belong to
a bound group of peers, she envisions belonging to a powerful community. Ghanaians, or
racial kin control state level affairs. Tara also expressed similar feelings of inclusion
because of a racial belonging and the power that comes with seeing these community
members in positions of power:

When I was in Ghana, I felt "normal" for lack of a better term. In the U.S.,
I'm still called a "minority," which to me carries the connotation that I don't
have full control over my life and my future because the majority still rules.
But in a place like Ghana, the leadership looks like the people...just the
thought of having leaders who actually reflect me, even if it's superficial, is
a powerful notion. Tara

In both examples, these women discuss the power of seeing black leadership. In a quote in
the previous chapter, Nina, an older retired homeland traveler, also discussed the power of
seeing racial kin in control:

All I felt was I was home, everywhere I looked and everywhere we went,
even the hotel and everything it was us there, Africans, black people, were
in control of everything. Nina

Regardless of age, homeland tourists discuss the authority and strength they found by
traveling to a nation governed and controlled by black people suggesting a powerful
implication for domestic community transformation.

While Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explained how “people ultimately do not eat pride,
cannot find a job by feeling good about themselves” (2010:224), we should not dismiss
feelings of empowerment that reshape the terrain of community identities. For example,
Tara explains the history and contemporary portrayal of black women:

Historically, women of African descent have been portrayed as
promiscuous sexual objects in mainstream media. Much of that traces back
to the days when slave owners would force themselves onto the women
they owned. In today's media, especially pop culture, black women too
often are shown as gold diggers, baby's mamas, or video hoes.
Understanding the origins of these images make me more aware of the information I take in from music, movies, magazines, etc. I also have young nieces who are impressionable, so I let them know that they should be proud of who they are naturally. Tara

Tara sees how the history of slavery has created a contemporary system of oppression. She can reaffirm the very essence of her subjectivity based upon this newfound knowledge that runs counter to official histories and contemporary hegemonic portrayals of African American women. The racial kernel branding her in opposition to society’s norms and values is understood in new profound frames due to her travel to Ghana and brief inclusion in a racial majority.

In Ghana these things marking her as a member of the majority allow her to feel included and equal, and as she explains; understood. In the quote below she explains the different receptions she receives in the United States and Ghana based on her hair.

A lot of times over here I get stares from everybody [for wearing an Afro]. When I was over there I got compliments, from the time I stepped off the plane to the time we were boarding the plane to come back to the States. It was just a different type of experience for me, because even here from African Americans, you don’t wear your hair naturally because it’s unprofessional. You don’t wear an Afro. But over there, it was everywhere I went. I got compliments, which I appreciated. Tara

Tara chooses to display her identification with the black community through style and aesthetics; she purposefully and intentionally wears her hair natural. From a perspective informed by theoretical work on subcultures (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979) style can be seen as a medium for expressing the aspirations of black people historically excluded from official representations of femininity and beauty. For Tara, natural hair is in direct contrast to the artificial mimicry of white beauty norms and represents a positive self-image and the political movement of “black is beautiful”. Yet, she is not received positively while in the United States. Tara is labeled as unprofessional and rebellious, not
powerful and confident. Yet Ghana can relate to natural hair, as a country of black people, therefore natural is normal.

Tara’s perception of black hair demonstrates how symbolic acts of belonging take on new contemporary meanings based on homeland encounters. Tara justifies a presentation of self that is discouraged or discredited in the United States based upon inclusion in distant majorities that she has direct experience of due to homeland sojourns. Therefore a mark of identity that marked her as unruly now influences how she relates and communicates with her community upon return.

Observations of locals can also affirm characteristics of the African American community besides from presentations of self that oppress in the United States. Nina, an older woman who travels often to Ghana on homeland tours states how homeland travel allows her to embrace the behavior that is denigrated in the United States since she sees it occurring regularly and without contempt in Africa:

It allows me to understand and embrace so many things that we do here in this country that is looked upon as backwards or ghetto, but then I realize that’s our culture. That’s why we do some of the things we do over here, the ones of us over here that want to integrate into the melting pot of white society, they belittle some of these things and look down on them or disown them. We like to sit on the porch, and sweep the dirt until its smooth like linoleum and things like that; we like to live close together…

Nina

In this quote, Nina goes even further than Tara. She explains the behavior that marks her and her social group as inferior by first explaining how it originates in Africa, yet it doesn’t just originate; it can still be seen. Because of this she now claims and owns her understanding of the behaviors that define African Americans.

Yet these misconceptions concerning the practices of contemporary blacks are also discussed as a misconception and misrepresentation of the power of slave ancestors.
Therefore homeland returns, as I've argued throughout this dissertation, reaffirm contemporary racial practices and specific histories of forced dispersal and movement. In the quote below, which I have discussed before, Jessica reminds us of the strength required to survive the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

I was talking to my Aunt, and she is of the generation that thinks Africa is bad, it's a third world country where people are backwards. I was like. Jessica

Jessica first discusses contemporary understandings of Africa, as a less-developed third world country not worthy of African American affiliation. Yet, she continues and highlights the power in the African part of her hyphenated identity. She combines this with a specific understanding of the strength of slave ancestors:

You are African American and that’s what you really think? We talked about that as we went through the pictures how the slave trade came about and why people sold other people who looked like them. To give them a sense of where you come from is not this bad thing, do not think that you are. And to talk about this experience that you have come all this way, it means wherever you are from, they were very strong people. Jessica

Jessica therefore finds empowerment through redefining slave beginnings and African ancestral allegiances. Yet this sort of strength can only be found if one returns to the source of separation. Jessica continues:

There is so much power that African American have that they just haven't tapped into. For me, its not assaulting the African American race, I just feel that a lot of African Americans out there because of sometimes the societal things that they look around them and the communities they can become depressed, I can't make it I can't do it. Well oh my gosh, you made it over here, that's just amazing to me. How could you not think you could do anything you put your mind to? Jessica

Tourists then go to gain a better understanding of a lot of different things. Strength as slave descendants, power and poise due to African ancestry, and comfort and inclusion to racial majorities. Lisa, one homeland tourist who traveled on the tour I traveled with combined
narratives discussing contemporary African American oppression with western third-world perceptions of Africa. On our last day, Lisa, always on the periphery (mainly due to her age as a young woman in an older group) finally commanded everyone’s full attention. At our gala celebration during our final night in Ghana, Lisa addressed our group, and declared:

I grew up in the South Bronx, the only thing we knew about black people is that we were niggers. Shut up nigger; sit down nigger, that’s all we knew. If we were to be informed about black people they were always the indigenous people, no brassiere, half dressed, looking ashy, so we thought that to be true. That’s all we saw, we were none the wiser or you would see Feed The Children, homelessness; wow they got problems over there...I didn't have any expectations about Africa, I didn't know what to expect as far as my Motherland. I am just overwhelmed, I personally was lied to... I am leaving her with a pride that I have never known before, I always stood with my feet planted and my shoulders square, but for whatever it meant then, it means so much more now. I always thought I knew who I was, my name is, my height is, my likes are, my dislikes are I always thought that was it of my identity, my accomplishments ex-cetera. I am pretty sure many of you thought the same thing. But there is much more to me than that, and I found that here...you are my people. Lisa

In this speech, similar to Jessica’s understanding of contemporary Africa, Lisa also explains the unworthiness attached to racial identities she has carried with her. She explains she has never felt confident or encouraged to connect to Africa, since Africa is viewed as unworthy of connection. Lisa demonstrates how the history of racial categorization is a history of moral judgments, a division of the world into more or less worthy categories of persons. The misrepresentation of the only people Lisa can possibly claim further limits her ability to belong in American society.

In this speech, she presents contemporary development narratives along with ancestry. Therefore homelands heal both types of negative racial branding, empowering
the tourists to define on their terms. The narration of her experiences becomes a key cultural practice with implications for future understandings of self and community.

The knowledge one gains on homeland tours therefore are perceived to be able to change and influence the definition of the group back home by speaking racial solidarity to racial domination. As Tara’s journal entry explains:

Before I left for Ghana, a friend of mine told me that once I made the decision to return across the Atlantic to America, I was no longer a slave. I’ve accepted that challenge. Are you coming with me? Tara’s Journal

In this excerpt Tara details the agentic power of transformation, only possible through homeland encounters. She contrasts her decision to return with the forced migration of the Middle Passage. Tara speaks with authority, liberating the power to define from the dominant ideological practices and discourses that shape our vision of reality (Lemke 1995).

I was struck by this transformation, and asked Tara to expand upon her journal entry. In the quote below from an e-mail exchange, Tara references structural domestic barriers and the domestic racial assumptions that continually shape her reality and opportunities:

I didn’t and don't consider myself a slave in a physical sense, but there are social, educational, and economic barriers that have been put in place to hinder the progress of certain groups. Growing up as an African American in the southern U.S., I had to deal with people who openly questioned my intelligence and academic capabilities simply because of my skin color and background. I also see many of my family members and friends who weren’t able to overcome those obstacles because they believed people who told them they didn’t deserve better because they were of African descent. Tara

In this quote Tara discusses the American history of racialization and her contemporary experiences. As I’ve mentioned before, Tara is a PhD candidate in Mathematics at a very
prestigious private university. Yet, due to racial assumptions, her intelligence is continually questioned. She explains how this negative racial branding affects all of those of African descent. Yet Tara has always worn her racial ancestry as a badge, or a sense of pride, but now she has evidence and confirmation when creating a racial identity in contrast to the understanding of race as a rigid and presumably permanent social hierarchy (Fredrickson 2002).

Therefore while Lee Baker reminds us that “individuals who yoke their identity to categories of race often miss the fact that most people stitch together an ethnic identity from various cultural heritages and that cultural identity has nothing to do with racial categories” (Baker 2001:68). These quotes suggest that individuals also use race to stitch together identity categories, relying upon a shared racial consciousness to connect and heal all different types of negative racial assumptions and characterizations. Imagined communities in this instance spans time and space and use a shared racial consciousness based upon foundational elements that are not questioned for their validity but remodeled for domestic empowerment. As stated by Patricia Hill-Collins, ‘when reframed through power relations, imagined communities can be marshaled for oppressive or emancipatory political projects’ (2010:18). In these uses, community is marshaled to inform and transform domestic experiences of exclusion and affirm assumed inferior heritages. Homeland tourism to Ghana cannot reconcile the dispersal of slavery or truly connect the diaspora with Africa. It does however validate black American experiences for middle class African Americans on the basis of racial kinship.
Reestablishing the Diaspora’s Identity, American Jewish Duty

As the above section demonstrates, homeland trips are experiences of connection, where you understand the things that mark you as different in the United States. Birthright participants also discuss the power of inclusion. In this section I present interview excerpts detailing how participants reorient their primordial Jewish identity towards contemporary community obligations, specifically to the nation of Israel.

The tourists I interviewed and have interacted with discussed feeling a newfound confidence in their Jewish identity and understanding of Israeli politics. In this instance of merger, similar to the example in Ghana, tourists blend time and space. Yet, here they deploy a newfound duty to express their Jewish identity based upon an interesting position as a global minority constantly under siege. I explain this diasporic duty through Appadurai’s understanding of the “fear of small numbers” (2006). In the section below I detail how homeland tours transform the self, and in the process transform and define the diasporic community along new lines and contemporary issues.

In earlier chapters, I explained how Jewish tourists understood their American difference and described moments of otherness and exclusion. These markers of otherness were thought to be common in Israel and markers of the majority. Testimonials on Birthright’s website depict Israel as a land of shared understanding thereby normalizing behavior that usually isolates American Jews from the mainstream. My interviewees also discussed the shared practices that were indicators of difference in the U.S., but indicators of belonging in/to Israel. As this quote from Jackie demonstrates, fleeting moments of majority status, similar to comments of tourists to Ghana, shape one’s continued membership in the imagined community within the United States.
For once in my life I do not feel like a minority. I feel like I fit in and belong here. Where I grew up there weren’t a lot of Jews but we weren’t very religious and there were a lot of people who were prejudiced against us and for the first time I feel I can be proud and admit I am a Jew. Jackie

Before Jackie traveled on a Birthright tour, she felt excluded from mainstream American society and was labeled and existed as an American “other”. Yet, after Birthright, while she still is an American other, she now doesn’t feel the weight of minority status. She states, similar to Tara’s newfound power, how, “for the first time, I feel I can be proud” of being a Jew. The romantic myth of Israel then creates a foreign land where these differences are commonplace. She has discovered a newfound pride, and in the process now feels more comfortable displaying and articulating her American difference.

Abby, another tourist, also discussed being empowered and transformed, combining an understanding of primordial beginnings with newfound contemporary allegiances and diasporic obligations:

To me Israel represents this stronghold of Jewish religion and of Jewish spirituality. It was this place that I went to and had this rebirth of love for everything that is in my past and my heritage. It certainly also pushed me to evaluate the current state of things in my life. In modern terms, it’s a rebirth of Judaism. Abby

Birthright facilitated Abby’s transformation. She discovered her past, her heritage and in the process also her contemporary role as a Jewish American. These connections are based upon witnessed moments of shared sensibility defined by mutual understanding due to primordial ties and contemporary perceptions of a shared consciousness.

Israel becomes a symbol of Jewish strength and, as I will demonstrate, Jewish responsibility. As I have discussed before, Birthright participants detail obligations to elders and community. They also discuss obligations and duty with respect to their military Israeli peers. Abby’s modern rebirth then becomes linked to this imagined duty to protect and
defend Israel from afar and obligation to her ancestors and community. Israel is a
stronghold, a contemporary location that must be protected. This process extends the
imagined across time and space with distinctly contemporary consequences. As Adam
explains:

It’s easier to feel better about Israel and about the military when meeting
the people. I feel better defending the Israeli military because I’ve met the
Israeli military. I understand what they go through. I feel more of a
connection to Israel…I get it. Adam

Adam discusses how he feels better defending the Israeli military suggesting how he now
speaks from authority on international policy issues due to the power of experience.
Therefore, homeland/tourist interactions are loaded engagements signaling present day
possibilities for domestic empowerment that have international implications. He feels
confident in his diasporic allegiances and defines his role as a Jewish American as a
defender of Israel.

While I explained and detailed the shared traditions and experiences of otherness
that defined the Jewish community and linked the diasporic Jew to Israel, Birthright tourists
mention a new organizing force to American Jewish identity. An understanding discovered
on their terms that explains domestic otherness, community responsibility and
transnational obligations:

The ability to be able to see and hear first hand, as an American Jew, all the
things you have been subjected to in Sunday school and in temple and
obviously more recently growing up with what's been going on in the news
to get a different more worldly perspective of what's really going on in the
"homeland" of your religion. It's just an amazing opportunity. Zach

Zach discusses how he was able to see first hand all the things he was forced to explore in
Hebrew school. He chooses to be a part of this community, continuing its distinctiveness
and now orienting his Jewish identity towards Israel based upon the validity of this
primordial core. But Zach also brings up another aspect crucial to homeland tourism; Zach can now speak with authority. Where Tara spoke with an authority about the history of racialization, Zach speaks with authority about Israeli politics thereby demonstrating his global acumen.

Besides from being a culmination of what one has learned, and a perfect moment for self-discovery, Birthright gives you a contemporary frame for understanding the significance of connection. He labels this international understanding as a “more worldly perspective” where a worldly more global consciousness is assumed to develop because of a quick and very mediated encounter with a specific already personally significant international location.

Homelands are not important as static locations of preserved heritage and history, but as sites of heritage enactments and possible nodes of global connectivity. Therefore primordial homelands are not preserved relics of distant times, but modern locations. Jacob elucidates on this point, demonstrating how contemporary circumstances influence significance:

But in terms of Israel being the Jewish homeland I see it more as a modern homeland than a historic homeland. I'm not numb to the fact that Jews lived her thousands of years ago and Judaism was born here, its not like it meant nothing to me but it was more. Regardless of how this place came to be in Jewish hands, its here now and because of that that is something to me, there is Jewish governments and businesses and societies and children being born, all within this Jewish state. And that meant more to me as a homeland from a contemporary and less from a historical standpoint. Jacob sidesteps the history of Zionism and focuses on two historical periods: the beginning of a Jewish community, and the contemporary existence of a Jewish nation. Yet, while the connection is primordial he sidesteps contemporary political allegiances consistent with how other tourists understand contemporary Israel. Yet, even though as Michael stated
before Israeli politics are a “domestic thing”, the consequences of connection and solidarity are contemporary. As Drew explains:

Our history, our people began in what is now Israel, and our people dispersed and return and reclaimed the land. It is important to know the history, get to know the true Israelis, and get a sense of the commitment necessary to return to Israel, our homeland, and rebuild the population of Jews in the world. Drew

Drew discusses a primordial ownership to the land of Israel. An ownership with some serious fine print and obligation only truly understood after experiences in the homeland. Below I demonstrate how tourists discuss the global status of Jews as an attacked minority requiring diasporic support.

Many Birthright tourists expressed their now acquired understanding of Israel’s role in the Middle East and explained their allegiance as a necessity to combat global anti-Semitism. For Appadurai, minorities are a problem in the modern global moment because they challenge national narratives of social cohesion. National majorities fear these small numbers because they expose the incompleteness of national identities, and the idea of a cohesive and pure national citizenry (2006). Birthright tourists however, discuss not a fear of minorities for national sovereignty, but a fear of being the small number.

Amy states how; “the world is very much against Israel and I love how Israel reacts to that.” This quotes suggests that participants might see Israel as symbolically important due to its contested legitimacy in the contemporary moment and Jewish people globally in need of support due to a global position as a people marked for active eradication. As Michael’s comment demonstrates:

They said the Muslim population is increasing faster than the Jewish state. They rely on Jews from around the world. Michael
Michael’s understanding and rationale for supporting Israel is based on a very interesting understanding of minority status and otherness. He discusses membership in a global minority and explains his political stance as a responsibility to combat the hatred and advancement of majorities into Jewish national territories. As this quote below from Ross explains. Birthright exists to enlighten the diaspora on this very issue:

I think it exists to get the word out about Israel, give people the opportunity to see it first hand and not just hear about it or read about it. It is important since there are so few Jews in the world, specifically in Israel, it is an important part. You can only get so much out of what you read in books or see in the news. You get a real biased view as to what its like there. Ross

In this quote Ross understands Birthright to exist to combat Jew’s vulnerable position as a global minority. He explains the power of experience that allows him to speak with authority when explaining Israel’s importance for world Jewry. He expresses a belief that the only way to truly understand the position of Israel, is to experience Israel. He relies upon his experiences not biased media explanations or textbook rationales to understand the global position of Jews as a persecuted minority requiring his support and allegiance. Birthright then, influences how he goes forward as a Jew, retaining a primordial distinctiveness with important contemporary diasporic allegiances.

Amy also discussed this position as a global minority, persecuted throughout time and still under siege:

It really is so important for the Jewish people considering our history and the security blanket that we need. What really impacted me or mesmerized me about Israel is that its there, it’s always there, and you don't need to use it if you don't want to. But if the necessity for it becomes, if there will be a necessity for it, it IS always there. And I love that about it… that’s why fighting for Israel as an entity and a land [is important]. Its sort of sad how only a few countries see it this way and the majority of people and political leaders and liberals are completely opposed to this view. Amy
Amy’s quote presents a very important shift in the reasons for Israeli allegiance. It exists for the diaspora. Israeli then requires allegiance just in case Jews are persecuted in their diasporic settlements and need an exit strategy. Amy’s quote, as others throughout this dissertation suggest; allegiance and support is the byproduct of diasporic ownership. As the title of the program even states: Israel is every Jewish person’s birthright.

Social uncertainties and the threat of national sovereignty is therefore not challenged by a domestic minority as in Appadurai’s understanding of national insecurity in the age of globalization. These new global flows of diasporic allegiance creating and defining Jewish identity presently are used then to bolster not unsettle nations, suggesting again how the nation is far from behind us. In this instance a global majority threatens community continuation and national existence, thus requiring the support of the global Jewish population to retain Israeli sovereignty based upon rights that stress primordial ownership of territories and transnational obligations.

This rebirth though, demonstrates how the American domestic Jewish community redefines themselves as a threatened global minority, requiring diasporic commitment. As Drew’s comment explains:

I feel empowered. I will return. I will spread the word. Israel is one of my priorities in life. My heart is there. Drew

Drew feels empowered as a Jewish person, but not empowered by discovering the redeeming qualities of his otherness, but an empowerment to display and weigh in on international issues with regards to Israel. Israel is now one of the priorities in his life. To date, Drew has not returned to Israel; yet actual returns are inconsequential. Tourists discuss becoming more involved, yet my findings and the findings of other larger Birthright studies suggest that this new understanding does not result in direct action (citations). As
Josh explained, now that his eyes have been opened, he plans to “Google things more”, suggesting a more banal approach to belonging to global imagined communities.

The responsibilities of membership then might appear, and kind of are, banal, yet have significant consequences for civic engagement. As Shaul Kelner recently explained “first and foremost, the tours are efforts to foster identification with a nation-state…The tours, as a diaspora-building practice, take implicit stands in favor of multiculturalism in the countries where the diasporas reside: they assert legitimacy of maintaining sentimental ties with foreign countries and reject the notion that citizenship alone should define the boundaries of a political community” (Kelner 2010:xx). Civic engagement is changing (Smith et. al., Pew Internet and American life Project 2009). The imagined bonds that Birthright works to create, are taking shape on social networking sites, and influencing what it means to be Jewish in America. Birthright participants connect and stay connected through sites like Face book and become aware of organizations with specific political objectives. This new form of Jewish community can appear uninformed and trite when we just study one aspect, like the Birthright tour itself, but by looking at the impact and the way it can shape community by examining these social media sites, we can see it has real political and civic implications.

Additionally, Birthright is becoming a pretty standardized ritual for Jewish identity, just as common as the bar or bat mitzvah. We are witnessing how Birthright and these newly transformed publics are using social media to transform what it means to be Jewish in America. Moving forward, more work is needed to challenge the very concept of primordial diasporic allegiance. However, most academic work on Birthright is funded by
the same organizations that are intimately related to its success. By linking Jewish identity with Israeli nationalism, Birthright as a program and the academic work hailing it’s importance, limits other possible Jewish voices by claiming an inherent and primordial right to the land of Israel. Therefore, Birthright’s popularity demonstrates not a genuine ethnic revival, but a new development in what it inherently means to be Jewish in the United States.

To return to Patricia Hill-Collins, “when reframed through power relations, imagined communities can be marshaled for oppressive or emancipatory political projects” (2010:18). For many Birthright participants, the power relations involve banal support for a beleaguered nation that tourists believe to have primordial ties to. Yet, in agreement with Appadurai, this fear is not based on primordial ties, but an understanding of contemporary forces and issues due to the consequences of globalization. Therefore Birthright is “community-building” (2006:7) through imagined global affiliations that rally tribal allegiances in distinct contemporary ways to support national sovereignty. Homeland tourists therefore connect to more than just essential characteristics of identity seen to exist in our very genetic makeup. They also connect to contemporary global social arrangements, and take pride in state sovereignty.

Confirming constructed families by understanding Chinese difference

In China, families also discussed the power of brief encounters of majority status, however, this is explained in relation to parental experiences in China as the minority. In this section, I detail the underlying assumption claiming that adopted children naturally

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1 For more information concerning the academic work on Birthright Israel and American Jews, visit the Maurice & Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/index.html
feel empowered due to primordial belonging and racial similarity with the homeland. But as I have showed throughout this dissertation, these girls are not necessarily members when in China, they are exposed Americans too. Nevertheless, parents discuss the power of these moments for their children as “native Chinese”, and present heritage and Chinese difference in symbolic, optional and voluntary frames consistent with white American understanding of difference, shaped by contemporary approaches to diversity like multiculturalism.

Parents hope to provide something crucial for their children, focusing mainly on passing in certain scenarios where they would be expected to perform as Chinese or Pan-Asian. I argue, then that while parents work to mitigate difference, they approach difference through the powerful frames associated with hegemonic whiteness, envisioning a time not when racial classification is behind us, but a time when the transnational and transracial family is commonplace and therefore accepted.

Experiences of belonging to the dominant social group were not limited to participants on homeland tours to Israel and Ghana. Families traveling internationally on adoption homeland tours also believed that even brief moments of hegemonic privilege was extremely important for the emotional well-being of their adopted children. Encounters with invisible privilege of majority inclusion, are seen as a benefit, and something owed to the adopted child. As the comment below demonstrates:

> We want the girls to have their own experiences and memories of China. We want them to have the opportunity to immerse themselves in their birth culture, to experience being the majority and to see their parents as the minority race. Urchin²

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As this blog comment suggests, immersion with one’s birth culture is seen as a natural experience of majority status assumed to naturally blend and belong in their homeland. Yet this parent also discusses a crucial factor of the homeland tour, this is also the first time parents experience moments of minority status. In these moments, parents explained, they were able to begin to understand the powerful feeling of dislocation and otherness when one is not a member of the majority.

However, parents return to the pull of primordial identity that supposedly shapes your behavior and interaction with the world. As Karl explains:

I do think that the trip had a slightly positive effect on our daughters’ sense of her roots...I do have the feeling that there is a sense in which she is perhaps a bit empowered as a native Chinese, a feeling probably enhanced by the Olympics (she cheered for both the Chinese and the Americans, as of course did my wife and I). Karl

For Karl, Anna’s adopted father, homeland travel to China can empower Anna through engagements with her natal land of origin. However, this manifests itself through new global imagined communities based upon contemporary, not historical symbols. Karl mentions how Anna is empowered as a native Chinese, yet draws on contemporary events like the upcoming Beijing Olympics.

This quote from Karl is very telling, yet also possibly an indicator of the timing of my homeland tour. We travelled to China right before the Beijing Summer Olympics, which was discussed by all the parents and children alike as a symbol of Chinese pride. Yet Karl still narrates the importance of homeland through two sometimes contrasting frames of organization: one of essential belonging to China and the other based upon consumption of symbolic cues heavily influenced by globalization.
While all the families were interested and excited by the Beijing Olympics, these symbolic indicators of Chinese solidarity did not translate into a genuine interest in Chinese heritage and history. As Karen, Farah’s mother stated:

“They are interested in the Olympics, but they're not really all that more interested in learning more about China. I think we all got a good sense of how well China is developing and how much like us the Chinese people are. They are more interested in international travel now. Karen

Karen’s comment demonstrates how important the contemporary age of globalization is for American explorations of diasporic and transnational identity. Farah is not interested in delving deeper into Chinese heritage, her interest stems from an American standpoint of global curiosity, which I will expand upon further in the next chapter.

As I discussed earlier, homelands are thought to fill in abandonment, provide primordial understanding through osmosis, and now experiences of majority status based upon assumed affiliation due to primordial native status to draw upon at a later date when exposed as an American outsider.

What parents actually give their children when they discuss this power of majority status is mainly symbolic and in line with white understandings of ethnicity. Parents pick and chose, usually ignoring political or controversial holidays and histories and focusing on celebrations like Chinese New Year or Lantern Festival (Tessler 1999). They also sidestep America’s history of Asian immigration and exclusion.

Food, rituals, and competency in even things like international travel are equated with understanding one’s difference. As this quotes from Farah’s mother demonstrates.

Chinese heritage and subjectivity is reduced to the easily understood symbols of Chinese-ness or Pan-Asian identities:
We do celebrate Chinese New Year every year (Chinese dinner)… and we eat a lot of Chinese food. Karen

These children (mostly girls) exist in mostly white upper and middle class worlds, where parents approach difference as if it were optional, symbolic and voluntary (Waters 1990). Where other forms of cultural education set up the child as a passive vessel, homeland journeys give them direct experiences with the meaning of being in China (even only briefly), but, as I have demonstrated, not of China. Culture and heritage are limited to the symbolic and the banal, as this quote from a mother on an adoption blog details:

I want them to know how to confidently sit down a restaurant, order food, and eat it correctly. I don't want China to be some mysterious place half way around the world. China Adopt Talk

Therefore for mostly white parents expert knowledge of being Chinese involves knowing how to not stand out in a Chinese restaurant, and passing as Chinese in certain settings (which I will elaborate upon in the next chapter).

As this comment below explains, Chinese identity and difference will be incorporated into the family in a similar fashion to St. Patrick’s Day and white ethnic expressions:

For me her culture is becoming part of what we, the family does. Just as when I married my husband, St. Patrick's Day got incorporated into what I do so does her culture. Ldw4mlo

This parent incorporates her daughter’s Chinese-ness by bringing in symbolic aspects and blending them with the white symbolic ethnic activities the family already engages with.

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4 China Adopt Talk, "Adult Adoptee Writings - Going Back" ldw4mlo 1/31/09

Dr. Jane Liedtke, the founder of FCC, also expresses a similar symbolic, voluntary and optional approach to incorporating Chinese difference:

A German-American family adopting a Chinese child is no longer solely a German-American or "American" family. They are now also a family with a Chinese heritage and culture. Dr. Jane Liedtke

Therefore, even international adoption specialists approach Chinese heritage through dominant frames used by whites.

The families I traveled with also expressed similar understandings of difference and incorporation. One day after dinner in China, I sat with the parents and discussed why I was doing this project. I told them I was trying to understand how one finds their place and comes to peace with their difference. Lisa, a mother of three adopted Chinese daughters expects that as her girls get older she will experience more problems with people accepting them as Greek Orthodox. She explains:

It’s black and white for me. I’m Greek and American, my girls are Chinese and adopted and will be raised Greek Orthodox. It is very important to me to give my children a sense of religion since it is what means the most to me even if some people at my church don’t see them as being Greek. Lisa

While Lisa hopes to instill a sense of both her Greek and American heritage, and include aspects of China, her husband Evan, a self-described “mutt” doesn’t see any importance in ethnic allegiance or identity in any setting. His counter to ethnic specificity was a story he told about when a relative returned home from Vietnam. “The entire town came out as a group, not as an ethnicity. We came out as Americans.” As a white man, Evan finds it difficult to understand how visible differences might make it hard for his children to be seen as American, and in this case as Greek Orthodox.

5 Returning to China with your Adopted Chinese Child® Dr. Jane Liedtke http://www.fccncalif.org/HomelandTravel/returninghandout.pdf

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These methods for incorporating China then are based upon contemporary approaches to difference and expanded global connectivity (which I will presenting detail in the final chapter of this dissertation). In my discussions with parents, and my analysis of comments on adoption list-serves and blogs, Chinese heritage is synonymous with a pan-Asian identity and a demonstration of global citizenship, an approach to difference consistent with American multiculturalism and the belief in this expand global realm for the imagined.

But, the circumstances surrounding how German, Irish or Greek immigrants came to the United States and their ability to assimilate based on racial similarities cannot be compared to migration patterns of Chinese adopted children or the continued discrimination Asian Americans still face in the United States. For children adopted from China, society will often identify and treat them, at least initially, as Asian rather than American, especially as they mature and begin to leave home and attend colleges and universities. In these well-intentioned attempts, families overlook the American history of Asian racialization, and ultimately reinforce white-upper/middle class American standpoints and America’s perceived position of global power.

And unfortunately, by focusing on heritage, some parents are doing more to engrain racial hierarchies than combat them. Parents discuss diversity in very specific ways reaffirming the racial order through color-blind ideologies. As one parent explains in a comment on an adoption blog regarding school choice for her adopted children:

I will choose my child’s safety and education over diversity any time. We haven’t made a decision on private v. public schools yet, but we did choose a daycare where there is a bit more diversity…I struggle with finding ways to ensure she’s not the only different one. We are fortunate, in
this regard, that we have a fairly large population of Chinese adoptees around us...\(^6\)

In this comment this parent makes an extremely important distinction between the sorts of diversity that nourish and the sorts of diversity that are hazardous. She explains how a racial and class based diverse school is unsafe. In this color-blind approach, this parent does more to further entrench racial differences in the United States, while failing to see how this sort of thinking could apply to her child. Unfortunately this approach fails to address the non-optional nature of identification for the Chinese child. Consistent with recent work on diversity and multiculturalism, the underlying inequalities of multiculturalism’s vision of difference remains unchallenged (Bell and Hartmann 2007). Therefore the processes that construct the dominant frames are not contested, but adopted (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

This subtle but consequential shift is not intentional or malicious; parents are trying to fix the problems of previous generations of Asian adoptions and as members of the dominant race and class, they are unacquainted with the lasting and continuing effects of racial labeling in the United States. As one mother discussed in a comment on the blog China Adopt Talk, white adoptive parents sometimes are unaware of the social positions their children inhabit in the larger American social order:

I have been reminded by an adult adoptee to mention something else – that many times our kids are “white by default”. They don’t deal with their racial issues because they are seen as white in their all white neighborhood and in their all white school. They are being raised by white parents, with “white values” (whatever that is). Rumor Queen\(^7\)

\(^6\) http://chinaadopptalk.com/2010/08/10/identity/#comments
\(^7\) http://chinaadopptalk.com/2010/08/10/identity/#comments
I would challenge Rumor Queen on one of her main points. I argue that adopted Chinese children are not seen as white in their white neighborhoods, but a sort of hybrid and approachable other, a child skilled in the cultural capital and forms of engagement associated with upper and middle class white society, yet visibly and racially different.

This new generation of adoptive parents approach transnational dislocations based upon a reflexive look backwards at previous approaches to international adoption. As one parent on an adoption blog explains:

I have read the opinions of adult Korean adoptees. I read a lot of hurt and angst. And it is understandable, and it is very real. But I also consider that current adults Korean adoptees were raised in the US during the 60s and 70s – a volatile time in US history, especially as it related to Asia/ I think raising a child of Asian heritage in the year 2010 in the US is entirely different. The social climate I different, people are much more educated, and as parents we have many more resources and tools to help our children. I am not saying that race issues no longer exist; I am merely saying that there are many, many more factors to consider...Looking different is only one of the many challenges that our children will face...

In this comment, based on contemporary multicultural and pluralistic approaches to differences, we accept and allow expressions of difference. Koreans adopted in the United States, historically were silenced and parental approaches limited homeland nostalgia and suppressed even the mentioning of racial differences (Bergquist, Vonk, Kim & Feit 2007). But I am left wondering, was it the silencing of heritage or the dismissed experiences of racial otherness? I speculate that the experiences of exclusion coupled with the inability to understand their difference in American master frames of heritage and difference resulted in the pain seen in older Korean adoptees today.

http://chinaadopttalk.com/2010/08/10/identity/#comments
Therefore, I argue, it's not necessarily heritage that heals, but confronting domestic experiences of racial exclusion and creating supportive communities of like-minded families. The circumstances are different, there exists now a distinct and vocal community for families with internationally adopted children.

No matter how superficial we perceive these symbolic practices that define identity upon return, brief alignment and identification with dominant social groups globally, and expressions of symbolic ethnicity are seen to heal the rootless and influence future relations domestically. However, I argue this necessarily does not heal the racial otherness of the adopted child; but the transnational and transracial family’s otherness.

Moments of exposure are common for all families, and while international adoption has become common, families still discuss interactions that have highlighted their unconventional nature, as one comment on a New York Times article explains:

> As a proud mother of four adopted children and three biological children, the only question that offends me is when people ask, “Which are your real children?” My standard reply is, “Which child looks imaginary to you?”
> Alana Sisk

American understandings of family are still tightly linked to biological kinship. Families first and foremost legitimize their very being, then determine how the will incorporate racial difference. When confronted with moments of exposure like in the quote above, families respond with affirmations of familial cohesion and solidarity, where family membership transcends each member’s difference. In the quote below, Karen details how she views China and family cohesion:

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Its more important to make Farah feel a part of the family, not a part of China, she is a special member because she is Chinese, but she is an Elms first. Karen

In this quote Karen explains how she first and foremost makes sure Farah feels comfortable in her American family. Yet she is incorporated and celebrated as special due to her difference. The quote below from Karen’s biological son Chris, provides further detail:

I used to think about that a lot [being singled out or noticed, Farah not belonging] but now, I'm used to Farah. I don't think twice about her being Chinese, because she's my sister, and she's always been that way. Chris

Chris then sees Farah as a special member of his family, based on contemporary understandings of difference and multicultural incorporation. Farah’s Chinese face and the essential Chinese heritage she carries with her then is a special additive to the white American family. Therefore, I argue, the transnational adoption community normalizes and celebrates the other within their child, not to redefine racial classification and hierarchies, but to affirm familial arrangements. The larger adoption community hopes that through their community’s visibility, their difference will soon be unnoticed. As this comment on a New York Times article details:

As a waiting family myself, I sounded a lot like the lady you met on the beach. It made me feel wonderful to know that my daughter will one day have a more supportive world. A world where others just like her will not always have to be “the adopted Chinese daughter”. My daughter will hopefully see herself as MY daughter. Wendi Caplan-Carroll

The following comment describes a different future for the adoptive family where one day this family arrangement will be common. This mother explains the position of the adopted child in frames easily understood through Appadurai’s global flows. These girls are the linkers, the connection between China and the United States. However, they will not be

accepted as their Chinese girls, but as my daughters, or members of an American (and probably white) family. Therefore the difference parents are dealing with is domestic and not due to the primordial pull of Chinese heritage, but the contemporary experiences of otherness the family encounters.

Homeland tourism to China cannot reconcile traditional understandings of family based upon blood and genetics or affirm the economic realities that brought the Chinese child to American in the first place. It does however validate these new family constructs and redefine possible Asian American subjectivities. As Farah explained: “it helped me learn about my heritage. I also think it helped bring our family closer together.” Therefore, I argue Farah’s heritage is not necessarily solely rooted in China, but her heritage begins and is organized by the history of movement that brought her to her American family.

The community for transnational adoption is growing larger, and with its growth Chinese adoptees are growing up in a world where Chinese adoption isn’t so unusual. As this comment explains:

In the last year or so, I’ve noticed that I have these kinds of conversations more and more. People who once would have intruded with a boorish question seem to have been replaced by others who want to share their own abiding connection to adoption. They were adopted themselves. Or they’re in the process of adopting — a “waiting family.” Jeff Gammage

Since Chinese adopted has gained popularity in the United States strong support structures and organizations exist and now shape and define what it means to be a family with interracially and internationally adopted children. Maybe because of this larger more visible community the crisis of identity that was witnessed with Korean adoptees won’t be

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so severe.

In this section I focused mainly on parental understandings and comments analyzed from adoption blogs, articles, and list serves. In my interviews and interactions with adopted Chinese children, they did not discuss feelings of otherness or dislocation, because perhaps, they are still too young to articulate these deep and personal sentiments. As these girls grow into young adults, more work is necessary that is both critical and sympathetic to understand the contemporary discourses of transnational adoption and the intimate space where belonging, race, culture and subjectivity are actively shaped.

Conclusion

In this section, we return from our homeland tour armored with a newfound strength due to membership in powerful primordial communities. Yet the discursive strategies of many tourists, even when claiming a shared space in the global community and a shared heritage with the people visited, sound similar to narratives of cultural essentialism common to Western engagements with the other (Said 1978). Therefore, I argue, while we look internationally to discover heritage and roots, we expect and anticipate domestic changes and domestic acceptance of difference.

In all these examples of empowerment and the assumed benefits of homeland explorations, we see an interesting intersection between the American, the transnational, and the global. This is all possible because, I argue, of the expanded imagined. In the next chapter, I end this dissertation by discussing the role of tourism and the expansion of the tourism industry. Tourism facilitates global thinking, where homeland discoveries become representations of belonging to the cosmopolitan international community.
Globalization is not simply a name for a new epoch in history or the next chapter in the biography of the nation-state; it is marked by a new role for the imagination in social life (Appadurai 1996:14). The tourism industry facilitates the new role for the imagination for this global era.
Chapter Ten: A Mechanism of Mobility: Tourism and Global Consciousness
Homeland tourism has emerged as a mechanism to discover roots and heritage particularly suited to this contemporary age of globalization and transnationalism. By traveling on homeland tours, tourists connect to their primordial essential core yet through present day reconnection; understand the value in practices that define domestic communities.

In this section I expand upon my argument and wrap up our journey. This dissertation explored the process of traveling to the homeland and then going home again, and this final chapter I demonstrate how the increase in tourism and the growth of the tourism industry is a specific product of globalization facilitating global thinking, where homeland discoveries become examples of another sort of grounding in community, belonging to the cosmopolitan international global imagined.

Tourism is the largest industry in the world, worth $6.5 trillion and directly and indirectly accounts for 8.7 percent of the world employment and 10.3 percent of world GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council 2006). Due to the scope and scale of contemporary tourism, tourism influences social relationships and social organization. The scale of travel has increased, and as John Urry states, “it sometimes seems as if all the world is on the move” (2007:1). This feeling of “mobility in the air” (Thrift 1996:259) creates a different way of thinking through economic, social and political relationships. Therefore tourism represents and is a consequence of globalization influencing why homelands are thought to be important today.

John Urry has labeled this the ‘mobility turn’, which “connects the analysis of different forms of travel, transport, and communications with the multiple ways in which
communication and social life is performed and organized through time and across various spaces (2007:6). As Urry states “the early retired, international students, terrorists, members of diasporas, holidaymakers, business people, slaves, sports stars, asylum seekers, refugees, backpackers, commuters, young mobile professionals, prostitutes – these and many others – seem to find the contemporary world is their oyster or at least their destiny (2007:1). With the ease of travel and the substantial growth of the tourism industry, homeland journeys are now a possibility. What I have demonstrated in this dissertation is how collective memories of movement shape the contemporary meanings of international homelands, but technological products and innovation shape how populations actually return. The ease of tourism then facilitates this process of connecting globally, imagining globally and envisioning global consequences and subjectivities.

Tourism’s possibility for education and growth are engrained in its very meaning. The practice of leaving one’s ordinary existence to engage in an experience outside the confines of the everyday historically has been valued for its educational possibilities that began with Grand Tours for European aristocracy during the end of the seventeenth century.¹ So while tourism facilitates global movement, as I have demonstrated, it also facilitates global thinking.

I return to Tara’s journal to highlight how tourism can facilitate these new global imagined links. In this excerpt Tara compares her decision to move away from home and attend college in an urban environment far from the comforts of her childhood community with her decision to travel to Ghana. She writes:

¹ “Between 1600 and 1800, treaties on travel shifted from a scholastic emphasis on touring as an opportunity for discourse, to travel as eyewitness observation...It is also interesting to note how travel was expected to play a key role in the cognitive and perceptual education of the English upper class (see Dent, 1975)” Urry 2002:40.
I left Memphis searching for a place among my young, black, and gifted peers. Now, I’m leaving American to find a place among those who share a common ancestry and history with me, despite the thousands of miles between us. Tara’s Journal

Tara attended a historically black university to strengthen and solidify her connection to the larger African American community. In this quote she compares that to her decision to travel to Ghana, a similar life-changing act of movement. She imagines transnational connections that have the ability to transform. In both examples, she expands her community by travelling to experience a larger black collective. Both communities she believes; share a common ancestry and an essential kernel of values and beliefs. Through travel and movement, Tara finds roots and a sense of groundedness. Travel and homeland journeys therefore facilitate connections and confirm belonging to larger imagined communities. This manifests in different ways for different homeland tourists.

As I have demonstrated, adoptees use Chinese heritage symbolically, and connect to the developing community of transnational adoption. Yet as I present below, parents and children envision global movement as crucial for understanding American Asian identities. China’s rapid development and presence on the world stage as a contemporary global power shape interest in homeland returns. In order to understand the global imagined one must also understand international travel and migration.

For example, Farah watches her other Asian friends travel back and forth between the United States and Korea. Therefore, for Farah, being Asian means having experiences similar to first and second generation Asian Americans in her school. In our conversations about Farah’s Asian friends, Karen also highlighted the movement specific to immigrant communities that Farah associated with an Asian identity. In this quote Karen begins with
the specific identities bound up in nations, yet conflates national Asian identities into a Pan-Asian consciousness:

I think she was curious about China and Chinese people. Many of her friends are Korean and one is Chinese. They all seem to travel back and forth to Asia often, and I think she wanted to do that. Karen

Karen sees her homeland tour as important because it provides Farah with an experience of return she so frequently observes as a marker of Asian identity for her Chinese and Korean friends. Homelands are therefore discussed as important because they demonstrate membership in this new global environment shaped by transnational movement, migration and linkages.

This transnational imagined is not really shaped by the specificity of nations as we can see in Karen’s comment. Karen mentions how Farah approaches China through this pan-Asian construct. Farah creates and adopts a pan-Asian symbolic identity, where she mimics images and presentations she sees in popular media and culture. Karen detailed:

Lately Farah has started to take pride in her Asian heritage, as several of her friends are Asian. She hasn't talked about wanting to learn more about her Asian heritage or learning Chinese, but she imitates the Asian model poses and makes up Asian screen names for AIM, etc. Karen

Farah signals her membership in an American pan-Asian community shaped mainly by popular culture and symbolic gestures. With an increase in international adoption, especially from China, a new generation of Chinese-Americans and their adoptive families navigate cultural meanings around identity, ethnicity, race and family where movement and familiarity with global movement is the desired result. While Farah hasn’t demonstrated an interest in Chinese culture or the Chinese language, she is interested in exploring the symbolic markers of Asian identity. Homeland travel, in this instance, provides Farah a sense of authority when she adopts this Asian presentation of self.
The global links discussed by those I interviewed, therefore help individuals make sense of new global social relations, and their position within them. Indigo Williams, an adoptee born in Vietnam, questions the cosmopolitanism implied in this global competency (2003). She argues that these descriptions fail to center the adoptees in the particular experiences and histories of the regions they are adopted from, and as these girls mature these distinctions will be crucial for how they construct their own identities and histories. But, making sense of contemporary global phenomena requires thinking in ways that highlight movement and expanded space. Both Farah and her mother discuss belonging in a community shaped by mobility. Karen’s interest in Asian connections and Farah’s frame of reference for understanding her Chinese identity demonstrate how prevalent global movement is for contemporary thinking and is in line with Appadurai’s classic example of the global flow of people and media:

As Turkish guest workers in Germany watch Turkish films in their German flats, as Koreans in Philadelphia watch the 1988 Olympics in Seoul through satellite feeds from Korea, and as Pakistani cabdrivers in Chicago listen to cassettes of sermons recorded in mosques in Pakistan or Iran, we see moving images meet deterritorialized viewers (Appadurai 1996:4).

While most of this dissertation has dealt with looks back to history and the primordial significance of homelands, the above quote from Karen suggest how place becomes significant because of present day conditions and the spread and impact of tourism.

For Chris, Karen’s older biological son, traveling to China allowed him to understand Farah’s natal homeland and China’s growing prominence and importance as a global super power. In an interview he stated:

It [going to China] helped me understand her birth country. I learned so much just by being there, and my preconceived notions of what China was like are all basically shattered. I feel like I have a much better
understanding of China, which is important, considering that they are definitely moving up in the world. Chris discusses both essential claims of identity and global economic relations in the same breath highlighting the difficulty of separating primordial understandings of identity from contemporary progress narratives. Homeland journeys then allow you to understand both the essential aspects of who you are, and current and possible future global relations. This is not specific to children with adopted Chinese sisters.

Helen, an older woman traveling to Ghana also used the global frame to discuss why she sees Africa and her traveling to Africa as important. In a conversation we had before we travelled together, Helen mentioned her family, and their failure to grasp Africa’s importance. In this quote Helen uses a model of global economic connectivity to explain her decision to travel as well as the crucial role of Africa in a globally connected world:

I told them when Bush and Clinton and all those people stop going to Africa I will stop going too. Africa actually has a lot of the things that this world needs...Everything we use is on that continent. Helen

Helen continued by commenting on how she is “proud of the role Africa has on the world stage”. Helen’s explanation of the significance of Africa demonstrates how contemporary events also shape why homelands are approached. She aligns herself with prominent American leaders and politicians, demonstrating her global savvy. Therefore, homelands are primordial but they are also contemporary.

Recent college alumnus Allison also used the increased significance of global thinking to explain her decision to travel. In this quote, she sees global understanding as something particular to her generation:
I think our generation is forced to have more of an international or global sort of outlook, right? We know that everybody is going to come up, there is so much collaboration happening, there are things going on everywhere. You can't just live in your American bubble, my parents generation never had to think too much about that. Allison

Even though Allison believes the global scope is only for those of a new generation, Helen’s belief demonstrates how the global scope transcends age. Allison and Helen both present homeland returns as crucial for a global consciousness not necessarily wrapped up in extended primordial communities. In other instances, both Helen and Allison deployed primordiality to explain their interest, yet in these quotes they apply narratives of global development and international relations. Allison’s quote shows us how important homelands can be for shattering the “American bubble”, and beginning the journey of belonging to a global citizenry.

I find this compelling because it demonstrates how primordial links to locations and essentialist understandings of identity also now signal belonging in a larger global imagined. This global frame of thinking is deeply valued in our society. As Melissa, one Birthright participants stated:

I think that this is important for me and my heritage because it really opened my eyes to learning about myself and the real world, what is beyond my backyard. I learned so much about what I value and what I want out of life. I had the opportunity to speak with people from such diverse backgrounds and that helped me learn so much about the world as well. Melissa

Melissa’s blending of heritage, self exploration and globalization demonstrates how interconnected and messy primordial understanding can be in an age of increased mobility and the expansion of the imagined due to globalization. Her understanding of the importance of international travel is similar to the original meanings of travel and the Grand European tours. Travel opens up the mind. Birthright’s website echoes this belief in
the importance of a global consciousness. One featured quotation mentioned how the Birthright participant now felt “calm after returning home, some kind of calm in my soul. I speak a little bit wiser and worldlier now”. Zach also echoes this:

The ability to be able to see and hear first hand, as an American Jew, all the things you have been subjected to in Sunday school and in temple and obviously more recently growing up with what's been going on in the news to get a different more worldly perspective of what's really going on in the "homeland" of your religion. It's just an amazing opportunity. Zach

In the quote above Zach also explains his new perspective as “worldy”, relying upon the power of experience to validate and confirm his understanding of what it means to be Jewish.

When pinpointing the specifics of this worldly disposition. One parent commenting on an adoption blog I analyzed detailed a very specific set of skills that demonstrate global aptitude:

China is not going to be some mysterious place in their minds. It won't be the place of misty daydreams...They’ll know how to navigate the airports, fill out the paperwork on the plane just before it lands, order food in a restaurant and know which dishes are eaten from and which are used for discards. Squat toilets will not be a shock to them. China Adopt Talk

In this quote, you can see what comes to be defined as “being more worldly” and why homeland travel is significant in a larger global frame. Homeland tourism therefore becomes a strategy of action (Swidler 1987) where you can learn and apply the habits, skills and styles that are perceived to signal globally competency. Homeland journeys therefore and not just important as facilitators of primordial connection, but as actions representative of international experience and global consciousness.

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2 Natalia Benson birthright website Heartfelt Reflection
Besides being able to deploy markers of international ease and demonstrating your worldliness, homeland significance is also discussed in future oriented terminology. On the Joseph Project’s website, the Ghanaian Ministry of Diasporic relations highlights the power of homelands as key locations that assist in transformations, not just for the individual, but for the entire transnational imagined community:

The African peoples everywhere have been taught to be self loathing, to see everything African as a negative: Taught to believe that Africa is a definition of failure and ugliness...The time has come for us to till our own vineyard; to produce inner and outer wealth for ourselves. The time has come for us to stand and state, "I am a proud African, proud of my land, proud of my people, committed to making the third millennium the African millennium." The Ghana Joseph Project

In this quote, racial kinship is used to bind all those of African descent, this bind is not just transformative for the individual traveler/pilgrim but transformative for the entire African continent. Sites of pilgrimage in this case are different than sites of traditional pilgrimage; both the traveler and the location envision being transformed. Yet as I have argued and presented throughout this dissertation, this extended global imagined and the power individual and communities find in homeland spaces combats domestic experiences influencing domestic futures (with globally imagined connections).

CONCLUSION
I began this project by highlighting the significance of home, not because I believe in the a priori and ineffability of primordial bonds, but because this desire for rootedness and comfort found in homelands reveal more about our contemporary moment and our individualistic approach to community consciousness. Homelands remain important today because they are seen as locations and destinations capable of providing effortless connection based upon a shared primordial core. In the pages of this dissertation, tourists express belonging to a global community that empowers and transforms domestically, yet has global implications since homeland tourists simplify and romanticize the homeland. In addition, only a select subpopulation with the financial means to travel internationally can engage in this practice, demonstrating the important role of class.

Through travel to lands of perceived beginning, foreign homelands are discovered, extended heritages are created, and multicultural visions of difference are accessed for American others previously excluded. Homeland tourists are betwixt and between before they even decide to travel. They live liminally and travel liminally, believing to be not fully accepted where they reside due to the qualities that mark them as somehow connected to the homeland. Therefore, this dissertation combines traditional theories of pilgrimage with contemporary theories of mobilization to explain and explore the significance of homelands.

Pilgrimage theories highlight the idea that by stepping outside one’s comfortable routine (even though you bring your routine with you) you will discover some inherent authenticity that can only be accessed in settings outside the everyday. While tourism is a break from the monotony of the everyday, the pilgrim travels for education or religious
purposes hoping to come back changed. While the tourist returns well rested from their seaside vacation, a pilgrim returns enlightened from a religious shrine. Pilgrimage travel has the possibility to create community through shared group experiences. By combining ideas from both standard tourism experiences and pilgrimage discovery, I present the homeland tourist experience as both a pilgrimage and a leisure activity. Experiences therefore become evidence into themselves, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established and how it operates, both domestically, and in the international homeland.

Following Geertz’s understanding of religion as a quest for meaning (1973), I have demonstrated how homeland tourists search for authenticity and self-renewal in the sacred spaces of pilgrimage and tourism. The homeland tour provides an interface between tradition and leisure and connects heritage to consumable international products, providing what the diasporic American craves: signs of imagined community and experiences producing knowledge regarding their subjectivity.

Homeland tourism then is important because it is based upon a romantic notion about the possibilities of travel. John Urry stated, that, “capitalist societies have always been characterized by a strong emphasis upon consumption based upon a romantic ethic” (2002:82). I argue this romantic ethic involves the ineffable and affective tug of heritage and original belonging. In an age of increased mobility and the instability of national borders (Appadurai 2006), “heritage represents some kind of security, a point of reference, a refuge perhaps, something visible and tangible which...seems stable and unchanged” (Hewison 1987:46-7). Gazing upon heritage is a contemporary fascination (Lowenthal 1985; Urry 2002) that is not unique to the homeland tourist, throughout the world heritage is being memorialized and commemorated. The contemporary fascination with heritage
coincides with increased interest in ethnicity and difference consistent with contemporary multiculturalism. Therefore while different tourists and tour experiences differ, the ideas of lineage and natural connection to original locations remain.

This dissertation teases apart the multiple forms of movement occurring simultaneously that represent our contemporary moment and reshape ancestry and belonging. Movement itself is a new frame shaping identities and community (Urry 2007). In addition, homeland tourism then becomes a way to participate in these transnational flows that come to define American immigrant communities. Homeland tours therefore provide Americans with experiences of international travel, and a sense of global enlightenment, based not on heritage, but an understanding of global connectivity and power relations. I further Appadurai’s cultural dimensions of globalization by discussing the productive aspects of the global imagined community and focus on one mechanism for transmission, tourism. It is through tourism that I demonstrate how the heritage-scape – the movement of people to international homelands – is used by individuals to maintain and create the boundaries of imagined communities. I follow Anderson and Appadurai and study the changing nature of the diasporic public sphere – the people who are moving across national spaces and using technology and cultural products to connect in different ways. The literal, virtual and imagined movement of people and ideas therefore shapes how individuals and social groups perceive belonging and membership.

One characteristic of the present era of globalization is technological advances that have both collapsed the globe spatially and penetrated every inch of the earth through consumption. This change in the spatial relationship of individuals coupled with increased and ever present consumption creates a greater level of interconnectivity in the global
world (Karla, Kaur & Hutnyk 2005). While the tools and techniques to accomplish community membership are not new: they still use myth, history, and symbols. Tourism therefore is a prime example of how essential aspects of perceived natural belongings are being reformed in the era of globalization.
Appendix A. Interview Questions

Ghana Interview Script

I would like to talk to you about the trip we are taking this coming summer to Ghana. I am interested in understanding this experience and its importance to its participants.

- What is your age/gender? Where do you live?
- What is your family like, do they live with you and are they coming on this trip?
- How did you find out about this trip?
- Have you traveled outside the country before? If not why now? Why this trip?
- Is this your first time going to Africa? Ghana? If not, where else have you been, if this is not your first time to Ghana, why are you returning?
- What are your reasons for going?
- Are you going with friends or alone? Is this important to you?
- Why now? Why are you traveling to Ghana at this point in your life?
- What to you expect it will be like? What drew you to this particular travel experience?
- What do you anticipate to be your favorite parts of this trip? Why? What do you anticipate for your experience?
- What do you think will be difficult?
- What do you want to see when you are in Ghana, why?
- What do you hope to bring back with you?
- What does your family/friends think of this trip?
- What type of souvenirs are you thinking of getting yourself and your family/friends?
- Do you expect to be changed by this trip? How do you think you will feel upon return?
- How will you describe this trip to your friends when they ask about your summer plans?
- Do you have any specific reasons or stories you would like to share about your reasons for traveling on an ethnic homeland tour?
- Is there anything I should have asked and have left out? Anything that you feel I don’t understand fully?
- What did you dislike?
- Do you own a digital camera? Will you purchase one for this trip?
- Do you have time to meet with me after the trip to talk about the experience?
- Are you willing to share your trip photographs (only the ones you want to share, 10 at most) with me?
Birthright Interview Script

I would like to talk to you about the trip you have taken with Taglit Birthright. I am interested in understanding this experience and its importance to its participants.

- What is your age/gender? Where do you live?
- What is your family like, have they been to Israel, did they encourage your participation?
- How did you find out about this trip?
- Have you traveled outside the country before? If not, why now? Why this trip?
- Is this your first time going to Israel? If not, why are you returning?
- What are your reasons for going?
- Are you going with friends or alone? Is this important to you?
- Why now? Why did you travel to Israel at this point in your life?
- What did you expect it would be like? What drew you to this particular travel experience?
- Did it meet your expectations? What did, what did not?
- What did you anticipate to be your favorite parts of this trip? Why? What did you anticipate for your experience?
- What was your favorite part of the trip?
- What do you find to be difficult? What was difficult upon your return?
- What did you want to see when you were there, why?
- What did you see and what sights were most important to you, why?
- What do you hope to bring back with you?
- What did you bring back with you? Why are these things important?
- What does your family/friends think of this trip?
- What type of souvenirs did you get yourself and your family/friends?
- Did you expect to be changed by this trip? Were you?
- How did you think you would feel upon return? Did you find this to be true?
- How will you describe this trip to your friends?
- Do you have any specific reasons or stories you would like to share about your reasons and anecdotes for traveling on an ethnic homeland tour?
- Is there anything I should have asked and have left out? Anything that you feel I don’t understand fully?
- What did you dislike?
- Do you own a digital camera? Did you purchase one for this trip?
- Do you have time to meet with me in the future to talk about the experience?
- Are you willing to share your trip photographs (only the ones you want to share, 10 at most) with me?
China Interview Script

I would like to talk to you about the trip we are taking this coming summer to China. I am interested in understanding this experience and its importance to its participants. I will explain the consent form and the options available to you as well as go over my interest in this project. At the end of this interview I will give you information so you can contact me in the future and directions for sending me your photographs upon your return.

- What is your age/gender? Where do you live?
- Who in your family is going? Is this important to you
- How did you find out about this trip?
- Have you traveled outside the country before? If not why now? Why this trip?
- Why are you going on heritage tourism with your family?
- What are your reasons for going?
- What other activities do you do to connect to your child’s heritage?
- Why are you traveling now?
- What to you expect it will be like? What drew you to this particular travel experience?
- What do you anticipate to be your favorite parts of this trip? Why? What do you anticipate for your experience?
- What do you think will be difficult?
- What do you think will be difficult?
- What do you want to see when you are in China, why?
- What do you hope to bring back with you?
- What does your family/friends think of this trip?
- What type of souvenirs are you thinking of getting yourself and your family/friends?
- Do you expect to be changed by this trip? How do you think you will feel upon return?
- How will you describe this trip to your friends when they ask about your summer plans?
- Do you have any specific reasons or stories you would like to share about your reasons for traveling on an ethnic homeland tour?
- Is there anything I should have asked and have left out? Anything that you feel I don’t understand fully?
- Do you own a digital camera? Will you purchase one for this trip?
- Are you willing to share your trip photographs with me?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your time, I will provide a pre-paid envelope and a blank cd so you can copy your trip photographs. Once I receive these images I would like to schedule a second interview that focuses on your favorite ten pictures and why. If you have any further questions, or do not want to participate in the second round feel free to let me know.
Post-trip Interview Script/Questions

I would like to talk to you about the trip we have taken and your experience now that we have returned home. I am interested in discussing with you your favorite ten pictures. Thank you for your participation. I appreciate that you are taking time out of your day to share with me your favorite moments from our heritage tour. This interview will last no longer than an hour.

- Why did you choose these pictures?
- What about these pictures captures your trip and your experience?
- What’s going on in each of these pictures?
- Who are the people in them?
- Where in China were they taken?
- Why are these your favorite out of all the other pictures you took?
- Do you have or plan to have these pictures framed and displayed in your home?
- What other souvenirs from your trip do you have displayed in your home, why?
- Let’s go through each one and talk about them.

Thank you.
Appendix B. Sample Consent Form

Informed Consent

Hello, my name is Jillian Powers and I am a graduate student in Sociology at Duke University. I am interested in understanding how tourism, specifically homeland/heritage tourism shapes individual experience and identity. The information that I collect through participation, interviews and photographs will be used in scholarly presentations, publications and ultimately in my dissertation. There is a possibility that this work will be published in academic journals or a manuscript.

There are many levels of participation and you can choose to participate at any level and can change levels at any time. The two interviews should take about one hour total and will occur at a time and place that is convenient for you. I will be taking photographs and would also like to use any of your trip photographs you feel comfortable sharing.

Your participation in my research is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time. If you want to participate but prefer not to be identified, I can use a pseudonym as well as blur your face in any pictures collected. If you agree to be interviewed, you may choose not to answer every question. If you agree to allow me to use your photograph as part of my research, you decide which ones I may use.

The information that I collect will be used to assist in my understanding of ethnic tourism and ultimately be used in my dissertation research. I hope to use the information that you provide to add to existing knowledge and provide a rich understanding of ethnic tourism and the reasons for international travel with a focus on personal exploration and ethnic identity. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to call or e-mail the address provided to you.

_____ Consent for interviews (a pre-interview and a post-interview)
_____ Release of image (I can take your picture)
_____ Release of photographs (I can use your pictures)
_____ If you would like a pseudonym
_____ If you would like your face blurred

Please send all digital photographs to me via mail or e-mail. If you need assistance in placing the images on a compact disk I am available. Please mail all compact disks containing your images to

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For further information or questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at (516) 818-4809 or by email at jpowers@soc.duke.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subject Committee at (919) 684-3030.
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Biography
Jillian Powers was born in Rockville Centre on July 12, 1981. She received her BA in Sociology from Dartmouth College in 2003 and her MA in Sociology from Duke University in 2006. She is the author of “Re-Imagining the Imagined Community: Homeland Tourism and the Role of Place”, forthcoming in the American Behavioral Scientist and “The Meaning of Home: Chinese Adoption Homeland Tourism”, forthcoming in the Journal Chinese America: History and Perspectives, a publication of the Chinese Historical Society of America.