

# Elite without Elitism? Boundary Work and the Israeli Elite Philanthropy in a Changing Field of Power

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## ABSTRACT

The crisis of neoliberalism and the upsurge of populist politics have renewed interest in how contemporary economic elites justify their privileged position, trying to be “moral” and “rich” in an era of increasing inequality and an anti-elite climate. We addressed this question through an ethnographic analysis of the socio-cultural life of the heirs of the Israeli economic elite and of the boundary-making processes that philanthropy allows them as they face internal and external challenges. Adopting analytical tools from a cultural process approach to inequality and a contextual approach to elite distinction, we suggest that the heirs generate distinct social and symbolic position within a changing field of power by presenting themselves as an “elite without elitism.” This is accomplished through a mutually reinforcing interplay between intra-elite distinctions and “inter-class inconspicuous distinction.” We contribute to the current analysis of elite reproduction “beyond Bourdieu” first by pointing at the (re)production of power and difference *within* the elite, and second by showing that *where* distinctions are drawn, matters.

**KEYWORDS:** economic elites; new philanthropy; boundary work; next generation; field of power.

*We're invited to an event held at the elegant home of a young businessman, second generation in one of Israel's most renowned industrialist families, involved in extensive philanthropic activity. This event marks the 30th anniversary of an association that helps people with disabilities on whose board the host is a member. In attendance are top names from local business. The guests are called to gather around the swimming pool, as the host wishes to thank the mythological retiring chair of the association: "There is a reason for inviting a very specific kind of business world crowd over today. For years, since as early as when my parents were involved, it was the custom for the business sector to embrace this association. Our retiring chair had the sense to embrace the business people, and pay them gratitude. Nowadays, unfortunately, it's not as popular to welcome the business sector, Israeli bon-ton dictates otherwise. But I'm sure this bon-ton will change eventually, and the Israeli public will once again*

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*cherish the contribution of all these wonderful people sitting in our garden today. We have no doubt about it."*

(Field-notes, 10.3.14)

How do economic elites consolidate their dominant position within a changing field of power? How do they justify their legitimacy to themselves and to others when the popular *bon-ton* turns against them? Although not novel in elitist thought (Bowman et al. 2015), public and academic interest in these questions has re-arisen following the financial collapse in 2008 and the global upsurge of populist politics. A growing body of scholarship has recently focused on the responses of economic elites to the socio-political challenges that have put them "on trial" in a variety of national contexts, asking how elites try to re-establish their legitimacy amidst socio-economic turbulence and rising demands for democratization (Morgan, Hirsch, and Quack 2015). Underlying much of this scholarship is the understanding that sustaining the elite's position in times of crisis may not simply mean reproduction, but rather may require ideological and institutional re-adjustments from the elite members against the challenges that threaten to undermine their position and political projects. Indeed, much of the recent scholarship addressing how economic elites adapt to change shows that they do so by redrawing social and symbolic boundaries in ways that refine and contextualize Bourdieu's (1984) classic analysis of inter-class distinction that has dominated the field (Daloz 2010). Highlighting the elites' inner diversity (Cousin, Khan, and Mears 2018), their variable relations with power (Sherman 2017), or the culturally embedded ways they employ to convey distinction (Daloz 2010), recent elite scholarship is moving beyond structuralist analyses of distinction as the reproduction of dominant position to subtler understandings of elites' boundary-making (Lamont 1992; Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014).

This article contributes to this scholarship by bringing an ethnographic account of the role of philanthropy in the socio-cultural life of the successors of the Israeli economic elite in an era marked by socio-economic transformations and political change. Adopting analytical tools from a cultural process approach to inequality (Lamont 1992) and a contextual approach to elite distinction (Daloz 2010), we explore the boundary and meaning-making processes that philanthropy allows the young members of the elite as they try to position themselves in a refashioned field of power. The scions of the old elite, or the "next generation" (NG), as they are locally recognized, began their philanthropy in times of significant challenges to their inherited power position and privilege in Israeli society. First, ideological challenges by ongoing hegemony struggles between the old elite's "ethno-republican" discourse and its historic association with the secular Labor Party (Frenkel 2000) and the more religious and populist nationalism of the right wing Likud that privileges new elites (Barkay 2003). Second, challenges tied to the polarization of socio-economic inequality and mounting public criticism against the greed and alienation of local "tycoons" that reached a peak in the 2011 "social justice" protests (Silber 2012). Finally, challenges related to transitions within the philanthropic field towards a "rationalized" and "entrepreneurial" new philanthropy (NP) marked by the entry of new and more socially diverse "self-made" players. The NP defies both the old-style "chequebook" charity (Shimoni 2009) of the NG parents and the boundaries of the local elite philanthropy traditionally dominated by the founding families of the business community to whom the NG belongs by family affiliation (Barkay 2003).

Studies of economic elites have typically emphasized the role of philanthropy, which offers a key playground for the production and display of symbolic power, a way of reproducing elites' worldview and power, and an activity for strengthening their cohesion and solidifying inter-class social boundaries (Kendall 2002; Ostrower 1995). However, as we suggest through the Israeli case, philanthropy in times of change is not only about the reproduction of inter-class distinction, but also about the production of intra-elite divisions and their strategic use for the legitimation of power. Drawing on participant observations and in-depth interviews carried out during 2012-2016 with key actors in the local philanthropic field, we show that NP serves the NG to navigate socio-political challenges

through an intricate boundary-making process that de-emphasizes inter-class distinctions by emphasizing social and inter-generational distinctions within the elite. Through this mutually reinforcing interplay between intra-elite distinctions and inter-class “inconspicuous distinction” the heirs define their position as the “next generation”—at once a form of inter-generational habitus, new business orientation, and moral being—and present themselves as an “elite without elitism.”

Unpacking the symbolic and discursive mechanisms through which elite successors adapt to change, we contribute to the current analysis of elite reproduction “beyond Bourdieu” (Cousin et al. 2018) in several ways. First, we extend the topic of elites and inter-class inequality common in discussions on elite philanthropy, to the (re)production of power and difference *within* the elite as both the elite composition and the philanthropic field experience change. Second, we move beyond universalizing models of elite distinction in general and of distinction through philanthropic endeavors in particular (see also Silber 2009) by showing that *where* distinctions are drawn, matters (Wimmer 2008). As the elite heirs shift from inter-class to intra-elite boundaries, symbolic distinctions operate not only as a means of social reproduction and re-distribution of recognition but also to perform active self-position and legitimacy repair.

We organize the article as follows: Section 1 brings a cultural processes perspective on inequality to the analysis of the sociology of elites and philanthropy. After presenting the context of the elite philanthropy in Israel (section 2) and our research design (section 3), we analyze the intra-elite and inter-class boundary work that the NG carries out through philanthropy (section 4). In the concluding section we discuss our findings and highlight the contribution of elites’ ethnographic accounts to the analysis of legitimation of power amid broader socio-political transformations.

## ELITES’ BOUNDARY WORK, NEW PHILANTHROPY, AND LEGITIMACY CHALLENGES

Philanthropy is integral to the elite equation. A considerable body of literature, still largely dominated by research in the United States, has shown how philanthropic endeavors and institutions may engender and preserve the social, economic, and symbolic capital of elites. Some of this scholarship emphasizes the role of philanthropy as a form of economic distribution that promotes elites’ interests and institutions (Odendhal 1989), while curbing progressive reforms that may threaten these interests (Fisher 1983). Another line of research highlights the reproductive role of philanthropic institutions in transmitting the social capital (DiMaggio 1982; Ostrander 1984), the cultural values (Kendall 2002; Ostrower 1995), and inter-generational habitus (Schervish and Herman 1988) necessary for preserving the elites’ cohesiveness and homogeneity.

Despite differences, most of this scholarship shares a common interest in philanthropy as reproducing the elite power and strengthening exclusionary class boundaries. Considerably less attention is paid to the ways wherein philanthropy can generate and reflect intra-elite differences<sup>1</sup> or how the structural changes taking place in the philanthropic field reshape the elite members’ strategies and their key legitimating ideologies (though, see Silber 2008).<sup>2</sup> The paucity of research on the transformative role of philanthropy in the socio-cultural lives of elites is surprising given two separate developments linking change with philanthropy and elites.

One development draws on organizational studies of philanthropy. Since the 1990s, scholars have identified the emergence of novel patterns, logics of action, and organizational configurations of philanthropy based on entrepreneurial conceptions that redefine charity as a form of “social investment.” NP, also referred to as strategic or task-oriented, is critical of traditional patterns of “emotional”

1 Studies on gender (McCarthy 1990), ethnic (Berger and Gainer 2002) and racial (Jones 2010) differences in elite philanthropy document intra-elite heterogeneity. However, the bulk of scholarship emphasizes inter-class dimensions of closure and reproduction.

2 The bulk of research dealing with the responses of elite philanthropy to legitimacy challenges focuses on corporate philanthropy (Clemens 2015).

charity, arguing that “rational” tools must be adopted if “effective” and “leverage-oriented” endeavors are to be achieved (Hwang and Powell 2009; Katz 2005). To this end, NP is typically organized through strategic networks and partnerships that further blur the boundaries between business and philanthropy (Frumkin 2003). The rise of self-made mega-philanthropists embracing innovative conceptions and practices of “social value” philanthropy has led to controversy over their political and social meaning. Some see NP as a new type of “caring capitalism” (Barman 2016), whereby “socially responsible” philanthropists and corporations end up monopolizing unprecedented political clout. Conversely, others view NP as an opportunity to “democratize” the world of philanthropy by opening it up to new, and mostly self-made, elites (Godechot 2012) in ways that traditional elite philanthropy did not allow. In any case, organizational perspectives link NP to broader changes in politics and economy while largely disregarding the changing socio-cultural world of the elite philanthropists in which NP is embedded.<sup>3</sup>

Conversely, sociological studies of elites show a renewed interest in how elites present themselves as morally “worthy” amidst an anti-elite climate (Sherman 2017) while negotiating legitimacy challenges in a variety of elite institutions (Cousin et al. 2018; Davis and Williams 2017; Morgan et al. 2015). Particularly relevant for the study of the NG, is the abounding scholarship on elite schools and their gradual opening to ethnic diversity, global competition, and expanding meritocratic ideologies (Gaztabide-Fernandez 2009; Khan 2011). Studies in numerous national contexts uncover the array of cultural strategies through which elites attempt to repair and justify their legitimacy in ways that mitigate rather than consecrate traditional class markers of distinction in Bourdieu’s sense. Research shows that elite students re-appropriate challenging ideologies to their benefit, embracing notions of social justice critical of privilege but distorting them into “social just us” (Levy 1990), or advocating meritocratic and “omnicultural” worldviews, while ensuring that their cultural and material resources can be used to “win” the meritocratic race (Khan 2011).

Whereas much of the research on the young elites shares an attempt to refine Bourdieu’s structuralist approach to “distinction” as domination, few have focused on the multi-faceted ways wherein distinction plays out in the field of elite philanthropy. In this article, we aim to fill the empirical lacuna linking the recent sociology of young elites’ distinction “beyond Bourdieu” and the organizational studies of NP. We draw on Lamont and colleagues’ (2014) cultural perspective on inequality and Daloz’s (2010) contextual analysis of distinction to analyze the meaning and boundary-making processes through which the Israeli NG makes sense of its philanthropic endeavors, generating its distinct social and symbolic position within a changing field of power.

According to Lamont et al. (2014), cultural processes operate inter-subjectively through shared scripts of meaning; they contribute to the production and reproduction of inequality by the sorting out of people, actions, or environments that require the creation of symbolic group boundaries, based on socio-economic, moral, or cultural repertoires of classification and evaluation. Thus, classification systems are driven to gain and monopolize both material and non-material resources and stabilize them in social boundaries and groups. These systems also explicitly relate to the distribution of recognition and legitimacy and attendant moral worlds of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). Indeed, the thrust of Lamont’s contribution to Bourdieu’s theory of cultural stratification lies in her interrogation of the link between social and symbolic boundaries. Whereas for Bourdieu, relations between social and symbolic boundaries are structurally homologous, with symbolic boundaries necessarily reinforcing and reproducing objectified forms of social difference, Lamont does not assume such homology.<sup>4</sup>

3 Research on the subjective practices and views of philanthropists is largely restricted to the United States; in countries where elite philanthropy is a relatively recent development, research is scarcer (Silber 2008).

4 In Bourdieu’s (1984) model of cultural stratification, a system of class differences (“the social space”) corresponds to a system of lifestyle differences (“the symbolic space”), and this structurally homologous relationship is tied to both group formation and institutionalized exclusion processes (Jarness 2017:358).

Relinquishing this structural assumption is key for examining the interrelated ways in which social and symbolic boundaries operate at both the intra-group and inter-group levels and how this interplay relates to culturally sanctioned context, as we aim to do here. Thus, as we show through the Israeli case, the drawing of symbolic boundaries in the field of NP can both create and reflect horizontal structural oppositions within the social space of economic elites—for example, between “old” and “new” money or “young” and “veteran” generations—without aiming to achieve primarily hierarchical inter-class reproduction (Jarness 2017).

Similarly, maintaining inter-class social distinctions may require downsizing symbolic boundaries through carefully crafted practices of “inconspicuous” distinction (Daloz 2012). Borrowed from Daloz’s (2010) comparative analysis of elites’ practices of conspicuousness and inconspicuousness, this notion emphasizes the importance of understanding the variety of symbolic ways by which elites’ superiority is defined within a given context and how elites may themselves be constrained by the cultural environment they share at the societal level. Following Daloz and our own analysis, a key variable when it comes to the use of modesty practices as an expression of moral superiority is the degree to which “communal reciprocity” and “a sense of obligation to one’s people” are culturally engrained. Thus, “inconspicuousness,” if crafted and staged, can also operate as distinction, not because it is merely manipulation but because it proves to be meaningful all the way up the social ladder (Daloz 2012).

In the following, we offer a rich description of strategies of symbolic boundary-making, pointing out how their location in the intra- or inter-group sphere shapes their meaning and transforms their function from a reproduction mechanism to one of negotiation of legitimacy and self-positioning.

### THE ISRAELI ELITE PHILANTHROPY FIELD

Israeli philanthropy is deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition of *tzedaka* (charity). Up until the 1980s, it was dominated by national-led entities oriented to fundraising from abroad as part of the symbolic, financial, and political exchange relations between the Jewish Diaspora and Israel, and just a few of the local wealthy families practiced a very sporadic philanthropy. It was not until the mid-1990s that local corporate (Barkay 2003) and private philanthropy gained prominence (Silber 2008). Today, most Israeli philanthropists operate through private funds and associations, often initiated or managed by the donors themselves (Silber 2012).

Data on the scope of elite philanthropy in Israel are based on fragmented sources that fail to provide the full picture (Schmid and Rudich 2012). Nevertheless, available statistical data regarding private and corporate philanthropy reveal a low rate of local donations compared to foreign ones. According to figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2017), 65 percent of the overall annual donations channeled into Israeli NGOs come from overseas; only 15 percent of the remaining donations come from Israeli private mega-donors.<sup>5</sup> This is despite the sharp rise in the numbers of local fortune holders and their capital (Avriel 2017). The expansion of elite philanthropy was prompted by the deepening neo-liberalization of what had been until the mid-1980s a highly centralistic political-economic regime. Neoliberal re-structuring was marked by the decreased state intervention in business and the simultaneous strengthening of business groups, controlled by a handful of families; the liberalization of capital markets that enabled private enterprises to raise funds on their own; and the rapid integration in global markets facilitated by the shift to exports and new industries (Maman 2004). These processes created a more independent economic elite while simultaneously transforming its social composition.

Currently, Israeli elite philanthropy includes a mix of traditional and NP mega-donors that reflects changes in the elite composition. Broadly speaking, the former are from established Ashkenazi families and networks that amassed their wealth through the historical association with the state-building “aristocracy” of the Labor Party (Frenkel 2000). They donate mainly to national causes promoting a

5 This is defined as a private donation of over NIS 100,000 (US 28,000).



secular, liberal agenda, which they see as key symbolic and political capital in the ongoing struggle over hegemony (Kimmerling 2001). Studies of the veteran elites point out the major disruptions they experienced with the downfall of the Labor Party in 1977. Despite being excluded from the socialist discourse and coping with much ambivalence in the context of a socialist regime, the founders of the business community took an active part in the structuring of nation-state building led by the Labor Movement and the consolidation of its hegemony (Frenkel, Herzog, and Shenhav 1996). Recent studies of the mega-donors describe giving patterns that are still related to Zionist engagement and “pioneer volunteering” (Silber 2008; 2012). Their philanthropy became more militant following the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, and the rise of non-liberal and religious political elites, which they perceived as a threat to their privileged status and their vision of Zionism (Barkay 2003).

The new philanthropists, in contrast, made their fortunes mainly in the finance and high-tech industries during the high-days of neoliberalism, and come from more diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, including Mizrachi businessmen and new immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Western countries, without bequeathed financial and symbolic capital (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg 2007). They perceive themselves as “philanthropic entrepreneurs” and expect a return on their investment in terms of social effectiveness (Shimoni 2009); create their own nonprofit “niche” organizations; and establish broad coalitions and partnerships with fellows and corporations (Silber 2008).

The groupings within the Israeli philanthropic elite are highlighted by a CEO of a leading philanthropic organization:

*Socio-demographically speaking, I can put them into groups. . . . If you need to categorise this lot, you'll find it is one group, then another, then another. They're unlike one another, but they belong to a class.*

Members of the NG that are the subjects of this study are situated in between these generational and identity dynamics of the Israeli elite philanthropy and contribute to its inner complexity: they are typically young business people, the successors of Israeli veteran fortune families. Most of them occupy senior executive positions in the family holdings, and many of them are acquainted with each other through social or business ties. Their socio-demographic characteristics as male, Ashkenazi, upper-class, secular, and well-heeled residents of up-market areas place them at the heart of the Israeli traditional elites and hegemony (Kimmerling 2001).

At the same time, the NG philanthropic endeavors are embedded in the world of NP. Their philanthropic coming-of-age takes place at a time of increasing public criticism against economic elites. The Israeli public attributes to the mega-donors a significant influence and high distrust of their motivations, believing them to be promoting their own agenda and strengthening political ties (Schmid and Rudich, 2008).<sup>6</sup> This negative image reached a peak in the massive “social protest” in 2011 that mobilized hundreds of thousands to demonstrate against the growing economic gap,<sup>7</sup> the decline of the middle-class, and the state’s withdrawal from public investment, blaming it on the finance-power nexus (Ram and Filc 2013). Against this backdrop, NG philanthropy has emerged as one of the key trends in the local philanthropy, along with the establishment of special training and guidance programs for the “young philanthropists”.<sup>8</sup> These developments attest to the weight and distinctive position of the NG in the Israeli philanthropic field, not only in their own eyes, but also in the eyes of the different players operating in this arena. Surprisingly, this unique group has yet to attract in-depth

6 This image troubles philanthropists, who speak about unfair treatment (Silber 2012), and it is often invoked to explain their relative low rate of donations.

7 Israel has a low rank on the OECD measures of inequality and poverty, with a Gini coefficient of 0.360 in 2013. The share of all income going to the wealthiest 10 percent is 14.9 times the share going to the poorest 10 percent, with the top 10 percent getting 35.6 percent of all income, compared with 1.7 percent for the bottom 10 percent (Dattel and Maor 2015).

8 For instance, “Sheatufim” and “JFN Israel,” learning groups for NG philanthropists.

research.<sup>9</sup> In the following sections, we present our research design and our ethnographic analysis of the NG.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Ostrower (1995) argues that it is only when research attention is diverted from examining the rationale at the base of giving among the elites to looking into the ways they employ to execute philanthropy and the social meanings they bestow on it that elite philanthropy gains its uniqueness. To that end, this ethnography<sup>10</sup> included 30 interviews with heirs of Israeli economic elite, philanthropically active; these were mostly men aged 25-45 from wealthy families considered the “pioneering founders” of the Israeli business community. In the absence of a database on elite philanthropists in Israel, we have no way to gauge whether the interlocutors are representative of the NG members who are active today. To overcome this limitation and gain a wider perspective on the field, we held conversations with informants situated in strategic positions in philanthropic funds and organizations, public relations, and strategic counselling. Second, we reached out to interviewees affiliated with diverse philanthropic frameworks and social networks.

To examine the key practices employed by the NG, get acquainted with their customary modes of behavior and discourse, we carried out participant observation at 15 fundraising events and five board meetings. The events took place in cultural institutions or in the philanthropists’ homes, which hosted pre-defined audiences. Participation in board meetings revealed how philanthropic endeavors are organized, who is let in, and why. Access to such a demarcated field was facilitated by the first author’s professional background working with funds and donors and personal ties. The purposes of the research were fully disclosed to the interviewees. To maintain ethical conduct, we avoid any use of materials that may reveal their identity or that of the organizations. The dual role of the first author as insider-outsider facilitated the relative high responsiveness of interviewees and gave us backstage access. While it minimized the “power balance” between researcher-researched, commonly described in “studying up” research (Aguilar 2012), it also entailed reflexivity and high self-awareness on how to harness this dual position for the benefit of the study, turning it into a way to gain a better understanding of the field and interlocutors, without being too naïve or judgmental.

## BOUNDARY-MAKING AND THE “NEXT GENERATION”: REPAIRING LEGITIMACY AND SELF-POSITIONING

The following sections examine the meanings that the elite’s successors lend to their philanthropic endeavors and the types of boundaries they draw while justifying and legitimizing their inherited position amidst multiple challenges and transitions in the Israeli field of power. As we will show, it is through philanthropy that the heirs define their position as the “next generation,” at once a form of inter-generational habitus, a new business orientation, and moral being that utilizes the ambivalence between “continuity” and “newness,” “roots” and “avant-garde,” “social closure” and “moral critique.” This is effected through the twofold boundary work that philanthropy affords the NG, between social closure and economic networking in the intra-elite sphere, and moral distancing and cultural assimilation in the public sphere.

### *Intra-Elite Distinction: Between Social Closure and Economic Networking*

In the late 2000s, the Israeli field emulated international trends of philanthropy that combined the pursuit of “social value” and of profit. Networking, partnerships, and pooling resources seem to be keywords in the social-cultural life of NG philanthropists. This is evident in how they incorporate business models into philanthropy:

9 Qualitative analysis of elite philanthropy is scarce in Israel (Silber 2008). Shimoni’s (2009) study of the NP focuses on donors who are “self-made,” rather than from the “heir” group.

10 Author 1 conducted fieldwork as part of research for the MA thesis.

*We made the decision that we're not the sort of fund to hand out grants. As a strategy, our involvement means management that goes way beyond just sitting in the board . . . to use the business world terminology—we're partners rather than mere investors. In the circles I hang out in, you'll find high involvement on the part of funds when it comes to "strategic philanthropy." It's about, say, taking a professional to run it and look into indices for success, as you would in business. I find it to be active philanthropy; it's more than just writing a check.*

Their business-philanthropic way of thinking seeks to challenge traditional dichotomies between "social" and "financial" interests and between "cooperation" and "competition," as they often describe their participation in new philanthropic collaborations:

*I've been active in quite a few philanthropic enterprises and "cycles of giving" . . . . There is always some networking going on. I'm aware of that, and it's necessary because philanthropy today is a kind of business in many senses.*

They use notions of "social bonds" developed in the United States and the United Kingdom in ways that resonate with the principles of solidarity and collegiality documented by [Spillman \(2012\)](#) through which businesses make capitalist action meaningful:

*In our social-economic model we've developed a concept of social stocks, with the purpose of prompting businesses to give over some of their proceeds for social causes, while harnessing civil society in its consumer capacity. That's what I'm after, to have business owners wanting to give not out of good will, but because it pays off financially. Today you have this distorted view that it's either you make money or you donate to associations; and if you do make money, you're necessarily undermining a social cause.*

Informants explain that the NG prefer the "synergetic potential" and the "power multiplier" of cooperative endeavors for the purpose of attaining common goals, sharing information, and enlarging the scope of resources. Interviewees highlight the advantages of such practices:

*Our idea was to turn to businesses in order to raise resources and put together a chain of links. Because we know how to talk to big firms, we don't look up to them; there are interrelations at play. He can't just give me the "no," because we come from the same circle.*

The NG members seem to be well aware that interlocking in the philanthropic arena can promote their own businesses and see this as a perfectly natural thing as one explains below:

*It's definitely a connection that is great for doing business. In fundraising events it can only be a "glimpse," but as part of an association, when you meet a group of people several times—it is really fertile ground. It's definitely a conducive position and it's very natural for it to happen.*

Alongside the evident financial values and opportunities that networking and interlocking offer, interviewees challenged the binary distinction between "financial" self-interest and "philanthropic" altruism, by presenting business and philanthropy as two sides of the same coin:

*Philanthropy today is a kind of business in many senses, [but] this networking has actually brought us a lot of benefit philanthropically—we got partners for our projects. And yes, you do get to meet people, which can obviously lead to business stuff as well . . . at the end of the day, the acquaintances we make here cut both ways. And Israel is such a small pond . . . so it's definitely an element, but even philanthropy itself benefits from that.*



The central tensions at play in the NG philanthropy are not built around “self-interest” versus “altruism” but around their views of two internal distinctions within the business elite. One is the inter-generational distinction.

When recounting what influenced them to enter philanthropy, they cited the family legacy, presenting it as something they “imbibed at home,” which “naturally” stemmed from their upbringing. They proudly talked about the “philanthropic training” associated with practices ranging from the association of “Bar-Mitzvah” events with the value of giving, to establishing a fund co-run by parents and children; they mentioned that their integration into their parents’ philanthropy was an essential part of their adolescence. These practices recall those of the intergenerational transmission of the American elite families who involve their youngsters in philanthropic rituals as part of the inheritance of social and cultural capital (Kendall 2002; Ostrower 1995; Schervish 1995). At the same time, the Israeli NG vision of philanthropy is part of a broader inter-generational gap in the ways of doing and understanding philanthropy and the social role of business. A group instructor with a philanthropic consultancy organisation summarizes these differences:

*The younger generation, first and foremost, are willing to step into the philanthropist role as part of their identity. Second, the older generation practiced a more charity-like philanthropy; while the younger ones are more into strategic philanthropy . . . models with a double bottom line—social and fiscal alike. The older ones are more soloists, while the younger work in collaborations. The older keep their cards close to their chest with no professionals, while the younger will take strategic consultants, branding specialists, etc. . . .*

These intergenerational differences indicate how in addition to familial “philanthropic training” (Ostrower 1995), expectations for “Noblesse oblige” norms, and the transmission of “financial morality” (Schervish 1995), it is actually the philanthropic arena that allows the NG to express their individuality and independence. Furthermore, they express their creativity and innovativeness vis-à-vis the family legacy by differentiating their forms of giving from those of their parents (Schervish and Herman 1988). The rationalized and synergetic philanthropy of the NG sets them not only apart from but also critical of the traditional benevolence of their parents and of the philanthropic dispositions they acquired at home. Interviewees were open about their criticism of the “good-will dependent” philanthropy:

*The idea is to build businesses that do good, because it's good for them. That's the only point to develop. And I'm saying this after years of seeing philanthropy of the brand developed and promoted by my mum, and seeing what “schnorring” means.*

A social entrepreneur and NG expresses his reservations from the “traditional philanthropy”:

*With the undermining of our welfare state, social organisations sprouted and filled the vacuum—which is wonderful. But while the welfare state had mechanisms of rights at its base, traditional philanthropy is based on mechanisms of mercy, which is very dangerous. If a problem exists that can be solved with a financial model, we have the moral duty to maintain it, so as to avoid making a mockery of philanthropy, because a culture of mercies has developed here which is not authentic and violent.*

NG’s philanthropic distinction from the “founding generation” entails ongoing tensions between the social reproduction of their family habitus and their experiences in a field reshaped by novel entrepreneurial conceptions and by the entry of strata of newcomers to the elite with whom they interact. Thus, another and more prominent division around which the NG distinguish their endeavors builds upon tensions between the organizational “liquidity” of the NP configurations and their strivings for social closure and cohesion. Interviewees were very clear about the virtues of NP partnerships, such as openness and expansion:

*We came with similar values, style, vision, we're all social entrepreneurs. It's true that our panel doesn't represent the fabric of society, but we're currently undergoing expansion, so as to have more circles beyond the people already participating, and there's certainly room for new people.*

Yet, they also talk about the “difficulties” of opening up the lines:

*Mind you, it's not easy to bring people. The group has already been working together, they've got their history. It's not easy bringing in a new culture, new language. Hopefully it does happen, I'm all for it, but you have to be very patient and some people aren't.*

The head of a philanthropic board made up of NGs, was more explicit about the tensions:

*When members were asked to “cast the net” and rally the wider circle of businessmen, the project came to a standstill. Some members are proud to be there, as opposed to those who aren't. . . . They'll always tell you “we should reinforce the ranks,” but there are many who don't actually want it—they say, “we should keep on the safe side.” It's not easy bringing a new member on board. He's got to have the right DNA.*

The double bind between “reinforcing the ranks” and keeping the “right DNA” underscores the ambivalent meaning that notions of “partnership” bear when transposed from the business sphere into the social sphere. When explaining with whom they “partner,” interviewees highlighted exclusivist notions of “togetherness”:

*It was just a group of friends . . . membership there means membership in this shared milieu. It was a “one member brings another” kind of thing. The first pact between the friends was strong, well-bonded. You do have chemistry formed here and a lot of mutual respect.*

A member of such a NG association described it as allowing a sense of belonging:

*It really is this common denominator, the wish to share the same . . . with people who have a similar lifestyle. People see it as a need to come and voice issues, or share problems, have someone at the other end who can really understand.*

The importance of “togetherness” became more pronounced when they discussed members of the new elites operating in the NP. Interviewees made a distinction between their own philanthropy as driven by “old money” values and the supposedly self-serving ostentation of the “nouveaux riches”:

*When money is not the “issue”—we know it's there, so you don't need to have your whole life revolving around it. I won't buy the biggest home in the neighborhood, I won't wear the flashiest gold watch, and I won't throw the most high-profile fundraiser either. “Second generation” come complete with roots. The new ones—they're more about “let's have this and that on my name.” But it's a question of style.*

Informants that have a broader picture of the field challenge these conceptions of “their” kind of philanthropy. The manager of a family fund explains:

*You could call it social psychology. It's all too easy for anyone who's “old money” to say “new is gaudy” . . . . These people—they may have the money, but it takes more than money to be elite . . . . It's about culture; it goes a lot deeper than that. It's the kind of demonization you'll find in the*

*battlefield. You're not one of us . . . . I think that even de-facto, new money is not gaudy. You don't see it, it's certainly not gaudy.*

Facing this climate of continuous questioning, and given the inter-generational and intra-elite tensions encapsulated by NP configurations, NG structure their self-identity by embracing a business-like discourse on expansion and synergism, while aiming to retain social homogeneity and “togetherness.” They are both avant-garde in the world of NP, well versed in the new world of business, and yet culturally different from the newcomers. Inseparable from the symbolic distinctions they draw in the intra-elite sphere are practices that de-emphasize inter-class distinctions in the public sphere. As we show in the next section, one of the ways by which the NG can “cash in” the intra-elite status distinctions and try to convert them into moral capital is through practices of inter-class “inconspicuous distinction.”

*Inter-Class “Inconspicuous Distinction”: Between Moral Distance and Cultural Assimilation*

*It is a sunny Saturday morning, and we are invited to a private philanthropic event at the Tel-Aviv Museum of Art thrown by the young heir of a well-known family. The guests, mostly from the local young generation of the economic elite, have been requested to donate to a non-profit supporting at-risk youth of whose management board the host is a member. The host and his wife mingle with the little clusters of casually-dressed guests, who hold glasses of locally-brewed beer. We all chat at leisure, greeting acquaintances with a handshake, hug and a peck on the cheek. Food stands are scattered between the statues and works of art, offering humus and falafel (street foods); popular music featuring songs of Arik Einstein and Shlomo Artzi (mainstream singers) plays in the background. The message is clear: “We are part of Israeli society, of Israeliness.”*

*(Field-notes, 12.9.12)*

In his analysis of the diverse symbolic forms through which elites manifest social distinction, Daloz (2012) posits that while in some settings the flaunting of one's assets is expected, in others, their excessive display might undermine one's reputation. Philanthropic events such as that described above are salient exhibitions of how members of the NG use, produce, and blur social distinctions while all along defending their position to the members of the elite and broader audiences.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the upper classes in France described by Bourdieu (1984) who utilize high-culture codes to create class distinction, Israeli heirs use cultural codes that blur their distinctiveness from ordinary Israelis, while at the same time stressing their moral distance from the elite newcomers. This nuanced interplay between distinction and “inconspicuous” distinction is manifested through their emphasis on “all-Israeli” values and experiences, strategies of modesty, and appeal to consensual notions of local patriotism, all of which highlight the “traditional morality” upon which the veteran elite and non-elite relations were historically constituted (Frenkel 2000; Silber 2012). In the current context, blurring inter-class distinctions allows the NG to show identification with Israeli protesters while simultaneously creating moral hierarchies of wealth that distance them further from the “tycoons.”

When asked about the origins of their philanthropic involvement and social awareness, interviewees highlight the “all-Israeli” motifs in the narrative of their life-course, attributing considerable weight to constitutive experiences of self-sacrifice, still predominant in the ethno-republican ethos of genuine “Israeliness”: combat service in the army, membership in youth movements and volunteering for a service year.<sup>12</sup> As one proudly describes:

11 Although events such as these are private affairs, “by invitation only,” most are publicized in the Israeli financial press that covers the social life of elite philanthropists and their enterprises.

12 This refers to voluntary service, after high-school graduation, in community activities.

*I was in “Hatzofim,”<sup>13</sup> a scoutmaster . . . . I volunteered for a year of public service, then joined Sayeret Matkal.<sup>14</sup> I grew up in an environment that championed contribution. That’s what shaped my worldview. I see it as a very formative experience, that’s what they talk about when they say “melting pot,” which is incredible . . . . At the time, Tzahala<sup>15</sup> was truly for the “salt-of-the-earth,” people who had built the country, we really grew up with a sense of being part of something, and I think it left a great ideological mark on us.*

Integral to the “all-Israeli” narrative are values of modesty, down-to-earthness, and hard work:

*My parents brought me up to value modesty. I don’t think I ever felt I had money until later in life, nothing was taken for granted. I started working straight after the army in the family business—at the storeroom, running deliveries . . . . In this sense, I look at it as a gift. Despite financial success, it was important for my parents to keep it reasonable, avoid flashiness as much as possible. And this has no doubt left a mark on me, in the context of social awareness.*

These motivational narratives resonate with the collectivistic ethos of “old-time” values of solidarity, sacrifice, and asceticism, promoted by the Ashkenazi-secular “founding aristocracy” as the “salt-of-the-earth” version of Israeliness, one that in the views of the NG runs the danger of extinction. Their “modest” strategy aligns with Daloz’s (2012) analysis of “inconspicuous” elites who distinguish themselves by studied understatement behavior. In this case, attempts at “passing modest” are bound to definitions of “Israeliness” that place them on the same line with the ordinary non-elite and are part of the elite’s sense of “communal reciprocity” (Daloz 2010). This is why, in their public appearances, NG philanthropists emphasize these “all-Israeli” motifs to convey the message that they are “just ordinary guys.” However, their self-presentation as “all-Israeli” is based on the interplay of recognition and misrecognition upon which cultural capital is produced and reproduced (Bourdieu 1984). Levelling differences between their experiences and those of “ordinary Israelis” misrecognizes the elitist origins of the “salt-of-the-earth” definition and the privileges that come with it (Shafir and Peled 2002). For instance, their serving in highly-selective army units<sup>16</sup> operates as symbolic capital that, unlike philanthropy, does not suffer from any legitimation crisis.

Local patriotism, which emphasizes the NG loyalty to the country and its people, seems to be another component of the “all-Israeliness” with which they associate:

*My dad used to tell us, “nothing but blue-white”<sup>17</sup> and during the 1<sup>st</sup> Lebanon War<sup>18</sup> dad said we’re going up north to spend every weekend in a guest house over there, because you have to support those settlements.*

But patriotism is also a careful strategy for avoiding public criticism by “being” and “doing” consensus (Barkay 2003). According to informants, a main characteristic of the NG is their fear of being publicly perceived as “political”:

*A unique feature of Israeli NG is how they keep away from political issues. American or European mega-philanthropists have a clear and professed agenda when it comes to political issues, while over*

13 Israeli scouts are self-defined as encouraging youth to “volunteering activity driven by a strong sense of Zionist ideology and connection to our roots.”

14 This is an IDF elite combat unit; its members are considered “the elect” by Israeli ethos.

15 This refers to a high-end neighborhood in north Tel-Aviv.

16 While financial capital is not a recruitment criterion, the socio-demographic background of these units indicates that the army operates as a stratification and reproduction mechanism (Sasson-Levy and Levy, 2008).

17 This is an expression denoting Israeli products to the exclusion of imported goods.

18 During this time residents of northern settlements spent extended periods in bomb shelters.

*here they avoid them like the plague; they're scared. Their overwhelming majority shall always stick to education, disabilities—the more easily-digestible issues.*

A young philanthropist in Israel and the United States explains avoiding political identification:

*Local philanthropists are not as comfortable with political identity. If you're not politically-affiliated, you can better secure your power to influence. Today there's tendency to strike collaborations with the government, and if you have a clear political leaning, there's no chance of you doing it. In the U.S, you can be either Republican or Democrat, but as a philanthropist, it doesn't compromise any move you may make, while in Israel it does . . . when you want to shake free of that, you go "I have nothing to do with politics."*

Their avoidance of political agendas and allegiances allows them to hold on to the core of Israeli current consensus, demonstrating high self-awareness regarding their at-risk position within an increasingly nationalistic and populist Israeli polity:

*There is no doubt about it that we are a homogenous part of Israeli society – we're all quite Ashkenazi, Jewish, secular, left-wingers . . . . So there is not much heterogeneity around here, and we should be very attentive to what's going on outside, in other places. Let's be clear—we were and still are the hegemony . . . but we need to pay more attention.*

Another way in which the NG bring themselves closer to “the Israeli people,” minimizing class-distinction, is by openly identifying with the public criticism against the disproportionate power of economic elites and their social alienation. Our study took place one year after hundreds of thousands of Israelis thronged the streets protesting against the high cost of living, privatization, and the unfulfilled promises of market-led policies. Waged under the banner of “social justice,” they focused much of their rage on the Israeli “one percent” and intensified public mistrust in philanthropists’ motivations. When asked if these protests had affected their philanthropy, NGs unanimously replied that they had had absolutely no effect in their activity and willingness to donate. Unlike Silber’s (2008) portrayal of Israeli mega-philanthropists as an “enraged elite under siege,” based on their accounts of the unfair public hostility, our younger interviewees voiced a sense of never having been the object of these protests.<sup>19</sup> Some went as far as expressing their sympathy and support for the protesters:

*I feel very comfortable saying that when this accusing finger is pointed—I don't think it's pointed at me. So I may well be wrong, and an outside person could say, “OK, you're exactly one of them” . . . all in all, I think the protest will actually lead to a change which shall eventually benefit everyone, no matter where you're from, and in this sense, I feel I'm part of this people.*

The NG discursive identification with the protesters is facilitated by drawing distinctions between those in the elite that “deserve” criticism and those who do not:

*Criticism abounds. Some have it coming, I admit, some called for it and earned it single-handedly, but it affects people who are driven by right principles. The local economic situation is relatively fine, you have new millionaires, people of wealth whose giving is negligible and are not recognized as generous.*

19 This could be explained by the fact that Silber’s interviews took place prior to the protests.



Key in this respect is the NGs refusal to identify themselves with the “tycoon” figures:

*The image of philanthropy in Israel is very tricky. With all this—often justified—criticism of “tycoons,” people usually can’t tell the actual “sharks” of the business world, who only take care of themselves, from all those who have money . . .*

In their view, these “sharks” come from the “new wealthy” extractions, of the “self-made” and newcomers, marked by excessive ostentation in their lifestyle, ways of doing business, and philanthropic endeavors alike, and by their foreignness to the “land-of-Israeliness” that inspired their own upbringing. Some of them openly questioned the origins of commitment of those “new wealthy” philanthropists:

*Of course there’s a difference—I think old capital owners have grown into it. It’s part of their DNA. It entails a familial process to impart these values, and really engage with giving as something you believe in . . . not because you need to belong to any circle or because it’s important status-wise. For new money people . . . there’s no guarantee that it’s forever. What if you’re going to start handing it out? If you’ve got nothing left? So most of them are going to be concerned. It’s something that doesn’t come naturally for them.*

The heirs’ assimilation of “all-Israeli” codes and their attempt to be recognized as part of a single unified identity with “the people,” while creating moral distinctions between different “types” of wealth and philanthropy, bridge the gap between the public criticism against social injustice and their own position in its creation and reproduction.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Understanding how elites maintain their dominant position in times of turmoil has been at the heart of elite theory at least since C. Wright Mills’ classic analysis of power elites in democracies (Bowman et al. 2015). The crisis of neoliberalism and the upsurge of populist politics have renewed the interest in this question as scholars aim to understand how contemporary economic elites justify and defend their power and privileged position, trying to be “moral” and “rich” in an era of increasing inequality and an anti-elite climate (Khan 2011; Sherman 2017). In this article, we addressed this question through an ethnographic analysis of the socio-cultural life of the heirs of the Israeli veteran economic elite and of the boundary and meaning-making processes that philanthropy allows them for justifying, re-evaluating, and deploying “giving” as they face internal and external challenges.

As a key playground where the elites’ money, status, and influence come together, scholarship has typically underscored the role that philanthropy plays in reproducing their symbolic, financial, and social power, while strengthening their social cohesion and solidifying inter-class boundaries (Kendall 2002; Ostrower 2002). Nonetheless, as we have shown through the Israeli case, the young elite can use philanthropic institutions and endeavors not merely for reproducing their dominant position but also for re-adjusting to change as the symbolic and political fields where they operate undergo significant transformations. Moreover, as they navigate socio-political challenges, philanthropy enables the elite successors to define their distinctive position and promote their self-perception and self-justification as an “elite without elitism” through a mutually reinforcing interplay between intra-elite distinctions and inter-class “inconspicuous distinction.”

We draw on Israeli philanthropy as a “secret door” through which to enter the fortified field of the local economic elite; nonetheless, our analysis yields broader insights into the sociology of current elites. First, our analysis points at the need to refine and develop Bourdieu’s cultural theory of inequality beyond structuralist definitions of distinction as the reproduction of dominant position to subtler and process-oriented understandings of elites’ boundary and meaning-making (Lamont 1992;

Lamont et al. 2014). For Bourdieu, distinction is based on the power held by the upper class to impose its own categories of perception and appreciation as legitimate upon the lower class (Daloz 2010). This definition assumes that there is a necessary correspondence between social and symbolic boundaries and that the elite share a homogeneous moral universe based on class position (Jarness 2017). Our ethnography shows nonetheless that in times of turbulence and challenge, the NG elite use philanthropy to (re)produce social and moral boundaries *within* the elite, disclosing thereby its heterogeneity and the diverse relations that its members entertain with various forms of power.

Intra-elite boundary-making is not free from ambivalence and tensions. As we showed, NP configurations disclose the inherent tensions that NG experience in the intra-elite sphere between social closure and economic openness. This is evident in their interest in opening the ranks to collective endeavours and partnerships—all of which place them at the avant-garde of the “new world” of business and philanthropy—and their actual pursuit of social closure and partners with the “right DNA” that would not endanger their version of collegial capitalism (Spillman 2012). Tensions between reproduction and change build on inter-generational divisions. Thus, on the one hand, NP allows the NG to distinguish themselves from their parents’ traditional and “out-dated” philanthropy by critically distancing themselves from the “dependency culture” that it nurtured; on the other hand, they draw clear moral distinctions between themselves, heirs of a philanthropic habitus, and the apparently gaudy and “rootless” philanthropy of the “newcomers.” The mix of inter-generational and intra-elite distinctions allows the NG to fashion themselves as a unique mix of “rooted avant-garde” in the world of NP and business.

The prominence of intra-elite boundary-making in the Israeli context also yields more general insights into the changing role of philanthropy in times of crises. Scholarship on philanthropy has focused mainly on inter-class distinction and domination while overlooking intra-elite dynamics. However, as our study suggests, conceptualizing distinction as the reproduction of inter-class domination may explain elite power in times of stability and continuity but does a poorer job explaining the maintenance and repair of legitimacy in a changing field of social and symbolic power.

Second, our ethnography points at the importance of analyzing distinction practices in a socio-cultural context. Following Daloz (2010, 2012) we argue that when and how the elite display distinction, matters. Our case shows that inseparable from the distinctions drawn in the intra-elite sphere are practices of “inconspicuous distinction” that de-emphasize inter-class distinctions in the public sphere. That is how NG attempt to convert the intra-elite social and symbolic distinctions into moral capital: by appropriating “all-Israeli” codes of modesty and self-sacrifice (“salt-of-the-earth”); endorsing non-partisan local patriotic values; and openly identifying with populist messages of social justice advanced by Israeli protesters. Blurring social and moral differences between themselves and “ordinary Israelis” certainly draws on the distinction games of “(mis)-recognition” so well described by Bourdieu (1984). Blurring allows the creation of moral hierarchies of “good” and “bad” wealth and enables the NG to disassociate themselves from the “deserving” objects of public criticism, the “tycoons,” while simultaneously misrecognizing their own position in the structure of inequality. However, the appeal to modesty as moral superiority draws also on cultural patterns of “reciprocity” engrained in societies like Israel where a “collectivist ethos” has traditionally organized the elite/non-elite relations and provided cultural legitimacy to “economic power” (Frenkel 2000). Thus, rather than mere smokescreen, “inconspicuous distinction” means that elites are also constrained by the cultural and political context they share at the societal level (Daloz 2010).

Practices of modesty and self-promoted images of “elites-without-elitism” are also engrained on epochal variations of “superiority.” The growing literature on elites’ adaptations to change documents similar strategies of ex-elitism and inconspicuousness. Studies dealing with the cultural-symbolic aspects of elites’ leisure and consumption patterns have shown that though some elite groups may flaunt their privileged position and superiority, others often downplay and even hide it (Daloz 2010). Research on (mainly young) members of the elite shows how they weather winds of change by embracing notions of social justice (Levy 1990); advocating meritocracy as legitimating principles

(Khan 2011); and denouncing profit-seeking behaviors associated with the pitfalls of neoliberal capitalism (Courtois 2015). Whether these strategies are based on their self-presentation as moral vanguards defending an aristocratic moral and social order of the past or as promoting progressive “omnicultural” worldviews fitted to times of diversity, most of these studies emphasize how “endangered” elites attempt to repair and justify their legitimacy by softening traditional class markers of distinction in Bourdieu’s sense. Overall, thus, our study confirms current understandings that as we live in times when principles of “diversity,” “inclusion” and “meritocracy” operate as main legitimating discourses, so are practices of elite distinction and elite’s nature changing (Cousin et al. 2018).

Third, our article contributes to the sociology of current elites “beyond Bourdieu’s” structuralism by showing that *where* distinctions are drawn, matters (Wimmer 2008). The ways by which the Israeli NG justify their legitimacy, to themselves and to others—presenting their “innovativeness” when facing the veteran generation; their “rootedness” and genuine Israeliness when facing the newcomers; and their embodied habitus of “patriotic sacrifice” that makes them “one of the people” and different from the “tycoons,” when facing public criticism—indicate a more intricate interplay of distinctions operating at different levels and in different spheres. Their boundary work thus includes intra-class distinctions, in that they position themselves in relation to other elite groups within the elitist field, and inter-class “inconspicuous distinction” effected through the interplay between “private” and “public” display of their “elite-without-elitism.”

Highlighting this interplay, our analysis reveals that re-positioning social and symbolic boundaries changes their meaning and purpose for the elite. As we showed, the NG’s ability to draw boundaries in different spheres is what enables their self-definition and justification in a changing political and symbolic field. This manifests in the polyvalent uses that they make of the notion of “next generation,” as denoting at once continuity with the moral aristocracy of their parents but also as “the next thing”—social vanguards of sorts offering a critical vision of the present akin to popular demands for an alternative. We believe that further research can contribute to this discussion by posing similar questions of continuity and change and inter-generational dynamics within the elite in other political and cultural contexts.

Last, by focusing on the formal characteristic of boundary-making—location—we also contribute to understanding anew the content and function of the elite’s philanthropy itself: rather than functioning as a means for re-distributing capital and class reproduction, as often argued, NP becomes a mechanism for legitimacy repair of elites “on trial” and for intervening in broader struggles over national hegemony.

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