

What is “Jewishness,” How is it Transmitted?  
A Look at the Nature of a Centrist Jewish Organization

Presented to:

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In the coming year we will meet in the framework of a research seminar devoted to the topic of “Education and Belonging: The Experience of Israeli and Diaspora Jews.” Seminar papers will bring social scientific theory and method to bear on issues having to do with transmission of Jewish collective identity through formal and informal education in general, and the work of the Department of Jewish Zionist Education of the Jewish Agency in particular.

My personal motivation for working as co-organizer of this seminar is to contribute to building a theory driven research agenda among social scientists studying the Jewish experience. For good reason the vast majority of social scientific research on Jews and Jewish organizations follows an applied bend. That is where the money is. However, without strong theory, and even more important without an explicit argument between paradigms that conceptualize the Jewish experience we are unable to create a critical distance from the grinding nature of everyday life.

My hope is that this seminar will bridge the gap that often opens up between strong theoretical discourse and applied research. Most of the papers will present the results of on-going research projects, some with a focus on the work of the Department of Jewish Zionist Education. At the same time, through the contribution of this paper and others we will sustain an intellectual argument regarding the implications of the research reports for the question of how it is possible to transmit a sense of belonging to the Jewish collective in contemporary times, and the manner in which our research paradigms enable us to answer this question.

I have two goals for this paper. The first is to present my suggestion for a paradigm capable of integrating both the quantitative and qualitative material we will receive over the course of the seminar. I will personally be working to challenge and shape this theoretical framework over the coming year. Beyond my own personal project, I also hope that the

framework presented in this paper will serve as a means of focusing the on-going discussion, if only as a point from which others can express disagreement in order to elaborate their own understandings of the issues at hand. My second goal is empirical. From within the paradigm, I want to introduce questions that are central for a comparative study of Jewish educational practices in general, and a strategic discussion of the agenda of the Department of Jewish Zionist Education of the Jewish Agency (our sponsor) in particular.

### **I. Jewish Education and the Problem of the Meaningful Boundary**

I have the honor of writing this paper knowing that Charles Liebman and Harvey Goldberg will not only read, but also act as respondents. Through their writings, and the time they have taken to respond to my work in the past, both Charles and Harvey have made a substantial contribution to my own understanding of the question of the transmission of collective Jewish identity. A short discussion of the differences between them offers an appropriate way of introducing the question at hand.

In contrast to a tendency among social scientists to focus on the individual, Goldberg and Liebman tackle the question of Jewish identity from the perspective of the relationship between the individual Jew and the larger group. What is the nature of group life in contemporary times? What types of social relationships enable the existence of Jewish community, what types do not? How is belonging to a Jewish collective transmitted from parent to child or teacher to student in an age of volunteerism and individual choice?

Both focus on the issue of individualism and volunteerism? In traditional society the distinction between Jew and non-Jew was imposed from above and belonging to the Jewish collective was obvious. In post-traditional society, the individual receives the right from the State to assimilate. Those who wish to belong must find other Jews with like-minded tendencies and create organizations that will provide them with the resources to create the

Jewish life-style that matches their ideal. The result is the rise of a multitude of religious and secular movements, all of which offer a pathway for belonging. Liebman tends to trumpet the dangers of volunteerism, while Goldberg stresses the possibilities.

Goldberg (1999) looks to the Jewish center to understand the nature of collective belonging. On the issue of education, he claims that for the Jewish centrist, education is a constant exercise of choice. The breakup of the traditional *kehilla* creates a disjunction between family and formal educational institutions. Families will search for educational institutions that come closest to their ideals, but will often find themselves faced with a gap between the values of the home and those their children receive in school. Even if the school is formally in line with the worldview of the family, economic and organizational needs lead most schools to pull in students and teachers from diverse backgrounds making attainment of an ideal fit impossible. The result is that both parent and child face a continual navigation between Jewish worlds (Goldberg 1999, p. 96). To preserve a connection to tradition, those Jews who occupy the middle ground of Jewish communal life have to continually reinvent their modes of belonging, if only to succeed in bridging the gap between family and school. Goldberg argues: “One aspect of a ‘tradition of invention’ is the readiness to experiment with, and be exposed to, various, and inherently unstable, educational ventures.”

For Goldberg the center of the Jewish ideological spectrum is our source of hope, and we should focus on the way centrist Jews close the disjuncture between family and school. “I suggest that focusing on the family indicates that the commitment to, and skill required in, such invention may be transmitted across generations” (Goldberg 1999, p. 94). In contrast to Goldberg’s optimistic view that active choice among centrist Jews creates innovative possibilities for the transmission of collective identity, Liebman points to the dangers.

Liebman argues that in a situation in which belonging is created from a position of choice, Jewish organizations must focus on their individual customers rather than on the needs of the larger community. The individual rather than the group becomes the goal of ideological innovation. Market forces lead the Orthodox movements to stress religious piety of individuals at the expense of outreach to the larger ethnic group in order to distinguish themselves from the non-Orthodox movements (Liebman 1983). In contrast, the non-Orthodox movements break down distinctions between Jew and non-Jew in order to make Judaism meaningful to those individuals who are no longer convinced by tradition. The result is the demise of an ability to distinguish between that which is Jewish and that which is not, and with that we witness the gradual destruction of collective Jewish life among non-Orthodox Jews. In a powerful statement, Liebman offers the following assessment of the move towards religious egalitarianism among non-Orthodox American Jews:

The second tendency associated with spirituality among modern American Jews is egalitarianism. The term seems to refer to more than the equality of the sexes; it suggests, really, the interchangeability of the sexes. Not only are differences between men and women to be ignored for purposes of observing or celebrating the folkways of Judaism, but differences between young and old, married and unmarried, knowledgeable and ignorant, pious and impious, observant and non-observant are also ignored. All these are categories to which the Jewish tradition ascribes significance but which modern American Jews ignore. They pretend that these distinctions are of no significance to them. All that counts, so they claim, is the individual, or at most the individual and God (i.e., the individual and his or her own benign self). To rephrase what I mean, differences between, say, an ignoramus and a learned Jew are important only if we think of the two as embedded in some community of people. Spirituality suggests that all that counts is the relationship between the individual and God. The fact that God has come to mean a reification of selected attributes of the individual himself only sharpens the tragedy.

This relates to the third tendency, ethicism, which is the opposite of ritualism. In this perspective, it matters not whether the folkways of Judaism are observed in the proper manner: what counts is the proper intention. It doesn't matter if the individual who is called upon to lead the congregation in prayer, or deliver a homily, or read from the Torah knows how to do it properly. All that counts is that the person, male or female, young or old, married or unmarried—indeed, at its most extreme, Jew or Gentile—wants to share the spiritual experience (Liebman 1999, pp. 15-16).

Liebman is concerned that the willingness of non-Orthodox Jewish organizations to cater to the search for meaning on the part of their constituents breaks down the boundary between Jew and non-Jew?<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Goldberg tells us that the Jewish center is alive and well, and defines the center as the product of the search for meaning that results from the attempt to bridge between family, school and other central institutions of Jewish life. Whether one agree or disagrees with Liebman and Goldberg's understanding of contemporary Jewish collective identity, they lead us to a central issue for the study of Jewry – the tension between boundary and meaning.

The following pages build on the tension between boundary maintenance and the search for meaning. By boundary, I mean a distinction between Jew and non-Jew. A Jewish educator must teach a particularistic conception of Jewishness, or there is no difference from general education. However, at the same time the educational content must be meaningful or people will simply opt out. As Liebman points out, the paradox is that meaning is generated vis-à-vis the everyday reality in which an individual Jew lives. Most Jews live in non-Jewish or highly secular societies. The result is that any attempt to imbue a particularistic Jewish identity with meaning also runs the danger of diluting the boundary between them and us. However, as Goldberg argues, if we are to build a model for collective Jewish continuity we must begin with the reality within which centrist Jews create meaningful connections between their family and other communal institutions. From within the Jewish center we can find the key to group continuity.

Like Liebman and Goldberg, I tackle the tension between boundaries and meaning by focusing on the group experience, rather than limiting myself to questions of Jewish identity at the level of the individual Jew. Instead of asking what is a Jew, I begin with the question

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<sup>1</sup> Although their analytical point of departure is the individual, Cohen and Eisen (2000) also focus our attention on the inverse relationship between ethnic particularism and the individual's search for meaning among  
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of what is a Jewish form of association. I am not interested in the Jew as an individual, but rather in the concept of Jewishness as it structures social relationships. My question is not “who is a Jew,” or what does an individual think or do, but rather “what makes a social relationship Jewish?” In this sense, Jewish education is not something that a teacher does or a student receives; rather, Jewish education is a particular type of relationship between teacher and student. The question is what makes an educational relationship Jewish?

My answer sorts a social relationship into three analytical levels, the micro (interpersonal), the organizational (the interpersonal relationship as it is embedded within an institutional environment) and the macro (the interaction between organizations and the larger cultural, economic and political environment). The presentation begins with a general theory of Jewish social relationships at the micro level. I will then offer an analysis of the Department of Jewish Zionist Education of the Agency as a centrist Jewish organization that sponsors educational relationships. What is Zionist education at the Jewish center? What are the ideological boundaries of the educational relationship sponsored by the Jewish Agency? On what basis are students selected and excluded? How does the organizational structure of the Jewish Agency reflect the priorities of its educational mission; and, what is the affect of recent attempts to decentralize the authority structure of the organization? Finally, I will attempt to tie in ideological changes taking place at the organizational level to processes of macro social change.

## **II. Micro Jewishness – The Subject-Object Relationship**

As a sociologist I assume that if the term “Jew” has any meaning it must inform social norms that govern relationships between individuals. Based on those norms, individuals entering a social relationship will identify the interaction between them as Jewish.

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American Jews.

For a social relationship to be Jewish there must be a gap between the *subjective* consciousness of an individual participant and *objective* “Jewish social norms” to which the individual conforms. The gap between subject and object is crucial to the study of group life. To illustrate the point, Georg Simmel (1964) argues that a social group must have at least three members, for only at that point are norms produced that are not dependent on the subjective desires of any one person. Coalitions will form, in which two of the participants agree upon a set of norms leaving the third to experience a gap between the “objective norms” of the group, and his or her subjective desire.

We can speak of a Jewish social relationship when there are objective social norms that are greater than the subjective desires of the individual participants. How do we measure “objective norms”? What are the norms that if you fail to follow, the others in a social relationship will simply not recognize you as Jewish, and hence will not allow you to participate in the relationship as a Jew?

To answer the above questions we need to take the concept of a social norm and break it into three dimensions – cultural object, ritual and symbol. In combination, they allow us to speak of a Jewish social relationship. According to Durkheim (1965) every group must have a common set of cultural objects that members recognize as representing the group. The cultural object turns certain things, places or times into an objective, and hence sacred expression of the group for its members. Ritual refers to the ways that an individual approach and handles a cultural object. Symbol refers to the interpretative schemes individuals impose on the object and ritual, in order to ascertain the meaning of the social relationship and their connection to the social group.<sup>2</sup>

Object, ritual and symbol work in tandem, to generate the normative basis of collective or group life (Marvin and Ingle 1999, p. 19). Group membership occurs when an



individual encounters the cultural object in a manner that is symbolically recognizable and ritually acceptable to others (Durkheim 1965; Eriksen 1993, p.128). Marvin and Ingle (1999) use the American flag as an example of a cultural object in their analysis of the ritual and symbolic mechanisms Americans use to create a national identity. According to the authors, contact with the flag is an important means for creating collective identity and regulating membership in the nation. If you do not handle the flag in the appropriate manner, you are simply not American.

At the micro level, all individuals in a particular interaction will search for common cultural objects. After locating the common object(s), they will then work with one another to identify and/or build the appropriate rituals that allow the interaction to continue. Erving Goffman (1982 (1959), p. 14) refers to the search for common cultural objects and the accompanying ritualized interaction as “defining the situation”. Failure to arrive at a common definition of the situation leads to conflict, that in turn generates new definitions of the situation, i.e. innovative norms, that allow for the interaction to continue. A social relationship ends when those who are party to the interaction *no longer attempt* to formulate a definition of the situation. However, up until the point where the parties simply have nothing to do with one another there is still a social relationship. So long as there is an argument over the correct rituals and the symbolic significance of common cultural objects, we can speak of a social relationship.<sup>3</sup>

From here on in, the concept of “Jewish relationship” and “Jewish social norm” refers to an attempt by otherwise disparate individuals to maintain a “Jewish definition of the situation;” that is, an attempt to locate common cultural objects and build rituals to govern the resulting interpersonal interaction. Within this frame, we begin our answer to the

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas (1982) refers to “natural symbols” in order to convey this Durkheimian idea.

<sup>3</sup> This general approach is taken from Simmel’s sociology of conflict (1964). Also see Coser (1956).

question of what is a centrist Jewish relationship by asking what is a Jewish cultural object and how do Jews use the cultural object as a basis for building social relationships.

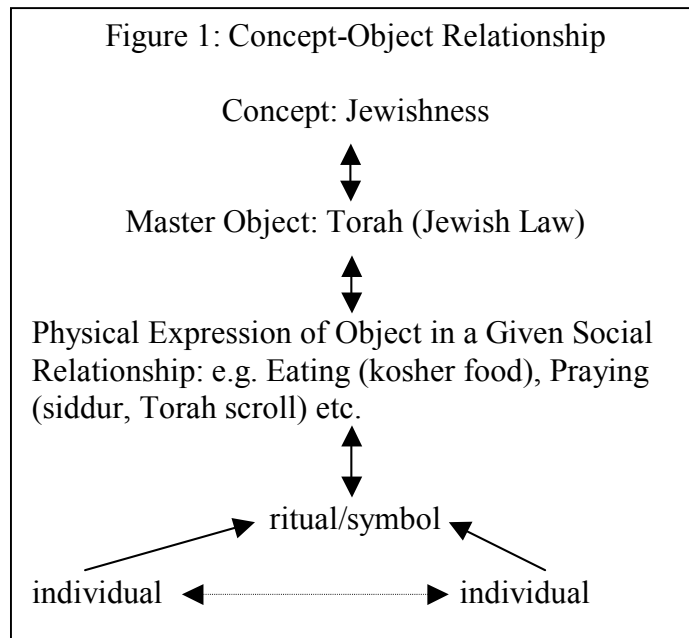
### **III. The Concept-Object Relationship at the Micro Level of Jewish Interaction**

In the previous section the argument focused on the need for objective social norms that stand above the subjective desires of individual participants in a social relationship. If the subject-object relationship lies at the heart of group life, then a second relationship between concept and object (see figure 1) allows us to speak of a particular group as Jewish.

The gap between subject and object is created when an individual enters into the presence of another and attempts to verify the Jewishness of the relationship by searching for common cultural objects. For participants to verify the “Jewishness” (the concept) of a social relationship they need to search for the appropriate cultural object, through which they build their definitions of the situation. If a recognizably Jewish object is located, the person will then ask how the other individuals in the relationship approach and handle the object. In so doing, the individual identifies the “other” as a particular type of Jew or non-Jew and the relationship proceeds accordingly.

There are three master groupings of cultural objects that Jews use to determine the Jewish character of a social relationship: (1) Torah (Religion), (2) Land (Nationalism) and (3) Peoplehood (Ethnicity). For purposes of elaborating the theoretical framework I will begin with “Torah.” In the next section we will discuss other objects that are closer to the heart of the mission of the Department of Jewish Zionist Education.

For the next few pages the concept—object relationship in question is “Jewishness-Torah”. As a physical object, Torah refers to the five books of Moses. The inscription of the five books on the Torah scroll serves as the symbolic and ritual center of most of the daily, weekly and annual religious rites. Most Jews take for granted that another Jew will look at the Torah scroll, not as a piece of paper with letters on it that can be thrown into the garbage



pale in the same way we dispose of a newspaper, but as a sacred object. Even the non-religious or avowedly secular Jew will treat the Torah scroll differently than any other book and view its desecration as a sacrilegious act.

Here, I wish to refer to Torah not in the narrow physical sense of Torah as a scroll that we read in synagogue, but as in a broad sense of Torah as referring to Jewish law, including both the five books and the oral tradition codified in rabbinic law (*halakha*). Within the broader definition of Torah, we can locate a rich repertoire of cultural objects that for Jews objectify their relationship to the Jewish collective.<sup>4</sup>

In the traditional Jewish community, a normative conception of Torah provided the rhythm of group life. A Jew could enter a synagogue anywhere in the world, and even if he did not know anyone else, there would be no problem participating in the service that includes objects such as the Torah scroll and siddur. Jews recognized one another as members of a common group, because a Jew knew how to pray with other Jews. In other words, when in the presence of Torah objects the resulting definition of the situation resulted

<sup>4</sup> I am using “Torah” as a general level cultural category (Parsons 1968). In Parson’s work all groups must have general cultural categories or cultural codes that demand a high level of cultural uniformity and hence integrate otherwise disparate individuals into a single social entity. In many ways I both build on and fashion myself against the work of Jeffrey Alexander (1988; 1992; 1993) one of Parson’s primary successors. The distinction that I make between object, ritual and symbol allow for a greater pluralism of interpretation and action, and still account for cultural integration within a social group. For work that is similar to the direction taken in this footnote continues on next page

in agreement on the common ritual basis for interaction. Likewise a plethora of rabbinic laws from those governing conversion, marriage and divorce, to eating enabled a Jew from one region to interact with Jews of another region in a taken for granted way.<sup>5</sup>

In the post-traditional Jewish community Torah remains an object of cultural significance to all but the most assimilated of Jews. However, there is a high level of conflict regarding the symbolic and ritual dimensions of Torah, making it difficult to produce a workable Jewish definition of the situation. For example, in the realm of the prayer service many non-Orthodox Jews are unfamiliar with, or find that they do not agree with the values (e.g., the treatment of women) represented in the traditional liturgy. The result is that the non-Orthodox Jew often does not feel “at ease” or take for granted the connection that they have with other Jews when they attend an Orthodox prayer service. The same alienating experience occurs for Orthodox Jews attending a non-Orthodox prayer service.

Instead of unifying Jews within a common social relationship, the prayer service (i.e., a ritual that occurs around the Torah scroll) serves as a divisive experience. Similarly, the practice of studying Torah plays a divisive role among religious Jews. Reform, Conservative and Orthodox employ different learning methods and often tend to view the methodologies of the others with suspicion. In addition, to the differences between religious movements, there are also the many “secular” or “less religious” Jews who lack the learning skills necessary to approach Torah in a manner recognizable to the elites of any of the religious streams. These larger religious and knowledge divisions translate into an experience of conflict and ambiguity when ritually prescribed contact with Torah objects serves as the basis of a Jewish social relationship.

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paper see Burns (1992; 1996a; 1996b).

<sup>5</sup> For a conceptualization of the changing role of religion in the Jewish community see Kopelowitz (2000; 2001 (forthcoming)-b), Friedman (1982; 1993) and Liebman (1983).

Conflict and ambiguity are not necessarily negative forces in a social relationship. Ambiguity speaks to the awareness of a significant other whose demands on the definition of the situation cannot be ignored. Conflict speaks to the attempt to manage a common social relationship despite the experience of ambiguity. For example, Orthodox Jews reject the ritual approach to Torah offered by Reform Jews. On the other hand, in particular situations the Orthodox agree to enter into social relationships with Reform Jews in spite of the resulting experience of ambiguity.

To illustrate the dynamic of a Jewish social relationship that involves conflict around religion one can think of a family dinner table. We begin by asking, is the social relationship between members of a family around the dinner table Jewish? To answer the question, we need to look for an objective expression of the concept of Jewishness. So far we have focused on one object, Torah. Torah can be physically expressed in the Torah scroll, but it also appears in other objects, the ritual handling of which is done according to the laws of Torah. In the example of the dinner table, a physical expression of Torah is kosher food. The Jewishness of the social relationship is in the way that the members of the family interpret the symbolic meaning of food and handle that object in a ritualized relationship. Here food is an objective medium through which the Jewish relationship exists. The norms around the handling of food are objective, in that they bind the family members into a normative relationship, which is greater than the subjective desire of anyone individual.

Even if there is conflict within the family over the nature of kashrut we can still use food as an object that allows us to identify the family as Jewish. If the conflict is positive the family will create norms for regulating kashrut observance in the home, despite the differences between them. Through arguments over the correct ritual handling of the cultural object (in this case food), each member of a family becomes aware of, and adjusts to the needs that the others members brings to the relationship.

The problem occurs when conflict is not managed, when a parent stops speaking to a child or sisters and brothers no longer speak to one another. In this case, conflict does not build the basis for Jewish consensus, but leads to the breakup of the family, as they can no longer eat together. The other negative scenario is that the family simply decides not to observe kashrut, at which point we can no longer use food as a means to identify the family as Jewish. If we think of the Jewish People as a family, we can ask if it is still possible for Jews to agree on objects, even through argument, such as food.<sup>6</sup> Once we locate the objects, we can then ask what are the resulting Jewish social relationships?

#### **IV. Jewish Conflict at the Level of Interpersonal Interaction**

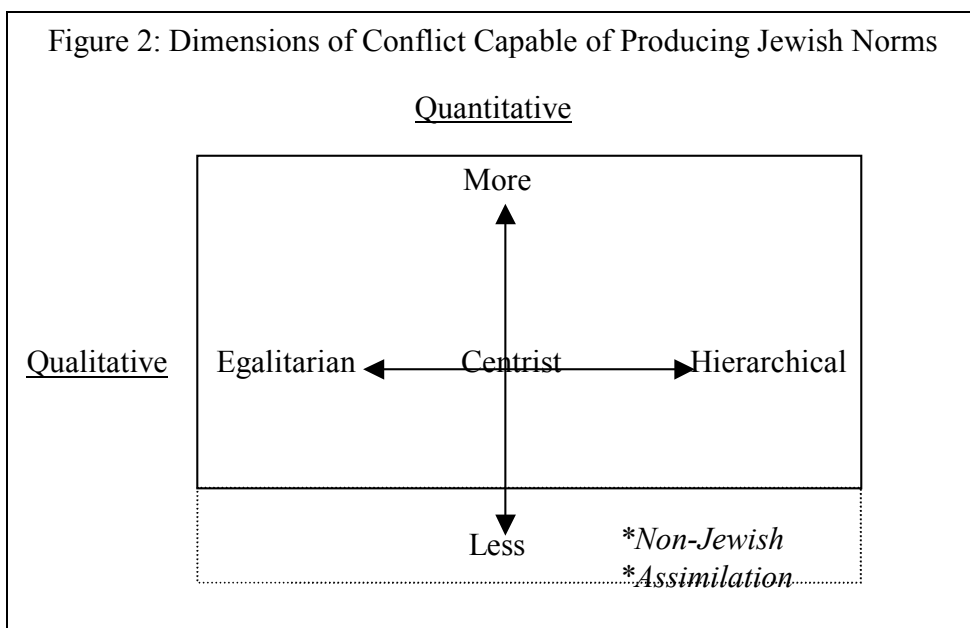
Two types of norm producing conflict (see figure 2) appear when we focus on the cultural object as the building block of a centrist Jewish social relationship. The first occurs between Jews who place greater significance on the cultural object and Jews who place less significance. This is a more-less scale of measurement. There are Jews who want Torah to serve as the central cultural object of a Jewish social relationship and there are Jews who want it to be less important, or not to use it all. If we stay with the family example, we can say there will be members of the family that want kashrut to be a central feature of the dinner table, and those that want less.

The quantitative dimension is relatively straightforward. There are Jews who identify more and identify less, or act more or less “Jewish”. Some Jews might do more in terms of religion (Torah) and less in terms of other dimensions (Land/nationalism, Peoplehood/ethnicity), or simply do more along all dimensions etc. Our research tools should measure the more—less dimension, and this does not seem hard to do. A question that measures more-less Jewishness only requires reference to a concept or an object, but not

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<sup>6</sup> Deshen (1998) provides an example of extreme conflict of ritual use of food in his description of secular Israeli Jews who eat in publicly staged events on Yom Kippur. Deshen claims that even in the act of ritual  
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both. We can ask someone if he or she feels Jewish, or do Jewish things – like observe kashrut? So long as we keep the concept (Jewishness) and the ritual object (kosher food) separate we will learn that an individual does more of one and less of another, but we don't have the ability to tackle the qualitative dimensions of ideology. To deal with ideological differences we need questions that bring concept and object together, namely: How does one need to observe kashrut (object) in order to be legitimately Jewish (concept)?



We might have all family members saying that kashrut is important, but they might mean different things and demand different forms of kashrut observance. Two Jews might do the same action – i.e., eat in a kosher restaurant or celebrate Israel Independence Day, but understand what they are doing in very different terms. Moreover, the manner in which they weave together a similar bundle of practices will differ radically from one sub-group to the next. Figure 2 illustrates the relation of the two dimensions of Jewish culture conflict.

To tackle the qualitative differences our tools for measuring Jewishness must grapple with questions of authority – namely who has the right to determine the Jewishness of the definition of the situation. Who has the right to determine the legitimate way that we

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violation the secular Jews enters himself into a social relationship to other Jews.

objectively determine the Jewishness of a given social relationship? I suggest three competing ways that individuals in a social relationship can create a Jewish definition of the situation and determine the legitimacy of the Jewish claims of others. As follows:

### 1) Hierarchical Relationships

Guy Swanson (1967) describes traditional Catholicism as presenting an ideal-type hierarchical model. Swanson argued that Catholics have an "immanent" conception of ritual practice in which God is present in the ritual object. The immanence of God makes it impossible for anyone but those who "know God's intentions" to change ritual and ceremony. The Pope sits at the top of a hierarchical organization that transmits divine will downwards to the laity. The result is a strong boundary between insider and outsider. Or you accept the truth as it is transmitted from above, or you don't. Along the symbolic dimension, a person who adopts a hierarchical conception of authority will expect a homogeneous interpretation of common cultural objects from those whom he or she interacts, in line with the dictates of established authority. In our case, a legitimate Jew will understand the concept of Torah and the objectification of the concept in the Torah scroll, kosher food or the siddur in only one acceptable way. Along the ritual dimension, access to and handling of the cultural object is equally homogeneous.

### 2) Egalitarian Relationships

Swanson describes the Protestant reformation as the move from an immanent to transcendent conception of religious authority. For Protestants, God is not immanent within the ritual object and ceremony, but rather the relationship between people and God is symbolized by the ceremony. Protestant ritual creates an association in the minds of participants of their relationship to the divine, but is not in itself an objective representation of the divine body. A successful ritual moves individuals into a common relationship to God, but does not actually represent the will of God. Change to the ritual and ceremony can be introduced by all those



involved in the relationship, as they are in themselves man-made productions that are meant to symbolize God's presence, but are not in and of themselves divine. If hierarchical authority creates boundaries, egalitarian social relationships create the exact opposite effect.

Boundaries between insider and outsider are blurred in order to make the ritual as inclusive as possible of all those present in a given social relationship.

Liebman and Cohen (1990, pp. 126-7) provide a good example of the difference between hierarchical and egalitarian relationships in their discussion of Orthodox and non-Orthodox observance of the Havdalah ritual, a ceremony that marks the end of the Sabbath and the coming of a new week. They write: "The havdalah service, as performed by most Orthodox Jews, is recited immediately after the Saturday evening prayers conclude and takes no more than two or three minutes." In contrast, "among the non-Orthodox this ceremony tends to be far more elaborate in such circumstances than among the Orthodox. It may conclude with all those present forming a large circle, holding hands, singing together, and, quite often, kissing one another." Liebman and Cohen argue that the Orthodox regard the ritual in cut and dry terms, it must be done in a certain sequence and at a particular time if it is to properly represent divine and rabbinical intention. In contrast, for the non-Orthodox, the ritual is open to manipulation in order to engender an emotional affect, drawing the individuals participating in the service into a relationship with one another and God. In the Orthodox case only an established rabbinic authority can suggest changes to the ritual, as authority does not rest with the individual participants. In contrast, in the non-Orthodox case (especially the Reform) the individuals involved in the ceremony are at liberty to shape it to their purposes.

### 3) Centrist Conceptions of Authority

Within every social group (i.e. a group of people sharing common cultural objects and ritual access to those objects) there are "extremist" factions that pull towards a strong egalitarian or

hierarchical conception of authority. The egalitarians will push for a relatively pluralistic understanding of what it means to be a member of a group, while those adopting a hierarchical model will argue against abstract interpretations of the common cultural objects, and for stricter adherence to a limited set of ritual options. The social relationship holds together so long as a middle or centrist position remains dominant. The centrist mediates a position between the strong pluralist (egalitarian) or sectarian (hierarchical) vision of the ideal Jewish social relationship.

At this point, we have returned to the dialectic between boundary maintenance and the search for meaning discussed above. Hierarchy enables boundaries, but at the same time the Jewish educator must consider the meaning needs of his or her students. Too much hierarchy will simply make the educational relationship irrelevant to the students' lives. However at what point does the egalitarian relationship, which is essential for creating meaning, destroy the ability of an educator to teach a student how to distinguish between them and us?

In my work at the Jewish Agency, I'm trying to develop a survey mechanism that will grapple with hierarchical and egalitarian tendencies on the part of participants in educational programs.<sup>7</sup> The aim is to inquire into egalitarian and hierarchical dispositions and the way the individual responds to the educational programming. As a brief illustration of the general idea, chart one presents two survey questions answered by 36 post-high school youth movement leaders from the Australian, New Zealand and South Africa who came to Israel to study at *The Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad* at the Department of Jewish Zionist Education in the Spring of 2001. The chart is organized by the average answer given by

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<sup>7</sup> In the spirit of the research seminar, I put this presentation forward in order to receive feedback. As I comment in footnotes 8 and 9 below, there is much that needs to be improved.

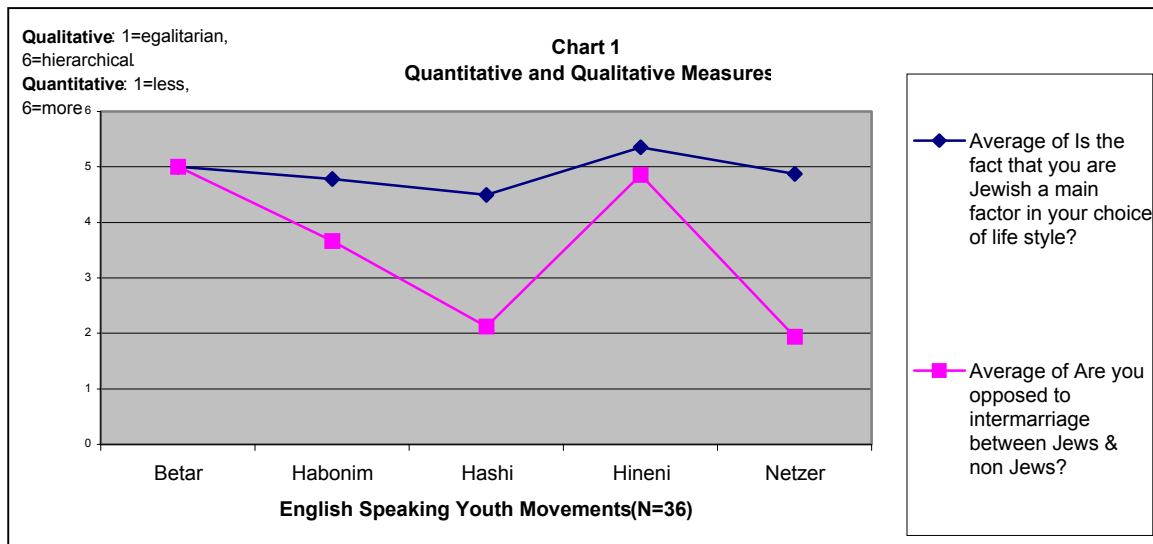
members of a particular youth movement. The stereotypical ideological characteristics of each movement are as follows: (1) Betar is a right-wing secular-Zionist youth movement, (2) Habonim and Hashi are left-wing secular-Zionist youth movements, (3) Hineni is modern-Orthodox, and (4) Netzer is Reform.

We see that for the question regarding Jewish lifestyle there is little difference between the participants, they are all very Jewish.<sup>8</sup> However, the question only measures a more-less relationship, as it refers to the concept of Jewish lifestyle without referencing an objective expression of that lifestyle. In contrast in the question regarding intermarriage there is an implicit concept—object relationship,<sup>9</sup> around which individuals can express ideological disagreement. Here there is significant variation between these “very Jewish” youngsters.

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<sup>8</sup> The scoring is as follows: 1=not at all, 2 = no, 3=not sure, 4 =maybe, 5=yes, 6=definitely. I have since done away with this scoring code as the 3 and 4 positions are not easily distinguished.

<sup>9</sup> I realize that a question such as “are you opposed to intermarriage ...” does not make the concept-object relationship explicit, and as such does not enable us to check the egalitarian-hierarchical position of a respondent on intermarriage with full confidence. This is a case of imposing a theoretical framework on questions that were not designed for the purpose. At the moment I am assuming that a person answering the question is making the association between the concept of Jewishness and the physical expression of that concept in the marriage ceremony. To correct this problem on the intermarriage issue, my plan is to present a bundle of questions that asks for the individual’s agreement with certain types of practices that are associated with inter-dating and inter-marriage in a way that makes explicit that the question is exploring the issue of what is a “Jewish” relationship. I hope to present this work at a later meeting of this seminar.



The concept (Jewishness) is reproduced within the object (the bodies of the bride and groom) and the ritual (marriage ceremony). When the respondent offers an opinion on intermarriage I am assuming (see footnote 9) that they take a position on the question of can one be Jewish and endorse a marriage ritual that mixes “corporate bodies” as personified in the physical bodies of the bride and groom?

Within the strong hierarchical conception of authority, the group (the Jewish People) is immanent within the cultural object (the bride and groom). The ritual for handling the object is the marriage ceremony. There is only one-way to conduct a Jewish marriage – both partners must be Jewish. To tolerate intermarriage means tolerating the blurring of boundaries, between us and them, and the corruption of the corporate body. Within the hierarchical position on intermarriage one can expect a different interpretation by secular and religious Jews (and variants therein) regarding the reason why a Jewish-Jewish marriage is sacred, nevertheless along the ritual dimension there is a high level of agreement that both bride and groom be Jewish. A legitimate Jewish marriage requires adherence by individuals to ritual proscriptions that are passed on from above.

Within the strong egalitarian conception of authority, the characteristics of the marriage ceremony are open to compromise and negotiation, because the presence of the marriage ceremony does not embody the corporate group. The Jewish People are not

immanent within the ritual object (the bride and groom). The ritual (the marriage ceremony) is not about controlling access to the objectified corporate body, but only *symbolizes* a connection between the participants and the Jewish People. The bride and groom are not themselves the Jewish People, i.e., the Jewish People are not immanent in the bodies of the bride and groom. Thus, the ceremony is reinterpreted to include the non-Jewish marriage partner, and still claims to provide a connection between the participants and other Jews. The meaning of the ceremony is not “from above” but is the average of the desires of the participants themselves. The goal of the ceremony is to connect the individuals present, and not to reproduce the group itself.

Thus far the argument is that conflict within Jewish social relationships is not negative, if it produces norms for managing conflict between the parties. The dimensions of conflict can be between those who want more and those who want less, and between those who with an egalitarian as opposed to hierarchical understanding of the ideal Jewish social relationship. My assumption is that the centrist social relationship embraces conflict and manages the accompanying ambiguity. In the next section, we consider the fact that a centrist Jewish social relationship and accompanying conflict are embedded within organizational environments. I want to use the Department of Jewish Zionist Education of the Jewish as a case study for looking at an organization that seems able to support centrist Jewish social relationships.

## **V. Organizational Jewishness**

Individuals create and maintain organizations to support a particular type of Jewish relationship. Organizations institutionalize access to cultural, economic and social resources that allow for a desired social relationship to continue over time (Wuthnow 1985; 1989; 1994). In this section, I want to continue the above discussion of the conflict between egalitarian and hierarchical understandings of Jewishness in the context of the work of the Department of Jewish Zionist Education.

I want to focus on the institutionalization of centrist, egalitarian and/or hierarchical authority relationships within Jewish educational organizations. The nature of the authority relationship supported by the organization determines the extent to which the organization is capable of drawing into its orbit different types of Jews. In my mind, the Department of Jewish Zionist Education represents an ideal-type centrist Jewish organization that has institutionalized a conception of cultural authority that allows for different types of Jews to maintain a common social relationship despite the differences between them. In any venture sponsored by the Department it is the norm to see religious working with secular, Orthodox with non-Orthodox, right-winger (on the peace process) working with left-winger, and classical Zionist (Israel is center) with neo-Zionist (Israel and Diaspora are partners). To offer an explanation of how the organization maintains this centrist position we need to return to the recipe for the analysis of social relationships offered in the previous section and then add to it an organization component.

Whether we are talking about the Jewish Agency or any other educational organization, the primary role of the organization is to create and sustain social spaces in which educators are able to transmit ideological truths to their students. To transmit a conception of Jewishness an educator has to pull students into a Jewish social relationship. How can Jewish educators create educational rituals around cultural objects capable of

generating a symbolic connection between Jews in a way that enables them to recognize one another as members of a common social group? What role does the educational organization play in supporting the Jewish educational relationship?

Lets compare “Jewish education” to “Science education” to illustrate the nature of the beast. Quantz and Magolda (1997) provide an example of the object/ritual/symbol dynamic in their discussion of the connection between the laboratory environment and “science education.”

Why do we equate “science” with [laboratory] apparatus in the first place? Why not understand “science” to be the theoretical understanding of the natural world and the laboratory investigation as technology rather than science? In this case, the room that “looked like a stereotypical high school laboratory that doubled as an equipment storeroom” suggests a symbolic commitment to the idea that science is a hands-on affair that requires special apparatus to answer the questions of the natural world. So when the students sit in this room on the first day, they are placed on a stage in which “science” is going to arise right in front of them, using all this exotic equipment as teams of individuals attempt to solve problems of the natural world. Science is obviously something that can best be conducted if one is properly equipped (Quantz and Magolda 1997, p. 234).

Science education occurs when students approach and handle “laboratory equipment” (the object) through ritual supervised by their teacher. The learning ritual generates symbolic understandings of what it means to be a scientist. The teacher instructs the student how to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate “scientific ways” of handling the laboratory equipment.

For all the reasons discussed in the previous section, when compared to “Science” education, “Jewish” education is far more complex, in that the common objects, rituals and symbolic understandings are more often than not the subject of dispute. At the center of the Jewish ideological spectrum a teacher cannot simply instruct a student as to the difference between legitimate and illegitimate “Jewish ways.” To demonstrate the point lets focus on “The Land and State of Israel” as the cultural objects that lie at the heart of the educational

mission of the Jewish Agency. For the educator working for the Jewish Agency, “laboratory equipment” is to science, as the “Land of Israel” is to Jewishness.

As an organization the Jewish Agency emphasizes support for a concept-object relationship that uses “The Land and State of Israel” as objects to create a connection to the concept of Jewishness. The primary difference between the Jewish--Torah relationship and the Jewish-Land<sup>10</sup> of Israel relationship is that in the former the physical expression of the concept-object relationship occurs in objects (kosher food, siddur, Torah scroll) that are not rooted in place.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the Jewish-Land, concept-object relationship is expressed through objects that are either located in the physical land of Israel or speak to a relation

Educational Trips Sponsored by the Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad

History of Jerusalem: Jerusalem Over Time  
Israel and the Diaspora: Visit to the Diaspora Museum  
Bar-Kokva Caves: Archeology and History over the Ages  
Geography and Action: Boundaries and Peace Agreements  
Following the Prophets: The Land of Israel as Text  
The Missing Resource: The Problem of Water in Israel  
Ritual and Belief: The Graves of Saints in the Galilee  
The Other Israel: Industry and Technology in Israel

\*The list is selected from list that appears in a recent (date unknown) brochure describing activities of the Institute.

between Diaspora and Israel. The list of educational trips (see text box) sponsored by *The Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad* provides a good example of the Jewish-Land relationship that stands at the center of the organization’s mission.

Without exception the educational trips create a connection to the concept of Jewishness through an encounter with an objective expression of the Land of Israel. The trip which focuses on “ritual and belief” does so via graves that are located in the Galilee, and not by focusing on ritual objects that have no connection to the Land itself. Likewise a visit to

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<sup>10</sup> For an in-depth collection of articles on the centrality of Land in the Israeli-Jewish experience see Bilu and Ben-Ari (1997).

<sup>11</sup> I find Boyarin’s (1992) work particularly instructive on this point.



the Diaspora museum, while an exploration of Jewish communal life outside of Israel, at the same time emphasizes the relational meaning of Diaspora vis-à-vis the Land and State of Israel.

So far we see that the Jewish Agency as an organization emphasizes a particular type of concept (Jewish)—object relationship in order to imbue social relationships within its organizational domain with a particular type of Jewishness. However, beyond the emphasis on a particular concept-object relationship, organizations also contribute to the creation of Jewish social relationships in two other ways: (1) By creating boundary conditions for participating within the organizational domain, and (2) creating an authority structure for determining legitimate and illegitimate practice.

In the previous section, we stated that after individuals locate the common cultural object they build rituals to enable them to handle the object. An organization is not only concerned with the handling of the common ritual object in a relationship that occurs over time, but also in place. Organizations are concerned with boundaries and what occurs within those boundaries. What is permissible behavior within our organization, what is not? Who is an insider, who is an outsider?

Lets stay with the case of the *Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad*. Within the general charge of creating an educational framework for building a connection between the individual and the Land and State of Israel, the Institute must create a selection process to ensure that only the “desired” type of individual will participate in the social relationships that it sponsors. In the text box below is an example of the boundary maintenance process as it appears in a statement from a brochure issued by the Institute in the late 1980s. The brochure speaks to the desire of the organizers to of the program to maintain a pluralistic social environment – anyone not interested in living with Jews who are different need not apply.

Excerpt from brochure:

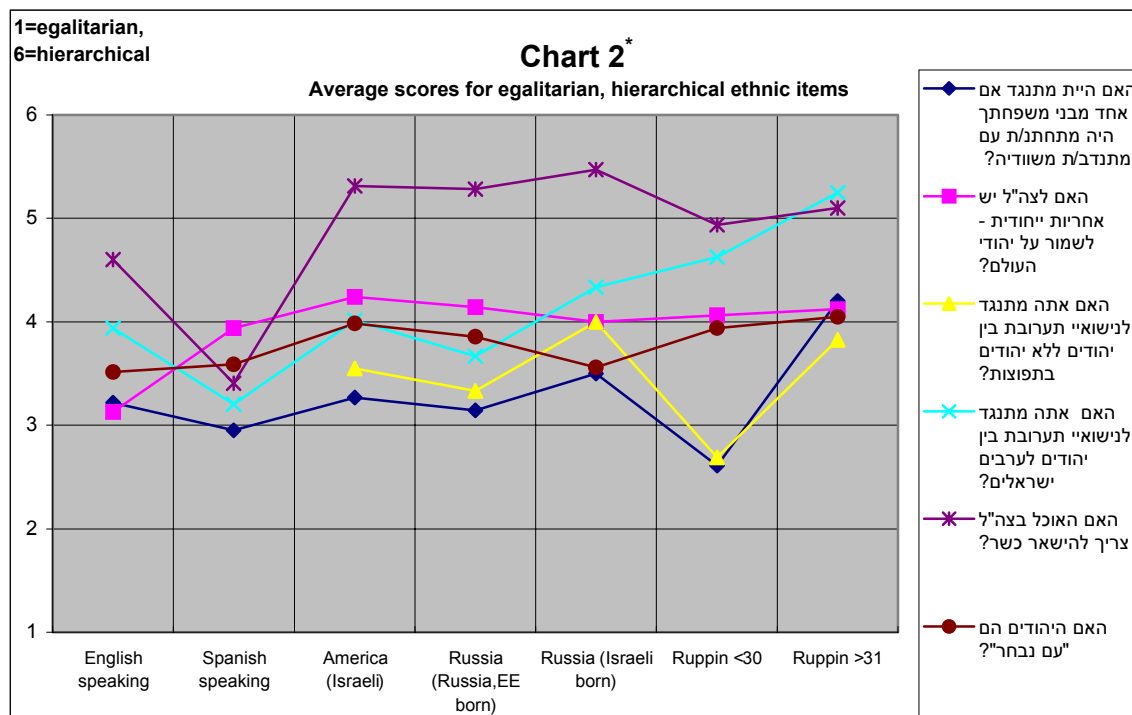
No description of the *Machon* [Institute's] social life would be complete without mention being made of the considerable diversity of its members. The Institute provides a unique opportunity for Jewish Youth from all over the world and from various religious and political backgrounds to live together as one community. The inevitable discussions and controversies that develop are perhaps the surest way of learning about other Jewish positions, organizations and communities. Together the *machonikim* learn to understand each other and each other's ideas in an atmosphere of co-existence and mutual respect.

While I don't know of a formal Jewish Agency directive that programs sponsored by the organization should select participants based on their ability to tolerate and cooperate with other types of Jews, the policy seems widespread within the organization. For example, I recently showed the results of several questions on Jewish identity questionnaire (see chart 2) to the director of a program that sends post-army Israeli youth to work in summer camps in the Former Soviet Union. The survey includes a sample of participants in her program (N=26), participants in a similar program that works vis-à-vis North American Jewish summer camps (N=155), students of mine at Ruppin College (N=44) and an English speaking (N=36) and Spanish speaking group (N=150) of youth group leaders studying at the Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad.<sup>12</sup>

At first glance, the Director of the program looked at the data and commented that she expected the Russian born participants in her program to be less concerned with intermarriage than those born in Israel. Then with a smile she said, it actually isn't surprising as the selection process works hard to screen out individuals (Russian born and Israel born alike) with extreme social and political attitudes. This example seems to evidence a conscious process to create a centrist form of Jewish social relationships within the organization.

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<sup>12</sup> The questions in the chart were asked of the Israelis. Two questions were different for the Spanish and English speaking program participants. Instead of asking them about the kashrut of food in the army, they were asked: Should the food at the local Jew Community centers in your home country be kosher? Instead of asking them about a member of their family marrying a Swedish volunteer they were asked: Are you opposed to intermarriage between Jews & non Jews?.



The selection process described above is a sub-category of the larger question of the institutionalization of authority within an organization. Namely, where is authority located in order to determine legitimate from illegitimate behavior within the organization's domain. There is no directive within the Jewish Agency regarding what types of Jews can participate in a program and what types cannot. On this particular issue the directors of programs enjoy a high degree of organizational autonomy. Likewise, on an issue as central as the relationship of Israel and the Diaspora authority within the Jewish Agency is relatively decentralized, allowing for a wide variety of educational philosophies within the organization itself. For example there is a clear ideological difference between the educational policy vis-à-vis Jews in the former Soviet Union that comes out of the Department of Jewish Zionist Education and that sponsored by the Department of Aliyah. The latter operates according to a classic Zionist philosophy that Israel is at the center of the Jewish world and that the Diaspora will eventually disappear. The role of the Jewish Agency is to promote *Aliyah*, and not work to support continued Jewish life in the local community. In contrast, the work of the Department of Jewish Education seems to push a neo-Zionist agenda that views the

relationship between Israel and the Diaspora as a partnership. A strong Diaspora will also mean a strong Israel. In the context of the former Soviet Union, this means balancing the goal of promoting *Aliyah*, with strengthening the local Jewish educational institutions and Hebrew language and Israel education programming within them.

We can compare the situation in the Jewish Agency to the organizational boundaries of the Orthodox and Reform religious movements. On boundary maintenance issues concerning membership, most of the Orthodox movements grant relatively little autonomy to its staff. A person who is not Jewish by the standards of rabbinic law cannot participate in a program run by a synagogue or Orthodox educational institution. In many cases, Jews who are Jewish by rabbinic law, but do not come from an observant home are also discouraged from participating in Orthodox educational programs. In comparison, Reform Judaism offers a high degree of ideological autonomy to its synagogues and educational institutions in determining who is Jewish enough to participate in social relationships taking place within its organizational domain.

There seems to be a correspondence between decentralized authority structure and the willingness of the organization to support an egalitarian ideological approach to the question of Jewishness on one side, and a centralized authority structure and a hierarchical approach on the other (Swanson 1967). The hierarchical approach tries to protect and further the “truth” as perceived by the organization’s leadership. In comparison, the egalitarian approach argues that the truth is located in the needs of the people whom the organization serves.<sup>13</sup>

One phenomenon that fascinates me is the seeming correspondence between the ongoing attempt by the Jewish Agency to decentralize its authority structure in order to

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<sup>13</sup> I elaborate on these issues elsewhere., See Kopelowitz (2001 (forthcoming)-a) and Kopelowitz [, 2002 (forthcoming) #460].

increase the responsiveness of the organization's representatives to the people and organizations they work with in the field and the increasing tendency towards neo-Zionist ideology. Here we return once again to the tension between maintaining ideological boundaries and the search for meaning. What is the nature of Zionist education today? At what point, does a positive affirmation of the Diaspora make the distinction between a Zionist and non-Zionist social relationship meaningless? To what extent should consumers of Israel education programs in the Diaspora, who have no intention of living in Israel, determine the agenda of a Zionist organization? In the other direction, we need to ask, how can a Zionist organization that regards Israel as a central part of the Jewish experience remain relevant to Jews in Israel and the Diaspora? To grapple with these questions we need to reference the macro dimension of a Jewish social relationship.

## **VI. Macro-Jewish Relationships and the Shifting Boundaries of Ideology**

The questions asked in the previous paragraph speak to social relationships occurring between organizations and other actors embedded within larger environments. At this level we can understand how ideological boundaries of Jewish organizations are created and shaped as part of a larger process of interaction vis-a-vis other Jewish and non-Jewish organizations all of whom are responding to their changing cultural, economic and political environs.

Zionism in general and the Jewish Agency in particular are direct products of the breakup of traditional community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the attempt by Jews to find new organizational means to create common social relationships. In the introduction to this paper the implications of the macro shift in 19<sup>th</sup> century shift Jewish communal life were discussed vis-à-vis Goldberg's (1999) description of the need for Jews to consciously choose the types of educational institutions that their children attend.

The post-traditional disjunction that Goldberg describes between educational institution and family, speak to a larger phenomenon of the breakup of a Jewish public sphere to which all Jews are obligated, and with which all Jews identify. The description given above of the inability of Jews to pray in the same synagogue, learn a Torah text together or eat at the same dinner table speak to a larger decline of public Jewish frameworks in which Jews of different stripes can continue to create and maintain organizations together. Likewise, most Jewish communities in Israel and the Diaspora no longer have a single educational institution that serves the entire population.

Classic Zionism and Orthodoxy represent the two great attempts in the post-traditional world to reimpose a common public framework. Both offer organizational frameworks through which post-traditional Jews will continue to live by Jewish public norms, and both aspire to achieve hegemonic status as the true representative of the Jewish People. In addition, both built hierarchical organizations to transmit their ideology.

For the Orthodox, the concept of the Jewishness is expressed in God's immanence within the Torah object. Change the ritual approach to Torah, and religion can no longer unite the Jewish People. For the Classic Zionist the Jewish People are immanent in the Land of Israel. The ritual of immigrating to the Land of Israel and settling the Land are the equivalent to the Orthodox conception of divine immanence. To leave the Land of Israel (*yerida*) is the equivalent of stopping the observance of religious commandments (*mitzvot*).

As discussed in the previous section, the hierarchical ideological organization does not consult with the consumers of the rituals that the organization offers. Organizational elites determine truth and pass it downwards and it is taken for granted that the rank-and-file will take the mantle. In the period after the creation of the State of Israel, no one asked the immigrants whom the Jewish Agency transported to Israel, or the educators and students that came to Israel for educational programs for their suggestions regarding what Zionism means

and how Zionist organizations should change what they are doing in order to make Zionism meaningful.

Within the Jewish Agency the hierarchical approach is currently on the decline. Large-scale macro political and cultural changes, accompanied by changes in the philanthropic habits of Diaspora Jews are contributing to the formation of a neo-Zionist vision that touts partnership and cooperation and the need for all Jews to find “personal” meaning in their relationship to Israel. As I noted above the ideological changes are accompanied by an attempt to decentralize the authority structure within the Jewish Agency in general and the Department of Jewish Zionist Education in particular.

To draw an analogy to religious movements, it seems that the Jewish Agency is rapidly moving from an Orthodox to Reform model of Zionism. Does the correspondence between the increasing emphasis on egalitarian neo-Zionist educational initiatives and the decentralization of authority within the Department of Jewish Zionist Education necessarily go together? If so how does will the ways that the organization decentralizes authority relationships, affect the organizations ideological mission and the ability of the Department to respond to a changing macro Jewish reality? How will the Department maintain a distinction between what is Zionist and what is not? Who will the organization cater to, and who will continue to be beyond the ideological pale?

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