Representation in Five Jewish Communities: Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, and the USA

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World Jewry is presently at the height of the second post-World War II generation. The first, which lasted more or less from the end of the war to the late 1970s, witnessed the reconstitution of Jewish communities throughout the world, either because of the necessity to reconstruct them in war-ravaged countries, because of the establishment of the State of Israel, or to consolidate the gains of settling in on the part of Jews in the new worlds which had benefited so greatly from Jewish migration out of the old during the prior century.

That reconstitution essentially involved a series of modifications of the five patterns of Jewish communal organization developed during the modern epoch to take cognizance of the realities of the opening of a new, then as yet unrecognized, postmodern age. These five patterns emerged between the convening of the Napoleonic "Sanhedrin" in 1807 and World War I. They were:

1. The *consistorial pattern* pioneered in France whereby all those who identified as Jews were officially organized into hierarchical synagogue-centered bodies called consistoires or some similar term, and, one way or another, all Jewish activities had to be subsumed within the consistorial framework.
2. The *kultesgemeinde pattern* pioneered in Germany and found, inter alia, in the Netherlands in which territorial organizations of Jewish communities based on, but stretching beyond, the synagogue, were governed by communal boards officially recognized and empowered by host governments and government-supported through their revenue-raising and distribution powers.
3. *Boards of Deputies* pioneered in Great Britain, and found in Australia and in a modified version in Canada, government-recognized bodies in which all the various activities in the Jewish community were represented and which served as a central address for the Jewish community but engaged primarily in external relations on behalf of the community. These were supported by Jewish resources exclusively or almost so.

4. *Congregational communities*, developed in smaller countries, which embraced the Jewish community as a whole. Normally these were not state-recognized and relied upon voluntary affiliation and support.
5. *Communities with no formal or official central address or framing body*, no formal government recognition, and no general government support (although some functions might receive government aid), pioneered in the United States.

These models persisted more or less in their original form until World War II. Most were restored to some extent after the war with modifications based upon changing times, changing situations, reconceptualization of what a Jewish community should be and how individual Jews could identify with it, and changing patterns of government recognition and support. The central thrust of these changes was the withdrawal of formal government support and, often, recognition as well and the broadening of the community's framing institutions to include religious, welfare, and community relations organizations in equivalent framing roles in an increasingly open environment in which new institutions and organizations could be established with relative ease and market-like competition could take place among them.

In France, the Consistoire found itself confronting two rival local organizations, the Conseil Representatif Israelite Francais (CRIF) and the Fonds Social Juif Unifie (FSJU). Both at the very least claimed parity with the Consistoire as umbrella organizations within their respective spheres and, at times, claimed to have replaced the Consistoire as the community's central address. The CRIF was founded in 1944 as a representative organization to represent French Jewry before the Vichy government and has continued its representative role throughout the postwar years. While an independent organization, the president of the Consistoire was also its president automatically until very recently. The FSJU was founded after the war to serve as French Jewry's local fundraising and social service delivery address. Israel-centered concerns were handled by the separately-incorporated French branch of the Jewish Agency and Keren Hayesod, neither truly French organizations.

In the postwar Netherlands, the three separate congregational groupings for Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Liberal synagogues rebuilt the Federation of Dutch Communities to be their representative body without granting it much strength. The lead role fell to the Ashkenazic congregational group, the largest of the three by far.

Australia, less disrupted by the war, never had a strong countrywide body. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) is the leading Australia-wide communal organization and is meant to play the major countrywide representative role. It has become progressively weaker through the competition of various countrywide state and local arms of Zionist bodies, B'nai B'rith, the World Jewish Congress, and the various welfare institutions which, while state or local, serve the countrywide community. Because the great strength of Australian Jewry is lodged in its two major roughly equal

communities, Sydney in the State of New South Wales and Melbourne in the State of Victoria, in fact, the state bodies were and remain the stronger ones and the ECAJ leadership and headquarters are rotated between the two cities with every new election as the chairs shift between the two states on a rotation basis. Even within the states the powers of the statewide bodies have diminished greatly in recent years so that in the last analysis, most organizations and institutions are independent of any serious framing body.

Canadian Jewry, once held up as a shining example of a New World Jewish community with an appropriately institutionalized common structure, has gone in the same direction. In the interwar years the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) could correctly have been said to have been the address for the whole community countrywide. CJC combined the British Board of Deputies model and the Polish kehilla model, reflecting the synthesis between the many Polish Jewish immigrants to Canada and the Canadian environment.

If anything, the CJC gained strength, to all outward appearances, in the first postwar generation, but during that time rival organizations were gathering strength, all stimulated by their counterparts in the larger American Jewish community who, intentionally or not, pressed their influence across the Canadian-American border. First, CJC's representative status was challenged by B'nai B'rith, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Canadian Zionist Federation; then locally it was challenged by the local Jewish community federations. Assisted by the Federation movement in the United States and with the added tendency of Canadian Jews for neat and comprehensive organizations, the federations not only became the framing bodies in all of the major Canadian Jewish local communities, but formed a National Budgeting Conference to undertake allocations within Canada that were neither local nor for Israel and overseas activities. The NBC immediately became powerful by virtue of its financial role. In the meantime, Keren Hayesod in Canada became the United Israel Appeal, locally controlled by Community Federations.

Then an arrangement was reached between the federations and the Canadian Jewish Congress so that the local branches of the CJC would enter the federation framework. By the early 1990s the CJC had not only lost its monopoly for representation, but also had lost its monopoly of the top leaders of Canadian Jewry, most of whom went to the federation movement or the UIA. CJC began to attract only the second level leadership. Its triennial countrywide meetings ceased to be significant decision-makers and in 1998, abandoned the pretense of decision-making and instead made the meeting a "virtual happening" for the delegates.

The United States, which from the first had been essentially an open market for every form of Jewish organization and institution, continued in this manner into the postwar period. Then the great financial needs of Israel and overseas rescue shifted effective power to the federation complex which included the local federations, United Jewish Appeal (UJA), its two parent organizations -- Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and

United Israel Appeal (UIA), and the federations' umbrella Council of Jewish Federations (CJF). For a short while in the 1950s, the struggle that had begun in the 1930s between the Jewish community councils and the community federations continued. The Jewish community councils sought to play both a representative role and a role leaguing all the separate Jewish organizations, synagogues, and other institutions into one body, especially for cultural and representation purposes, at a time when the federations concentrated on fundraising and service delivery.

For reasons that cannot be discussed here, in community after community the federations won out over the community councils by 1960s. Community councils became Jewish community relations councils, either as constituent agencies of the federations or sometimes even as federation committees with purely representation roles. While this change eliminated their efforts to be independent comprehensive representative bodies, it actually strengthened their ability to represent their local communities since they had the backing of the now-powerful federations.

More than that, their countrywide organization, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), began to become more powerful than the independent national bodies previously claiming to represent the Jewish community. All were all self-proclaimed in that role. Principal among them were the American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906 by the leading Jewish notables at the time to represent Jewish interests in Washington; the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), founded by B'nai B'rith in 1913 to fight anti-Semitism by mobilizing popular support in the aftermath of one of the few blood libel cases in American Jewish history; and the American Jewish Congress, founded in 1918, an effort to provide a countrywide democratic body along the lines that were seen at that time as modified versions of the kehilla movement and which had come to emphasize separation of church and state in the United States in fields in which the Jews found themselves at a disadvantage because of their religion.

These three groups and other specialized representative bodies such as the Jewish Labor Committee and the Jewish War Veterans vigorously competed with one another, in most cases over the same turf, until the CJF stepped in in the 1940s in an attempt to bring order to the representation field. While formally the attempt failed, undoubtedly because of the marketplace character of American life which gave CJF no opportunity to impose its views on what were, after all, independent organizations, the effort did give birth to NJCRAC and ultimately to its moving into a position of supremacy, and to the other organizations becoming more specialized in what they did so that they conflicted less.

In the 1960s and 1970s it seemed as if the federations and their movement would become the unequivocal framing institutions in American Jewish life. The growth of the federations' community planning and Israel-oriented roles both pushed in this direction. Yet, today, the federations are fighting for their lives as a shift in the attitudes and outlook of American Jews have led the latter to abandon federated giving in droves and,

if they are involved at all, to directly seek the "causes" of most interest to them as individuals. The unbounded individualism of the youth revolt of the 1960s is having its effect as the baby boomers reach middle age and Israel's established institutions have lost drawing power.

Today it is fair to say that there has never been a time when American Jewish life has been so diffused with so little in the way of common leadership and effort, except in the representation sphere where the picture is curiously mixed. The federations and their countrywide arms have retained a much more important role because very few private bodies can compete with them and, indeed, very few want to. The older representative organizations have become weaker, even if they continue to dominate the country's publicity channels, and of the new ones, only the Simon Wiesenthal Center has proved itself to mobilize the resources and the talents necessary to be a competitive voice, which it has been, much to the distaste of the organized Jewish community. The World Jewish Congress, for its first half-century virtually unrecognized in the United States and with no real organizational presence there, has moved up rapidly as a public voice under the leadership of Edgar Bronfman and Israel Singer who, by relocating the world headquarters in New York and pursuing a strategy of selected issues handled in a well-publicized manner, have capitalized on a name that carries a greater cachet than its real weight might bear, to emerge with new strength. On the other hand, the Conference of Presidents, which had become strong during the years of Israel's maximum strength and visibility on the American Jewish scene, is now in something of an eclipse because of the decline of Israel's cachet, a factor compounded by the divisions over Israel in the American Jewish community, making it more difficult for the President's Conference to take sharp stands or to speak in the name of the entire community.

Contemporary Patterns of Communal Organization

Today we still find five patterns of Jewish communal organization, but they are considerably different from the more rigid patterns of the modern epoch. They are:

1. Communities based on a single local organization or congregation. This is the simplest pattern and the closest to its predecessor congregational-community model. It only exists in the smallest communities where local Jews find that they cannot afford the "luxury" of different organizations despite the "Jewish" incentives for division. (Examples: Luxembourg and Monaco.)
2. Integrated congregational communities where several different organizations or congregations exist but all are tied together around a single community or congregation and operate within that integrated framework. (Examples: Gibraltar and Norway.)

3. Government-recognized/assisted framing institutions in a very limited market situation, where the availability of government recognition and assistance encourages the distinction between recognized and unrecognized organizations and encourages Jews to belong to the former, but at the same time allows room for the latter to develop. (Germany is the best example.)
4. Communities with recognized framing organizations but with a semi-open market in which one or more organizations are accepted by the vast majority of Jews as central addresses for the community or for specific bundles of communal functions or which frame communal activity in that manner in a situation in which other Jewish organizations cannot only emerge but cannot become strong enough to compete with those more formally recognized. Australia Canada, France and the Netherlands -- four of the five communities under discussion, fit into this category.
5. Diffused communities that are either partially framed or unframed, where an open market exists for competing Jewish organizations to emerge in every sphere and in every arena. The United States is a prime example of this category.

What is characteristic of these new patterns is that membership in the community, indeed adherence to a formal connection with Judaism or the Jewish people, is an entirely voluntary matter. Even in a case such as Germany where those registered as Jews pay their share of the government-levied church tax which is then reallocated to the Jewish community, one can choose to register as a Jew or not as one wishes. All of the communities are increasingly pluralistic; that is to say, there is no establishment to impose a single pattern, religious or communal, on them, but rather people seek a way to express their Jewishness or Judaism that they find comfortable, even if they have to invent new ways to do so, and sooner or later the community must recognize them in some way.

In one way or another all are organized to cope with five spheres of communal activity:

1. religious-congregational;
2. educational-cultural;
3. extend relations-defense;
4. communal-welfare;
5. Israel-world Jewry.

Formally, the third sphere, that of external relations and defense, embraces what in Europe are referred to as representative organizations. Indeed, outside the United States, before World War II, those organizations framed and spoke for the communities of concern here. That can no longer be said to be true for any of them. In the United States, this sphere has become subordinated to the communal-welfare sphere. In Australia it plays a very limited role and shares the field with more specialized bodies who "represent" Australian Jewry's interests in Israel. In Canada this sharing is even more

diffused. In France, the CRIF continues to represent internal French Jewish interests and its president now can be chosen independently of the Consistoire while French Jewry's interest in Israel is expressed through other channels. In the Netherlands, the largest congregational body, the NIK, (that is, the first sphere), represents its congregations' interests directly and a weak Coordinating Council has very limited rule.

Most, if not all, of the spheres receive some government assistance. Government assistance generally has ceased to be in the form of general support and more in the form of assistance for specific functions. Thus, even in the United States with its strong rules of separation of church and state, federal and state funding is available for Jewish health and welfare institutions. Elsewhere it may be available primarily for educational institutions.

There seem to be emerging two integrative sets of institutions in the various communities regardless of type. One is cosmopolitan, serving the community as a whole, either formally framing, such as a community or countrywide federation or a representative board, or developing a thick texture of informal relationships within the government-like institutions that may even merge into one comprehensive institution, or may simply absorb functions in the external relations-defense, communal-welfare, and Israel-world Jewry spheres. The other is localistic, reflecting the growing concentration of individual and family Jewish activities within a congregational or local community center framework. That framework may be very pluralistic with congregations to serve every expressed Jewish orientation, or it may be in some more formal religious establishment in which individual congregations adapt to different styles in the interests of their members, but increasingly if Jews want to be counted, they connect themselves with a local congregation for lack of any other sure form of connection.

Types of Communal Organizations

Larger communities will have four kinds of organizations.

1. *Government-like institutions*, whether "roof" organizations, framing institutions, or separate organizations serving discrete functions that play roles and provide services on all planes (countrywide, local, and intermediate), which under other conditions, would be played, provided, or controlled -- predominantly or exclusively -- by governmental authorities. They are responsible for tasks such as external relations, defense, education, social welfare, and public (communal) finance. They include:
    a. A more or less comprehensive fund-raising and social planning body.
    b. A representative body for external relations.
    c. A Jewish education service agency.

   d. A vehicle or vehicles for assisting Israel and other Jewish communities.
   e. Various comprehensive religious, health, and welfare institutions.
2. *Localistic institutions and organizations* that provide a means for attaching individual Jews to Jewish life on the basis of their most immediate and personal interests and needs. They include:
   a. Congregations organized into one or more synagogue unions, federations, or confederations.
   b. Local cultural and recreational centers, often federated or confederated with one another.
3. *General purpose mass-based organizations,* operating countrywide on all planes, that function to (a) articulate community values, attitudes, and policies, (b) provide the energy and motive force for crystallizing the communal consensus that grows out of those values, attitudes, and policies, and (c) maintain institutionalized channels of communication between the community's leaders and "actives" ("cosmopolitans") and the broad base of the affiliated Jewish population ("locals") for dealing with the problems and tasks facing the community in the light of the consensus. They often include a Zionist federation and its constituent organization and B'nai B'rith lodges.
4. *Special interest organizations,* which, by serving specialized interests in the community on all planes, function to mobilize concern and support for the programs conducted by the community and to apply pressure for their expansion, modification, and improvement.

The first two of these types are embodied in the institutions that form the structural foundations of the community and the last two in organizations that primarily function to activate the institutional structure and give it life. Institutions of the first type are easily identifiable in most communities. They include the boards of deputies founded by Anglo-Jewish communities, the American Jewish community federations and the Council of Federations, the Canadian Jewish Congress, the Fonds Social Juif Unifi, in France, and the like.

The most important localistic institutions are the synagogues, which, by their very nature, are geared to be relatively intimate associations of compatible people. Even very large synagogues that lose their sense of intimacy are localistic institutions in this sense, in the overall community context. The most important localistic organizations are Jewish community or sports centers.

Organizations in the third category differ widely from community to community. In the United States, B'nai B'rith and Hadassah come closest to performing these functions, with a number of smaller countrywide organizations sharing in the task; in South Africa and much of Latin America the Zionist federations have assumed that role. The special-interest organizations are also readily identifiable in the various communities.

Voluntary Communities

By now all Jewish communities in the diaspora are unbounded; that is to say, no clear external limits divide Jews from non-Jews. Rather, all are organized as a series of concentric circles around a central core of Judaism/Jewishness that draws Jews toward it in varying degrees, circles which fade out at the peripheries into a gray area populated by people whose Jewish self-definition and Jewish status are unclear, certainly from a *halakhic* standpoint but also from a sociological one. Thus, every diaspora community today is fully voluntary and its organization reflects its voluntary character.

Moreover, Judaism is recognized as a major faith in all five countries and many Jews who participate in the public square derive their compass in public positions and activities from the teachings of Judaism as they understand them which generally means filtered through their particular Jewish experience. However, because the Jewish community is more than simply a religion in the conventional Christian manner but also has ethnic and communal dimensions that are both part of and stand somewhat separate from Jewish religion, each Jewry articulates itself in a far more complex manner than can be encompassed by any representative organization except, perhaps, on a few specific issues in each community or in which there is a world Jewish consensus.

Consequently, the first task of every Jewish community is to learn to deal with the particular local manifestation of Jews' freedom to choose. This task is a major factor in determining the direction of the reconstitution of Jewish life in our time. It is increasingly true that diaspora Jews, if they feel Jewishly committed at all, feel that they are so by choice rather than simply by birth. Not that organic ties do not underlie the fact of their choice, but birth alone is no longer sufficient to keep Jews within the fold in an environment as highly individualistic and pluralistic as the contemporary world. No one is more conscious of this than are the Jews themselves.