The Geographic Expansion of Jewish Communities and its Implication for Social Cohesion and Community Organization

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The geographic expansion of Jewish communities into suburban environments is a process that has been in effect almost as long as the process of suburbanization itself (Lipman, 1968). It has immediate and important consequences for social cohesion and for community organization. For instance, to paraphrase Shaul Esh some 20 years ago, what are the minimum and optimum sizes needed in order to make a Jewish community work, or work efficiently? How long before a group of Jews get together to found a new synagogue, new community institutions and new community structures? How long does it take for Jews moving to a suburban or exurban environment to detach theselves from the community of which they were part before their migration? In an era of declining budgets for community activities such as social and welfare services, how is the delivery of these services affected? Do the declining budgets mean that social welfare services will become more home-based, as a larger percentage of the total declining budget becomes concerned with the actual delivery of the service rather than with the purchase and maintenance of the buidlings in which the service might previously have been provided?

If this is true, as seems to be the case in the United Kingdom, it becomes important to know where the recipients of the services live, where they are likely to be living in a given number of years, and where their next of kin are likely to be, too. This means that we must have a good understanding of what binds a community together, socially and spatially, and of the ways in which the community is changing, again socially and spatially. In other words, we need a clear

picture of the social geographical patterns and processes at work amongst the group.

In Greater London, Krausz (1968; 1969a; 1969b) carried out fieldwork in Edgware, in the far northwest of the metropolis, a quarter of a century ago, but he concentrated on strictly sociological problems. Later, Kosmin and Grizzard (1975) developed a methodology to study Jews in Hackney, but that was Inner London and unrepresentative of the suburban populations to the northwest; moreover, it was based not on fieldwork but on an analysis of Small Area Statistics. The survey in Redbridge, which was directed by Kosmin a decade ago (de Lange and Kosmin, 1979; Kosmin and Levy, 1981; Kosmin, Levy and Wigodsky, 1983; Kosmin and Levy, 1983) did look at a suburban community in northeast London, but this, too, was somewhat atypical, as it was rather too uniform in terms of social status and religious affiliation to be representative of London Jewry, let alone British Jewry.

Our own work involved mapping Jewish concentrations. We were able to do this down to street level with reasonable accuracy. This permitted us to build up our data units to whatever scale we considered suitable to the task at hand. Most of the descriptions and analyses that had appeared before had been carried out at the scale of the borough, a scale which is too gross (average population around 200,000) to be able to arrive at any conclusions about social geographical processes. Our data were amalgamated so as to provide statistics to the Ward (14,000), Polling District (3,000), Enumeration District (500) and Complete Postal Code (c. 50) levels.

Basically, we tried to understand what these maps of Jews as a proportion of the total population at each level were able to tell us about concentration, and thus to infer (or hypothesize) about congregation, and segregation of Jews within the general population. To infer process from an analysis of pattern is always a risky business, although it has been an accepted means of conducting research in urban sociology and urban social geography for decades. What the analysis of patterns was able to do was to hint at possible processes or to prompt questions about directions of research. A direct consequence of these maps was to adapt the methodology used by Kosmin and Grizzard for Hackney over a decade ago and amalgamate the Enumeration Districts in which the estimated Jewish population was 50 percent or greater into concentrations which, by definition, would have Jewish majorities. The subsequent analysis of the 1981 Census data was carried out for the Jewish concentrations in London's northwestern Borough of Barnet.

The variations observed in the analysis of these Small Area Statistics indicate that in northwest London we were looking at a series of sub-populations or sub-communities. It is untenable and undesirable to refer to the Jewish population as a uniform body, even where there is a tendency to perceive them as such. One of the issues that this raises is that of perception of the "nature" or "quality" of a neighbourhood or of a more extensive area, and how such an area is chosen for initial settlement.

We can hypothesize that an initial decision to settle an area is taken on the basis of a combination of considerations, encompassing a variety of cultural, social, and economic factors. However, once an ethnic (read: Jewish) character has been given to an area (and it is more likely that the ethnic character will be identified internally first by members of the group before it becomes obvious to outside observers), then this can act as a self-reinforcing factor, attracting additional members of the same group. If two areas already differ on features such as housing types or property prices, then it might be assumed that these differences will be extended and perpetuated, with a resultant increase in ethnic flavour.

So, it seems that it is not just a matter of Jews wishing to congregate and associate with other Jews, but that it is also a matter of *which* Jews they choose to congregate with. This raises a host of questions about the social processes involved in migration of members of the group within a metropolis, how different areas are perceived, and what centripetal forces act to make a community viable and cohesive. The role of Jewish institutions and of "exchange professionals" such as estate agents in this process is important to understand. Obviously, for some subgroups within the overall Jewish population, comfortable driving distance to anything "Jewish" (such as a delicatessen or a sports club) is sufficient, whereas for others, much shorter distances to more fundamental Jewish institutions (e.g. the synagogue) are important.

How is the spatial congregation of a group perceived by individuals within that group as a conscious conservative measure against assimilation and for maintaining group identity? What implications does congregation have on subsequent experiences of members of the group such as in upward or downward social mobility, the formation of social ties and out-marriage or intermarriage?

How is the choice of residential location among the Jewish community affected by income, social class, social ties and other factors? Is it possible to measure the extent to which prestige within the community – a social factor – is traded off against more material things (personal factors) in restricting the search areas of Jewish

movers? How can residentially segregated patterns be explained and predicted by structural, discriminatory and pluralist factors?

How and when is a new independent Jewish community perceived and recognized? What is the miminum size and the appropriate combination of factors needed for the constitution of a separate Jewish area? Can we extract a typology for ethnic movers and build models for ethnic moving which encompass such groups as "early movers", "followers", "fillers-in", "successors", etc.?

Some of these ideas, of course, are not specifically Jewish and can be applied in the study of other ethnic groups. Despite the existence of large ethnic-minority populations, census data reveal that over the whole of London, only a small number of areas the size of the administrative wards contain majorities or any single minority group. Therefore, we might argue that the general Jewish settlement model is not really unique and that the overall pattern in London is one of ethnic congregation. The ways in which a study of Jews can really contribute to a better understanding of some of Britain's other minority populations should be the principal message that any such study should project to outsiders. Contemporary British Jews are white, middle-class and relatively long-settled, but the majority have chosen to maintain a separate identity while integrating into most aspects of society in general. If not appropriate to all of Britain's ethnic minorities, perhaps the Jews can provide a useful model for achieving a better understanding of those that are rapidly mobile upwards.

Some upwardly mobile New Commonwealth groups are less free than the Jews have apparently been to dissolve into the general population. Indications are that many of the problems that have already been faced by the Jews are being tackled in similar ways in suburban environments by these other groups. As the Jews are two generations longer established than other ethnic groups, they might be able to provide a model for some of these, especially those middle-class ethnics, which except for skin-colour would find it easier to assimilate into society at large.

A data base appears to be a necessary commodity so as to record the life experiences of people who differ from the majority in values, lifestyles, and in consequence, social needs. If such distinctive lifestyles can be identified, it may be necessary to recognize specific cultural needs for social services. Failure to do so might leave members of minority gorups at a permanent disadvantage. This is the real message of this study. We must learn more about the needs and desires of ethnic minority groups in Britain, as they jostle and jockey for more

advantageous positions in British society. Surely a serious study of the Jews can reveal much in this respect.

There is no real alternative to the investment of substantial resources (time, manpower, money) toward helping us understand the Jewish experience. There is a need to have a clearer and more accurate picture of what has taken and is taking place among the Jews. There is a need to be able to identify likely problems over the next two decades, and to be able to prepare contingency plans to solve these problems as and if they arise. That is the clearly ingrained message of the specifically Jewish aspect of the study of Jews in Outer northwest London. Desk research, and the representation and manipulation of generally inadequate statistics are no substitute for real research. By playing with numbers, we are only putting off that bitter day when we must face up to the fact that without money for field research, and without field research that investigates spatial as well as social processes, we are likely to learn little of any value that concerns the way in which Jews move throughout an urban or metropolitan area, and how this affects the internal cohesion of a community and the interaction between individual communities to form a metropolitan-wide Jewish population.

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