

JERUSALEM LETTER

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

No. 345 19 Heshvan 5757 / 1 November 1996

THE INTEGRATION OF JEWISH IMMIGRANTS IN MONTREAL: MODELS AND DILEMMAS OF ETHNIC MATCH

Morton Weinfeld

The Concept of Immigrant Integration / The Role of Ethnic and Immigrant Communities / The Jewish Model / The New Diaspora Context / The Concept of Ethnic Match / Jewish Immigrants in Montreal / Integration into the Jewish Community / Communal Responsibility and Financial Constraints / Three Research and Policy Questions

The Concept of Immigrant Integration

The experience of the Jewish community of Montreal provides a good example for exploring the various alternative approaches and conceptions of immigrant integration. Here we will look at the issues surrounding the role of ethnic/cultural communities in the integration process and, specifically, in the provision of culturally sensitive services to immigrants. The data for this study are taken from annual reports and other documents of over a dozen Jewish agencies in Montreal, and from interviews with professional staff of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS) of Montreal, as well as other Jewish agencies serving Jewish immigrants.

First, it is important to understand that much of the policy discussion around immigrant integration is based on a flawed assumption. The term "immigrant integration" is an oxymoron to the extent that it refers to a process in which an adult immigrant to a host society, e.g., Canada, the

United States, or Israel, actually achieves a high measure of "integration" with that host society. That almost never occurs.

By and large, adult immigrants to Canada — especially if they arrived from a non-English or non-French speaking society — retain one foot firmly planted in the old country. This simple realization is often overlooked in the mounting concern found in many government circles about the "failures" of immigrant integration. This also impacts on the process of devising and collecting indicators of integration, and, more importantly, on evaluating those indicators. True integration into a host society is usually achieved, if then, by the second generation, and at times the third generation.

This is not necessarily a tragedy. The fact that full integration is a multi-generational process of adjustment does not indicate a failing on the part of the host society, or on the part of the immigrant.

Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher; Zvi R. Marom, Associate Editor; Mark Ami-El, Managing Editor. 13 Tel-Hai St., Jerusalem, Israel; Tel. 02-619281, Fax. 02-619112, Internet: elazar@vms.huji.ac.il. In U.S.A.: 1616 Walnut St., Suite 513, Philadelphia, PA 19103-5308; Tel. (215) 204-1459, Fax. (215) 204-7784. © Copyright. All rights reserved. ISSN: 0334-4096.

The Jerusalem Letter is a periodic report intended to objectively clarify and analyze issues of Jewish and Israeli public policy.

What immigrants go through is best considered as adjustment, or in the now quaint term, settlement, or re-settlement. Moreover, what generally takes place for Jewish immigrants is a three-fold, nested process of immigration: into subcommunity, community, and host society.

The Role of Ethnic and Immigrant Communities

To the extent that immigrants have integrated at all, they have done so mainly within their own pre-existing communities. Historically, when the state supplied little by way of immigrant services, these functions were carried out, formally and informally, by immigrant institutions. As Raymond Breton defined it in Canada, the more "institutionally complete" an ethnic group was, the more likely immigrants would be to integrate first into the ethnic community.¹

Thus, the process of immigrant integration is in fact one with two or three distinct phases. The first involves the integration of the immigrant, in most cases, into the respective ethnic community. This process should not be seen as problematic, but as a natural response of immigrants to the trauma of the dislocation.

In fact, the range of services provided by ethnic communities has always been large, but of late has increased. They include economic opportunities for workers and employers, schools, churches, media — from newspapers to radio and television, fraternal, recreational, cultural, social, political, and other organizations. Daniel Elazar's typologies, developed for the Jewish polity and its functions, can be applied to ethnic communities in general.²

The Jewish Model

Jews have been by far the most institutionally complete ethnic group in North America. The major reason for this tendency towards development of a dense communal infrastructure, which *inter alia* serves to integrate immigrants, is that Jews have a diaspora history of some 2000 years. They have had lots of practice in getting it right and, because of anti-Semitism, have had the need to get it right. This has simply not been the case for other major European groups in North America. For example, the Ukrainian diaspora is only one hundred years old, dating from the 1890s. A second reason is that Jews have generally not thought of their country of origin as a homeland, so their migration would tend to be comparatively permanent, with a resulting need for permanent institutions. Third, the fact that Jews are both a religious and an ethno-cultural group has given them another set of reasons

to justify this institutional completeness.

Thus the array of services provided by Jewish communities in affluent liberal democracies such as Canada, including Landsmanschaften, Free Loan Associations, YMHAs, and Jewish Immigrant Aid Services, can provide a maximal model for those seeking to likewise maximize the array of services available to groups today.

Ironically, the recent Canadian literature on services for immigrants suggests that the Jewish experience may not be seen as relevant to the case of non-European recent immigrants. The older European immigrant groups have certainly been aware of the Jewish model, and have been inspired by it. Thus the Canadian German Congress and the Canadian Polish Congress have been modeled to an extent on the Canadian Jewish Congress. Perhaps Jews are no longer recognized as a disadvantaged immigrant group within the current "anti-racist" discourse. Perhaps they are seen by newer immigrant groups as an established religious group.

The New Diaspora Context

There is one sense in which the admittedly ambitious goal of immigrant integration is even *more* problematic today than in the past. Immigrants today, thanks to changes in communications technology and more accessible travel opportunities, are far more likely to be able, should they wish, to keep one and a half feet firmly in the old country.

Immigration at the turn of the century often meant, at most, one return visit to the old country. Letters served as the medium of communication. Today, immigrants are likely to visit periodically, and to host old country relatives on periodic visits. Letters have been supplanted by fax, phone, and e-mail. Movies (videos), recordings, and newspapers from the old country are more readily available. Ethnic radio and TV stations bring the old country into the homes of new immigrants. This is true of Israeli or Russian Jewish immigrants as well as other immigrants.

In this sense, the new migration patterns of Jews are more fluid than in the past, with greater two-way links with the country of origin. The example of Israelis who have lived in North America for twenty years but still see themselves as having left Israel temporarily is a case in point. And many ex-Israelis do in fact re-migrate to Israel.

This phenomenon, in conjunction with the drive over the past 10-15 years toward the creation of culturally sensitive health and social services in various policy domains — health, social services, education, criminal

justice — has created a much greater potential for reinforcing institutional completeness for immigrants. Thus, immigrants are better able to retain their cultural specificity. In other words, just as the concern is increasing about the failures of integration, we find technological changes and policy directions which may in fact slow down an idealized process of integration.

In the past, the pace of assimilation for the children and grandchildren of immigrants has, on the whole, been impressive. It remains to be seen whether the experience of the more recent immigrants and their children will mirror that of earlier generations.

The Concept of Ethnic Match

New concerns for the provision of culturally sensitive services have raised to prominence the option of ethno-specific services or, more generally, the option of "ethnic match." The concept of ethnic match can vary along three dimensions. The first of these involves the professional service provider. Is the ethnic origin of the professional or caregiver the same as the recipient of the service?

This consideration refers to the ethnic cultural congruence between the origin of the service recipient and the service provider: doctor, nurse, therapist, social worker, lawyer, police officer, teacher, or journalist. An assumption is that the recipient of the service will be better off when matched with a service provider of the same group.

In fact, this assumption has not been established through systematic scientific studies. No one knows for certain if minority students are better off being taught geometry by minority teachers; they may or may not. The same uncertainty applies for all the other service domains including immigrant integration services, extending also to children of immigrants.

Even less research has been done on the minority-origin professionals themselves. How do they see work with those of their own group? As a duty, a calling, a niche, an opportunity — or a ghetto? No one knows. One problem not always recognized is that all the ethnic or cultural categories are extremely heterogeneous. One cannot always assume that a Black, or a Chinese, or a Jewish professional represents the *same* origin and identity as that of a client from the same group. Consider the differences among Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews, Orthodox and Reform, as well as differences of country of origin, gender, and social class. Matching a Jew with another "Jew" may be no match at all.

A second dimension of ethnic match involves the organization or institution providing the service. Is it

under the auspices or control of the recipient's ethnic community?

Individuals may receive services from mainstream organizations (e.g., a general hospital or social service agency), or one which is explicitly ethnic. In Montreal, for example, one can find almost cradle to grave ethno-specific service institutions, from day care centers to old age homes. The Jewish community obviously is the most organized, but other groups are catching up. In some cases there can be an ethno-specific unit within a mainstream organization, such as a Black Studies department at a university.

Furthermore, an ethno-specific institution may well employ a mix of professionals, not only those from the given group, while a mainstream agency may also employ, deliberately or not, staff of minority origin. Finally, the funding and to an extent control of an ethno-specific agency may come, to a greater or lesser extent, from the state.

The third and perhaps the key dimension of ethnic match is ethnic practice. Is the actual content of the practice of the service reflective of or sensitive to the ethnic culture of the recipient?

How does the role of ethnic culture shape the content of the service — the medical diagnosis, the counselling advice, the teaching style, the punishment meted out to the guilty, the content of the journalism? One can imagine an anti-racist curriculum, or a social worker familiar with the ethnic culture when advising a client.

In theory, culturally sensitive practice can be delivered by a professional of any origin who has been suitably trained, and in any sort of agency. At times it may be difficult for the ethnic practice to gain acceptance within the dominant or mainstream professional culture (e.g., acupuncture, rap music).

It is important for both analysis and policy to distinguish among these three core dimensions of ethnic match. For example, affirmative action programs aimed at hiring minorities in mainstream agencies are not comparable policy responses to the setting up of community-based service delivery agencies. The ethnic match model described here can be applied to any of the policy domains described above, and one can imagine immigrant minorities facing a range of ethnic match, from maximal to minimal. Maximal ethnic match, in theory, might be the case of a Jewish social worker working in a Jewish immigrant service agency and counselling Jewish clients based on Judaic precepts and guidelines.

Jewish Immigrants in Montreal

Montreal has a long history as a pioneer in the reception and resettlement of Jewish immigrants. The estimated number of Jewish immigrants to Montreal, from 1981 to 1993, was just over 6,600, based on JIAS files. As of January 1996, JIAS retained a caseload of 529 family files, totalling 1,250 individuals. (Of course, many Jewish immigrants may arrive without any contact with JIAS at all.)

Historically, JIAS has played a dominant role in immigrant integration and resettlement, but over time there has been a gradual evolution away from meeting all immigrant needs in one agency, toward recognition of a more comprehensive approach. Indeed, it is fair to say that immigrant integration is a major component of the activities of nearly all the Jewish communal agencies.

JIAS expenditures totalled \$950,000 for 1995-96, while expenditures from other agencies for immigrant services totalled over \$528,250. These included special programs for employment at Jewish Vocational Services, and for counselling and support at Jewish Family Services, which includes Le Mercaz, the volunteer food and clothing distribution center, among others.

In Montreal in the mid-1990s, the Jewish Federation established a Council on Immigrant Integration and Acculturation (CIIA), with representation from 28 related communal agencies including JIAS. When the Jewish community approaches the issue of immigrant integration, it clearly does so from the dual perspective suggested above: integration into the mainstream society (finding a job, language acquisition of English or French, meeting immediate basic needs) and, at least as important, integration into the Jewish community.

In 1995 the CIIA set up three specific task forces designed to deal with different elements of the process of immigrant integration, for outreach to immigrant teens, employment, and education. In addition, plans are underway to develop a new multi-agency Welcome Center for Jewish immigrants and refugees. The reports of the three task forces, the proposal for the new Welcome Center, and the general community literature which is available to new immigrants all stress the dual dimensions of integration.

For example, the JIAS Mission Statement states:

JIAS promotes and advances their well being and integration into the Jewish community and society at large.

The overall objective of JIAS is to help newly arrived members of the community achieve their full potential as full independent

members of the Montreal Jewish community and Quebec and Canadian society as quickly as possible.

Even in the communal organizations devoted to communal subgroups — Ethiopian, Russian, or Israeli — the rationale generally includes the objective of facilitating the integration of these immigrants into the Jewish community.

Integration into the Jewish Community

There has been a renewed focus of late on the development, collection, and analysis of "indicators of integration." Yet there has been little parallel work on defining measures of integration within the Jewish, or any ethnic, community. Possibly these would mean the same array of variables used by social scientists to measure the levels of affiliation and identification of any Jews in North America. One of the problems with such measures of immigrant integration into the host country — reading newspapers, knowledge about the country, political participation, joining voluntary organizations, etc. — is that many of the native born would likely score poorly!

It seems clear, however, that one must make allowances for lower levels of such integration into the host society. Indeed, in fact for some Jewish immigrants we might speak of a third layer of integration, into a specific Jewish subcommunity.

At present, within the Montreal Jewish community there are formal organizations representing Sephardic, Israeli, Ethiopian, and Russian Jews. Thus one can argue that while the formal Jewish community is concerned with the first two levels of integration, in fact, the first level of integration is that which takes place within the subcommunity and may involve both formal organizational and informal networks.

This is not a new story. Earlier waves of Jewish immigrants were likewise segregated into subcommunities, be they German or Russian, Litvaks or Galicians. More recently, in the postwar period, other multiple subcommunities persisted.

My late father, *alav ha shalom*, was a Holocaust survivor who arrived in Montreal in 1948. He was formally integrated into the Canadian community, though not that of Quebec, because he spoke English rather well, read newspapers, and voted regularly. Yet the two jobs he held in Montreal were both within the Jewish community, a bookkeeper first for *Der Kenader Adler*, the Yiddish daily, and later for the Lubavitcher Yeshiva. I attended a Jewish day school, and spent summers at a Jewish summer camp. Informally, his

world was circumscribed: specifically, his social circle consisted almost exclusively of Polish Holocaust survivors — a very distinct subcommunity within the Montreal Jewish community. He had nothing to do with Canadian-born Anglo-Jewish Montrealers. The question to be posed here is: What indicators or what measures would we use to assess the degree of integration of my father, and into which community?

This nested process is not limited to Jewish integration. Recently I was in a Toronto cab, with a driver who was clearly of African origin. When I began to chat about issues relating to racism and the Black community in Toronto, he pointed out to me that he was not primarily "Black," nor African, nor Nigerian. Rather he was an Ibo, identified as such, associated mainly with other Ibo, and even belonged to an Ibo organization in Toronto. He also was scathing in his comments about Jamaicans.

These two anecdotes suggest that the process of immigrant integration may proceed from subcommunity, to community, to mainstream society.

Thus the issue of ethnic match becomes even more complex, with our recognition of the complexity within the Jewish or any other category. A common Jewishness alone may clearly be insufficient to provide culturally sensitive services between Jewish professionals and Jewish clients. In addition, it is not clear whether those Jewish immigrants who avail themselves more of Jewish communal, i.e., ethno-specific services, fare better in their general processes of integration than those comparable Jewish immigrants who choose not to.

Communal Responsibility and Financial Constraints

Unlike the case of some other communities, the Jewish community, through its own resources, has mounted a parallel system of integration for Jewish immigrants compared to that of the state. This has raised an unusual dilemma. On the one hand, most Jews, and Jewish leaders, have strongly endorsed liberal immigration policies and those which might bring the largest numbers of Jewish immigrants to their communities. On the other hand, the increasing numbers of Jewish immigrants have posed a particular financial burden on local communities, particularly in the case of the Soviet Jewish migration.

As the former leader of the Jewish Federation in Montreal indicated:

Let's take the issue of refugee admissions. Perhaps there would be benefit for JIAS to consult with representatives from AJCS (the

Federation) as to the positions they would take on refugee admissions. This is because even if we put to one side the strictly governmental aspect and the non-sectarian aspect, the positions that they may take in terms of accelerating the admissions do potentially have a local impact on the community which is more responsible in the area of reception and resettlement and absorption in the community. The issue whether the community is prepared to provide the financing is just one issue....³

If the Jewish community found it difficult to provide its admittedly wide range of services to increasing numbers of refugees and immigrants, all the more so for less affluent and organized groups.

Three Research and Policy Questions

A generic question is to what extent governments should provide financing for ethno-specific services, which may have as part of their agenda, stated or unstated, the integration of the immigrant into the ethnic community itself. In other terms, to what extent is the process of integration into the ethnic community consistent with the broader governmental objectives of immigrant integration?

For the ethnic community, to what extent is immigrant integration into the ethnic subcommunity a positive or negative development in terms of general communal objectives? What degree of fine-tuning of ethnic match within an ethno-specific agency would optimize services? The Montreal Jewish community developed a specific program to train women from the Hasidic community in basic social work to meet the needs of that particular subcommunity. Does this lead to communal cohesion, or communal fragmentation?

Related to this, to what extent must government, and ethnic groups, embrace principles of ethnic match and cultural sensitivity when providing services to immigrants and their families?

* * *

Notes

1. Raymond Breton, "Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities and the Personal Relations of Immigrants," *American Journal of Sociology*, 70 (1964):193-205.

2. Daniel J. Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995).

3. Anne Kilpatrick, "The Jewish Immigrant Aid Services: An Ethnic Lobby in the Canadian Political System," M.A. Thesis, Department of Sociology, McGill University (1995), p. 77.

* * *

Morton Weinfeld, an Associate of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, is Professor of Sociology at McGill University in Montreal. He is co-editor of

The Jews in Canada (Oxford University Press of Canada, 1993) and co-author of *Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians, and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada* (Penguin/Viking, 1988). This *Jerusalem Letter* is based on the author's presentation at the Conference on Jewish Migration held at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, July 7-11, 1996. Funding for the study reported here came from a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Mr. Ho Hon Leung assisted in the research.